

**Comments by
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Vice Governor General and Knight of the Collar**

**September 29, 2018 at the Annual Meeting of the
Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Western USA Lieutenancy**

Now, I would like to talk to you ó not as Vice Governor General of the Order - but just as a knight of the Order and a concerned Catholic. These comments are not an official position of the Order. They are from my heart, as a simple Catholic in the pew, who loves his church.

Our Church is going through its darkest hour - at least in the last 500 years. And it may get darker before we begin to see the light shine once again. Catholics have left the Church in droves since the sexual abuse crisis began some 25 years ago. We see it in our Church attendance each and every Sunday. A pastor said a few weeks ago that only 300 or so families of the 5000 registered in his parish have made pledges to this year's diocesan campaign. Really? We need to lift our heads and look around. There may be 5000 families registered in his parish, but many, if not most, are not coming to church. What that 300 families gave probably indicates that he has, maybe, 2000 families in his parish. Where did the other 3000 go? And, while we are looking around, look at how many parishioners are under the age of 35. We have lost a whole generation, for the most part.

With the recent news of criminal and mortally sinful behavior within the highest levels of our leadership - and questions about who knew what, when - we will undoubtedly lose many more followers, and even the most loyal of Catholics may be questioning their commitment to the Church. We are likely to see a decline in donations to the Church and to Church related charities. We are likely to see another drop in Church attendance. Yes, our Church may get smaller and parishes may have to be closed. Charities may have to reduce operations. However, mankind needs something to believe in - that void will certainly be filled - and God help us as those leaving our Church search and find who knows what!

All of this has happened on our watch, so we must shoulder some of the blame. We

are the lay leaders of the Church. Have we done our duty to the best of our ability? Have we held our clergy accountable? - morally, financially, and in terms of governance? Why aren't competent lay people put on clergy review or personnel boards more often? Why are pastors administratively responsible for parishes to the degree that they are? They are our parishes. We should shoulder that responsibility and let the pastor be our pastor. Have we even held our clergy leaders accountable theologically? What condemned us to Hell in the past often doesn't anymore. Holy Days are sometimes obligations on the East Coast, but not on the West Coast. Hell, does Hell even exist? I am not saying our beliefs shouldn't evolve, as long as they stay true to Jesus' teaching, but if we don't stand for something, we won't stand at all.

I can tell you one thing with absolute certainty: The Devil exists - and where God isn't, the Devil is. Yes, this whole situation is Diabolical, no doubt about it, but it is so only because we and our clergy gave him the opening. Now, it is up to us to send him packing, to chase him out of our lives and our Church, but it cannot be done by prayer alone. We cannot just hear the admonition to pray and assume everything will be OK. We need action - action based upon our deeply rooted Catholic Christian values. Perhaps one of the most important of those values is that we are the Church. If we are the Church, and are to be saved, then we need to be a big part of the solution to our current problems and we cannot leave it up to the clergy, even the Pope, to sort it all out themselves.

I am a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. You are Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order. If we are not the first line of defense in this attack against our Church, then who is? If we do not lead the charge in confessing our sins, asking forgiveness, doing penance, and asking for the ongoing grace of God to give us strength, then who? If we leave solving these problems to the clergy, they will not get solved, because you cannot leave out we who are the Church and solve them. We lay leaders must be involved in every single meeting, every single discussion about these issues, or the process will fail. And, at all costs, we must avoid a cover-up in the name of protecting Mother Church - which never works, by the way. It just weakens the Church - every time.

The media is rightfully all over this, and necessarily so. However, in this fire storm what is lost is the fact that the overwhelming majority of our priests are good, hard working, moral men who need our active support - and not just our prayers. In fact, in my whole life, and I am a pretty active Catholic, I have never met or known a person abused by clergy, nor have I ever known a clergy abuser. Don't take this the wrong way. I am not at all saying sexual abuse is not a big problem or

minimizing the seriousness of this issue. However, it is not everybody ó not even close. The vast majority of our priests, our bishops, feel the same pain we do, and you can see it in their faces, yet they have made great strides in making sure these sins are not committed again. In fact, the Catholic Church in the United States is probably the most squeaky-clean institution in the country at this time, on this issue.

The sexual abuse crisis isn't just the clergy's problem to solve, it is ours together. It is not enough for us to get behind our bishops; we need to be side by side with them - at the table ó at every table. However, there are those who should not be at the table, who should simply resign from office as priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals - and they know who they are and why - and the sooner the better.

What may be lost during this crisis is the fact that our church is the one, true, catholic, apostolic church. What may be lost is that we started with 12 men and a small band of disciples of Jesus - men and women inspired by the Holy Spirit - and became the dominant church on the planet for 2000 years despite all the attacks we have endured, the mistakes we have made, and the sins we have committed. We grew because people saw something different in us. They saw us faithfully live what Jesus taught. The way we lived our lives inspired others to be like us - to join us. That is how we grew; and that is how we will make the light shine bright once again.

We, the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre will not run from the present challenge. We are the light and we will never be snuffed out. We will fix this. We will never give up. As a Church, we must get back to basics - living our lives as Jesus taught us. That is one of the ways we can lead the Church out of this morass. That must be our focus and the focus of our entire Church. We must be visible witnesses faithful to Christ; everything else is noise.

The other thing we need to do is to tell our story. Yes, we have sinned; yes, we have made mistakes, but oh, my God, look at what we have already done to clean and purify our house. And though we have not yet done enough, and though our work is not nearly finished, we will take responsibility for the mess we have made, and we will continue to create an environment, a structure, a process with controls, to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again! We need to empower you to tell our story, the story of our redemption ó and we need to, as a Church, take our story to the public, through the media, even social media. Not to deflect our responsibility, our culpability, but to genuinely let people know that we get it and are totally committed to doing something about it ó and have done so in a very

significant way already. Such a campaign is not the be all to end all, but it would be a step in the right direction. A very necessary step. Our Church needs to do this, and we need professional help to do it right, to do it effectively.

As for you as Knights and Dames of the Order, I would like to challenge every single Section in each of our Lieutenancies, in consultation with their bishop, to find a local project or cause to serve actively, with visible hands-on service, within the Church, or, better yet, of a more secular nature, in order to give public, visible witness as to who we are and for what we stand as Catholic Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order. We must give witness of our Catholic Christian values and our faith in Jesus to the secular community. That is how the early Christians evangelized ó by example. And, that is also what we must do.

If we faithfully get back to basics, the light will brighten, and our Church will grow again and be ever stronger for the test. That must be our chosen path, and it will lead us forward; it will lead us to the light. The Catholic Church can count on us. Our bishops and the Holy Father can count on us. Deus lo Vult!

In closing, please pray this prayer with me and meditate on each and every word to discern what they mean to you in the context of this call and these times.

**O Almighty God, we the Knights and Dames of the
Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem,
who throughout the centuries
have watched and witnessed
at the gloriously empty tomb of Jesus,
beg you to send us forth again,
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
clad in the armor of our faith,
with good works as our sword,
in the loving service of Christ Our King.
Amen**

Deus Lo Vult! Thank you!