

The Lenten Call to Renewed Hope

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Epístula

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“Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.” [Collect for the First Sunday of Lent]

The lengthening of days is once again here and the whole Church begins the holy season of preparation to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. The opening prayer for the First Sunday of Lent provides our Order with some rich food for our prayer and for our life of service in the Church. It is a plea to God to help us live in hope, perhaps to help us regain the hope we have lost. Only in Christ is it possible to dwell in true hope, and only with Christ can our understanding of his death and resurrection be deepened. So, we ask God to help us to understand the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection and to teach us to reflect it in our lives.

This Lenten call to a renewed hope is also a critical plea from God to us: *See, I have set before you life and prosperity, death and adversity ... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days. [Deuteronomy 30: 15 & 19].*

You are all well aware by now that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is calling the whole Church to a new endeavour of renewal. We want to choose life and not death, but this can only be accomplished if every member embraces the call from God found in Deuteronomy. Let us pray that, if it is God's will, the work of the Order to our Lord's sick and the poor may continue, and our ministry to God's little ones may inspire hope in the hearts of men and women who will want to join us in this wonderful call.

Lent begins with the blessing and imposition of ashes in the form of a cross on the forehead, and in the Gospel for Ash Wednesday we are presented with the three traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I would like to reflect on these four

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"actions" from the Ash Wednesday liturgy to see how they help us to deepen our understanding of the Paschal Mystery and how they enable us to reflect that understanding in our lives; how they help hope to endure.

Understanding the Meaning of Christ's Death and Resurrection: The signing with ashes calls us to look behind the simple gesture and to discover what is being proclaimed. It is true that the sign of the cross on the forehead with ashes signifies our need for repentance and conversion, but behind that obvious meaning we discover a sacramental meaning. When we were baptized, the celebrant anointed our foreheads with chrism in the form of a cross. He proclaimed that God the Father of Jesus has freed us from sin, has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and has welcomed us into his holy people.



We had entered into the Paschal Mystery of Christ. We had been freed by God, we are a new creation, and we now belonged to a community of holy people. The faithful love of God met us in death and gave us new life. The ashes are our acknowledgement that we have not always acted out of all that God has done for us; we are in need of an on-going conversion of life. We turn to God in the hope that he will again wash us clean and restore us to the fullness of life.

Teach Us to Reflect It in Our Lives: Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three courses that we take in the Lenten School of God. As members of the Order of Malta we should always be eager for, and open to learning the deeper truth. The actions by themselves can easily be passed off as those three things we are

supposed to do during Lent, but if we see them as the three disciplines that enable us to reflect the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection in our own lives, they take on deeper significance.

Prayer is that holy conversation we enter into with the one who shows us so great a love. It is in this conversation that we can again and again open ourselves to the seduction of God's love and be transformed. In prayer God speaks to us about fidelity, strength, courage, giftedness and compassion. It is in prayer that we remember how wonderfully we have been made and redeemed. It is in prayer that we respond to love by saying that we will go – that God can send us to bring hope to his people. Please be open to that seduction and generously respond to God's call.

Fasting is not just about giving up stuff but about filling the empty space of ourselves with life-giving action: *Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? [Isaiah 58: 6-7].* In the School of God we learn the

fullest meaning of fasting; that it is a call to reflect the faithful and life-giving love of God in all of our actions.



Almsgiving is more than the token giving of something outside ourselves. True almsgiving is the free sharing of ourselves with others. We give alms when we console the suffering and the dying. We give alms when we share our gifts and talents with those who are not gifted in the same way. Offering words of forgiveness or telling another that you are truly sorry for what you have done is almsgiving at its best. Through this course of study God helps us to acknowledge the abundance of gifts we have received from him and to share them lovingly with those who are in need

With God's grace and one another's prayerful support, may our Lenten course of studies help each of us to be open to God's seductive love which redeems us and give us new life in Christ. May we have grateful hearts for the gifts and talents God has bequeathed to each of us; may we freely and generously offer all of these to God's people. When we live in this way we have come to understand the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection and have learned to reflect it in our lives. Then we can sing with the whole Church the great proclamation of joy and hope; *Jesus Christ, our King, is risen! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! The risen Saviour shines upon you! Christ, that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all humanity, your Son who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen. [Exsultet]*

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President's message

By André A. Morin, KMOB

In February 2014, a year after the commemoration of the 900th anniversary of the *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* bulla in Rome, our Grand Master, His Most Eminent Highness Fra' Matthew Festing, invited us to take part in an international strategic seminar in Rhodes.

The purpose of this meeting was to develop a strategic plan for the coming years of our Order. More than 300 delegates from every continent gathered in Rhodes in answer to the Grand Master's call. Grand Master Festing wished for an increased participation worldwide from young knights and dames.

In his opening remarks the Grand Master underscored five priorities for the Order of Malta: 1. We must pray for the awakening of vocations for professed knights. 2. The Grand Master wishes to increase accountability and internal controls within the Order in Rome and in national associations. 3. Recruiting and identifying tomorrow's leaders is also a priority. The Grand Master stressed that more than 70% of our members are over 70 years old. Recruiting young persons has become a major challenge. On this score, I am proud to point out that it is also a priority identified by your Board in its strategic plan that was distributed to all members more than two years ago. The Board, and more specifically the committee responsible for recruiting, has accomplished an extraordinary exercise in this regard. 4. The Grand Master also underlined the importance of internal communications within our Order. 5. Finally, the Grand Master's last priority is the protection of the Order's sovereignty. The Order's diplomacy allows Malteser International to be present efficiently on several fields of operations through its ambassadors and their work on behalf of the poorest people.



Participants were distributed in 15 working groups. Each group had two moderators. Points for consideration had been sent in advance to participants in order to increase the efficiency of the work.

The first group's mandate was to formulate a training profile for knights of Justice. The work accomplished by this group demonstrates the importance of the Order's religious members. They are the heart of the Order. It is essential that chaplains be mindful of vocations. They must detect and encourage candidates who have this vocation. Knights of Justice must play an important role in the guidance of new members. It is necessary to pray so as to stimulate vocations for our Order.

Group 2 concerned itself with the governance of the Order. In this respect, the Order, thanks to its Charter and Code, is able to define clearly its goals and its mission. It is necessary to increase transparency and fiscal accountability within the Order. For my part, I am proud to underline the work of our Audit committee, which, over the past few years, has worked to increase transparency within the Canadian Association.

Group 3 dealt with the selection and training of new members. National associations and priories must pay special attention to recruiting. The Order's survival depends on it. The group strongly urges that committees be created within national associations to work on recruiting. The Regulations and Commentary are an important tool for the candidates to understand fully the aims and the mission of the Order.

It is imperative that associations have a training program for candidates. I am happy to say that your Association has a training program that was distributed throughout the country. Each candidate must undertake the training program. The Order is looking for men and women who are active Catholics in their communities, in their parishes. These men and women must understand that admission in the Order is a commitment to the poor and the sick. Members must commit themselves to serve the Order and must take part in the Order's activities. It is of paramount importance that sponsors undertake to explain the Order to prospective members in order that they be witnesses of the Order's spirituality.

Group 4 worked on the duties of priories and associations. It is the duty of associations to distribute, and to make known, the Rules and Commentary published by H.M.E.H. the Prince and Grand Master, Fra' Matthew Festing. The chaplains must commit themselves to their brothers and sisters in the Order. The principal chaplain must be a member of the governing board in each association. This is already the case in your Association. Sponsors have an important duty to discharge in order to actively support candidates.

Group 5 was concerned with developing structures for associations. This group recalled the importance for associations to have Boards that meet regularly. This is normal practice in your Association. There is a need to establish a calendar of meetings. Presidents must inform members regularly through written briefings. Each association must produce reports of its activities at annual general meetings.

Group 6 was tasked with defining the role of volunteers. The mission of volunteers in service to the Order must be to help the poor and the sick. Associations must develop rules to govern volunteers. There is a need for a Code of ethics for volunteers and for a recruiting strategy. Should volunteers wish to raise funds for

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activities, it must be done in a professional way so as to project a good image of the Order.



Group 7 reflected upon the creation of a training centre for the Order. According to a June 21, 2013 decree, the Magistral Palace must be used as a training centre. It will be necessary to hire professional instructors in order to dispense courses of the highest standards on the Order's spirituality, its diplomacy, its mission, etc. Technology may be used in order to reach several groups at a lower cost.

Group 8 worked on the qualities needed to be a good leader and to occupy high level functions in the Order and in the associations. The group clearly stated that executives or administrators of the Order should be models of empathy, of humility, honesty and ability to listen sympathetically to others and be totally committed to the Order so as to be true bearers of the Joy of the Gospel.

Group 9 prepared the Order's response to Pope Francis in order to follow through on the Pope's appeal, bearing in mind his recent Apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, which is a fundamental text for the Church.

We must be ready to transmit the joy of the Gospel. In order to do this, members of the Order must, before they launch into action, pray so as to give a Christian sense to their commitment as outlined by the Holy Father in paragraph 262 of his Apostolic exhortation. We must return to the Order's mission which is to be ready to defend the Faith and to serve the poor and the sick. The members of the Order must go the periphery to meet those who are exiled from our world in order to bring them a message of Hope.

"Members of the Order, fired up by the Joy of the Gospel, must serve in the field, reaching out to the excluded."

Members of the Order, fired up by the Joy of the Gospel, must serve in the field, reaching out to the excluded. The Order must place all its energy in this goal and not hesitate to use its diplomats in the service of the poor in order to build a more just world. As underlined by the Holy Father in paragraph 102 and those that follow: "Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the people of God." Lay persons in the Order must be into service to the poor and the excluded, and be properly trained to fully fulfil their tasks. There is a need to give more space to women within our Order, in the associations, or on executive Boards and in the Order's government. In paragraph 104 of *Evangelii gaudium*, the Holy Father recognises the demands "that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity." The Order must encourage and invite women to assume an important role in order to assist the poor and the sick.

Finally, the Order must help the victims of the economy, of exclusion and of social inequalities. The Order must promote social justice and facilitate evangelisation in several areas of society, notably in the world of finance, of sciences and of health.

Group 10 worked to improve internal communications. It is an important priority in this world of communications. We must use the Order's intranet. We must report our activities on Conto, the Order's database. Associations must have up-to-date internet sites and facilitate communications with their members. The Order encourages the use of Facebook by associations.

Group 11 worked to define the importance of the Order's sovereignty. The Order's diplomacy must be in the service of the poor and the sick, promoting their well-being and working in conjunction with national associations in the promotion of the Gospel and the Order's values. It is thanks to these values that the Order is able to promote peace and the respect of persons in the concert of nations.



“A sustainable fundraising strategy must be developed and the importance of knowing the Order’s spirituality must be emphasized in order to live an authentic commitment in the service of the Faith, the poor and the sick.”

Group 12 worked on the forgotten of the world, abandoned persons. Each association must develop, with assistance from the Grand Magistracy, policies of intervention to look after the excluded and immigrants.

Group 13 reflected on the protection of the Order’s identity. We must use our shield with the eight-pointed Cross in order to be identified by a simple and significant symbol. We must register the names used by the Order as trade marks in order to protect them. We must create strategic alliances with our sister orders, the Venerable Order and the Johanniter, so as to protect the eight-pointed Cross and the other symbols of the Order.

Group 14 worked on our cultural heritage that distinguishes us from other organisations. The Order is unique through its long history, its neutrality, its spirituality, its diplomacy, and its sovereignty. The essence of our culture is religious in the service of the Faith, the poor and the sick. This group has recommended financing an Institute dedicated to the history of the Order.

Group 15 developed the 2050 vision of the Order. What will the Order be like in 2050? We must recruit a great many more young persons. In 2015-2020, one new member out of two must be less than 50 years old. We must invite young persons to join the recruiting committee and this committee must report directly to the Presidents of associations.

The Order must reinforce its diplomacy and favour the growth of international camps for the handicapped. A sustainable fundraising strategy must be developed and the importance of knowing the Order’s spirituality must be emphasized in order to live an authentic commitment in the service of the Faith, the poor and the sick.

The Grand Magistracy will, in the near future, determine its priorities that will be communicated to you. I believe it is important to inform you of the whole of the discussions at the seminar in the interest of transparency and healthy communications.

In closing, I give sincere thanks to the members of your Association who took part in the strategic seminar. They worked very hard in workshops in order to animate discussions and move forward debate and reflexion. They were: the Honourable Noël Kinsella, Dr. William Sullivan, Mr. Mathieu Dupont, Dr. Jean-Marc Guilé and Mr. Patrick Rechner. Thanks to these selfless confrères who worked in different workshops, your Association contributed actively to the success of this international gathering. I deem it a privilege to have been able to depend on their contributions during this important strategic seminar.

To everyone, I offer confraternal best wishes for a Happy Easter.

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