



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr ŠTEFAN FATEŽ,
AMBASSADOR OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 13 October 1997

Mr Ambassador,

I am very pleased to welcome you and greet you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Holy See. Please express my respectful thoughts and cordial greetings to the Prince and Grand Master of the Order, Fra Andrew Bertie, together with my gratitude for his devout sentiments which you have conveyed. I am also grateful to the members of the Sovereign Council of the entire Order, who on this important occasion have wished, through you, to express their renewed fidelity to the Successor of Peter.

You are well aware of the distinctive features of the Sovereign Order of Malta. It is distinguished for its supranational, religious and charitable character. As you have just recalled, being a subject of international law allows the Order to have diplomatic relations with numerous States and organizations, including the Holy See. Moreover, the latter has profound links with the Order which date back to the beginning of the second millennium, when it was founded in Jerusalem as the Hospitaller Order of St John. These links are also fostered by the religious affection of the Apostolic See and of all Christianity for the Holy Land, and by the Order's very aim, which is graphically defined in the motto: "*Tuitio fidei, obsequium paupe-rum*".

A truly noble aim, which finds wonderful confirmation in the whole history of the Order, which has distinguished itself for centuries by its defence of the faith, frequently to the point of the supreme witness of bloodshed, and by its charitable service to pilgrims, the sick and every other form of human need.

Today the defence of the faith is expressed above all in giving witness by word and action to the Christian truths. This presupposes as a preliminary condition that you are well instructed in these truths and thoroughly convinced of the duty to profess them with courage and firmness, as is required of a "knight" who keeps his word. In this perspective, I would like symbolically to entrust to all the members of the Order of Malta the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which has recently been published in the Latin typical edition. Defending the faith often means, especially in our time, defending the great values that human reason without the light of Revelation risks misunderstanding in their integral and radical nature. These are, for example, human dignity, the nature of the family and the fundamental right to life.

Mr Ambassador, I encourage the whole Order to continue generously supporting these spiritual battles, on which the civilization of the third millennium depends. I am certain that the age-old institution which you represent here will not fail to persevere in making its valuable contribution to all the initiatives which the Church, in fidelity to God's plan for humanity, is undertaking to safeguard the rights of all, beginning with the weakest.

The typical field of service for the Order of Malta is that of caring for the sick and pilgrims, who are honoured by its members as "lords" who must be assisted with the attitude of "servants". "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15), Jesus said to his disciples after washing their feet. May this Gospel image of service always inspire the action of those who serve in the Order of Malta!

I listened with satisfaction, Mr Ambassador, to your brief summary of what the many works administered by the Order in the world have accomplished. They are doubtless a valuable service to the needy and an effective witness to Christ, the Good Samaritan of humanity. The Holy See supports these initiatives and, for my part, I pray that they may respond ever better to the evangelical and humanitarian spirit from which they originated.

I was interested to hear of your emphasis on the particular efforts that the Order of Malta intends to devote to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In this regard I would like first of all to stress the happy coincidence of the Order's ninth centenary, which will occur in 1999, with the eve of the Holy Year. If one looks carefully, there are not many institutions which can boast of such ancient origins: its existence spans almost the whole of the second millennium. What more favourable circumstance could there be to show people today that, despite profound historical changes, the Order of Malta, faithful to its original Gospel inspiration, has kept very much alive its most valuable possession: faith and charity?

Your choice to be present and active in the two focal points of the Jubilee, Rome and Jerusalem, is very appropriate and deserves every success. As Bishop of Rome, I express grateful appreciation for all the Order has done and I offer my fervent best wishes for what it is intending to do in the service of pilgrims who visit the holy places of the "Eternal City" in ever greater numbers.

Mr Ambassador, as I receive the Letters accrediting you for this new mission, I hope that it will be useful and richly satisfying, and at the same time, I assure you of a constant remembrance in my prayer.

With these sentiments I invoke the motherly protection of Mary most holy on the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which venerates her with the title of Virgin of Filèremo, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to the Prince and Grand Master, to you, to the chaplains and to all the members of the Order as well as to their relatives.

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