



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

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

What is the “place and role” for Dames in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre?



*The Order of the Holy Sepulchre has welcomed Dames in addition to Knights since 1888. From that moment, increasingly more women have joyfully taken on their roles within our pontifical institution, performing various tasks. Today around a third of our Members and 15 local leaders are women.*

**Dame Imelda Agnès asks the Grand Master for his “vision regarding the place and role that Dames occupy in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre”.**

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

The first chapter of the first book of the Bible recalls a fundamental truth: everyone, men and women, are created in the image of God. This image is incomplete if the one is without the other.

In 1888, when Pope Leo XIII authorised the entrance of the Dames to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre through the brief “Venerabilis Frater”, addressed to the Patriarch of Jerusalem Msgr. Vincenzo Bracco, he was certainly acting ahead of his time. It was no longer the time in which the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem began; the Middle East was changing with the end of the Ottoman Empire, the Christians began to migrate and there was the need for a new approach with the Holy Land. Women, too, who in the time of Jesus followed and assisted him, had to have their

role. As such, it was understandable that the new Order of the Holy Sepulchre involved not only men (Knights), but also women (Dames). Then with Vatican Council II the role of women in the Church also had opportune recognition, which was developed successively by the Supreme Pontiffs.

Thus on August 3, one hundred and thirty-two years ago, Dames from various countries of the world began to develop a particular role towards the Holy Land. Today they constitute about a third of our Members and locally they work at expanding our Lieutenancies and Magistral Delegations with commitment, dedication and service. Various peripheral structures of the Order are guided by women today.

I am asked what I think about the “place and role” of the Dames in our Order. I would like them to be promoters at all times, without ever expecting this role to take place by impulse or concessions of others: *“If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?”*, said Rabbi Hillel (*Pirkei Avot* 1:14).

When a man or a woman has a strong ideal motivation, the way opens up and allows for the bearing of fruit. I have the joy of seeing people in the Order who walk this path and give of themselves. When one is at peace with who one is, this promotion is not in the order of being man or woman but rather in the motivation that pushes us and that – let us not forget it – we receive as a gift from the Lord. Saint Paul gave us this precious teaching: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:26).

This does not mean that there is no diversity between human beings and in the Order we favour both inclusivity and complementarity.

Women played a fundamental role in the Resurrection of Jesus, by bringing forth the happy news. Each one of the apostles called by Jesus and each one of the women who visited the tomb at sunrise, the first day after the Saturday, has a name and a story and this is important: God looks, chooses and calls ME, not a man or a woman by chance.

We learn to recognise the call of God in our life without living it in concurrence (for example man-woman) but alongside our companions along the way: only in such a way will we be ever more a gift for one another and for the Church.

**Fernando Cardinal Filoni**

*(September 1, 2020)*