Pope Francis encourages the members of the Order to continue their commitment invoking Our Lady's protection

The address of the Holy Father Pope Francis to the members of the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem

Dear brothers and sisters!

I welcome you at the conclusion of the Consulta of Members of the Grand Magisterium and of the Lieutenants of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. I greet and thank Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, Grand Master, and the Pro-Grand Prior, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa; I greet the members of the Grand Magisterium, together with the Lieutenants of the nations and of the places where the Order is present. And with you I greet the whole family of Knights and Dames from all over the world. My gratitude goes to all of you for the many spiritual and charitable activities you carry out for the benefit of the peoples of the Holy Land.

You have gathered for the Consulta, the general assembly that is celebrated every five years at the See of Peter. Here in the Vatican, you are, in a certain way, at home, as you constitute an ancient pontifical institution placed under the protection of the Holy See. Since the last Consulta of 2013 the Order has grown in the number of its members, in the geographical expansion with the creation of new peripheral articulations, in the material assistance that it has offered the Church in the Holy Land and in the number of pilgrimages made by your members. I thank you for supporting programs that are pastorally and culturally beneficial and I encourage you to continue your commitment, alongside the Latin Patriarchate, in facing the refugee crisis which has led the Church to provide a significant humanitarian response throughout the region in the last five years.

It is a good sign that your initiatives in the field of training and health care are open to all, regardless of the communities they belong to or the religion professed. In this way you help to pave the way to the knowledge of Christian values, to the promotion of interreligious dialogue, mutual respect and mutual understanding. In other words, through your commendable commitment, you too contribute to the construction of the path that will lead, we all hope, to the achievement of peace throughout the region.

I know that this week you have focused on the role of local leaders, or Lieutenants, present in over thirty nations and areas of the world where your Order is active. Certainly the continuous growth of the Order depends on your incessant and ever renewed commitment. In this regard, it is important not to forget that the main purpose of your Order lies in the spiritual growth of its members. Therefore, any success of your initiatives can not be separated from appropriate religious formation programs aimed at each Knight and each Dame, so that they consolidate their indispensable relationship with the Lord Jesus, especially in prayer, in the meditation of the Holy Scriptures and in the deepening of Church doctrine. It is above all the task of you leaders to offer an example of intense spiritual life and concrete adherence to the Lord: you will thus be able to render a valid service of authority to those who are subject to you.

As for your mission in the world, do not forget that you are not a philanthropic agency committed to promoting the material and social progress of your beneficiaries. You are called to place the evangelical love of neighbor as the purpose of your work, to witness everywhere the goodness and care with which God loves everyone. The admission into your Order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons is not an honor. It is part of those duties of their pastoral service to assist those among you who have a responsibility role by providing opportunities for community and liturgical prayer at every level, continuous spiritual opportunities and catechesis for ongoing formation and for the growth of all the members of the Order.

It is in front of the whole world – which too often turns its gaze to the other side – the dramatic situation of Christians who are persecuted and killed in ever-increasing numbers. In addition to their martyrdom in their blood there is also their ‘white martyrdom,’ such as that which occurs in democratic countries when freedom of religion is restricted. Alongside your work in favor of people so harshly tried, I urge you to always associate the prayer, to constantly invoke Our Lady, whom you venerate with the title of "Our Lady of Palestine". She is the caring Mother and the Help of Christians, for whom she obtains strength and comfort from the Lord in sorrow.

May the icon of Our Lady of Persecuted Christians, which I will soon bless and you will all receive to carry her to each of your Lieutenancies, accompany your journey. Let us together invoke Mary's concern for the Church in the Holy Land and, more generally, in the Middle East, together with her special intercession and for those whose life and freedom are in danger. I accompany your precious and indefatigable work with my Blessing, and I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you.

(November 16, 2018)

Grand Master’s Greeting of the Holy Father on the occasion of the Consulta 2018

Your Holiness:

We are honored by your invitation to this Audience and grateful for this opportunity to hear your words and receive your blessing.

Present here are the leadership of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem representing 64 lieutenancies from 40 countries and territories. Ours is an ancient Pontifical institution presently enjoying a time of strong development in terms of increased members, geographical expansion and

fincial support. Especially in these days, for everyone it is a great joy to observe the ongoing growth of a Catholic association.

Every 5 years according to our Statutes we gather as a Consulta to discuss matters of importance to the Order in developing the growth of personal holiness of our more than 30,000 members. We also seek ways of how we can more effectively serve and support the needs of the Church in the Holy Land in serving the pastoral, spiritual and humanitarian needs of our fellow Christians there.

Our support goes especially to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, but also to independent Catholic institutions and to the other *sui iuris* Churches. Let me underline that all the schools, universities and health-care centers that we support are open to everyone regardless of their religion or the community to which they belong. In addition to prayerful and material support our members are pledged to regular pilgrimages to the Holy Land to show our solidarity with the faithful in their daily trials and challenges.

This week we have profitably considered the pivotal role of our lieutenants in fostering the goals of our Order. We have also taken note of the growing persecution of Christians in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East. We know how often you have spoken of this continuing tragedy. We humbly ask you to bless the icon of Our Lady of Persecuted Christians copies of which our members will take to their lieutenancies for prayerful intercession.

We repeat our thanks, Holy Father, and we assure you of our prayers in your ministry and our unfailing loyalty to the Successor of St. Peter.

Edwin Cardinal O'Brien