Foundation of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in the Caribbean

Catholic faithful worldwide feel the call to be close to Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, the place that witnessed the Resurrection and is so central to the Christian faith. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, as an organism of the Church, has been mandated by the Popes to support the Church in the Holy Land, the territory in which the Order arose. Knights and Dames of the Order have responded to this call are today are present in some forty countries. Last week, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, presided over the celebrations for the installation of the Order's 65th local reality, the first in the Caribbean, the Magistral Delegation for Santo Domingo.

"Having received from this fervent community the request to become part of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre a beautiful link opens up between this island home to the first church in America, Rome, the heart of the Universal Church, and the Mother Church of Jerusalem," Cardinal Filoni stressed when meeting the Dominican press.

On 23 May, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, accompanied by the Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, the Deputy Governor General for Latin America, Enric Mas, the Master of Ceremonies of the Grand Magisterium, Monsignor Adriano Paccanelli, and the head of the communications office, Dr. François Vayne, was received by the President of the Dominican Republic, Luis Abinader, in the presence of the main local authorities, including Carolina Majia, Mayor of Santo Domingo.

The meeting allowed the Dominican Head of State, a few days before his meeting with the Holy Father in the Vatican, to be updated on the Order's initiatives in the Caribbean area and, in particular, on the creation of the Magistral Delegation in Santo Domingo. From a family originally from Lebanon, the President showed great interest in the Order's activities in the Holy Land and, in particular, in the peace education initiatives, so necessary throughout the Middle East.

Over the next two days, the striking Primatial Cathedral of America, a sign of the evangelization of the entire continent from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, was the setting for the Prayer Vigil and the Investiture of the Order's new Knights and Dames.

The Grand Master invested the Metropolitan Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Msgr. Francisco Ozoria Acosta, who took on the office of Grand Prior, and the new Magistral Delegate, Juana Josefina Domínguez de Jesús, together with eight other members (4 Knights, 3 Ladies and a cleric). Among the various authorities present at the ceremonies was the Lieutenant of the neighboring lieutenancy for Mexico Guillermo Macias Graue - who assisted and accompanied the formation process of the new Knights and Dames in Santo Domingo.

"Santo Domingo represents the first concrete step in the growth of this Pontifical Institution in Caribbean America, - commented Governor General Visconti di Modrone - and strengthens the ties in this region of the world thanks to the closeness and fraternal support received from the Lieutenancy for Mexico, which accompanied the process of founding the Magistral Delegation in Santo Domingo and is already broadening its horizons with the presence of the first Guatemalan Knight who was invested".

The visit ended with a Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, 26 May in the shrine of Our Lady of Altagracia in Santo Domingo. At the end of the Sunday Mass, the Governor General presented the new members with their diplomas, before a moment of community prayer next to the reproduction of the Marian image displayed high behind the altar. The original image, deeply loved by the people of Santo Domingo, who in Higüey, in the east of the island, built the country's first shrine in 1572 to house it, is one that takes us directly back to the Holy Land: Mary in Bethlehem in recollection before the Child Jesus showing us the way.

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