



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Audience with participants in the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem



This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Cardinals,

Dear brothers in the Episcopate,

Members of the Grand Magisterium and Lieutenants,

Brothers and sisters!

I welcome you all, Knights, Dames and Ecclesiastics representing the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. I address a particular greeting to Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Grand Master of the Order, extending my sentiments of gratitude and respect to all the members of the Order throughout the world.

You are gathered in Rome for the Consulta, which involves the meeting of the Lieutenants, the Magistral Delegates, and this year also the Bishops Grand Priors, to discuss the theme of *formation*. A formation necessary for candidates aspiring to enter the Order; an ongoing formation for those who already participate in its life and mission; and furthermore, the formation of those who are called to hold roles of responsibility, with two elements: the spiritual, in the awareness of the high moral commitment assumed before the Altar; and that related to the organization of activities and resource management, to meet the needs of the Holy Land continually and adequately.

Initial and ongoing, practical and spiritual formation: they are four guidelines that we can see represented in the sign of the Cross, which stands out clearly on your mantles and inspires your spirituality. With its horizontal arm, it reminds you of your commitment to ensure that your dedication to the crucified and risen Christ embraces your entire life, and in charity makes you close to every brother and sister; while its vertical arm, firmly planted on the ground and pointing to heaven, reminds you of the inalienable complementarity, in your journey, between a life of prayer and service to your brothers and sisters, attentive, qualified, and well rooted in the realities in which you operate, aimed at the total good of the person (cf. *Eph 3:17-19*; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, III, lect. 5).

In this regard, the Statutes I have approved constitute the high road on which to travel as a lay Order, with a purpose that was already well foreseen by Blessed Pius IX and then confirmed by his successors: to associate men and women who are committed to a fuller participation in the life of the Church, starting from that "Mother" Church in Jerusalem, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul (cf. *1 Cor 16:3*), and opening up to the whole world. With this universal outlook, you are called to be an Order that, strong in its own identity, participates in the mystery of charity in the most beautiful way, open and available, ready to take on those services that the Lord requires through the needs of our brothers and sisters: from the education of children in schools to concrete solidarity with the most fragile categories, such as the elderly, the sick, and refugees. Let us remember here, always, I would say the "refrain" that the Lord makes all the prophets say in the Old Testament: the widow, the orphan and the stranger. This care we must have.

The empty Sepulchre, whose special custodian you have by vocation committed yourselves to be for centuries, is in this sense above all a sign of the boundless love of the Crucified One, who keeps nothing for himself and who therefore cannot be held back by the snares of death; it is a sign of the victory of the Risen One in whom we too find life (cf. *Rom 6:8-9*) and of the power of the Mystery of his Body and Blood that unites us all as his members (cf. *1 Cor 10:17*).

To form and to be formed, at the beginning of the journey of Investiture and throughout life. Formation is lifelong. Formation is a universal and inclusive charity. Studying the history of your Order from this point of view and, in a context of listening and prayer, applying yourselves to acquiring the skills to respond to the needs of your neighbour: this is a great service you can offer to the Church and the world today. In every age, even in ours, marked by the technocratic paradigm, there is a great need for people who practice charity with intelligence and imagination. I therefore urge you to continue your work in this style, and to transmit it faithfully in the various phases of formation.

Before concluding, I would like to join you in thinking of the Holy Land. We are sadly witnessing a tragedy unfolding in the very places where the Lord lived, where he taught us through his humanity to love, to forgive and to do good to all. And instead, we see them torn apart by terrible suffering that affects above all so many innocents, so many innocent dead. That is why I am spiritually united with you, who certainly live this meeting of the Consulta sharing the great sorrow of the Mother Church of Jerusalem and imploring the gift of peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Virgin Mary, invoked by you with the title of *Queen of Palestine*, assist you always in your mission. I bless you all from my heart, I bless all the members of the Order and their families. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

(November 9, 2023)