



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Strengthening the presence of the Order in Central and Latin America



Central and Latin America form an immense continent with strong Christian roots that deserves every effort for greater development and an authentic enhancement of the presence of our Order. Unlike other geographical areas, such as North America, Europe and Asia- Oceania, so far the South American continent has not benefitted from the coordination of a dedicated director in the Grand Magisterium. The Cardinal Grand Master favorably welcomed the idea of creating the office of Vice Governor for Latin America, entrusting it to Enric Mas, former Lieutenant for Eastern Spain, to promote the potential of this huge basin.

The new Vice Governor was able to immediately place his vast experience and international knowledge at the disposal of the confreres of the Latin American continent, developing an action plan together with the Governor General Leonardo Visconti di Modrone during visits to Mexico, Argentina and Brazil in July and August.

■ MEXICO

In Mexico the Lieutenantcy had been labouring for some time under a seemingly irreversible crisis. In December 2017, the visit of the Cardinal Grand Master, the Lieutenant General and the Governor General and the appointment of Gustavo Rincón Hernández as regent, laid the foundations for a process of rebirth. From that moment on and with great determination, a process of renewal of the Council began coupled with the search for new forces, drawing on the experience of many confreres also active in the Order of Malta. Indeed, it was found that the objective of developing charitable activities in favour of the Holy Land, specific to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, is perfectly compatible, and in fact complementary, with that strongly felt in the Order of Malta to boost active assistance to the local population.

On July 29, and despite an injured arm, the Governor General accepted the invitation of the Lieutenant-Regent and went on a lightning visit to Mexico City. There together with the Grand Prior, Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, they evaluated what had been accomplished to date and discussed the next steps to be taken. Considering the advanced age of Gustavo Rincón, particular attention was given to the modality of alternating his responsibilities with a younger but experienced Lieutenant, capable of carrying on the great project of reconstruction and ensure its continuity. The choice fell on Guillermo Macías Graue – a polyglot professor, with international experience gained in prestigious universities such as, the Gregorian in Rome, Salamanca and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem – who will take the lead in November at the Investiture ceremony of the Lieutenancy, while Gustavo Rincón, in recognition of the meritorious work performed, will be appointed Lieutenant of Honour. In commenting on the meeting with the Governor General, Cardinal Rivera defined the process thus started as an authentic “resurrection” of the Lieutenancy.

■ ARGENTINA

On August 20-21 the Governor General, accompanied by the Vice Governor General Enric Mas, paid a visit to Argentina where he attended the Investiture ceremony in Buenos Aires officiated by the Grand Prior Msgr. Héctor Aguer and met with Lieutenant Juan Francisco Ramos Mejía and the leaders of the Lieutenancy in that city. One of the objectives of this second journey was to place the leaders of the Order in full harmony with the guidelines of the Grand Magisterium in Rome and with the local episcopate, following the directives of the Holy Father. Communication difficulties did not help in the recent past in the life of the Order in Argentina, but in a conversation with the leaders of the local hierarchy, the premises were hopefully set for starting a more constructive dialogue. In Argentina, 90% of the inhabitants claim to be Catholic, but the percentage of practicing Catholics is much lower.

Speaking with members of the Lieutenancy, following his meeting with local Church leaders, the Governor General urged them to support greater participation in diocesan activities by the whole Catholic community, given the moment of difficulty that the nation is currently experiencing. He then recalled that the Order of the Holy Sepulchre is an institution of the Church with a precise mandate to maintain the Christian presence in the Holy Land, strongly encouraged by Pope Francis.

■ BRAZIL

The Governor and the Vice Governor were in Brazil from August 22 to 24, where they met the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro Cardinal Orani João Tempesta, Grand Prior of the Lieutenancy. Together with him they examined in detail the issues relating to what is unquestionably the country with the greatest number of Catholics in the world, and therefore deserving of special attention.

The program then included a meeting with the Lieutenant of Rio de Janeiro, Isis Cunha Penido, and with the heads of the Lieutenancy in the offices hosted at the splendid Old Cathedral of Our Lady of Carmel, to review the various charitable activities undertaken by the Lieutenancy, addressed to the needs of the country as well as to the Holy Land.

Finally, the Governor and the Vice Governor met the Lieutenant of São Paulo, Manuel Tavares de Almeida Filho, discussing the prospects of opening new peripheral structures of the Order in the country after those of Rio and São Paulo, in order to achieve the aims of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, through a widespread and capillary presence. The opportunity to organize a first meeting of all Latin American Lieutenants in São Paulo was also evaluated. Before leaving, the Governor General and the Vice Governor granted an interview to a local television station.

■ A UNITARY STRATEGY

In addition to a strengthening of the presence of the Order in Brazil, the program of the Governor General and the Vice Governor General for Latin America envisions visits to other countries in the area in view of a concrete enlargement. The Latin American continent must in fact be placed in a situation of absolute parity of importance with the other three geographical areas in which the Order is active. An exchange of experiences between the respective four Vice Governors (three recently appointed) is hoped for. For reasons of cultural and linguistic affinity, it was decided that the Lieutenancy for Mexico, previously included in the North American area, will become part of the new Latin American formation, while continuing for now to participate as a guest in the meetings of the North American Lieutenants, also in order to ensure a connection and greater sharing. One of the most interesting aspects that emerged in the various sectoral geographical meetings – and always emphasized by the Governor General – is the need to foster the sharing of experiences between Lieutenancies of different areas and therefore – by analogy – between the four Vice Governors.

“The Order is one and it is right that the strategy be unitary – said Governor General Visconti di Modrone in one of his recent interventions – but in implementing it we must also carefully consider local customs and traditions and above all the different experiences. We must unite in feeling we are working to maintain the Christian presence in the Holy Land, despite the difficulties the Church faces today, treasuring at the same time the wealth of ideas and proposals that come to us from different corners of the earth.”

One strong suggestion that emerged from the meeting of the North American Lieutenants in Houston last May regarded the importance of the pastoral component and of the participation of families in spiritual activities. The European Lieutenants who met in Rome emphasized the charitable commitment and the realization of projects for the formation of young people in the Holy Land. Asian confreres gathered in Brisbane concluded that distance does not constitute a hindrance to collective participation in the Order’s charitable activities (and the Cardinal Grand Master’s planned visit to these countries in January, following on from his trip to Australia last year, is a visible confirmation of this). The Grand Magisterium’s active focus on Latin America is part of this unifying context.

“Our Order is inspired by the image of the Sepulchre from which Our Lord was resurrected,” the Governor General recalled. “Therefore it is not a funeral monument but the symbol of the unity of our Faith. The principles we are inspired by are those of charity, humility and obedience: they bring us closer and make us brothers and sisters in every corner of the world.”

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