



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Regular Canoness of the Holy Sepulchre becomes a Religious-Dame of the Order

From the origins of the Order to the present day



In the introduction of our Constitution, it states, “The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, of ancient origins, has its historical roots in the creation of the Canons Regular of the Holy Sepulchre and in the firmly established custom of valiant men being invested with the title of knight at the tomb of Christ in past centuries.” Centuries later, we still see the richness of the tradition linking the Canons Regular and the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Sister Monica Raassen, a Regular Canoness of the Holy Sepulchre, who was recently invested as a Religious-Dame in the Netherlands, here shares her testimony about her calling to join the Order.

Sister Monica, could you tell us more about your Congregation and how you decided to become a sister?

My religious Order is named ‘Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre’. Our Order was founded during the First Crusade in 1099. At first, it was intended for men only, but soon after for women too. We served the pilgrims around the Holy Sepulchre and in time, the Order settled in Europe. Our oldest Monastery, which was founded in 1276, still exists and is located in Zaragoza. I entered this religious Order at the age of 45 after I became a widow. It was not my intention to become a nun but the Lord led me to the Monastery in Maarssen, in the Netherlands. In the Monastery – Priorij Emmaus – lived the Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre and I entered the community in 2006. In January 2012, I took my final vows. I lived for a few years with a small number of sisters very happily in our community. Today, my Monastery does not exist any longer because most of the sisters have died, and there was a lack of new vocations. Although I am no longer living in a community, I am still a member of the Association of Regular Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre

and the general Prioress is my Superior. At the moment I live in a presbytery in Breukelen in the Netherlands. I am based here because I am involved as a pastoral worker with a mission that the Archbishop of Utrecht, Cardinal Eijk, chose for me.

How did you get to know about the Order of the Holy Sepulchre?

The Dutch Lieutenancy of the Order used to come twice a year to our Monastery to celebrate the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and then again on the first Sunday of Advent. During these meetings, since 2006, I have personally made contacts with several Members of the Order. We shared our spirituality and that created a bond. Since 2017, the national meetings have no longer been held in our Monastery but I have been invited to continue to attend. During the last three years, I was invited to join the regional meetings and to give some lectures. Then two Members of the Order asked me to become a full Member and because the possibility to become a Dame is open for religious women now, the procedure started. Your connection to the Holy Land was already part of your spiritual life. How do you think that being a Member in the Order has added something to that dimension? The Order takes special care of the Christians in the Holy Land, and I like to join this care with my prayer, and financial support as far as is possible for me. During the meetings, and through the newsletters, we are informed about the situation in the Holy Land and in this way I am even more involved. My bond with the Holy Land has therefore been strengthened.

How is your religious family supporting your commitment in the Order?

My Superior supported and approved my membership in the Order. My religious Order community in Odiliënberg in the Netherlands was very supportive during the Investiture. I stayed with them during the two days of the celebrations and they followed the ceremony by livestream.

Your closeness to the Land of our Lord is definitely a source of wealth for the other Members of your Lieutenancy. How do you think that this gift of yours can be shared with your fellow Knights and Dames in terms of service?

Being present during our meetings is an enrichment for all of us. Since I am a theologian I will contribute with my knowledge, and to this end, I have already given some lectures and have led some conversations. Together with a priest in our region, I contribute to Church celebrations with a testimony or a sermon. In the future, I intend to help as much as I can.

You were recently invested. Can you describe the experience of the ceremony? Was there something that particularly moved you?

As a religious sister, I like simplicity, so I was a little afraid of too much ceremonial display. Nevertheless, I was touched by the intensity of the ceremonies. Everything was very well prepared and we were surrounded by overwhelming warmth and sense of brotherhood. The local musicians who played during the procession and during the celebrations provided a very special moment for us.

Do you have a favorite place in the Holy Land and a Biblical passage that is especially dear to you?

Because I lived for so many years in the Priorij Emmaus, my favorite place in the Holy Land would be Emmaus. My favorite Biblical passage is therefore the story of the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:13–36)

Interview by Elena Dini

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