



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

"Today the Church once again entrusts you with the mission of being
guardians of the Sepulchre of Christ"

The Holy Father's address to the more than 3,600 participants in the Order's Jubilee Pilgrimage (Paul VI Hall, October 23, 2025)



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Peace be with you!

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,

Dear brothers and sisters,

In this Jubilee Year, it is a joy to meet the Knights and Dames of the *Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem*.

You have come to Rome from various parts of the world, and this reminds us that the tradition of pilgrimage lies at the heart of the Order's history. Indeed, you were founded to safeguard the Holy Sepulchre, to care for pilgrims, and to support the Church in Jerusalem. Even today, you continue this mission with the humility, dedication, and spirit of sacrifice that characterize chivalric Orders. This you do especially through "a constant witness of faith and solidarity towards Christians residing in the Holy Places" (*Address of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem*, 2 March 2000).

In this regard, I am thinking of the remarkable support the Order offers, which you do quietly and without fanfare, to the communities of the Holy Land, by sustaining the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in its various endeavours. These include the Seminary, the schools, charitable and welfare initiatives, humanitarian and educational projects, the University, and assistance to the Churches. All this you do so with particular interventions during times of acute crisis, as was the case during the Covid pandemic and in the tragic days of war.

In all of this, you show that guarding the Sepulchre of Christ does not simply mean preserving a historical, archaeological, or artistic heritage, though important as it is, but supporting a Church made of living stones (*cf. 1 Pt 2:4–5*), which was born around it and continues to live today as a true sign of Easter hope.

For this reason, in this Jubilee of Hope, I would like to pause with you for a moment to reflect on that Church, highlighting three of her dimensions.

The first is that of *confident expectation* (*cf. Francis, Bull Spes Non Confundit*, 4). To pause before the Lord's Sepulchre is, in fact, to renew one's faith in the God who keeps His promises, whose power no human force can overcome. In a world where arrogance and violence seem to prevail over charity, you are called to bear witness that life triumphs over death, that love conquers hatred, that forgiveness overcomes vengeance, and that mercy and grace prevail over sin.

Your "presence" in the Holy Places must above all be a "presence of faith", helping the men and women of our time to pause with their hearts before the tomb of Christ, where sorrow finds its answer in trust, and for those who know how to listen, where the proclamation still resounds: "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said" (*Mt 28:6*)

And you can do this by nourishing your hearts through an intense sacramental life, through listening to and meditating on the Word of God, through personal and liturgical prayer, and through spiritual formation, which is so carefully cultivated within the Order.

The second dimension of hope I would like to reflect on can be seen embodied in the icon of the women who set out towards the Sepulchre to anoint the body of Jesus (*cf. Mk 16:1–2*). It is the face of service, for not even the death of the Master prevents Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome from caring for Him. I have already expressed my gratitude for the great good you do, following in the footsteps of the ancient tradition of assistance that characterizes your Order. Thanks to your work, how many times has a glimmer of light reopened for individuals, families, and entire communities at risk of being overwhelmed by terrible tragedies, and at every level, and especially in the places where Jesus lived.

Your charity sustains them, recognising in their needs those "signs of the times" that Pope Francis has invited us to embrace and transform into "signs of hope" (*cf. Spes Non Confundit*, 8).

There is, however, a third dimension of hope to which I wish to refer: the one that leads us to look towards the goal. The image we may recall is that of Peter and John running to the Sepulchre (*cf. Jn 20:4–10*). On Easter morning, having heard the women, they hurriedly set off at once in a race that brought them to the empty tomb, where they renewed their faith in Christ in the light of the Resurrection.

Saint Paul uses the same image when he speaks of his life as a race in the stadium, that has a goal, but directed towards the encounter with the Lord (cf. *1 Cor 9:24–27*). This is what the act of pilgrimage expresses: a symbol of the search for life's ultimate meaning (cf. *Spes Non Confundit*, 5).

You too have undertaken this journey, and I invite you to experience your presence here not as a destination, but as a stage from which to set out again, to resume your path towards the one true and final goal: full and eternal communion with God in Paradise.

Let this also be a witness to the brothers and sisters you encounter: an invitation to live the things of this world with the freedom and joy of those who know they are journeying towards the infinite horizon of eternity.

Dear friends, today the Church once again entrusts you with the mission of being guardians of the Sepulchre of Christ. Be so, in the trust of expectation, in the zeal of charity, and in the joyful momentum of hope.

As St Augustine said to the Christians of his time: "Go forward, go forward in goodness [...]. Do not stray from the path, do not turn back, do not stop!" (Sermon 256,3).

I bless you wholeheartedly and pray for each one of you. Thank you.

(Paul VI Hall, Thursday October 23, 2025)