

Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Investiture Mass, St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, 26 June 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Dear Knights and Dames to be invested

Dear friends, one and all

Recently, after many months of lockdown, I was pleased to travel north and visit my parents. So many people have been distanced physically from their loved ones by the Covid 19 restrictions. Gradually, and thankfully, things are improving. So, how lovely it is today, to be able to gather together, even though we are, perhaps, not as many as we would have been in normal circumstances.

My parents spent some of the lockdown sorting through their house and, during my visit, my father presented me with a gift of two small books. The first was a souvenir copy of *'Flowers and Views of the Holy Land,'* with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre painted on its wooden cover. It was sent by my paternal grandfather to my grandmother, and inscribed by hand: *'with love and kisses, from your devoted husband; Jerusalem, July, 1941.'* During the Second World War, he served as a dispatch rider at Dunkirk. He was then stationed in North Africa and, from there, made his way to the Holy Land.

The second book was *'Your Guide to the Holy Land,'* published in Jerusalem, again in 1941, by Franciscan Press. The descriptions and maps of the Holy Places are interspersed with advertisements for such places as the *'Cleopatra Store,'* *'Near King David Hotel,'* specialising in Damascus silk and brocade; and Hanania Brothers *'Photo Dealers,'* on the Jaffa road, *'Near Barclays Bank, Jerusalem.'*

What drew my grandfather to the Holy Places, almost exactly eighty years ago, has drawn visitors and pilgrims throughout Christian history. What he saw and touched, we can still see and touch. *'All the earth shall remember and return to the Lord,'* says our psalmist.¹ For millennia, we have been remembering and returning to the homeland of the Lord Jesus.

Whenever we hear the Gospel proclaimed, we remember and return to the sites, scenes, and events of Christ's living, dying, and rising. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember and return sacramentally to the Upper

¹ Ps 22:27

Room, to Calvary, and to the Empty Tomb. It was beside the Syrian sea that those first disciples heard the Lord's gracious calling. Like them, in faith, we too have met the Lord Jesus and heard his voice. He says to us *'rise up and follow me.'*

It is our living relationship with our living Lord which brings us to this act of investiture. In a new sense, and in a special way, we become connected with the Holy Sepulchre and the Holy Land, and, importantly, with its Church and people today.

Sadly, yet again this year, we have witnessed what Archbishop Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, described as *'explosions of violence and war in the Holy Land.'*² With devastating loss of life, and the destruction of homes and communities, only peace with justice can safely secure the future. Our determination must not falter. We pray for, and work to build, that peace which, in Archbishop Pizzaballa's words, *'is the fruit of the Spirit, who gives life and trust, always anew, without ever getting tired.'*³ How urgent is the prayer for the peace of Jerusalem.

Our Gospel today invites us to return to Nazareth, the town in Galilee where the Lord Jesus spent most of his childhood. It was a familiar place to him, but, with St Luke, we remember that something new happened there at the beginning of Our Lord's public ministry.

Entering the synagogue, the Lord Jesus applied to himself the ancient words from the scroll of Isaiah. As he spoke, and the people listened, the prophetic pronouncements were fulfilled in his very person. It is Christ, above all others, who is anointed by the Spirit, such that we who share his life, also share the gift of the Spirit. What might this mean in terms of investiture for service as a Dame or Knight of the Holy Sepulchre?

At heart we must each deepen our personal friendship with Christ. We are to live the Christian life with commitment and devotion, in fidelity to our Holy Father and the Church's teaching. Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre are, first and foremost, evangelists, joyful witnesses who announce the Good News of salvation.

² Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Patriarch's Message, 18 May, 2021.

³ Ibid.

At our baptism we were marked with the cross, the sign of Christ. Through investiture we embrace Christ's cross anew, specifically clothing ourselves with the cross of Jerusalem. This larger cross, surrounded by four smaller crosses, has varied interpretation and significance. It reflects the five sacred wounds of Christ. It signals our Lord and the four Gospel writers. It represents Christ and the four points, the four quarters, of the world's compass. Together, and individually, we are evangelists of Christ crucified and risen, sent out to carry the Gospel to every place and every person.

Alongside our Christian witness at home, we take up the wider call to be missionary in relation to the Holy Land. We evangelise through partnership with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with the lay faithful, clergy, and religious. Our charitable support really is good news for the poor. It sustains people and communities imprisoned by hardship. It gives new vision by helping to provide healthcare and education. Our contributions assist directly the Catholic Church in the Holy Land to retain its presence, to grow, and to carry out its mission.

In all of this, pilgrimage is an essential aspect of our Order's work. Our financial aid is indispensably accompanied by personal contact. We are not simply donors to the people and the Church of the Holy Land. We are fellow disciples in a bond of friendship and communion. The combination of prayer, almsgiving, and pilgrimage, strengthen our spiritual and pastoral solidarity, flowing from our vocation to evangelise as Dames and Knights.

After eighty years, the small book of pictures and pressed flowers my grandfather sent from the Holy Land to my grandmother still has all its colour and beauty intact. The colour and beauty of this ceremony, of investiture as Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, points to deeper realities. When we keep at the centre, in our hearts, the gracious words that come from the lips of the Lord Jesus - his gracious life, death and resurrection - then, we too, become signs of the Lord's favour. By our faithful service, may the truth of the Lord Jesus be fulfilled in us, and through us, as, journeying together, we keep our eyes fixed on him.

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of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem