Commitment in the Order is a path towards holiness

The testimony of Claude Grbesa, Magistral Delegate for Croatia

Il cardinale Edwin O'Brien in raccoglimento davanti al reliquiario del beato cardinale Alojzije Stepinac, membro dell'Ordine, nel corso di una cerimonia d'Investitura in Croazia.

Iread Pope Francis' **apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*** on the call to holiness in the contemporary world with great pleasure. The exhortation was published at the right time: now more than ever the lay faithful need to feel an integral part of the Catholic Church and to know that holiness is accessible to all.

Therefore, it is highly desirable that the Croatian Knights and Dames read this document, the content of which will now be included in the **formation process of future members**.

For a Christian, responding to the call to holiness is inseparable from his or her faith. It is true that this spiritual journey appears long and full of obstacles. The Lord offers Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre various tools for the journey. Not just shield and sword, but love of God and neighbor, constant prayer, audacity and fervor to make the message of the Gospel triumph. Pope Francis invites us to follow **the Beatitudes, the DNA of every Christian**, in the manner of the saints. Living the Beatitudes requires a daily dynamic of conversion and it is possible only through the grace of the Holy Spirit that nourishes the Word of Christ.

As suggested by the Holy Father, we must first start with **small everyday gestures**: within the family, at work and with our friends. Our existence is made of simple joys that we give or that others give us.

The double mission of the **Knight or Dame of the Holy Sepulchre** – called to deepen and constantly strengthen his faith, as well as to support the Christian presence in the Holy Land – creates a favorable context for achieving holiness. The prayer and action evoked in the apostolic exhortation as a primordial symbiosis are therefore well present in this mission.

This spiritual growth would be impoverished if it were not carried out within a vast community of the faithful, in this case that of the Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre, which constitute a large family. “Sanctification is a community journey,” emphasizes the Holy Father.

In the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* of 1988 on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, St. John Paul II outlines a series of “**criteria of ecclesiality**” to recognize the associations of lay faithful. The first criterion is exactly “the primacy of the vocation of every Christian to holiness.” In this sense, any association of lay believers is called to increasingly represent an instrument of sanctification of the Church itself.

One can engage in following Christ, taking inspiration from the lives of the great saints. As for me, **Blessed Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac** – Archbishop of Zagreb, martyr and Knight of the Holy Sepulchre – accompanies me every day in my role as Magistral Delegate. He is a point of reference to which I turn for inspiration and support in difficult times.

However, around us there are **closer saints** still, as Pope Francis recalls: within the family, in the parish, or among friends and acquaintances. We cannot then forget our Christian brothers in the Holy Land and the Middle East, who – although geographically distant – live in the depths of our hearts. They too are living saints who stay firm in their faith facing difficulties and persecutions.

Ultimately, each one is called to follow “the unique and specific path” that the Lord wants for him, with the Word of God as a compass.

Claude Grbesa

Magistral Delegate for Croatia

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