Open the door to the other: activities in the Lieutenancy for Finland

The Lieutenancy of Finland organized two events that stood out during the Jubilee of Mercy. Although they did not directly bear the theme of mercy, both of them had the special character of **coming together in brotherly love with "Others".** In the first instance, the others were the members of the Maltese Order (SMOM) in Finland, in the latter the members of the Lieutenancy of Sweden of our Order. Both events were new openings among the activities of our Lieutenancy and both turned out to be greatly appreciated by all participants.

In the autumn 2015 our Lieutenancy organized an initiative **with the members of the Maltese Order in Finland: a joint charity dinner** at the beginning of the Advent and the Year of Mercy. The idea was to raise funds for the benevolent purposes of each of the two Orders. The members of the Maltese Order welcomed our motion with a propitious interest. One member provided the banquet hall and his private chapel in Turku and the members of our Order in Turku took care of the practical arrangements. **Our Grand Prior, the bishop of Helsinki, Msgr Teemu Sippo,** SCJ, KC*HS, celebrated a Holy Mass with the Knights, Dames and friends in the chapel. After the mass a dinner followed.

As the main speaker of the banquet **Rev. Jukka Paarma, the Lutheran Archbishop Emeritus of Finland**, was invited. He is a keen advocate of **ecumenical relations between Lutherans and Catholics** in Finland, with a personal interest in the Medieval Catholic era in Finland. He gave us a vivid lecture of the Catholic bishops in Finland during the Middle Ages, or to be exact: the Catholic bishops of Turku. No independent Finland existed then but Turku was the capital of the Eastern province of Sweden from the 13th to the beginning of the 19th century.

Bishop Teemu Sippo, SCJ, and many Catholics in Finland desire to revive the canonization process of Blessed bishop Hemming of Turku (14th century) which was interrupted by the Reformation. This process is by no means only a matter of our Lieutenancy, but it seemed a good time and place to

invite Rev. Jukka Paarma as our guest just thinking of the memorial year of the Reformation and the case of Blessed Hemming.

The banquet was a success both as an effort of co-operation between members of the two ancient Orders in Finland and as a fund-raising event. The profits from the evening were divided between our Order and the Maltese Order for the charity purposes of both parties. It was mutually agreed that joint fund-raising banquets should be arranged in the future, too.

Time to get together for the members of different Lieutenancies

The second special event took place in September 2016. From Spring 2016 onwards our Lieutenancy was in close contact with members of the Lieutenancy of Sweden, now the Lieutenancy of Sweden and Denmark, as we planned to direct our **yearly pilgrimage this time to Sweden**. From Sweden Christianity was first implanted in South-Western Finland during the 11th and 12th century. Maybe the most famous woman during the Middle Ages, **Sancta Birgitta**, was Swedish. It seemed proper to visit the Brigittine convent in Vadstena, the first one in the chain of convents established by Birgitta and the only Brigittine convent which still follows the original order formulated by herself. As it happens, Birgitta was also a close friend with the bishop Hemming of Turku.

Besides Vadstena, we visited other places in Östergötland and Uppland (in Mid-Sweden) which bear the memory of the early Christianity in Sweden and saints of those days, especially the national saint of Sweden, St. Erik, whose relics lie in the medieval (nowadays Lutheran) cathedral of Uppsala. **Members of the Lieutenancy of Sweden guided us on our pilgrimage** both in **Vadstena** and in **Uppsala**.

Our visit in Sweden reached its culmination in the Brigittine convent of Djursholm near Stockholm where we met a group of Swedish Dames and Knights for a Holy Mass, and afterwards a banquet took place. The evening was convivial and a verbal agreement of near future relations and new meetings was welcomed by both sides.