



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Towards the Order's General Assembly of Lieutenants, Consulta 2023

Interview with the Governor General, Leonardo Visconti di Modrone



How are you preparing for the Order's next Consulta and what, broadly speaking, is the purpose of this meeting of the world's Lieutenants?

The Consulta is like a General Assembly: all the Lieutenants come together and compare their experience. Many of them meet for the first time and come from very distant countries. For example, the Lieutenants from Australia and the Pacific, or those from Latin America, who have suffered more than the others from the Pandemic. This will be an opportunity not only for them to hear the Grand Master in person speak about the evolution of our Institution and the programs we are planning to implement, but also to get to know each other, to exchange evaluations and experiences. In a word, to experience the spirit of the Order together, in a fraternal atmosphere. Many of them will leave having gained new friendships, which will then develop and grow stronger.

Opportunities to meet, exchange visits and reciprocal invitations are more frequent among Europeans or North Americans, facilitated by the short distances. But for those who come from further afield, the Consulta represents a unique opportunity to be able, at least once in their term of office, to get closer to brothers and sisters they would otherwise never meet.

I am a great believer in dialogue and the exchange of experiences: I see the benefits in those occasions of meetings between groups of Lieutenants who are similar in language, culture and traditions, which I promote incessantly and which always bear good fruit.

But beyond this aspect, there is the need to promote the Order's unity, especially after the Covid experience, which has changed our way of living together and relating to each other so much. There is a need to unify, while respecting local traditions, the way of living fully and in fraternity the experience of belonging to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, of praying together with the same voice. Let us

remember, that we are an Order which is not conferred on us by merit, but to which we have voluntarily asked to belong, accepting its spirit and obligations, and committing ourselves to live its spiritual and charitable contents. This is why the Cardinal Grand Master considered “Formation” to be the theme of this Consulta: so that through a common vision of formation, we may reach a unity of intent and fully respond to the mandate conferred upon us.

Members’ formation is therefore the focal theme of the Consulta, but not only spiritual formation. What other aspects of formation will be addressed?

Formation is divided into different successive stages, but we could say they are integrated into a single purpose. Generally, the greatest effort in formation is attributed to the preparatory phase of a candidate for entry into the Order. It is clear that this is an important moment to understand whether the motivations behind the request to be accepted into the Order are sincere and whether the candidate has fully understood the commitment he or she is making.

But the ongoing formation of the Knight and Dame already in the Order is no less important, particularly in helping them to nourish the original flame that determined their entry, and to ensure that negative elements, which have occurred in their lives, cannot weaken or drive them away from their initial commitment. Lastly, the formation of those who are called upon to take on positions in the Order’s hierarchy, and who in turn are required to confer them is equally vital. They must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany every advancement, the need to be an example and a guide for other brothers and sisters, and above all not to fall into the temptation of pursuing ambitions of social vanity. Every assignment brings with it a tremendous burden of responsibility, including operational choices, especially in a pyramid structure such as that of the Church and the Order, in which the assignments of tasks are not the result of an elective process, but a conferral from above, and in which the choices may be – as is desirable – the fruit of consultation, but fall substantially under the exclusive responsibility of the person who assumes them.



Participants of Consulta 2018 received by Pope Francis at the Vatican

In an exception to the norm, the Grand Priors will be invited to this Consulta. How will you articulate the interventions in relation to those of the Lieutenants and how do you plan to foster the exchange between them?

The Consulta – I repeat – is the General Assembly of the Lieutenants, i.e., those responsible for the various peripheral structures of an Order that is lay. The Lieutenancy is not a vessel with two captains. The leadership of the Lieutenancy of a lay Order rests with the Lieutenant. The role of the Grand Prior, as defined by the Constitution, is to assist the Lieutenant and collaborate with him in the spiritual direction of the Lieutenancy, also by coordinating the activities of the Priors of the Section and Delegation. Therefore, it is an important role of supporting the task of direct responsibility that belongs exclusively to the Lieutenant, and which presupposes a harmony in respect of the individual roles. Such harmony has sometimes been lacking. Experience has shown that dialogue is sometimes rendered difficult by the fact that the Grand Prior – because of his principal office as Bishop or Archbishop of an important diocese, in some cases with the rank of Cardinal – has little time to devote to the spiritual issues of the Lieutenancy. In other cases, he is unable to establish a constructive dialogue with the Lieutenant for various reasons, which can generally be traced back to a misperception of what the mutual assignment is or to a lack of personal understanding. Hence the need to involve the Grand Priors in the assembly debate in order to focus on the various problems of running a Lieutenancy. It will be interesting to involve them in the debate precisely on the issue of formation, an exercise that needs the contribution of the spiritual element, proper to the figure of the Grand Prior.

After the last Consulta in 2018, the new Constitution and the new Ritual are in force, and a new Regulation is being drafted. How will these important texts be evaluated during the 2023 Consulta?

The last Consulta, although it did not produce a final document, gave a significant impetus to focus on the new rules that currently govern the Order. After the Holy Father's approval of the New Constitution, which accentuates the spiritual aspect of belonging to the Order compared to the previous ones, new Ritual for Celebrations were drafted, reflecting this aspect, applying it to the liturgy, and which were the fruit of profound reflection and extensive consultation.

At present, the Order's leadership is engaged in drafting the General Regulations, which are an addition to the Constitution and in a certain sense its rules of implementation. This drafting work has also benefited from all the reflections that emerged from the last Consulta on the rules that each Lieutenant is called upon to apply in his daily work. That work, skillfully collected and coordinated at the time by the Lieutenant General, as expressly mandated by the Grand Master, will flow into the General Regulations that I hope can be finalized in time for the 2023 Consulta, so that an assessment can already be made. However, the intention remains that the General Regulations will only enter into force after a period of application *ad experimentum*, during which additions or changes may also be proposed.

Since you took office as Governor General, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre is better known not only in the media but also in the diplomatic world. What are your plans for the future to develop this dimension of external relations, also in view of the Jubilee of 2025?

The Order must avail itself today of the most modern means of communication to make itself known and to make our work in the Holy Land known. This is why I have tried to develop external relations, also drawing on the experience gained in over forty years of diplomatic activity in the service of my

country. The enhancement of Palazzo della Rovere, a splendid 16th century building donated by the Pope to the Order, which I like to compare to one of the talents in the famous Gospel parable, is also part of this context. It is our duty to bring this “talent” to fruition to the best of our ability, like the faithful evangelical servant, for the good of the Church and the Holy Land, obviously operating with the utmost transparency and under the watchful eye of the Vatican supervisory bodies, aware of the responsibility entrusted to us. The Jubilee of 2025 is an important milestone for many of our initiatives, which aim to raise awareness of the Order among the thousands of pilgrims who will flock to Rome.

Interview by François Vayne

(April 2023)