A new Ritual for the Order: Innovation within the Tradition

First and foremost, let me thank all those who have sent me so far their positive and useful reactions on the implementation of the Rituals for celebrations circulated during the past week. I wish to express my gratitude in particolar to the Vice Governors who have supported and helped me with comments from their respective geographical areas, as well as the Lieutenants who are endeavouring to translate into their different languages the new rituals, and are going to put them into practice. Apart from a few remarks, that will be taken into consideration, and keeping in mind that these Rituals consist in guidelines that can be adapted to local traditions, the document – resulting from a considerable study and work by his Eminence the Cardinal Grand Master, assisted by the Assessor, members of the clergy and a special Commission – has received a general consensus.

The document reflects the spirit of renovation and simplification promoted by Pope Francis. Just as the Holy Father has confined to the past some of his titles, keeping the one of “Bishop of Rome”, equally the new Rituals focus on the officiating bishop, who holds the spiritual power, by laying the pastoral staff or the Processional cross on both Knights and Dames in the same way.

I believe that it is important to emphasize this intention to place on the same level, both formally and in essence, Knights and Dames who are being invested. Our Order – which as early as the 19th century, opened its doors to women, showing a modernity uncommon for the time, by its awarneness of the important role of women in the Church - places today, in line with that choice, the Dames close to the Knights in front of the altar, during the Investiture ceremony, while in the Vigil, chooses for them a symbol of femininity, the perfumed oil, as a remembrance of those women who went to the Sepulchre to anoint the body of Our Lord.

While commenting the new rituals, someone has recalled the example given by a great saint, a former knight in arms, who after fighting cruelly in battle, became a knight of the spirit, St. Ignatius of Loyola , who went in pilgrimage to the Church of Holy Mary in Montserrat and, after a long vigil of prayer,

took off his sword and placed it before the statue of the Virgin. In the same way, following our past tradition, the sword is placed as a symbol near the altar during the Vigil, while the ritual is enriched by the adoration of the Eucharist, underlining the spiritual aspect of the knightly element of our Order.

On the other hand, during the Investiture, before all the faithful, we receive our mandate by the authority of the Church,and confirm that our commitment towards the Holy Land is fulfilled through our faith in the Resurrected Lord, and through charity, humility and obedience, keeping in mind the spirit of our time in front of those who care for our Order.

Leonardo Visconti di Modrone

Governor General

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