“The Grand Master's decision to introduce this strong symbol of the jar of oils, for the Dames, is an immense gift”

Agnès Durand, Dame Commander of the Lieutenancy for Central Italy

The sword, jar of fragrant oils and spurs are highlighted during the Investiture Vigil Ritual, in reference to their spiritual symbolism.

“I would like to begin by expressing my greatest gratitude and thanks to the Grand Master, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, for the introduction of the jar of perfumed oils in the rite of ceremony for the Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The Grand Master’s decision to introduce this powerful symbol for the Dames is an immense gift. The experience of holding it in my hands and passing it on to the new Dames of our Order is unforgettable.

The act of holding this jar in their hands, helps each Dame to experience, in a special and unique way, the memory of the gesture of the first women who loved Christ and who had brought the jars of fragrant oil and aromas to prepare His Body in the tomb. They found the tomb empty; Christ is risen! It is the foundation of our faith. It is this resurrection that gives power to our life and is the reason for the existence of our Order.

The Lord gave me the grace to be chosen by the Lieutenant for Central Italy, Anna Maria Munzi Iacoboni, to pass on this vessel to the new Dames last July 1st , 2022. The whole time I held it in my hand during the ceremony, my excitement was immense, and I felt questions and answers arise. What does it mean for us Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre to remember and perpetuate what the first women did or to hold this jar in our hands? What do we put in this jar, for whom and why?

Firstly, the symbol of this jar allows those who hold it in their hands to ponder the power of Christ’s resurrection in their daily lives as Catholics and especially as Dames.

We no longer fill the jar with oil and aromatics, but with our actions of charity, love of Christ, of others, of ourselves, summing up, the life that the Gospel asks us to follow.

Finally, this jar is also for us, because the tomb is empty, and the glorious Body of Christ needs neither perfumed oil nor aromatics. Instead, it is our mortal body that needs to prepare itself for the encounter with the Lord on the chosen day with what we will put into this vessel each day.

Agnès Durand with the jar of fragrant oils during the Investiture Vigil procession in Chieti.

“Blessings and graces are hidden in suffering. Learn how to bring them forth”

The answer of why is in the intimate relationship each of us has with Christ. In my case, the answer is found in the painful circumstances the Lord chose to call me into the Order.

Coming from one of the poorest countries in the world and from a large family in which I am responsible for the needs of my brothers and sisters, I had no reason to enter the Order because already the concerns and expectations related to my family in Africa and my country are enormous. I know well that entering the Order is an honor for many people however, for me, it is a call to consolidate my faith and I believe that was why I received the jar in my hands.

It all started with the following premonitory quote, added to the end of a Christmas message sent to me by a religious friend: “Blessings and graces are hidden in suffering. Learn how to bring them forth.”

In my discouragement, the Lord revealed to me JERUSALEM CROSS 2022-2023 55 what faith allows me to understand, the path of my journey to find my answer.

Thus, my eyes were opened to find this answer on March 16th, 2019, during a spiritual retreat of the members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, in Rome, during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The answer that was clearly revealed to me was on the page I was holding in my hands at the time, on the liturgy sheet of the day that had been distributed to us where it said, “Christ, who transfigures our mortal body to conform it to your glorious body, configure to the image of your glory our dead.”

The jar therefore reminds us why we need to prepare our body, Christ’s temple, for the day of his transfiguration. The jar is really a gift for all those who understand the meaning of their belonging to the Order and the purpose of life on earth.

All these things are for me the confirmation and fulfillment of the beautiful quote enclosed in my friend’s message.

May the Holy Spirit always descend upon Cardinal Fernando Filoni to guide us and upon each of us members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.”

(April 2023)