Video message by the Governor General Leonardo Visconti di Modrone to the North American members

Excellencies, dear confreres and consoers from North America, thank you for giving me the opportunity to inform you on the main achievements of the Order in the year just finished and on our plans for the one that has just begun.

Technology allows us to comunicate both with words and visually, somehow making up for the impossibility of meeting in person .

Last December our Grand Master has spoken to you about the spiritual aspects of belonging to our Order.

In future connections with Jerusalem you will be able to hear from the Patriarch Mons. Pizzaballa how the situation in the Holy Land is evolving and about the impact of our contributions to help our Christian brothers living there.

I believe that my duty now, as Governor General, is rather to inform you about the government and the management of the Order and about our plans for 2021.

In 2020 we have gone through a few important events .

First of all January 2020 has seen the beginning of the mandate of the new Grand Master Cardinal Fernando Filoni. Under his guide a few changes have been introduced.

Cardinal Filoni, intending to improve our communications, has

introduced in our Website a section called “The corner of the Grand Master” in order to answer directly any questions from members of the Order: the whole collection of all these short texts, translated in various languages, is published in our Website: I advise you to give a look at them, every once in a while, since they encourage to think about a variety of topical subjects, such as the symbolism in the investitures, peaceful coexistance among peoples, dialogue with other faiths, the role of the young people, of the women and of the clergy, the promotion of volunteering, the missionary commitment of the members of our Order,…, and so on.

The wish of our Grand Master of being as close as possible to the knights and dames of the Order is evident. He wants to face with all of you the most frequent problems, helping you to overcome possible difficulties and establishing an open dialogue.

This aim is reflected in a more complete form in the booklet on spirituality recently published by him in Italian, and currently being translated in various languages.

A second important event in 2020 has been the approval by the Holy Father of our new Statute .

Do you remember since when we have been discussing it? I believe it all started with the Consulta of 2013. How many people have been working on it! How many drafts have been circulated! How many proposals have been made! Well, eventually with the impulse given by Cardinal Filoni the final word has been said.

And please take note that the changes introduced by the New Statute are few, but essential: first of all there is again a reference in the preamble to the spiritual commitment and the solemn engagement for those wishing to enter the Order. In this connection the Cardinal insists on stating that becoming member of the Order and being granted a rank of knight is not the acknowledgment of past merits, as in other orders, but a firm engagement for a future Christian life .

There is also another very important aspect in the new Statute: the formal recognition that the Order is a Central Entity of the Church. What does this mean? It means that the Order is an instrument of the Church, for acting permanently in the Holy Land to support the Church of Jerusalem, where our faith originated.

This recognition is very important. I would like that every member of the Order fully realize it. We are not a group of faithful people acting on our own on charitable initiatives: it is the Catholic Church who shows through us its presence in the Holy Land. By confirming this aspect, Pope Francis connects us to the main reason for the creation of the Order in mid- nineteenth century, when Pope Pius IX decided to re-establish the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem and entrusted to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre the task of supporting it financially and continuously. Until then the knights of the Holy Sepulchre were individuals who wished to be invested in Jerusalem, motivated by their personal faith. But from that moment on the Order has been organised as an entity of the Church with its rules, its hierarchy and its duties.

A third important event and a reason to rejoice, has been the appointment of Mons. Pizzaballa as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. His task is an extremely delicate one. To be able to profit from his past experience as Apostolic Administrator and, before that, as Custos of the Holy Sepulchre should give us a strong feeling of confidence .

Let us remember, among other things, that Mons.Pizzaballa has put order and professional experience in the management of the Pathriarchate and has succeded in paying off the debt made by previous patriarchs for financing Madaba University.

A fourth significant event has left its mark on 2020: the coming in force of the New Vatican Procurement Code which shows the determination of the Pope to reorder the management of the Holy See.

In the course of our contacts with the persons newly appointed by the Pope to manage the vatican finances we have been confirmed that our administration corresponds fully to the criteria of good management, efficiency and trasparency.

If we look now at the engagements in the life of the Order over the year 2020, we will find that the two Grand Magisterium meetings have taken place in new forms.

The first one in spring by sending written reports; the second in autumn by videoconference. Also the three area meeting have been held by video conference.

The one of the North American Lieutenants in June has opened the way , showing that this form could be effective, and reduce the expenses.

The same form has been used for the Latin American Lieutenants' and for the European Lieutenants' meetings, introducing however something new: the possibility to be connected, and therefore to attend, for everyone. This is a further step towards a wider communication: the meetings are not any more limited to a few participants, they are open to everybody.

Investitures have been obviously lacking; just a few Lieutenancies have been able to organize them, with all the required sanitary precautions.

The decrease of investures has determined a decrease in proceeds, and significally those covering the institutional expenses of the Pathiarchate.

As you know, the Grand Magisterium covers the expenses of the day-to-day management of the Patriarchate, the Beit Jala Seminar and the schools with the proceeds from the appointments and from the promotions. Every month, regardless of the amount of the collections, Rome sends to Jerusalem 647.000 US Dollars to cover those expenses. In 2020, to keep such commitment, we have been forced to have recourse to the special reserve as provided for by the Statute.

This is something that I feel it is my duty to point out. I am aware of the fact that each Lieutenancy prefers to give a specific destination to its contributions, but we must keep in mind that there are regular expenses of the Patriarchate that, even if not pertaining to projects or specific

humaniatarian activities, are the daily bread of the Patriarchate, of the schools and the Beit Jala Seminary.

Here are some figures to give you an idea of what we are doing for the Holy Land.

Contributions from the Lieutenancies have amounted in 2020 to 17.500.000 US Dollars and altoghether we have sent to the Holy Land 19.200.000.

With regards to the projects, the Jubeia Church is almost finished. Only a few external details have to be completed but it has been possible to celebrate the Christmas Mass there.

Two other medium-size project have been started while the small projects have been slowed down mainly for the interruptions during the lockdown .

We have started in Rome the restauration of Palazzo Della Rovere, our prestigious seat donated by the Church to the Order . I wish to reassure all my confreres by confirming that the relevant costs will not fall on the lieutenancies' contributions for the Holy Land, but on a special fund established years ago by Cardinal Fowley to this purpose. Part of the costs will also be covered by the company that will manage the hotel located in a portion of the palace.

You will now wish to know what are our expectations for this year 2021. The answer is not an easy one. We must follow the tide, but ready to set sail as soon as the wind blows again in a favourable direction.

We are aware that contributions could decrease but we count on a very strict management and on a selective choice of project to finance .

We will probably have to meet by video conference at least in one of the the two Grand Magisterium appointments , but I really look forward to being in Omaha for the North American Lieutenants meeting next june.

I hope to have given you a clear although synthetic picture of the situation of the Order, as seen from our headquarters in Rome.

I rely on a continuing interchange of opinions with all Lieutenants and through them with all members of the Order. And I rely on the collaboration between laity and clergy in the life of our Order keeping in mind the importance that our spiritual commitmemt be followed by a real charitable effort in order to make it really fruitful.

St James reminds us "What is the use , brothers, if someone says "I have the faith " but there are no deeds? Could that faith save him? "

Thank you for your attention. While thanking especially Vice Governor Pogge for his precious help, I remain united in prayer, with you all, with my best wishes.

Leonardo Visconti di Modrone

Governor General

(January 2021)