A question of perspectives: not “the only one” but the first Knight in Guatemala

Julio Menchú and his family were a lovely and warm presence at the Investiture that took place on May 25, in Santo Domingo. Julio, who is Guatemalan, is a teacher at a Catholic-inspired high school, and has always wanted to serve the Church as much as he could. “I had requested to be ordained as a permanent deacon, but when the Archbishop of Guatemala passed away in 2018, the project was interrupted.” Since then, Julio, who has remained profoundly moved by this desire, remained open to other possibilities of serving within the Church.

Julio recounts, “I wrote to the Lieutenancy for Spain and asked them if they could provide me with more documents and information about the Order. After a few months, I received an email introducing me to the Lieutenant for Mexico.” Shortly after, he began the formation process in preparation to join the Order. “Due to the pandemic and because the Knight and Dame candidates were spread throughout Mexico and the Dominican Republic, I was fortunate that the training was conducted online, which allowed me to join without any further issues. Even though I am here in Guatemala, the journey alongside others and the guidance of Lieutenant Guillermo Macías Graue has allowed me to feel connected to the Order, its Members, and the other candidates.”

However, Julio’s challenges were not over. He was supposed to join the group receiving Investiture in Mexico in December. “Due to immigration procedural issues, it is not straightforward for a Guatemalan to receive permission to enter Mexico. We tried every which way, but my request was denied,” Julio recalls. He is a husband and father of three children, including little Rocío, who captivated all the participants during the Investiture ceremonies. “I was truly devastated, but I told myself that God always knows why He does things and does them for the good. Therefore, I called the Lieutenant for Mexico, who, after a moment’s silence, came up with the solution. He said, ‘Come to the Dominican Republic.’ What an emotion!”

Thereafter, Julio joined the first group of Knights and Dames for their investiture by Cardinal Filoni, the Grand Master, in May in Santo Domingo, coinciding with the establishment of the Magistral Delegation for the Dominican Republic. When he reflects on these years of approaching the Order, Julio confesses, “I have experienced a personal conversion journey, while discovering more of myself as I drew closer to God through the Order.” The dimension of service is fundamental for Julio and his entire family, who have played a central role in his decision to become part of the Order. “My family belongs to the ancient indigenous noble families of Totonicapán here in Guatemala. My older brothers serve in local government, and they pay to do it because to serve the people is an honor. The issue is not about the title (especially here in America, where the term ‘Knight’ or ‘Sir’ sounds almost anachronistic). What excites me and makes me happy is being part of an Order, an Institution of the Catholic Church that serves the first diocese in the world, the land where Jesus was born.” Julio concludes emotionally, “The contribution I can offer, no matter how small, is precious to me and fills my heart with pride because it can help other Christians in the Holy Land.”

At the Investiture in Santo Domingo, everyone already knew about the existence of the “Guatemalan Knight” and his story. “‘Julio, we’ve talked about you,’ the Governor General said to me. ‘What joy that you’re here for your Investiture’. This welcome made me feel very close to everyone, and from here in Guatemala, I share my experience and seek other candidates for the Order so that this beautiful reality can grow.”

Julio concludes his Investiture account by mentioning an exchange he had with Cardinal Filoni. “At the post-Investiture lunch, Cardinal Filoni asked me, ‘Julio, you’re from Guatemala. How many Knights are there?’ I replied that I was the only one, and he said, ‘If you say you’re the only one, there won’t be any others. But if you say you’re the first, others will come after you – others you may never know.’ Therefore, I am not the only one but the first Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Guatemala, and that both motivates me and makes me happy.”

Elena Dini

(July 2024)