

JERUSALEM CROSS

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The Grand Master's Message

LET US BE GUIDED BY THE RISEN LORD

Dear Knights and Dames,

During these holy days following Easter, the Church turns her gaze towards Jerusalem and the mystery of the Lord's Resurrection. Our attention is focused on the witness of the local Church there and the entire ecclesial community, led by Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who has strongly reminded us that faith is embodied within the concrete history of humanity, marked by suffering and conflict. His presence alongside the faithful of the Holy Land is a sign of enduring hope, which continues to call for peace even in the most painful of situations.

We accompanied the Lord along the *Via Dolorosa*, pausing in contemplation of the Stations of the Cross, while the universal Church, from Rome, joined in prayer around the Successor of Peter, Pope Leo XIV, making visible the communion of the people of God.

In this journey, the silence of Holy Saturday holds a special place. This is the day of great silence, when the Church waits in anticipation before the tomb. In that silence, the Virgin Mary dwells in a singular way: she teaches the Church to persevere in her waiting, not to flee from this time of absence, and to believe that God is at work even in the unseen. Her faith becomes a source of strength for us

at times when history seems to have come to a standstill and pain seems to have the final say.

We are called to become tangible signs of this hope. The words and witness of Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who continues to call for justice and brotherhood in Jerusalem and throughout the Holy Land, remind us that peace is a daily task, while often fragile, it is always possible. We also heed with profound attention Pope Leo XIV's appeal he made on the eve of April 11: "Stop! It is time for peace." This is an invitation that challenges our consciences and calls for a concrete response. "War divides; hope unites." With these words, the Pope calls us to become artisans of



The Virgin Mary, who welcomed the Holy Spirit in his fullness, intercedes for the Church so that her members may be, like her, filled with divine grace and bear witness to it through their lives.

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reconciliation, who are capable of building new bonds where divisions and fears prevail.

Dear friends, Easter is not merely a liturgical commemoration; it is a living force that impels us to walk through history as reconciled men and women. During the holy season following the Resurrection, the Lord Jesus revealed himself to his disciples, gave them peace and opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures, which confirmed the truth of his resurrection with concrete signs of life. He instructed them about the Kingdom of God and strengthened them in the faith, while calling them to

become witnesses of his victory over death.

With the Ascension, Christ entrusted the Church with a missionary mandate and called on His disciples to persevere in one accord in prayer as they await the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the Upper Room, together with Mary, they prepared to welcome Pentecost, which was the beginning of a new life and of the Church's mission in the world.

Let us entrust this journey to the protection of the Risen Lord and to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Palestine and Mother of Hope.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni



The Order in union with the Universal Church

ECHOES OF HOLY WEEK 2026

Holy Week 2026 took place in an atmosphere that combined religious contemplation with a focus on the complex international situation, accompanied by a strong call for peace and coexistence. Thus, between Jerusalem and Rome, between the sites of the Passion and the heart of Christianity, Holy Week and the days that followed appeared as one immense journey: from the memory of sacrifice to present responsibility, from liturgy to life, in the tireless search for peace.

Palm Sunday, March 29, opened Holy Week in Rome and Jerusalem in a delicate context. The Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa initially encountered difficulties in accessing the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, which were subsequently resolved. These obstacles were due to security restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities. Though these were overcome, they made the fragility of the balance in the Holy Land even more evident, where

religious freedom can be put to the test and where the liturgy itself becomes a witness of resistance and hope.

In Rome, the celebrations took place from the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum to the Easter Vigil in St Peter's Basilica, and maintained their universal character. On April 11, during the vigil for peace presided over by Pope Leo XIV, the Pontiff renewed his appeal to shared responsibility, stating, "Stop! It is time for peace!" He denounced the "delusion of omnipotence" that fuels conflicts, he recalled the value of dialogue, while emphasizing that "war divides, hope unites", and invited all to build paths of peace "without weapons or violence."

In a particularly powerful passage, he encouraged people not to yield to despair: "Let us rise from the rubble! Nothing can confine us to a predetermined fate." In his closing prayer, he invoked Christ, recalling that He triumphed "without weapons or violence... with the power of peace."

Pope Leo XIV is seen here bestowing the Apostolic Blessing on the city of Rome and the world from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica on Easter Sunday.



“DEAR POPE BENEDICT, WE NEED YOUR PRAYER TODAY MORE THAN EVER”

On Saturday, March 28, in the Vatican Grottoes of St Peter's Basilica, Cardinal Filoni presided over a Mass in memory of Pope Benedict XVI. The Masses are organized by the Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI Vatican Foundation, and held there every month. Here we publish Cardinal Filoni's homily, which is full of gratitude.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During this concelebration, allow me to begin this brief homily, as a gesture of deep affection for Pope Benedict XVI, by citing the words of the Evangelist Luke who, in the Prologue of his Gospel, wrote: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us [...] it seemed good to [...] write an orderly account [...] that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (cf. *Lk* 1:1-4). Clearly, and within the scope of these brief remarks of mine, I am not going to recount with “zeal” the events that took

place during Benedict XVI's Pontificate, nor do I offer an account of the “soundness” of his immensely profound teaching. Instead, I simply wish here to highlight a few aspects of his life, since much has already been said—and there is much more to say still—about his ministry and teaching. For my part, therefore, I dwell on a memory which, for me, aptly characterizes the beloved Pontiff's personality.

First of all, I recall the affection he was accustomed to showing to all those closest to him and to his collaborators. Each of us, therefore, has many memories to recount and many recollections to share. I have a

The Grand Master of the Order in prayer before the tomb of Pope Benedict XVI.



few as well. Perhaps one of the dearest memories is an expression he would write by hand when giving me copies of his publications:

"Dear friend". I cannot say that I was truly a "friend" of the Pope, but I was greatly honored that

he would write to me in this way. Perhaps because, during the period of his "cloistered life" after his pontificate, he was freer to express his deeply human and elevated sentiments. There was esteem, but also his way of appreciating the fact that, on my part, in knowing some of his tastes, I would take the liberty of sending him things I knew he enjoyed. In this way of acting, I experienced a precious benevolence toward me. In addition, I remember well his attention when I was Substitute – for example, the fact that he would ask whether I had taken some time for rest during the summer, and that for my anniversary he honored me with his presence in my home. Once, while flying to the United States, he wished to make a toast to me on the plane, which was then reciprocated the following day by President George Bush in front of the White House, since his birthday fell on April 16, the day after mine.

Today, dear Pope Benedict, I like to think that you are not absent from among us; rather, that you are, so to speak, "concelebrating" with us, because our prayer, as you often said, is an act of profound thanksgiving to God. Yet today we would also like, with our prayers, to thank you for your long, luminous, and passionate service to Christ and to the Church, whom you deeply loved and faithfully served. Thank you once again for your service.

I can say, dear Pope Benedict, that many "friends", if you will pardon the expression, continue to hold you in great affection.



Personally, I cannot fail to recall here that your writings continue to do much good for the faithful, and people often remind me of this. I find, for example, your three volumes on *Jesus of Nazareth* to be an inexhaustible

treasure. Here I am reminded of what Jesus said to Thomas Aquinas, and it is no coincidence that I refer to it here. It is said that, before Thomas's death, the Lord asked him: "You have written well of me, Thomas. What do you desire from me as a reward for your work?". Thomas, who as a child asked "Quid est Deus?", and spent his whole life seeking the answer, replied: "Lord, only you!". Benedict XVI, too, wrote eloquently about Christ, and he, too, was theologically 'tormented' like Thomas Aquinas, even asking himself: Who is Christ today for a world that is indifferent, or that often shuts the door on Him in a godless modernity, or would welcome Him without the Church – which, in fact, was the Pope's other great passion? A Church for which Benedict XVI devoted his entire life, about whom he wrote and taught with clear witness, both as a priest and as Pope.

One of your axioms comes to mind, which reads, without the Church, Christ would be reduced to a religious sociologist; and the Church, without Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, would be something akin to a philanthropic organization composed of men and women.

You see, dear Pope Benedict, this Church still needs you, and many of the faithful keep saying so and even come here out of affection to visit you; and we need your prayers to the Lord more than ever before, whom you now contemplate in blessedness.

Amen.

Fernando Cardinal Filoni



“WE WITNESS THE GOOD AWAY FROM THE MEDIA SPOTLIGHT”

On March 19, Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, celebrated the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination at the Church of San Salvatore in Lauro in Rome. Present at the liturgy were the Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, the Assessor of the Order, Archbishop Tommaso Caputo, along with numerous distinguished guests, including Knights and Dames of the Lieutenancy for Central Italy. On the occasion of this significant milestone, we published on the Order’s website www.oessh.va a comprehensive interview with His Eminence, retracing his lifelong dedication in service to the universal Church. Here is an excerpt:

Eminence, on the anniversary of your 25 years of Episcopacy, what is your particular act of thanksgiving?

On March 19, twenty-five years ago, Pope John Paul II, in the presence of other ecclesiastics, consecrated me a bishop. In addition, this day is also the anniversary of when the Holy Father appointed me as his diplomatic representative to Iraq and Jordan. Before my episcopal consecration, I had just completed my time in Hong Kong, where I had spent eight years learning to love and to know the Church in China, which was emerging at that time from many years of suffering and martyrdom. While there, I met many men and women who had borne witness as confessors of the faith, and about many others of whom I had heard of and had read about their martyrdom. Therefore, it was also a period in which I gave thanks to God for having permitted me to come to know this scarcely known reality;

in fact, very little was known at the time. I had come to know it deeply because I had direct contact with those who had suffered, and access to written accounts of the highest spiritual and ecclesial value, which reached me after decades of immense hardship. Therefore, prior to my appointment, I had already had an extremely important experience, which was profoundly marked by faith through the testimony of these men and women, religious brothers and sisters, and clergy and laity who had suffered under Chinese communism. When Pope John Paul II chose me for the episcopate, it was difficult to say “no.” At times, I reflected on what Saint Augustine notably said, “It is more

important to be worthy of bearing the weight of the episcopate than to be a bishop” (*Sermon 340/A*). What he means here is that there is an immense responsibility that accompanies this position, and on a human level, we consider ourselves humanly, culturally, spiritually, and





Cardinal Filoni in Iraq in 2014, as Pope Francis's special envoy supporting the victims of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network.

pastorally inadequate. I was also extremely fond of something else St Augustine had said, and, as if in conversation, I would say to him, "Yes, but you accepted"; and in reply he seems to say: "I cannot withdraw from the voice of God." After a few days' reflection, I accepted because there was no escaping the logic of obedience and the papal call, nor the fullness of the priestly ministry. After some time, I left Hong Kong and prepared myself for this new adventure as a bishop and as the papal representative to Iraq and Jordan. These were complex countries because, at that time, although Jordan was peaceful, it needed our support as the Christian presence there was small. Iraq, on the other hand, was a country with a recent past full of turmoil, with small *sui juris* Churches, whilst the majority of the population was Muslim, either Shia or Sunni.

Later, in Iraq, during the so-called war waged by the United States and its allies, you were the only diplomat who did not leave the country.

After eight years in China, I found myself assigned to Iraq (2001-2006), and there too the situation was complex. The president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was known internationally as a dictator, which he was,

but no more and no less than many others in the region. Obviously, the fundamental issue in the Middle East was, and still is, Israel's security, and, at the same time, the 'Palestinian question', as we see today with the war involving Iran. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the United States had used Iraq against Iran; then, when Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait, the United States turned against him. It seems they had initially given their consent and later withdrew it, which left Saddam Hussein exposed. He claimed the Kuwaiti territory, stating, "Doesn't the oil beneath Kuwait also come from Iraq? In addition, aren't the wells close to our border? And did borders even exist during the Ottoman Empire?" However, he was unaware of international law, since under the agreements of 1915-18 (when the major colonial powers divided up the Middle East through the Sykes-Picot treaties) Kuwait had become a sovereign state.

Therefore, he had violated international law. With the oil at his disposal, Saddam Hussein bought weapons, and made Iraq a regional military power, which was something Israel and other neighboring countries did not welcome. Following the occupation (1990) and the expulsion from Kuwait (1991), the United Nations imposed severe economic sanctions on Iraq.





I therefore found a nation trying to emerge from those sanctions, but there was no agreement on the international demands. I had to follow the two countries of Jordan, which is essentially a peaceful nation, and Iraq, with its serious internal problems, because the Kurds in the north were fighting Saddam Hussein, and in the south, the Shiites were rebelling too. As I could not fly due to the embargo, I had to drive 900 kilometers across the desert between Baghdad and Amman. The desert has its own charm, but you really hope nothing goes wrong, as there were no service stations or mobile phone coverage. We, as the Catholic Church (Chaldean, Syriac, Latin, Melkite), together with the other Christian Churches, were a small presence, but there was freedom of worship and people lived together without major difficulties. The people were kind and respectful; for example, I treasure a simple pectoral cross made by an Iraqi Muslim, who crafted it as a token of appreciation for my decision not to leave Iraq during the Second Gulf War. Saddam Hussein held the Holy See in high regard because the nuncios remained in Baghdad throughout both the First and Second Gulf Wars. Furthermore, he respected Christians.

Your Eminence, you wrote a book, titled *The Church in Iraq: From the Beginnings of Apostolic Preaching to the Present Day*, published by the Vatican Publishing House and available in many languages. You often speak of a little girl called Nur, who embodies the very essence of the Church's mission in that country. What can you tell us about this?

Among the people I met, Nur holds a special place in my heart. At the time, she was a severely disabled newborn baby, who had been welcomed by the Sisters of Mother Teresa, who had been authorized by Saddam

Hussein to open a small home. This was a kind of hospital for boys and girls whose families had rejected them because

of their serious mental or physical disabilities. We usually speak only ill of Saddam Hussein, but in this decision to allow the Sisters of Mother Teresa to care for children with grave, incurable conditions, I believe he showed an extraordinary, positive, and respectful vision of life. In this regard, I can only speak well of him for those children and the Sisters were under his personal protection.

From time to time, I would visit them, and celebrate Mass for the Sisters too. One day they told me, "They have brought us a newborn; we have named her Nur," which means *Light*. She was a child without arms or legs; yet mentally she seemed normal. The Sisters raised her. The beautiful thing is that when Pope Francis made his pastoral visit to Iraq, he wanted me to accompany him, and I went. After the visit to the head of state, the Pope went to greet the Christian community in the Syriac-Catholic cathedral, where dozens of people had been killed in suicide attacks. The Pope wanted to make a gesture of great love and respect toward that deeply wounded Christian community.

I saw the Sisters of Mother Teresa and upon greeting them, I asked, "What had happened to Nur?" They took me a short distance away; the young woman was sitting in a wheelchair, with the face of an entirely normal young person; indeed, I would say a lovely one. We looked at each other and I said, "Nur, you know that I have known you since the day you were born?" Nur then spoke English, and she gave me a beautiful smile, which was unforgettable. I thought to myself, this was one of Mother Teresa's miracles. Nur is the good that came about far from the noise of the *mass-media*.

Interview by the Communications Office of the Grand Magisterium



AWARDS IN RECOGNITION OF CARDINAL FILONI

Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, received several honors in February and March for his diplomatic, cultural, and pastoral work in support of peace, dialogue, and human dignity in some of the world's most complex contexts. The International "Nassiriya Peace Prize", presented by the cultural association Elaia, highlights his witness of faith, courage, and dedication in difficult settings marked by conflict and crisis. The Ethical Journalism Award "Lights of Truth", presented to him at the Ministry of Culture in Rome, recognizes his ability to combine cultural depth and human sensitivity in addressing major global issues. The Roma International Award, presented at the Ghione Theatre, honors his diplomatic career and cultural contribution, particularly through his writings on the Church in Iraq. The "Promotion of Life Award", bestowed at Palazzo Giustiniani, seat of the Senate of the Republic (see our photo on the right), celebrates his tireless commitment to defending human dignity and promoting a culture of life and peace. Together, these awards highlight Cardinal Filoni's enduring missionary spirit and his profound pastoral charity.



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A LETTER FROM CHINA IN THE GRAND MASTER'S POSTAL MAIL

Last Winter, among his abundant correspondence, the Grand Master received a letter from a Catholic in China who is keenly interested in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, whose presence is growing in Asia. We have chosen to publish an excerpt from the letter written by this faithful follower of Christ living in the "Middle Kingdom". His words express universal love for the Mother Church of Jerusalem, to which the 30,000 Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre throughout the world are devoted.

Your Eminence,

Greetings in the Lord. I am a Catholic from China, writing to you with a heart full of devotion to God and deep admiration for the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

I am proud to share the same faith with Catholics around the world and hope to foster closer ties with a holy institution like the Order.

I have learned of the many charitable works carried out by the Order in the Holy Land such as the restoration of Churches and aid to those in need. These actions not only demonstrate faithfulness but also radiate love and care for humanity. For this, we express our sincere appreciation and support.

We would be honored to have the opportunity to participate in some of the Order's charitable projects—whether through prayer or other means—and to contribute in our own way to the protection of the Holy Land and the proclamation of the faith. I also hope to learn more about the history, culture and spirituality of the Order, so that my own journey of faith may be enriched and strengthened.

Finally, may God bless you and every Member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre. May you be kept safe and steadfast on the path of guarding the Holy Land and may the light of our faith shine forever. If possible, I am looking forward to your reply.

Yours respectfully in
 Christ,

B. A. H. Q., China

A replica of the Grotto of Lourdes in Beijing, photographed by Monsignor Filoni during his time as head of the Holy See's "study mission" in Hong Kong (1992–2001).



Proceedings of the Grand Magisterium

“DO NOT BE AFRAID, LITTLE FLOCK!”

A reflection by the Grand Master

Anyone visiting the Holy Land today will notice a difference compared to their previous trips: basilicas are empty, the streets are devoid of pilgrims, and there are visible tensions due to the increased security presence. From an economic perspective, the crisis has hit everyone hard, including Christian families and religious communities.

Last summer, during my most recent visit there as a simple pilgrim, I observed that the survival of many families often depended on ‘vouchers’ distributed by the Latin Patriarchate to purchase basic necessities. This demonstrates that Christian communities around the world, through the aid they provide to the Patriarchate, are supporting the presence of families in the Holy Land. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre

devotes its energies to this noble mission, as detailed in our publications.

In reality, the issue of sustaining the Christian presence is not confined to the Holy Land; instead, it affects the entire Middle East. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, millions of Christians have left the region. They once accounted for between 20 and 22 per cent of the population, compared with 1 or 2 per cent there today. How did we get to this point?

First and foremost, we must recall the violence perpetrated against the ancient Christian communities (Armenians, Greeks, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Chaldeans, Assyrians, etc.). But the problem stems not only from this violence but also from laws that discriminate and make life difficult for so many who would like to look to the



future of their families with confidence.

In this context, the international community has a responsibility, because whilst there is a right to emigrate, there is also a right to remain in one's own land!

For a century now, we have been witnessing a kind of ongoing exodus. These ancient Churches, which have their own culture and language and have given so much to the world, cannot be forgotten. Some celebrate the liturgy in the language of Jesus, but it is well known that those who emigrate lose touch with their ancient traditions.

When a family has children and those children have no future, the question arises as to whether or not to stay. Some families have even asked me what I would do in their place if I had had children and lived there. These families love their homeland, and therefore it is a moral obligation to help them remain.

During my recent trip to the Holy Land, I reflected at length on the words Jesus addressed to his disciples: "Do not be afraid, little flock!" (*Luke 12:32*). What meaning do those words hold for us today? If we look at the history of the region, since Jesus' time,

the Christian community has always been, and has remained a minority, which has often been persecuted or discriminated against. Christians have indeed always been a "little flock". Attempts to make them a dominant presence have always failed. However, the little flock that still cherishes a love for the Holy Land today, understands that Jesus is calling us not to lose heart, even though at times we may feel an insurmountable challenge.

The truest Christian vision is not one of seizing power, but of dialogue and the defense of everyone's fundamental rights. There is no need for specific laws or privileges; rather, Christians must be able to live alongside all those who inhabit the Holy Land and with whom they share common roots.

Our vision, as a small flock, nevertheless makes a genuine contribution for the benefit of all, whether they be Jews, Muslims or Christians. This is not about competition, but about giving meaning to Jesus' words: "Do not be afraid, little flock!" We believe that this can lead every community to live in peace and brotherhood with everyone.

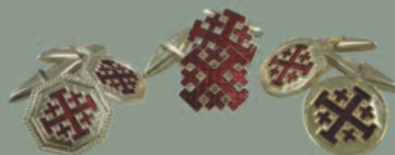
Fernando Cardinal Filoni



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Spring Meeting of the Grand Magisterium – April 21, 2026

A RECORD CONTRIBUTION FROM THE ORDER IN SUPPORT OF THE HOLY LAND

During the Mass celebrated on April 21 by Cardinal Fernando Filoni to open the Spring Meeting of the Grand Magisterium, participants prayed in particular for the repose of the soul of the Order's Chancellor Emeritus, Ivan Rebernik, who had passed away a few days earlier. Later, gathered for a day of discussions at the temporary headquarters of the Grand Magisterium on Via Belli in Rome, they also extended their birthday wishes to Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, conveyed by the Grand Master.

In his opening remarks, Cardinal Filoni emphasized the generosity of the Knights and Dames in response to the dramatic situation unfolding in the Holy Land, where hatred and violence continue to rage. Referring to the reprehensible act of an Israeli soldier who damaged a statue of Christ—an incident widely reported in the media the previous day—he noted a growing global awareness, reflecting a universal desire to bring an end to the war in the Middle East and the abuses arising from it.

In his address, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, Governor General, welcomed the new Members of the Grand Magisterium: Manuel Tavares de Almeida

Filho, representing South America, and Anna Maria Munzi Iacoboni, Lieutenant Emeritus for Central Italy. He also expressed gratitude for the record increase in donations from Members of the Order in 2025.

Reviewing the Order's major events—particularly the canonization of Knight Bartolo Longo, an example of Christian life for all—he announced the upcoming meeting of European Lieutenants in Pompeii in October 2026, at the invitation of the Assessor of the Order, Msgr. Tommaso Caputo, Archbishop-Prelate of Pompeii and author of a new book dedicated to the founder of the shrine.

The Governor General also expressed satisfaction with new contacts established in India and Africa aimed at expanding the Order, and he highlighted the Order's commitment to multilingual communication through the Grand Magisterium's website. Addressing humanitarian emergencies in the West Bank and Gaza, he reaffirmed the Order's full support for the Latin Patriarchate, with the goal of preserving the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

Continuing his update to the Members, he spoke about the new Foundation of the

During the Mass held prior to the meeting of the Grand Magisterium, those present prayed for Ivan Rebernik, the Order's former Chancellor, who had recently passed away.



Cardinal Pizzaballa, Grand Prior of the Order, addressed the meeting of the Grand Magisterium via videoconference from Jerusalem.



Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Third Sector Body, which will support the activities of Palazzo della Rovere, the Order’s headquarters, and particularly its museum currently under development.

During the meeting, the Patriarch of Jerusalem spoke via videoconference, outlining the severe difficulties faced by local residents. “The Promised Land has become the land of promises,” he said, describing a prevailing atmosphere marked by waiting... for better days. Characterizing the situation in the West Bank as a true “Far West,” he denounced settler violence and the emergence of mafia-like practices in the administration of certain Arab cities in Israel, such as Nazareth, where the police have replaced the mayor.

The Patriarch also highlighted recent decisions by Israeli authorities invalidating the equivalence of university degrees obtained in Palestine—even those from Bethlehem University—thereby preventing, for example, Palestinian-trained teachers from working in Jerusalem. Additionally, schools in Jerusalem will be required to adopt the “Bagrut” (the Israeli matriculation system) and abandon the “Tawjihi” (the Palestinian system). Schools that do not comply will lose public funding. It is evident, he noted, that the State of Israel is asserting its intention to exercise control over the entire Holy City through increasingly strict restrictions, such as those seen during Holy Week. The Patriarch also pointed to growing problems within families, linked to male unemployment.

Referring to his forthcoming pastoral

letter—aimed at situating the mission of the Mother Church of Jerusalem within the context of the conflict—he expressed sincere gratitude to the Order for its spiritual and financial support and voiced hope of attending the next Grand Magisterium meeting in person this fall.

Sami El-Yousef, CEO of the Latin Patriarchate, reviewed recent historical events that have weakened the Holy Land: the pandemic, the war in Gaza, and two conflicts involving Iran. In his detailed presentation, he underscored the severity of the healthcare crisis, noting that many people lack access to treatment – especially in Gaza, where medicines continue to be blocked. One positive development, however, is the imminent reopening of a Catholic school in Gaza.

He also denounced the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, which deprives Palestinians of their land and fuels widespread despair, as residents endure ongoing attacks from settlers targeting villages. A system resembling apartheid is taking shape, while the Palestinian Authority is being progressively stripped of its role.

Tourism has collapsed and pilgrimages have ceased, making economic survival impossible for many Palestinians, El-Yousef added. In this context, the Latin Patriarchate continues to operate with perseverance, working to create jobs—particularly in the construction sector—in collaboration with West Bank parishes and Bethlehem University (AFAQ Program), and distributing food vouchers in Gaza thanks to the Order’s extraordinary humanitarian aid. Regarding



the daily life of the Church, he thanked the Knights and Dames for the many funded projects, especially the renovation of Catholic schools (12 in Palestine, 25 in Jordan, and 6 in Israel, serving a total of 19,000 students), as well as for supporting the pastoral formation of laypeople, who are increasingly called to participate in the evangelization of youth.

During the discussion that followed, Cardinal Filoni quoted the words of Christ: "Do not be afraid, little flock" (*Lk 12:32*), emphasizing the need for the Church to bear witness to fraternity amid the cultural and religious diversity of the Middle East, in the spirit of the Abu Dhabi Document signed by Pope Francis.

In the afternoon, Treasurer Saverio Petrillo presented the 2025 financial report: approximately €27 million in revenue (including asset management), with about €6.4 million more than the previous year coming from the Lieutenancies, driven by the historic need to support Christians in the Holy Land facing war and the colonization of their lands. Of the total annual amount, more than €3.6 million was raised through the North American campaign in support of the Patriarchate's schools.

The President of the Holy Land

Commission, Bart McGetrick, revisited the virtual visit conducted last March, while Iranian responses to Israeli-American attacks were reaching Tel Aviv and occasionally Jerusalem. Praising the Patriarchate's courageous work "under the radar", he and the Commission members observed increasing settler aggression, severe communication challenges (with 1,000 checkpoints in the West Bank), and a worrying rise in unemployment (70%), particularly among Christians who depend on pilgrimages for their livelihoods. In this context, the mission of the Order is more vital than ever to sustain hope - especially by fostering job creation alongside the local Church and supporting education for peace.

Following internal "off the record" exchanges after valuable contributions from the Vice Governors General⁽¹⁾ and the Chancellor regarding the global development of the Order, the meeting concluded with a prayer to Our Lady of Palestine for the intentions of all our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

François Vayne

⁽¹⁾ A further article will provide a comprehensive overview of their important contributions.

"They returned to Jerusalem with great joy"

A proposal for experiencing the vocation of the Church in the Holy Land

At the end of April, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem published a lengthy *Pastoral Letter* by Cardinal Pizzaballa. In the introduction, the Patriarch explains that "Its purpose is not to propose immediate answers or technical solutions, but rather to help each person reflect on how to live our Christian faith in this land today in the light of the Gospel". He notes that he signed the text on the feast of the evangelist Saint Mark, travelling companion, disciple, and interpreter of the apostle Saint Peter. This pastorally oriented *Letter* is structured in three parts. The first begins with an analysis of the current chaotic situation. "Before speaking of ideals, it is necessary to anchor ourselves firmly in reality as it is, while recognizing God's active presence in it", Cardinal Pizzaballa emphasizes. In the second part, he shares a vision for the Latin Catholic community of the Holy Land, drawing on Scripture with particular reference to Jerusalem. The third part seeks to translate this vision into pastoral implications, addressing the activities of parishes, families, schools, and institutions as he does so. The Patriarch concludes with a reference to the heavenly Jerusalem, "a City with doors always open, illuminated by the splendor of the Lamb, the leaves that redeem the nations." We invite all Members of the Order to read the *Letter* carefully, available in the main international languages on the Patriarchate's website (www.lpj.org).

THE NEW FOUNDATION OF THE ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

On October 27, 2025, a Foundation of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Third Sector Body, under Italian law was established by notarial deed. The Foundation carries out activities to support the Order's projects of an economic and commercial nature. It was deemed appropriate to establish the Foundation and distinguish the Order's competences for fiscal reasons and for ease of management. However, the Foundation will be able to carry out, with legal autonomy and on a non-profit basis, activities of a commercial



nature, such as the management of the museum at Palazzo della Rovere, the publication of editions, the promotion of cultural, social, and outreach activities, and the organization of charitable and official events. In addition, it is going to benefit from the tax incentives and advantages offered by the Italian legal system for Third

Sector activities. For example, in Italy, there is something called the 5x1000 regulation that makes it possible for Italian residents to allocate a percentage of their income tax to non-profit organizations, including, in this instance, the Foundation of the Order.

MEETING OF THE ITALIAN LIEUTENANTS

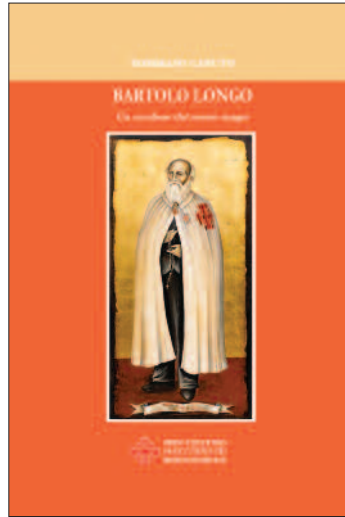
On the margins of the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Episcopal Ordination of the Cardinal Grand Master, March 19, the Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, convened the Italian-speaking Lieutenants who had recently taken office, together with their predecessors. The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate the handover process and to foster the continuation of the fraternal spirit of collaboration that has developed over the years within the group. The gathering also provided an opportunity to exchange views on how best to make use, in Italy, of the benefits offered by the newly established "Foundation of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem – Third Sector Entity", recently established by the Cardinal Grand Master, who acts as its guarantor.



A BOOK BY MSGR. CAPUTO, ASSESSOR OF THE ORDER, ON SAINT BARTOLO LONGO

The idea of a book on Bartolo Longo emerged after Leo XIV celebrated his Canonization in St Peter's Square on October 19, 2025. The event was attended by several hundred Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem who had travelled from all over the world.

Bartolo Longo was an eminent Member of the Order. He belonged to us in a special way through the distinction of Knight Grand Cross conferred upon him in 1925 by Pope Pius XI, then Grand Master, which was something of a crowning recognition of his exemplary life of faith. He was also animated by ardent charity and indomitable hope, while supporting the many men, women, and children of his time who lacked a dignified life. Even today, countless pilgrims turn to



the Shrine in Pompeii for their spiritual and material needs.

The Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre can therefore feel encouraged by such a beautiful and generous example, which he expressed in daily action as well as in the lofty virtues that help us reflect on the ideals at the heart of our Order. Therefore, this is the purpose of the book on Bartolo Longo, which was conceived with a view to the ongoing formation of the Members of our Institution too.

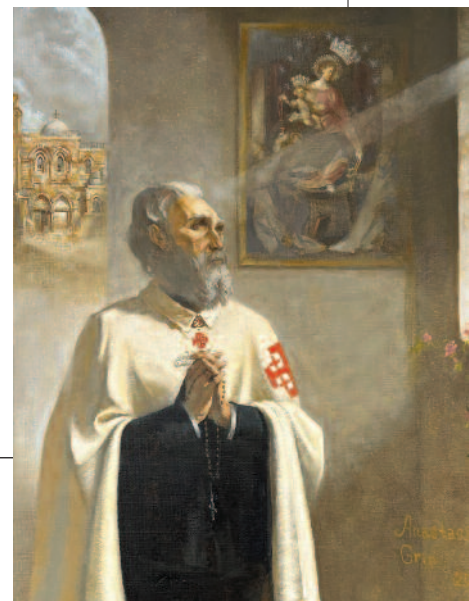
Bartolo Longo is the first lay Knight of our time to be proclaimed a Saint.

(Excerpt from the Preface by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem)

***Note to our readers: This book is currently available only in Italian.**

THE "JERUSALEM CROSS" IN RUSSIAN

The Order's annual magazine, which is regularly published in six languages (including Portuguese for the Lusophone world thanks to Lieutenant Bartolomeu Costa Cabral) is now available in Russian too. The Lieutenant for Russia, Aleksandrovich Ternovskiy, and his wife Natasha have undertaken the translation so that the Order's Members in their vast Country may be better informed about the life of the Knights and Dames on all continents and about the activities of our pontifical Institution in the Holy Land. In the spring, Aleksandrovich and Natasha travelled from Moscow to Rome. They passed through Istanbul on their way to participate in the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Cardinal Fernando Filoni's episcopal ordination. Upon arrival, they presented him with a splendid icon of Saint Bartolo Longo, which had been blessed on March 26 under the light of the Annunciation. The icon was placed in the Grand Magisterium's meeting room, where the Angelus and the prayer for peace to Our Lady of Palestine are recited daily.



The Order and the Holy Land

THE HOLY LAND COMMISSION : A VIRTUAL VISIT

The Holy Land Commission site visit in March had to be undertaken virtually since it was not possible to travel to the Holy Land. Nonetheless it was an opportunity to have an overview of the current situation and to discuss some specific initiatives. Overwhelmingly, what was striking was the scale of the problems... the depth, the breadth and the duration. It is also important to reflect that the purpose of the "site visit" was to reinforce the importance that the Order stands alongside the Patriarchate in support of the Christian communities of the Holy Land - especially in these times of conflict and hardship. That support is primarily spiritual and shows solidarity with those whom we serve in the Holy Land.

This is a time when we witness that all people are struggling—in terms of health, economic conditions, socially, and educationally—while trying to maintain a sense of hope in an environment of considerable uncertainty. The Church is strenuously working to support the Christian presence in spite of the war and the conflicts that abound everywhere.

What was memorable on this visit was the activity in Gaza, especially with the disadvantaged children in school. The plan to have provision for 1,000 students later this year is highly commendable. The commitment and dedication of Fr Gabriel Romanelli and his colleagues is a source of inspiration nationally and internationally and it was a privilege to have had a conversation with him.

The Patriarchate's projects are making a huge difference to society more generally,

and especially for the most vulnerable. The Social Care work continues to be very impressive. This is clearly an area in which more resources are needed and the Commission will do all it can to try to find what is needed.

The continuation of education on an online basis is impressive and to be commended. There is some heroic work going on "under the radar" (literally!). The work in schools in Palestine continues to flourish in this challenging environment. It was also exciting to hear of the new thinking being undertaken in the schools in Jordan.

There were many other examples of great work being undertaken, such as the developments in the Seminary in Beit Jala and the teacher education initiatives with Bethlehem University. All this adds to the vibrancy of the Church in harrowing times.

There were several areas which were of special interest to the Commission:

First, the importance of housing for those who have been displaced or whose homes have been demolished. There is a large number of people living under canvas in extreme conditions in Gaza, and some in the West Bank as a result of settler action and violence. Also, the Knesset law that would allow Israelis to purchase property across the occupied West Bank is a measure that clears a path for Israelis to claim more land under occupation while bypassing long-standing legal barriers.

Second, the Israeli government law on "*Prevention of Employment of a Teacher Holding an Academic Degree from the Palestinian Authority*" is foreseen. This will affect some 232 teachers who are "Green





Due to the war, the Holy Land Commission of the Grand Magisterium was unable to travel to the site, so the visit took place virtually, in collaboration with the administration of the Latin Patriarchate.

Card Holders" (i.e. Palestinian) in 15 schools who will not be allowed to teach in those schools. This is clearly a threat to the university which is taking what action it can to minimise the risks of this and help students too.

Third, the vital importance of job creation. The Commission heard first-hand about the AFAQ Project with Bethlehem University that has been extremely helpful in creating opportunities for employment and has the potential to be expanded.

Fourth, the issue of currency devaluation of the ILS (running at c. 17%) and therefore cost increases are affecting all areas of funding. This is often a hidden cost when considering the funding of projects.

It was also pleasing to hear that the Schools Improvement Campaign managed by the North American lieutenancies is universally acclaimed as a success. They

have provided around US\$12 million additional funding for all schools in the Latin Patriarchate. This is not only helpful financially but has been a significant psychological benefit to pupils, teacher, parents, who can see clearly that "someone cares!"

The general impression of the visit was that the situation for Palestinians has never been so desperate. Yet there is a conviction that the Christian communities must stay and be a strong force in the Holy Land. The role of the Order is to maintain that stance in spite of what can be for so many an apparent hopelessness. The main contribution that the Order wishes to bring to the Patriarchate is hope.

We pray for you and with you... You are not alone and not forgotten!

Bart McGettrick

President of the Holy Land Commission



THE CHURCH'S MISSION CONTINUES IN THE HOLY LAND WITH PATIENT DETERMINATION

We publish below the main excerpts from an update by George Akroush, Director of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem's Development Office, on the commitment the Patriarchate continues to uphold in rebuilding and supporting the Holy Land during these first months of 2026.

His Beatitude Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, often describes the Church in these difficult times as a "pneumatic hammer" at work (*martello pneumatico* in Italian). Like a hammer that slowly and persistently strikes hard rock until it begins to crack, the mission of the Church continues with patient determination. It is not a matter of force or noise, but of perseverance. Through steady and faithful effort, repeated day after day, the Church continues working patiently until even the hardest realities begin to change.

This image reflects well the life of the Church in the Holy Land today.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains extremely fragile. Access to basic supplies continues to be restricted, and the medical system is under severe strain. Many hospitals operate only partially, and shortages of



medicines and medical consumables remain critical. Food insecurity affects a large portion of the population, and the disruption of infrastructure continues to place enormous pressure on water, sanitation, and public health systems.

In the midst of this suffering, the Church continues its quiet and persistent work.

Our community in Gaza, especially those sheltering within the compound of the Latin Patriarchate, has remained comparatively stable thanks to the emergency food stocks secured earlier. Our teams continue to provide shelter, food, fuel, and medications

while supporting the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities, and children who remain under our care. The staff serving there work under extremely difficult circumstances and carry immense responsibilities, yet their dedication reflects the spirit of the "pneumatic hammer": constant, faithful, and tireless.



For the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, support for education in the Holy Land remains a priority.



Amid this difficult reality, we are also preparing an important step toward recovery. **By June 2026, the Latin Patriarchate plans to reopen one of its major schools in Gaza.** The school will begin by welcoming around **400 students** and will gradually expand to serve up to **1,000 children**. At full capacity the school will employ approximately **75 teachers and staff members**, initially, it will employ **43 staff members** in addition to those already serving the Latin Compound.

This school will be open to children from all communities, Christian and Muslim alike, prioritizing those who attended our schools before the war. Education remains one of the most powerful ways to restore dignity, stability, and hope to families who have endured so much uncertainty. For many children it will be the first step back toward normal life.

The situation in the West Bank is also deeply challenging. Economic conditions have deteriorated sharply, with poverty levels rising and job opportunities shrinking dramatically. Movement restrictions, displacement, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure have placed additional burdens on communities already struggling to sustain their livelihoods. It is worth mentioning that the unemployment rate has exceeded over 50% among Christians in particular; this rate is considered the highest of all time.

In response, the **humanitarian and job-**

creation programs of the Latin Patriarchate continue to expand in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Through **employment initiatives, small business support, and social assistance programs**, we are working to help families remain in their homeland with dignity. These initiatives aim to respond to immediate needs and to restore confidence that a future is still possible here.

Every day the Church continues to accompany those who are most vulnerable: the elderly, the sick, children, families facing unemployment, and those who feel the growing pressure to leave the land of their ancestors. The work is often quiet and unseen, but it continues with determination.

Like the "pneumatic hammer" described by His Beatitude, the Church continues striking patiently at the hard realities surrounding us. Each act of service, each job created, each child returning to school, and each family supported represents another small break in the rock of despair.

We urge you to keep the Holy Land in your actions, your prayers, and your continued solidarity. Your dedication and faithful support of the mission of the Church here remains a powerful sign of hope for our communities. It reminds our people that they are not forgotten and that the universal Church walks beside them in these difficult times.

With gratitude and prayers,

George Akroush



The life of the Lieutenancies

“THE ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE IS A RARE EXAMPLE OF QUIET VOLUNTEERISM”

An Interview with Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone

At the annual meeting of the Lieutenancy's officials for France, held last winter, the Governor General of the Order, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, answered questions put by the Lieutenant, Inspector General of the Armed Forces Christian Piotre. Here follows the interview, recorded in French in Rome and broadcast locally on that occasion. The content of the interview is of interest to all Knights and Dames worldwide.

A few months ago, about 3,700 Knights and Dames took part in the Order's Jubilee pilgrimage. What lessons has the Grand Magisterium drawn from it?

I must say that the presence in Rome of three thousand seven hundred pilgrims of the Order during the Jubilee clearly highlighted the international dimension of our pontifical Institution. This is something that is particularly close to my heart: we are not merely the sum of numerous Lieutenancies confined to their local customs. We are a universal family, made up of thirty thousand faithful, who are scattered throughout the world, yet united by a shared love for the land where our faith was born. Whilst respecting local traditions, we have a single inspiration that unites us in prayer and in our work.



What are the prospects for the development of the Order in new countries across the five continents?

We are present on every continent and are constantly expanding. Today we cover the whole of North America and almost all of Europe. Our main expansion efforts are therefore focused on Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is a patient and methodical process, which begins with consultations with local church authorities and requests for approval from the Episcopal



Conferences. We then proceed to identify a group of faithful to whom we can entrust the task of forming an initial core around which a Magistral Delegation will be established. This is a complex process that sometimes encounters obstacles or unforeseen difficulties, but which yields results. Today, we have established contacts in India and in various Pacific nations; in Africa, discussions are underway in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Madagascar and Nigeria. In Latin America, we wish to extend the Order's presence in Brazil, where there are already two Lieutenancies, but contacts have also been established in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Chile.

How do you assess the evolution of the situation in the West Bank and in Gaza? Media attention is focused on Gaza, but is there not a risk of forgetting or underestimating what is happening in the West Bank or in Jordanian territory, which hosts so many refugees, some of whom are Christians, from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the West Bank?

Although the overall strategy is determined in Rome, based on guidance from the Holy See, it is nevertheless clear that no one knows the real needs of the

Holy Land better than those who are on the ground. For this reason, we are in constant contact with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to which we regularly send the donations we receive from the Lieutenancies and with which we agree on how they are to be used, whilst respecting the wishes of the donors. It is sometimes difficult to strike a balance in the face of the generosity of some of our Members, who tend to favor projects of their own choosing, often in support of institutions they may have visited during pilgrimages. For this reason, we recommend that the Lieutenancies do not neglect, in their contributions, the Patriarchate's institutional expenses, which cover running costs, parish maintenance costs, staff salaries, and the expenses incurred by the schools and the seminary. Only by ensuring that the system functions smoothly overall is it possible to pursue a balanced aid policy. Thereafter, the Lieutenancies are able to focus their charitable efforts on specific projects that are particularly close to their hearts. The tragedy in Gaza has moved the whole world, but we know, thanks to the information we receive daily from the Patriarchate, just how dire the situation is in the West Bank too, where the violence perpetrated is not adequately reported on by the international press. Jordan is also the subject of particular attention. To monitor the situation across the entire region is a delicate task, but one of which we are fully

The Governor General is seen here answering questions from the Lieutenant of the Order for France via video during a meeting of the Lieutenancy's leaders held last winter.





The Church's role in offering comfort in the Holy Land is particularly important for people facing the horrors of war and its consequences. Despite the suffering they are experiencing at the moment, Christian hope enables them to look to the future with confidence.

aware. To this end, the Holy Land Commission serves as an effective tool for monitoring the situation on the ground through regular visits and reports sent to the Grand Magisterium.

There are also several major institutions and organizations operating in the Holy Land; for example, the Order of Malta, the Opera d'Oriente and Aid to the Church in Need, to name but a few. Does the Grand Magisterium maintain relations with these various bodies in order to coordinate efforts on the ground in the Holy Land? In what ways can the Lieutenancies play a role in this regard?

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is a central body of the Church and serves as the operational arm of the Holy See in supporting the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Its mandate is precise, as defined in the Constitution approved by the Holy Father, and territorially limited to the places of Our Lord's preaching and of the early Church. Its contribution, including financial support, cannot be compared to that of other institutions that have broader mandates and intervene in crisis situations around the world, while dealing with the Holy Land

only marginally and not in a structural way. There can be, and indeed there are, collaborations between the Order and other institutions on the ground, as well as within the activities of certain Lieutenancies, but what distinguishes the action of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre from that of other institutions is the 'continuous' nature of its commitment. The

financial contributions of its Members ensure a regular and consistent flow of resources, which makes it possible to plan aid effectively. The generosity of other institutions towards the Holy Land is welcome, but it forms part of a substantial and regular flow represented by the voluntary and institutional contributions of the Members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which amount to over twenty million dollars a year in total.

Are there any communication initiatives planned by the Grand Magisterium to further highlight our support for the Patriarchate and for Christians in the Holy Land, both in financial terms and through our presence on the ground?

The generosity of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre is inspired by the principles of the Gospel and does not seek recognition or visibility. The Holy See is fully aware of the discreet and constant role that the Order of the Holy Sepulchre carries out "with humility and dedication" as a Central Body of the Church. When he received us on October 23, the Holy Father himself acknowledged that this work is carried out "without fanfare and without publicity", in the purest spirit of the Gospel. It is true that in the world we live in, which is flooded with information that is often



biased or partisan, if not misleading, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre stands as a rare example of quiet volunteer service, which perhaps deserves to be better known. This may also be achieved through widespread communication within local churches. These churches sometimes fear that their resources might be diverted toward a distant cause; therefore, it is important to explain to the faithful the true spirit of the Order, marked by humility and a sense of service. This charitable activity is focused on the Mother Church of Jerusalem, yet it does not forget the Order's commitment to the local churches to which its Members belong.

You and the Cardinal have mentioned the need to create a network of *Friends of the Order*. Could you tell us more about this? Are you considering a general, unified legal structure, or a decentralized organization promoted by the various Lieutenancies and adapted to the specific circumstances of each Country?

Having examined the various organizations within the diverse landscape of voluntary work, the Cardinal Grand Master sought to encourage participation in our initiatives by members of the faithful who, for various reasons, are not members of the Order. This can be achieved through the establishment of the *Friends of the Order* category, about which he has recently published the governing regulations. The aim is to mobilize all those who feel called by the Gospel message to engage in charitable work for the benefit of the Holy Land. Its implementation allows for a certain flexibility, since situations vary from one country to another depending on local norms and traditions. Indeed, many Lieutenancies derive substantial benefits from promotional initiatives carried out beyond the restricted circle of Knights and Dames. Nonetheless, beyond the financial aspect, which is certainly important, there are other positive elements too. For

example, some people who are not members of the Order wish to share in its spiritual activities, its pilgrimages, and the realization of its projects. In a few years, it will be possible to assess the fruits of this initiative, which has also received the approval of Pope Leo.

The Grand Magisterium announced over a year ago the establishment of a Historical Committee to preserve this heritage and promote scientific research. Can you tell us what stage the committee's formation has reached?

Among the various initiatives promoted by the Cardinal Grand Master, the establishment of a Historical Committee aims to provide a rigorous and definitive account of the origins and development of our Order over the centuries, with a view to offering candidates a historically reliable reference text during their training. At the same time, the Committee will be able to shed light, through studies and archival research, on aspects that are still obscured by differing and sometimes fanciful interpretations. Referring to figures from the past must serve as a pretext for looking more clearly to the future and endowing our Order with the character of a modern institution, which is proud of its history but mindful of the responsibilities demanded by the world of today and tomorrow.

To conclude, could you outline your vision and priorities for the Order?

Under the guidance of the Cardinal Grand Master and encouraged by the Holy Father's benevolence, we shall continue along the path we have embarked upon to expand the Order, deepen its spiritual dimension, educate the younger generations—particularly in our schools—and resume our pilgrimages. In the Holy Land, we wish to be a sign of trust and hope for the Christians who live there and an interlocutor open to dialogue for all.



Culture and History

ECCLESIASTICAL BUILDINGS ENTRUSTED TO THE ORDER IN SICILY

A book published by the Lieutenancy for Italy – Sicily

On January 28 in Palermo, the book *Church Buildings Entrusted to the Order in Sicily* was presented. The work is the result of collaboration between numerous Members of the Italy-Sicily Lieutenancy and was edited by Dr Rita Cedrini Calderone. It presents the sites entrusted to the Order as places of prayer and spaces for spiritual and cultural encounters, often of great historical and artistic value. The Governor General, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone, who conveyed the greetings of Cardinal Grand Master Fernando Filoni and his

congratulations on the initiative, emphasized how vast the subject of religious art in Sicily is, because this land has always been a crossroads of civilizations: "In no other territory where the Order is present, in Italy or abroad, is there such a rich endowment of churches to our Order: (...) to speak of religious art in Sicily is to recount the very soul of the island", which is a unique example in the world of coexistence between different faiths, manifested in the synthesis of the Byzantine, Arab and Norman worlds. In Monreale Cathedral and the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, sacred art brings people

Ambassador Visconti di Modrone travelled to Palermo for the presentation of a book dedicated to the religious buildings entrusted to the Order in Sicily. During the event, Cardinal Romeo appointed Monsignor Lorefica as Grand Prior (seen here on the right). Prior to this appointment, he had been Archbishop of Palermo since 2015.



together: the Governor recalled that "the mosaic of Christ the Creator, commissioned by a Catholic king, is set within an arch designed and built by a Muslim architect."

Thirteen buildings are presented in the volume, with splendid photographic reproductions and rich descriptions contributed by authors from across the Lieutenancy. These buildings offer a journey through the cultural and spiritual history preserved by the Order. The journey commences in Palermo, with the Chapter Church of San Cataldo and the Oratory of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. The path continues through churches dedicated to the saints: San Giuliano (Catania), San Tommaso in Ortygia (Syracuse), San Giorgio (Agrigento), and San Nicola (Delegation of Caltagirone). There are numerous buildings that express a profound devotion to Mary; for example, the Sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception (Caltanissetta), and the churches of Maria SS. delle Grazie (Mazara del Vallo) and Santa Maria delle Grazie (Ragusa). In Noto, the Church of the Holy Spirit houses a reliquary of the Holy

Cross.

Sacred art, Ambassador Leonardo Visconti di Modrone emphasized, can be "a symbol of Sicilian identity and a driving force for a cultured and discerning form of tourism, and the Lieutenancy has therefore done well to publish this book. In Sicily, Baroque religious art is dramatic, theatrical, and almost overwhelming. The golden limestone absorbs the sunlight, transforming church façades into living stage sets. External beauty symbolizes victory over destruction and the fear of death, while the interiors display a decorative exuberance meant to offer the faithful a foretaste of Paradise." The Governor recalled the well-known Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia, who highlighted the power of art to bring the divine into a human dimension, making it accessible to the senses and allow its meaning to be intuited: "Religious art is the only one capable of giving body to the invisible, of making the mystery part of daily life without destroying it."

Livia Passalacqua

TOWARDS UNCEASING PRAYER WITH SAINT NICHOLAS THE PILGRIM

A *d ogni passo, ad ogni battito. Storia del pellegrino Nicola [At Every Step, at Every Heartbeat. The Story of the Pilgrim Nicola]*, (EDB, 2024, 240 pp.) With this innovative book, Mons. Natale Abino introduces a wider public to the singular spiritual experience of a young Greek who became a bridge between the Latin Church and the Churches of the East. *At Every Step, at Every Heartbeat* leads readers to discover Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim. He was a layman, an evangelizer, and herald of God's mercy, and one of the few figures venerated by both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox

churches after the schism of 1054. The Author, who was formerly the Secretary of the Apostolic Delegation in Jerusalem and Palestine, and of the Apostolic Nunciature in Israel, seeks to help readers understand why this Saint was officially recognized by the Greek-Orthodox Church of Italy and Southern Europe in 2023.

The text is based on the three contemporary sources by Bartolomeo, Adelferio, and Armando (late 11th- early 12th century), cited alongside other documents and later literary compositions. The book is enriched with poetic-style reflections, and



the narrative unfolds chronologically in 99 scenes from the life of Nicholas, each accompanied by a biblical quotation. This framework allows the reader to reinterpret the saint's life in the light of salvation history, while deepening the reading through meditation and prayer. Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, who is Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints and author of the Preface, describes the work as a "sapiential reading", while in the introduction Archbishop Adolfo T. Yllana, Pontifical Representative in the Holy Land, affirms that the book "belongs to the literary genre of the *lives of the saints*, which is halfway between a reasoned biography and a hymn of love to Nicholas the Pilgrim."

Nicholas was a pilgrim, a young layman and witness of the prayer of the heart, almost a jongleur of God. Ancient sources recount that, in the Middle Ages, pilgrims who embarked from Apulia invoked him along their journey, so that they might walk "at every step and every heartbeat" with the Lord, practicing the prayer of the heart "*Kyrie eleison*" and turning to Him at every moment of life.

Saint Nicholas was born Greek-Orthodox in 1075, in Stiri, Greece. Because of his constant call to conversion through the invocation "*Kyrie eleison*", he was driven out of his home by his mother. At only eight years of age, he had encountered Jesus, and received from Him the prayer of the heart *Kyrie eleison*, which condenses the great foundations of

the Christian faith: *Kyrie*, the divinity of Jesus, and *eleison*, our human misery. In 1094 the young man left for Taranto where, because of his incessant cry of "*Kyrie eleison*", he was ordered to be flogged by Bishop Alberto. At sixteen he set out barefoot on a great pilgrimage to Rome to venerate the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul, carrying nothing but a wooden cross and a small satchel. He passed through Otranto and other Apulian cities, and arrived in Trani on May 20, where Archbishop Bisanzio I welcomed him and granted him permission to remain. Through his preaching in the streets, he attracted many children. On June 2, 1094, he fell ill and died as a result of the beatings and the many misunderstandings he had endured. He was just nineteen. Pope Urban II canonized him in 1099, and by 1143 his mortal remains were transferred to the Trani cathedral, which was built in his honor.

In the book's Postface, Fr. Guglielmo

Spirito describes the book as "a solid, robust, and sober biography" and "an invitation to discover Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim as a pleasant travelling companion and perhaps as a guide to unceasing prayer". The originality of his witness and his profound spiritual experience has been handed down to this day, from Greece throughout Europe, as a source of inspiration even for today's pilgrims who cherish the desire to journey to the Holy Land.

Livia Passalacqua

