



# ORDE VAN MALTA

Souvereine Militaire Hospitaal Orde van St. Jan van Jeruzalem, van Rhodos en van Malta  
Associatie Nederland

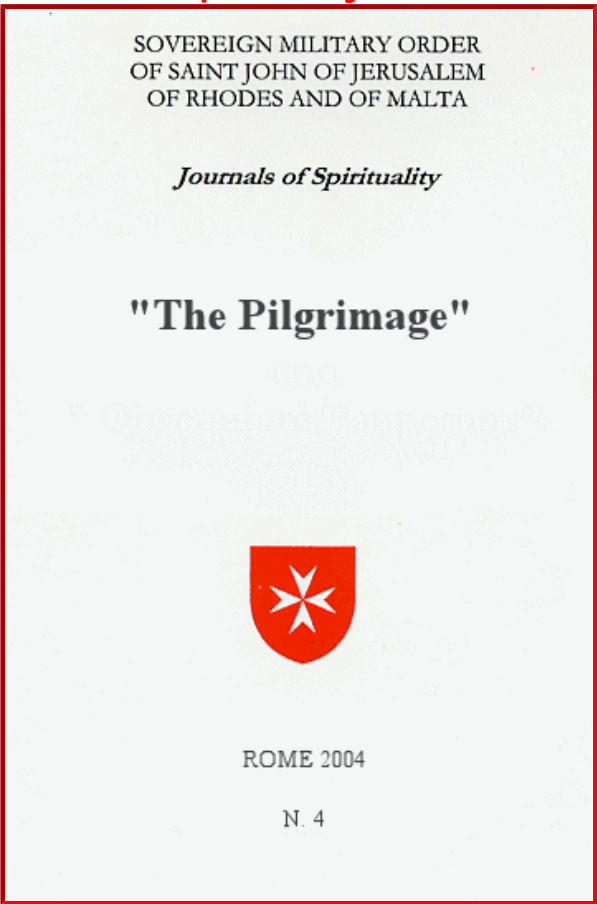


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## Spiritualiteit

### Journal of Spirituality N. 4



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Hospital of Saint John in Jerusalem was founded in order to serve poor pilgrims. After their long and often dangerous journey, they would arrive sick or even with injuries. Our founder Blessed Gerard and his companions devoted themselves to their care, calling them "our sick Lords".

Our Order has been associated with pilgrimage from the beginning. This very ancient Christian tradition became part of its patrimony and now, at the start of the third Millennium, it still forms a lively and important part of the Order's life.

It seems appropriate to devote a number of our Spirituality Journal to the theme of pilgrimage, in the belief that a deeper study of this topic can contribute to the spirituality of the Order. The contents of this booklet are arranged as follows:

I. Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville, Emeritus Archbishop of Birmingham and Principal Chaplain of the British Association, considers pilgrimage in the Old Testament.

II. In this chapter we publish an extract from the research of Mons. Annibale Ilari, Honorary Conventual Chaplain, on pilgrimage in the first millennium and in the following centuries of our own Order. He offers an historical framework in which to place the generous and frequently heroic service of the Knights of Malta to pilgrims, especially in the Holy Land.

III. Jerusalem is the birthplace of the Order of Malta, which is indeed also known as the Order of Jerusalem; Cardinal Pio Laghi, the Cardinal Patron of the Order, formerly resident in Jerusalem while Apostolic Delegate to Palestine, offers some reflections on the Holy City.

IV. The Prelate of the Order proposes some ideas for a greater appreciation of the significance of pilgrimage for the spiritual life of the Order and its members.

V. The annual international Pilgrimage to Lourdes is firmly rooted in the Order's tradition: an article has been written about it by the Rev. Abbé Régis-Marie de la Teyssonnière, Conventual chaplain ad honorem of the Order and Chaplain of the Hospitalité Notre-Dame de Lourdes.

VI. "Our sick Lords" are often the protagonists of our pilgrimages: the Grand Hospitaller Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager explains to the members of the Order the value of their presence and the commitment that this calls forth.

VII. Don Pedro Merry del Val y Diez de Rivera, Marquis de la Villa de Orellana, describes some of his experiences with a particular category of sick pilgrims: the mentally handicapped children.

VIII. As this year is a Holy Year in Santiago de Compostela, our Order is involved in the "camino" to

Compostela: Don Joaquin Ignacio Mencos, Marquis de la Real Defensa, explains further.

IX. Finally, Fr. Hugh Kennedy, Principal Chaplain of the Irish Association, discusses the participation of young people in the Pilgrimage.

The Order of Malta, "in itinere" with its pilgrimages, is in communion with the rest of the Church which is itself pilgrim, and, together with the Church in heaven, forms the whole mystical body of Jesus Christ.

Angelo Acerbi

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## 1. PILGRIMAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville

In a way, the whole of the Old Testament's history of salvation begins with a pilgrimage. It began with the calling of one particular nation, the people of Israel. Israel itself has its origin in the faith of one man, Abraham, whom we call in the Mass Our Father in Faith. (Eucharistic Prayer I)

### A personal God

Abraham's calling took place in a perfectly definable period and place. He came from Haran, in present-day Syria, and he lived about 1800 B.C. His background is fairly well-known since the people of that time and place had the happy inspiration of using clay as a writing material, which, when baked, is practically indestructible. The religion of Abraham's contemporaries is thus fairly well-known. They worshipped the gods of nature, (the sun, the moon, the sky, the winds, the underworld), in great temples, where corporations of priests carried out solemn liturgies. But the call of Abraham to his special vocation did not come from any of these gods. It came from the one whom his contemporaries called "the god of a man". In the Mesopotamian civilization of the time, every individual was believed to have a personal god, whose name was not known, but who was referred to as "my god", or "his god", or "the god of so-and -so" .

Have you ever wondered why, in the early chapters of the book of Genesis, God is referred to over and over again as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It is rather a cumbersome phrase. Quite simply, it was because no one knew his name. It was not revealed until the time of Moses, when the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob said "I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel 'I AM has sent me to you'. From this revelation the name Yahweh derives.

The mysterious personal God of Abraham calls his devotee to an equally mysterious vocation: "Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country that I shall show you" (Genesis 12,1). But not only is he asked to leave; the wanderer is given a promise. Abraham is told that his wife will have a son and that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. He was also told that all the clans of the earth would bless themselves by him, that he would be the father of many nations, and that the land where he was to be a wanderer would be given to his descendants.

From this introduction, we should retain the idea that, at the beginning of the history of salvation, there is a vocation, resulting from an intimate and personal revelation, to which is attached a promise.

**The pilgrim Church**

Since the Second Vatican Council, we have become accustomed to calling the Church the Pilgrim Church. There again, it is the history of God's people which teaches us. When the people of Israel left Egypt, they were saved from the Egyptians by the miraculous intervention of God at the crossing of the Red Sea. There followed a long and arduous road in the desert, but the Council teaches that this unpleasant state of affairs was already a partial fulfillment of God's plan, because it meant that the people of Israel became a prefiguration of the Church. "As Israel, according to the flesh which wandered in the desert, was already called the Church of God, so too the new Israel which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city, is also called the Church of God" (Lumen Gentium, chapter 2, #9). The state of pilgrim, as thus described, is both satisfactory and unsatisfactory; it is based on a firm hope that it is on its way to a permanent city, which is heaven, but it has to face the roughness of the road" advancing through trials and tribulations." (Ibid.)

**Local pilgrimages in the land of Canaan**

The date of the settlement of the People of Israel in the Promised Land is still discussed by scholars. Their estimations seem to vary between 1400 and 1200 B.C. Obviously sedentarization brought the adoption of a new life style, and in many cases this involved the adoption of the religious practices of the region. The inhabitants of Canaan were accustomed to bringing the fruits of the earth and the result of their hunting to a place deemed sacred, and offering it to their god. The Israelites seem, in many cases, to have taken over such cultic practices, which included a pilgrimage to the local shrine.

One catches a glimpse of the celebration of an annual pilgrimage in the story of the birth of the prophet Samuel which probably occurred about 1050 B.C. (I Samuel, chapters 1 & 2). His family were accustomed to go up to Shiloh, the local temple, for the annual festival which involved worship of god and the offering of sacrifices; it also involved the celebration of a feast, at which everyone ate and drank to their hearts' content and spent the night in the sacred spot. An annual pilgrimage to the local temple was part of the religious life of the tribe or clan.

**The prophets and pilgrimages**

In later centuries, the prophets criticized the way pilgrimages to local shrines were being celebrated. This is already the case in the book of the first prophet whose message has been written down, the prophet Amos, who lived about 750 B.C. Amos was scathing in his denunciation of the corrupt religion of his contemporaries. Speaking in the name of God, he said:

I hate, I despise your feasts  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them.  
And the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
To the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters  
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5,21-24).

It was not so much local pilgrimages as such that Amos disapproved of (though there is mention of disreputable behavior at a shrine in Amos: 2,7) but what he condemned absolutely was that those who were celebrating a religious rite in honor of God completely disregarded his commandments. He warns them that such behavior will bring down terrible punishment from God:

Seek good and not evil  
So that you may survive,  
And Yahweh, God Sabaoth, be with you  
As you claim he is.  
Hate evil, love good,  
Let justice reign at the city gate:  
It may be that Yahweh, God Sabaoth,  
Will take pity on the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5: 14-15).

Perhaps the words of Amos, spoken so many centuries ago, could lead us to an examination of conscience about the way we go about our pilgrimages today. Would Amos have anything to say about them? Do they centre on socializing? Do we make the malades our principal concern, or are we happy to be with our friends most of the time? Do we look for an inner conversion and a real change of heart during the pilgrimage.

The disreputable character of local shrines towards the end of the Davidic monarchy was probably one of the factors which led King Hezekiah (who reigned from 716 to 687 B.C.) to centralize the cult on the temple of Jerusalem and to forbid pilgrims from going to the local shrines any more; he said: "Here in Jerusalem is the altar before which you must worship." (2 Kings: 18,22).

#### Destruction of the Holy City

Unfortunately the Israelite people, especially their kings and rulers, continued to practice the corruption which the prophets had condemned. The warnings, which the prophets Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, had uttered, were not heeded and the dreadful punishment which they foretold came about. In 597 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar besieged and captured Jerusalem; he pillaged the treasures of temple and palace, and deported 10,000 men, the notables and the skilled craftsmen, settling them in his own land, present-day Iraq. Unfortunately, the puppet monarch, which Nebuchadnezzar had installed to be his vassal in Judah, did not accept the advice of the prophet Jeremiah, who told him that everything would be alright if he accepted his lowly status and trusted in the message of submission which he, Jeremiah, brought to him from God. Unfortunately King Zedekiah was not strong enough to withstand the nationalist party within Jerusalem. He relied on Egypt to support rebellion against the Babylonian Empire. This time the punishment was dire. Jerusalem's second siege, in 587, ended with the population dying of hunger. The temple and the palace were burnt. The walls of the city were demolished. What was left of the population was deported to Babylon. Zedekiah tried to escape, but he was captured and brought before the King of Babylon "who passed sentence upon him. He had Zedekiah's sons slaughtered before his eyes, then put out Zedekiah's eyes and, loading him with chains, carried him off to Babylon." (2 Kings: 25,7).

The humiliation and the degradation of Judah were complete and utter. Would any survival be possible? Many of the peoples of that time, who had been defeated in battle, were taken away to exile and captivity by the great empires of the Near East. They abandoned the gods who had been powerless to save them, adopted the gods of their conquerors and, losing their identity, vanished from history. In the case of Israel however a strange and unique phenomenon occurred. Because of the frequent warnings that the prophets had given, disaster was interpreted in religious terms. God had punished his people because they had disobeyed him, but it was still his people and now he was calling them to repentance.

That moving Psalm 137 expresses the sadness of the Jewish exiles but continues with an expression of hope:

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept  
when we remembered Sion.  
On the willows there, we hung up our harps. . . .

If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither...  
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth  
if I remember you not,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy (Psalm 137: 1-2,5-6).

Such hope was fulfilled in an unexpected way when the Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon and annihilated the Babylonian empire. In 538 B.C. he allowed the Jewish exiles to go back to Palestine and to rebuild the temple. No wonder the Jews in Babylon felt "Am I dreaming?" The feeling of elation is expressed in Psalm 126:

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Sion  
It seemed like a dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter  
On our lips there were songs (Psalm 126: 1-2).

**Pilgrimage renewed**

The return was seen as a great pilgrimage caravan crossing the desert, following a way prepared by God himself:

Pass through, pass through the gates.  
Clear a way for my people.  
Level up, level up the highway,  
Remove the stones,  
Lift up an ensign for the people.  
Behold the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth  
Say to the daughter of Sion  
"Behold, your salvation comes". (Isaiah 62: 10-11).

The rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem during the time of Esdras and Nehemiah was completed in 515 B.C. and was celebrated with great solemnity in the Passover of that year. The Jerusalem temple was now accepted by all Jews as their sanctuary. Not only did pilgrims come from Palestine; the temple acquired a wider resonance as groups of Jewish pilgrims came to it, traveling by land and sea from other parts of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East, as well as Jews who had preferred to remain in Mesopotamia.

**Devotion to the Temple**

Nearer to the time of Jesus, about 200 B.C., a passage in the book of Ecclesiasticus, describes the ceremonies in the Jerusalem temple when Simon, son of Onias, was High Priest. One senses in this passage devotion to the cult and to the assembled priests, as well as recognition of the presence of the people: (Ecclesiasticus: 50, 1-25).

It was the High Priest Simon, son of Onias...  
How splendid he was with the people thronging round him,  
When he emerged from the curtained shrine...  
When he receive his portions from the hands of priests...  
Himself standing by the altar hearth,  
Crowned with the circle of his brothers...  
When all the sons of Aaron in their glory. . .  
Stood before the whole assembly of Israel. . .  
And with the cantors chanting their hymns of praise.  
Sweet was the melody of all these voices,  
As the people pleaded with the Lord Most High  
And prayed in the presence of the Merciful one,  
Until the service of the Lord was completed  
And the ceremony at an end.  
Then [the High Priest] would come down and raise his hands

Over the whole assembly of the Israelites,  
To give them the Lord's blessing from his lips,  
being privileged to pronounce his name;

and once again the people would bow low  
to receive the blessing of the Most High (Ecclesiasticus :50, 1-21).

"The practice of going up to the temple at Jerusalem on the part of the people brings us closer to New Testament times and to the account of the losing of the child Jesus on one of the big feasts of the year. The Day of Expiation was the only one when the Sacred Name of God, Yahweh, could be pronounced by the High Priest. However Luke's gospel tells us that it was on the Feast of the Passover that Mary and Joseph and the twelve-year-old Jesus were in the temple. Once again it was a family occasion, like the visits to the temple at Shiloh in the time of Samuel, so many centuries previously. During that time, the faith of Israel had been purified and deepened by the process of God's self revelation which is contained in the Bible. An even greater transition was drawing near when Jesus could say "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up". The movement from devotion given to a material temple to the worship of a temple not made by human hands is part of the movement from the Old Testament to the New, that incredibly wonderful but true mystery of the incarnation and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville

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## 2. PILGRIMAGES IN THE FIRST CENTURIES OF THE ORDER

(Translated from Italian)

### The Pilgrim in antiquity

Melitone, bishop of Sardi, in the second age of II<sup>nd</sup> century, set out on a journey to Palestine with the aim to see "where the things had been preached and completed." French pilgrims in the year 333, some 20 years after the so-called Edict of Constantine, walked to the Holy Land, as attested to in the Itinerario da Bordeaux a Gerusalemme. In 384, the Galician Egeria or Etheria, probably married into Theodosius' the Great family, told in the Peregrinatio Aetheriae the halting places of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Saint Jerome, charged by Pope Damasus (366 - 384) to translate the Bible into Latin, the Vulgate, in 372 had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem; in 385 he reached the monastery founded by some roman patricians where he wrote the Peregrinatio Sanctae Paulae recounting, among other things, of having found in the city pilgrims coming from all over the world.

The aspiration to visit the Holy Places did not stop in front of wars and of the stealing of the Savior's great relics. Pilgrims did not abandon the Holy City notwithstanding the Muslim invasion of VII<sup>th</sup> - VIII<sup>th</sup> century, the occupation of Jerusalem in 972 by the Fatimiti Caliphs and the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher in 1009, by caliph al-Hakim.

These sorrowful vicissitudes at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century convinced Urban II to mobilize the European Christianity to the conquest of the Holy Places with the iter Hierosolymitanum, the crusade.

In the course of the 11<sup>th</sup> century the flow of pilgrims bound to Santiago di Compostela became very frequent.

During the walk the pilgrim improved his spiritual practice; he did not ignore the risks of the shelter, of the

support, of the inclement weather and the dangers in crossing rivers, seas, and the assaults of criminals, of the enemies of the Christian name and infirmities, although knowing that he would be sheltered willingly by the community and by the christifideles.

The medieval pilgrim was receiving a special personal blessing. A blessing was reserved to the clothes, which characterized him and rendered him respectable, consisting of a long vest with a short cape (pilgrim's cape or pelerine), a hat with wide straps, a staff, a knapsack and an itinerary for the orientation to the hospitable places offered freely by monasteries and by private owners.

**Pilgrims to Jerusalem and the foundation of the Order of Malta**

The Blessed Gerard at the end of the 11th century founded, in the neighborhood of the Holy Sepulcher and of the Amalfian Abbey of Santa Maria Latina, the Xenodochium Jerosolymitanum, which, as it was from the etymology of the term Xenodochium (= hospice for foreigners), was intending to provide for the assistance of the foreigners, that is of the pilgrims who were going down to Jerusalem for the veneration of the Holy Places. One autonomous religious corporation pursued its activity of assistance for the pilgrims and for the poor in the Xenodochium: Godfried of Buglione, the defender of the Holy Sepulcher, that is the supreme civil authority, recognized it as being ecclesiastical "sui iuris" retaining it capable to operate in good time. The supreme ecclesiastical authority intervened around a decade after, according to the surviving documents, with the decretal Piae postulatio voluntatis of Paschal II requested by him of Blessed Gerard in his quality of praepositus et institutor Xenodochii Hierosolymitani.

The Pontiff signed the decretal at Benevento on February 15, 1114. The text of the decretal is the pontifical document more anciently known which, to use a mathematical term, is the coefficient of importance of the Order of Malta's canon law. It sanctions the institutional relations among the pilgrims, the poor and the sick, besides the receiving of the rule of servus pauperum et custos Xenodochii Hierosolymitani Raymond du Puy (1120ca - 1158). The decretal is also the fundamental of the Constitutional Charter of the present Sovereign Military Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, approved June 24 1961 by Blessed John XXIII. The Decretal is still exposed in the relics room of the National Library of Valletta in the Republic of Malta.

Paschal II legislated in favor of the venerable son Gerard, founder and president of the Jerusalem institute of social assistance (as you would say today) and, having declared to know the merits, he decreed to take it forever under the protection of the blessed Peter and under his own, to assign the patrimony wherever it was to the necessity of the pilgrims and of the poor, to increase it with the exemption of payment of tithes from whoever would be in the condition to take them, and from the burden of the donations. The pontiff inflicted the penalty of excommunication, after triple admonition, to who would ensnare the patrimony, by now property of the pilgrims and of the poor (obsequium pauperum). The Xenodochium Jerosolymitanum, as declared by Paschal II, had at that time outbuildings called xenodochia or ptochia (= beggar), which were houses for the pilgrims and the poor structured on the Jerusalem model, at Saint Gilles in Provence, at Asti, Pisa, Bari, Otranto, Taranto and Messina. Frederick Barbarossa, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, October 28, 1158, decreed at civil level what had been decided by the Pontiff.

The testimony more anciently known of the faithfulness to the Gerardine charism and to the obedience to the apostolic decretal came after about two centuries from the publication of Les chemins et les pèlerinages de la Terre Sainte, in which the crossings of the pilgrims were described under the protection of the fratres Xenodochii Hierosolymitani, who became equites (military force, tuitio Fidei) before the second half of the twelfth century. The assurance, in fact, of the Palestinian roads comprising those of access to Jerusalem was very much precarious for the military deficiencies of the neo Christian-Jerusalem reign. Since the beginning of the crusader conquest the pilgrims were assaulted by the Muslims: Fulcherius of Chartres, who lived in Palestine from 1100 - 1127, recounted that the local population lived frightened, waiting for the blasts of the bugle announcing immanent danger for the arrival of the Muslims. Therefore, the solution of the problem became always more undelayable.

The fratres Xenodochii had certainly learned that the solution had occurred by means of the institution of one religious military body, the Fratres pauperum commilitonum Christi Templi Hierosolymitani, called templars, with the goal to militarily protect the pilgrims.



The fratres Xenodochii, to realize better the rule of Raymond du Puy that remained unchanged until after the beginning of 14th century, decided to assume military tasks. But one cannot negate that the military option had placed the Xenodochium Hierosolymitanum in condition to carry out better the tuitio Fidei in function of the obsequium pauperum, according to what postulated by the apostle James quoniam fides sine operibus morta est (Iac. 2, 20-22).

Official documents on the data of the turning point, if this were one or if it were a necessary complement to assure the development of the principal institutional aim, do not seem to have been published. But if one considers that the institute of templars was aligned with Canon law, and that, therefore, it could not be in contradiction with the saying of Paschal's II decretal, one is induced to hypothesize that the fratres Xenodochii had retained the original qualification of servus pauperum et custos Xenodochii Hierosolymitani, held by Raymond du Puy first successor of Blessed Gerard, compatible with that of magister equitum Xenodochii Hierosolymitani. In fact, both canonical agencies were under pontifical law.

The defeat of Christianity in 1291, caused also the end of all ground assistance of the knights of St John to the pilgrims. They continued in the Mediterranean by the island of Rhodes, conquered in 1307, with their navy until 1522 and from 1530 from the island of Malta until the unlucky July 12, 1798 when the grand master Ferdinand von Hompesch (1798 - 1799) withdrew from the general Napoleon Bonaparte.

**Pilgrimages of the Order of Malta and Marian devotion**

The first news on the knights' Marian devotion, that date back to the conquest of the island of Rhodes (August 1307) approved by Clement V, were linked to the revival in an ancient Greek basilica on Mount Fileremo of an icon of the Madonna, probably transferred there in 1204, from a church in Constantinople following the events caused by the passage of the 4th crusade. The icon, of about 40x51cm size - counted among the images not painted by human hand (acheropite), or attributed to the evangelist Saint Luke - shared the vicissitudes of the knights until the fall of the island of Malta and, from 1952 it is guarded in the National Museum of Montenegro. The Grand Master went to Cetinje (April 12 -16, 2004) to venerate the icon.

The Grand Master, therefore, mindful of the secular veneration for the icon of the Virgin of Mount Philermos, instituted from the last quarter of the last century annual pilgrimages of the Order of Malta towards famous Marian sanctuaries. He has chosen those of Our Lady of Lourdes, of the Black Madonna of Loreto and of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi where, in the chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Mount Philermos a copy of the Rhodian icon is venerated. This copy was made during the restructuring of the Knights' Palace in Rhodes, brought about by the governor of the island of Rhodes, which was at that time an Italian property in the Dodecanese (1924 - 1945).

Excerpt from an article of Mons. Annibale Ilari

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**3. JERUSALEM: CITY OF GOD**

(Translated from Italian)

Throughout the world there are countless shrines, sanctuaries and other holy places which are sought out by

pilgrims yearning to draw closed to God. Each of us, inspired by our own devotion, has his or her preferences: Fatima, Lourdes, Loreto, Assisi, Saint James of Compostela. But I believe that no shrine or holy place can produce greater spiritual fruit of can penetrate more deeply into the spirit of the pilgrim that that of Jerusalem, the city of God.

Over the course of the centuries, at least 70 different names have been given to Jerusalem, many of which have biblical origins: "beloved city", "city of gold", "city where the thrones of justice have been placed, the thrones of the house of David", "joyous city", "joy of all the earth", "holy city", "city of justice and peace".

On one ancient geographic map, Jerusalem appears at the centre of an enormous triplex sheet. From it branch out three great petals which carry the name of the three continents known at that time: Europe, Africa and Asia. Jerusalem is at the centre of the world.

But beyond being the "centre", or better yet, the "spiritual epicentre" of the world, Jerusalem is also the "mother" of all peoples and nations because all were "born" in her. In Psalm 87, Yahweh, seated on a throne in the vestments of the king of the universe, has a register of the peoples in his hand and he is looking at the list. He pauses to confirm the birth place of each one, "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia - 'this one was born [in Jerusalem]' they say. And of Zion it shall be said. 'This one and that one were born in her'".

Jerusalem calls her own all the peoples of the earth, but especially the followers of the three religions of Abraham (Hebrews, Christians and Muslims), who find the root of their faith in Jerusalem. In particular, we who follow Christ, reborn in baptism, have in the holy city the source of divine grace.

**Pilgrims to Jerusalem**

Our Sovereign Order, which from the beginning assumed its name from the city (the Jerusalemite Order), was born in Jerusalem under the guidance of Blessed Gerard, who, together with some Christian knights, erected a hospital for the cure and assistance of the sick and took up the defense of our faith, even at the cost of their lives. For the knights and dames of the Order, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem is almost an obligation, like going to visit the mother who gave us birth and quenched our thirst with water from her springs.

In Jerusalem one finds the holy places of the three religions which call Abraham their father, Abraham, the friend of Yahweh, and as St. Paul said, "our father in the faith". In that holy city even the rocks talk, because each one has within it a long story, lived over centuries made current through daily events.

The great stones speak that Herod set to support the courtyard of the Temple; the rock speaks that rises up at the centre of the mosque of Omar with the cupola shining with gold; the stones speak that make up the pavement of the "litostratòs" at the beginning of the Via Dolorosa, as does the well-polished marble stone on which was laid the dead body of Christ, taken from the cross, awaiting the resurrection.

When one is standing before those rocks, as in every holy place marked by the presence or action of Jesus, it is necessary to go beyond the superficiality of the tourist, whose eye is glued to a camera or video machine and his ear attentive to the abbreviated explanations of the guide, who repeats stories of the past.

A visit to Jerusalem, as to Bethlehem and Nazareth, must develop along three itineraries: that of history, art and culture; that of topography and iconography; and above all, that of faith. In this way one discovers the indelible mark that God and his messengers, the last of whom was Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, have left in those places. We also discover the path taken by the followers of one of the three religions and perceive the mark of the encounter of man with God and of God with each one of us.

No one ever leaves Jerusalem without carrying a more living and concrete understanding of the events of our salvation. I would like to quote a phrase that I heard once from a pilgrim: "Before coming here, the Gospel for me was limited to a single horizontal dimension; during my pilgrimage it stood up and now I see it in all its other dimensions!"

To conclude, I wish to cite something that John Paul II said when he was preparing to go to the Holy Land on pilgrimage during the Jubilee Year. "To go in a spirit of prayer from one place to another, from one city to

another, in the area marked especially by God's intervention, helps us not only to live our life as a journey, but also gives us a vivid sense of a God who has gone before us and leads us on, who himself set out on man's path, a God who does not look down on us from on high, but who became our travelling companion", as He did with the two disciples of Emmaus (Letter of John Paul II Concerning Pilgrimages to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation, n.10, June 29, 1999).

Cardinal Pio Laghi

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#### 4. SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ORDER OF MALTA PILGRIMAGE

(Translated from Italian)

This brief article is intended to focus on certain aspects of pilgrimage which affect the spiritual life of the pilgrims.

##### **Faith content**

The Order of Malta is a religious order and one of its objectives is to promote the sanctification of its members. In the tradition of the Order, pilgrimage is one of the means for achieving this end. The pilgrim who joins a regional, national or international group leaves his home and makes his way towards a Shrine. There is an exterior movement, marked by the various stages of the journey, and there is also an interior dimension which gives meaning to this "onward march". For a believer it is a life-giving experience which should lead to the formation of a "new heart" and a "new spirit" under the influence of divine grace. Setting out from our home or native land, being closely involved with the sick and suffering, reminds us of the transience of life. Saint Peter indeed calls our life: "the time of pilgrimage" (1 Pet 1,17) and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: "Let us go forth to him outside the camp, for here we have no lasting city" (Heb 13,13-14). The pilgrim needs to make serious preparation, if he is to create within himself a proper disposition for the pilgrimage.

##### **"Let us go forth to him (Christ)"**

Jesus says of himself: "I am the Way" (In 14,6). Saint Bonaventure in his "Journey of the mind to God" offers a beautiful reflection which can inspire the pilgrim to remain close to the Lord: "Christ is the way and the door. Christ is the ladder and the mercy seat placed above God's ark (Ex 26,34). Whoever turns to this mercy seat with absolute determination and fixes his gaze upon the Crucified Lord. . . makes the Paschal journey with him, that is to say he passes through the Red Sea with the rod of the Cross, leaving Egypt behind so as to continue through the desert".

In this meditation of Saint Bonaventure there is also an invitation to detachment as a way of finding Him. Saint Paul vividly expresses a similar idea in the Letter to the Philippians: "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize. . . in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3,13-14).

##### **Christ is our Passover**

The Pilgrimage of the Order of Malta is centered on the Eucharist. How can one fail to recall those beautiful Eucharistic celebrations with the sick, the solemn processions, the blessing of the sick? The Eucharist is truly the pilgrim's Passover: the Jews celebrated it "with loins girded, sandals on their feet, staff in hand" (Ex 12,11), during that night when, protected by the blood of the Lamb, they began their pilgrimage towards the Promised Land. Christ is our Passover. He is the true Lamb, and the Eucharist is the "memorial" of his passion, the "bread of angels which has become the food of pilgrims". The Eucharistic celebrations should be the true heart of our pilgrimage.

**The paths of conversion**

For the Prodigal Son in the Gospel parable, "conversion" meant returning home. The pilgrim draws inspiration from this parable for a "return to the Father's house", made in a penitential spirit through the Sacrament of Reconciliation but also through abstinence of some kind, through the acceptance of inevitable setbacks, through the practice of the "Via Crucis". The history of Lourdes records many favors and miracles, but more numerous still are the conversions and life-changes among the pilgrims who flock there from all directions.

**Motives for making a pilgrimage in the spirit of the Order of Malta**

There are some particular features which distinguish Order of Malta pilgrimages from others. I am thinking not so much of the various ceremonies - meetings between associations, the awarding of medals, special religious celebrations - but rather of certain interior qualities which should influence our external behaviour.

One of these may be called in forma humilitatis. Humility on a pilgrimage is above all a quality of the spirit. The sense of belonging to the group and the common goal must impart a spirit of equality and, if anything, of emulation in service. When we go as pilgrims to the Virgin Mary, we recall what Saint Augustine wrote of her: Humilitate placuit, she pleased God through her humility.

Another dimension may be expressed with the words in forma caritatis. It is impossible to exercise true charity towards the poor and the sick unless the members of the Order feel united among themselves by the bond of charity, with the qualities which Saint Paul lists in the first letter to the Corinthians (13,4-5): "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way." Finally, the presence of the sick should be considered as a gift which enriches the Order of Malta pilgrimage. Being close to them, speaking with them, praying with them, offering them service, is all about giving and receiving. The sick help to purify the faith of the pilgrims and to put many things in perspective. The members of the Order should be proud of the privilege of traveling in company with the sick. The Grand Hospitaller treats this point at greater length in his article. I would just like to suggest that one of the ways we can show our care for the sick is by helping them to avoid long waits, both on the journey and during the religious ceremonies.

**The pilgrimage continues**

Memories, images, meetings. . . and then we return to ordinary life back at home. The fruits must remain. There is a saying in the Imitation of Christ which we could usefully ponder: "Qui multo peregrinantur, raro sanctificantur": those who make many pilgrimages seldom become holy. The pious monk who wrote this fine book was issuing a warning to the itinerant pilgrims of the Middle Ages. The Order of Malta pilgrimages must be stages, or rather steps in the spiritual ascent of the members of the Order. The fruits they produce are measured by the growth in their Christian life and in their commitment to works of charity.

Archbishop Angelo Acerbi

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## 5. AU CŒUR DU PELERINAGE, LA GROTTÉ DE LOURDES

Abbé Régis-Marie de La Teyssonnière

Faire pèlerinage, c'est se mettre en marche vers un lieu saint, un lieu souvent si particulier que, pour le pèlerin, il deviendra un point de départ. Il quittera alors le sanctuaire, différent, changé ou même transformé, pour se rendre chez lui. Pour cela il empruntera peut-être un autre itinéraire, il marchera certainement sur un autre chemin de vie. La démarche de pèlerinage, on l'aura compris, induit une progression balisée par des étapes.

Lourdes est un Sanctuaire marial mondialement connu. Or ce Sanctuaire international invite, d'une certaine façon, à une autre approche du pèlerinage. En effet, il ne s'agit plus seulement de quitter son quotidien pour se diriger vers un lieu saint et, ensuite, de retourner chez soi. Il est proposé, au contraire, de demeurer plusieurs jours dans le Sanctuaire pour y vivre quasiment l'intégralité du pèlerinage. Et, même si les Sanctuaires Notre-Dame de Lourdes proposent aux pèlerins un domaine de plusieurs dizaines d'hectares, l'essentiel de la démarche du pèlerinage s'accomplit dans un espace tout à fait modeste. En effet, à Lourdes, les quelques mètres carrés qui constituent l'espace de la Grotte - ce lieu central de l'expérience de Bernadette Soubirous en 1858, ce lieu privilégié pour les pèlerins d'aujourd'hui - sont le lieu du pèlerinage. Quelques mètres et quelques instants suffisent aux pèlerins pour « passer » à la Grotte. Accomplissons, pas à pas, la démarche avec eux.

La première étape du pèlerinage à la Grotte se situe à l'extérieur, face au Rocher. C'est là que, le 11 février 1858, se tient Bernadette. Elle hésite à traverser le canal, en raison de sa maladie qui lui fait redouter le contact avec l'eau. Elle ne peut que considérer sa pauvreté, son ignorance, sa tristesse de n'avoir encore pu faire sa première communion. Elle se tient à distance, comme le publicain de l'Évangile qui, pécheur, reste au fond du Temple. Elle est comme Moïse qui, devant le Buisson mystérieux, est invité « à se déchausser car ce lieu est saint ». Aujourd'hui, se tenir devant la Grotte c'est, pour beaucoup de pèlerins, se présenter tel que l'on est : faible, blessé, pécheur. C'est l'expérience des deux disciples qui quittent Jérusalem pour Emmaüs. Après la mort de Jésus, ils sont abattus, accablés, sans espoir. Ils l'admettent et l'expriment. C'est l'attitude des chrétiens au début de la Messe : Ils se préparent à la célébration de l'Eucharistie en se reconnaissant tels qu'ils sont : pécheurs. Mais pécheurs qui s'ouvrent au pardon de Dieu.

La deuxième étape du pèlerinage consiste à entrer dans la Grotte. C'est ce que Bernadette a fait à partir du 14 février 1858, c'est-à-dire à partir du jour de la deuxième apparition. Bernadette occupait alors une « place » précise pour prier, chapelet à la main, les yeux tournés vers le creux du rocher où, très vite, la Vierge Marie venait la rejoindre. Aujourd'hui, pour les pèlerins de Lourdes, ce lieu est plus difficile à matérialiser. En effet, puisque le rocher de la Grotte vient au devant des pèlerins, le moment et le lieu de l'entrée dans la Grotte est moins facilement identifiable. Cependant un lieu précis correspond à cette étape. C'est la petite rampe qui permet aux personnes se déplaçant sur un fauteuil roulant ou sur un brancard d'entrer dans la Grotte. Deux hospitaliers sont là, de part et d'autre, pour aider à cette accès à la Grotte des personnes malades ou handicapées. Moment important. On franchit un seuil. On pénètre. On entre. On est à l'intérieur. Et pourtant, de là, on voit encore la représentation de la Vierge, comme Bernadette elle-même pouvait voir Marie. Imperceptiblement, on s'ouvre à une présence. Le cœur est donc déjà en éveil. C'est le moment où les deux disciples qui viennent de quitter Jérusalem sont rejoints par le Ressuscité : Jésus s'adresse à eux, les accueillants tels qu'ils sont, pour faire route avec eux et leur expliquer les Écritures. C'est le moment où, à la Messe, est proclamée la Parole. Parce que Dieu est premier, Dieu parle et l'homme écoute. Par son attention, par son désir, par toutes ses capacités, l'homme se tourne peu à peu vers le Christ. Prélude d'une rencontre.

La troisième étape du pèlerinage est celle de la rencontre. C'est le cœur de la démarche. C'est l'étape la plus

belle, mais aussi la plus mystérieuse, la plus ineffable, la plus difficile à percevoir et donc à exprimer. Cette rencontre qui change une vie, en lui donnant son sens, son fruit, son goût. Dès le 18 février 1858, jour de la troisième apparition, la Vierge Marie invite Bernadette à se rendre au fond de la Grotte. C'est le point le plus éloigné de l'entrée, le plus obscur, le plus loin de ses préoccupations. C'est là où le rocher se dérobe, où plus personne ne peut le toucher, l'embrasser, ou s'appuyer sur lui. Bernadette obéit. Et, dès qu'elle arrive à l'endroit indiqué, elle s'aperçoit - oh ! Merveille - que la Sainte Vierge l'y avait précédée. C'est le lieu du cœur à cœur. C'est là, que Marie va parler à Bernadette. C'est là que l'humble fillette de Lourdes devient la Messagère du ciel. C'est là que Bernadette se laisse saisir par le projet d'Amour de Dieu pour son Église. C'est là que la pauvre adolescente entre dans l'expérience de la fécondité de l'Évangile. Pour les pèlerins d'aujourd'hui, le lieu où se tenait Marie est très proche de celui où se trouve le tabernacle. Et, tout à côté, le lieu où se tenait Bernadette est l'endroit précis où se trouve le tronc des intentions de prière. C'est donc là que chacun ouvre ses mains pour déposer ses intentions qu'il porte dans son cœur. C'est là où chacun ouvre son cœur en formulant les intentions qu'il porte entre ses mains. C'est le moment où les deux disciples arrivés à Emmaüs sont à table avec Jésus. « Il prit le pain, dit la bénédiction, le rompit et le leur donna ». Corps livré par Amour. Sang versé pour que l'homme reçoive La Vie. C'est l'heure de l'Eucharistie. Réellement présent sous les espèces du pain et du vin, Jésus se donne à ses frères et à ses sœurs, pour les faire passer, avec lui, de leur réalité à la sienne. De leur réalité, marquée par la souffrance, le péché, la mort, à sa réalité qui est le Royaume des cieux où l'on entre dans l'expérience de la Vie éternelle qui est Amour, Paix, et Joie. Moment d'intimité où l'homme « est unit à la divinité de Celui qui a pris notre humanité ». Mais qui peut appréhender un tel mystère en un seul instant ? Moment qu'il faudra donc garder précieusement en son cœur pour le méditer.

La quatrième étape du pèlerinage à la Grotte est celle de la sortie. Mais quand sort-on de la Grotte ? Il est difficile de le dire avec précision. Cependant ce lieu doit pouvoir se localiser à peu près à l'aplomb de la niche, située à trois mètres du sol, au creux de laquelle les pèlerins peuvent voir une représentation de la Vierge Marie. C'est d'ailleurs toujours par là que Bernadette quittait la Grotte. Après la rencontre, elle retrouvait le quotidien. Mais elle le retrouvait, différente. Heureuse. Bonheur d'un cœur dilaté par ce qu'il contient. C'est là où, pour les pèlerins d'aujourd'hui, le « passage à la Grotte » prend tout son sens. Car ce passage matériel, à travers ce lieu saint, contient un autre « passage », spirituel. Un passage, qui est une « Pâque », parce que « passage » avec le Christ. En cet instant, chacun reflète sur son visage quelque chose du Royaume des cieux. Le visage est parfois défiguré par la souffrance. Il est en même temps éclairé de la lumière de la paix. Le visage peut être torturé par le chagrin. Mais il laisse souvent voir quelque chose de la transparence de l'amour. Le visage paraît meurtri par la douleur, pourtant la joie est là qui déjà le transforme. Expérience certainement fugitive qui est cependant, pour beaucoup, une prise de conscience de ce qui vient d'être vécu. Comme pour les deux disciples qui, à Emmaüs, ayant reconnu le Christ Jésus à la fraction du pain, se disent : « Notre cœur n'était-il pas brûlant lorsqu'il nous parlait en chemin ? ». Comme pour les chrétiens qui, au sortir de la Messe dominicale, restent ensemble sur le parvis de la cathédrale, devant l'église, tout prêt de l'oratoire. Ils viennent d'entrer ensemble dans le monde de la Résurrection, et leurs visages sont les témoins lumineux de cette expérience incomparable.

La cinquième et dernière étape du pèlerinage est celle du témoignage. Bernadette la connue à des moments différents, plus ou moins prêt de la Grotte. Lorsque la « Dame » de Massabielle a demandé à Bernadette « d'aller dire aux prêtres que l'on construise ici une chapelle et que l'on y vienne en procession », elle a du parcourir deux kilomètres avant de transmettre à Monsieur le Curé de Lourdes ce qu'elle avait reçu à la Grotte. Par contre, le 25 mars 1858 lorsque la « Dame » se présente à Bernadette en lui disant : « Je suis l'Immaculée Conception », c'est seulement à quelques mètres de la Grotte que Bernadette va confier cette mystérieuse parole de la Sainte Vierge à une amie qui l'accompagne. Aujourd'hui, certains pèlerins se rassemblent tout de suite après leur « passage » à la Grotte. En couple. En famille. Entre amis. On partage si ce n'est l'expérience du « passage » du moins une émotion que ce passage a pu susciter. D'autres pèlerins partagent leur joie plus tard. Au moment d'un repas. Au moment du départ, sur le quai de la gare, dans le hall de l'aéroport, ou près de la voiture. Mais ce moment du témoignage intervient surtout, sous bien des formes différentes, lorsque l'on est rentré chez soi. C'est le bienfait du pèlerinage. C'est le fruit d'une rencontre qui ouvre le cœur du disciple à la fécondité. C'est ce que font les deux disciples revenus à Jérusalem pour s'entendre dire : « C'est vrai ! Le Seigneur est ressuscité : Il est apparu à Simon Pierre ». Et, à leur tour, les deux disciples racontent ce qui s'était passé sur la route, et comment ils avaient reconnu Jésus quand il avait rompu le pain. C'est l'heure du quotidien. Après avoir entendu le prêtre conclure la célébration de la Messe en les envoyant en mission « en allant dans la Paix du Christ », les chrétiens témoignent dans leur milieu de vie habituel du Christ Ressuscité.

Abbé Régis-Marie de La Teyssonnière

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**6. PILGRIMAGES WITH THE SICK AND DISABLED TO LOURDES**

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager

**On the beginning of a pilgrimage**

It is not easy to put what happens during a pilgrimage to Lourdes into words. At the start of a pilgrimage it is first of all the departure that absorbs so much energy. Every long trip needs more or less extensive planning. This is all the more the case when it is planned for the disabled and the chronically ill. The problems of transport and provisions alone need enormous preparation.

And yet it is chiefly fear that governs each pilgrim on the platform of the railway station when he meets his still unknown co-travellers and their assistants. More than the healthy, those disabled and ill are dependent on a regular routine and reliable care, since they cannot master the world on their own. And now they need MORE than normal help; they must surrender themselves to others to whom they are bound for the duration of the pilgrimage. Fear of having overstepped the limits of one's own courage often arises now, as well as the question whether going on this pilgrimage wasn't a mistake. Behind these thoughts is probably an apprehensive doubt: will hopes remain unfulfilled? Will the traveller return home feeling betrayed and have to submit to the mockery of those who with a great amount of energy had tried to talk him or her out of the pilgrimage in the first place?

It is previous pilgrimages or accounts by other pilgrims that most often lead to the decision to go on a pilgrimage. Sometimes in the young a lust for travel and adventure plays a role. The greatest and commonest incentive, however, is the longing for support, for a restorative, perhaps even a cure--a longing born from disablement and affliction. Whether it arises from a deep and trusting faith or from a desperate hope to try a pilgrimage when other things have repeatedly failed--in any case it is an encounter with God and His love, something perhaps only vaguely realized.

It is for this that the pilgrims have left home, have found the time, and now at the beginning of the journey lie or sit in an uncomfortable train, lacking fresh air, and possibly under an increasing amount of pain.

It is a somewhat different situation for the accompanying assistants. For many of these helpers it is not the direct search for God's intervention that has led them on this pilgrimage but, on the contrary, the will to help those who are dependent on them. But they, too, often enough have anxious thoughts: will they be able to withstand the physical strain and, even more, confrontation with the massive urgency and moving destinies of those afflicted with handicaps or illnesses.

At this point, you are reminded of Abraham who, following God's call, set out from his tribal land to trek to Israel, or of the people of Israel on their march through the desert. Neither the destination nor the fulfilment of the journey are within reach.

From the very beginning much depends on how the team of helpers succeed in creating a feeling of trust through care, through verbal exchanges and cheerfulness and how, by their good preparation and organization, they succeed in transmitting a feeling of security. The first devotions and mass take place already during the journey and lay the groundwork for an atmosphere of prayer. By the time the pilgrims have reached their destination, an initial layer of confidence has been established and a pilgrim's company has formed, in which important threads of conversation have already been woven. The mutual getting-to-know-you phase has encouraged many to tell their stories and express their hopes and disappointments. This atmosphere of understanding and confidence, the basis for making such conversations even possible, are a real surprise to many.

**At the arrival to the destination**

Once the destination is reached, the situation changes. The geographical goal of the pilgrimage is at hand and the inner journey shifts into a new phase, which in some ways resembles the disciples' journey to Emmaus. Whether it is expressed or not, God is present in word and thought at least as an object of conversation or observation until the direct dialogue with Our Lord can begin, often for the first time, which then can be taken up, continued and amplified.

Lourdes is, like many pilgrim's resorts that cater to the sick and the disabled, dedicated to Mary. "Healer of the sick", "Comforter of the desperate" are two of the many honorific titles given to the Mother of God. There are few regular occasions where the reality of these attributes of Mary are experienced more clearly than on pilgrimages to Lourdes with the sick and the lame. In this capacity she is referred to by Christ on the cross as Mother of the Church and of Christians. The atmosphere of the pilgrim's resort is infused with trust in this Mother and with acceptance of her motherly care. She guides you on the path to Christ and to God the Father, to an intimation of an experience, or perhaps even to a resolution of one's own personal plan for salvation, which God has foreseen for the sick and lame in His own special way.

Meanwhile the outward impressions of the pilgrim's resort and the solemn daily routine take over. These are: the extra-ordinary experience as an invalid of being the centre of attention, the experience of this large company of sufferers often with comparative or even worse lots in life and all in an atmosphere blessed by the perceptible peace of God and a general willingness to help. The pilgrim's resort seems to exist in another world that is somehow - despite this concentration of misery and through the proximity to God - a more sanctified world. It transmits the message that God in His goodness and mercy to the fallen and sinful world always and, here-and-now, concretely offers salvation, the eradication of sin and suffering at their very roots.

**The ways of progressing through pilgrimage experiences**

All too often the question of the physical miracle, of the spectacular cure is the main interest. Undoubtedly such miracles do occur. They are important as signs and often the visible initiation of a special vocation for the person thus healed or for the ones who witness it. But they are few-and-far-between compared to the vast number of sick and disabled pilgrims. If the pilgrimage were solely aimed at such results, it would end in most cases in abysmal disappointment. On the other hand, it soon becomes clear that an inner strength is given - the power to persist despite undiminished and continuing pain - and a new meaningfulness found in one's own outwardly-confined life. The less spectacular miracles are the visible seals of such confirmation.

The daily routine after arrival remains a strenuous one. The many strong impressions cannot all be immediately coped with. Many will become accessible later and only gradually. Holy mass, the sacrament of penance and the blessing for the infirm are experienced as offers of grace and accepted with deepest gratitude as pledges for the future.

Last of all it is the church's experience with suffering--her ability to transmit this charisma to the sick and disabled who turn to her and to take this up in her liturgy--it is this experience that stamps and upholds such a pilgrimage. It is these moments in which the church is known not as lame and vulnerable but as all-powerful, not in the sense of an institution of power but as a community that with the might of Mary leads to God the Redeemer.

For the assistants who accompany the sick and disabled, the experience with these pilgrims is profound. If many just went along only to help out, they soon see themselves confronted with the immediacy of not being



able to avoid either the events of the pilgrimage or the burning question of God. They will not return home the way they left it. Either they say "yes" to what they have lived through, gain a stronger belief and set out on the road to a new and deeper faith. Or they begin to set up barriers. A neutral stance of being unmoved is out of the question in the face of their deep personal contacts with the disabled and the way the changes in these pilgrims are manifest.

It confirms the lines from Matthew 25 in the Bible: "...as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." God accepts their readiness to help the helpless as a service to God and meets these helpers who assist the sick and the disabled head on. As a reaction, they often feel powerless and no longer want to accept the gratitude given them by the pilgrims for their many large and small services, their helping hands, their readiness to talk and to listen. For now the helpers are more and more aware of themselves as just as much given to as giving to those they came along to help.

It is felt as an enormous deliverance, for instance, to push aside the pressure of one's own problems, which become relative when faced with the overwhelming lot of the sick and disabled and their obvious gratitude and joy. The tangible healing power of God strengthens these assistants' trust in Him. The sick and disabled become for them a living gospel so powerful that it can make the life of these helpers take a new turn.

The sick, of course, become aware of this effect and aware that they themselves are more or less responsible. This makes them feel important and accepted. Our Holy Father in his apostolic letter "Salvifici doloris", on the Christian meaning of human suffering, revealed the mystery of pain to be the source of a great reconciliation. For me this is one of the greatest wonders, how the sick and disabled are suddenly enlightened as to the meaning of their infirm lives, how they accept this and take strength and comfort from this. And by their acceptance of suffering allow this to bear fruit within the church itself. Our Holy Father says that the church is constitutionally built on just this happening.

Herein lies the almost frightening responsibility for planning and carrying out such a pilgrimage with the disabled. Will it succeed in creating the atmosphere for such an experience that perhaps in quite rare form allows the disabled to recognize the sense of their suffering and to accept it, thereby making their lives fruitful for the world? Or will this chance be shut off by mistakes, by clumsiness, maybe by a superficial and obtrusive way of talking about the mysterious meaning of life?

Luckily, once again God Himself takes the willingness to go on a pilgrimage as reason enough to help out here.

**At the end of a pilgrimage**

When the pilgrimage is at an end, the fruitful results become more and more evident on the return trip. Very seldom have I found that the sick and disabled have been disappointed, even if they gained something different from what they had expected or hoped. One of the pilgrims had completely forgotten how to ask for something, because at home it was useless to do so. He then also stopped asking God for anything. The outgoing and cheerful helpers gave him back the confidence to request things again. When someone formulated for him his own wishes to God, he then rediscovered for himself how to direct his innermost pleas to God and to trust in the fact that these wishes would not go unheeded. It was like being given a new life.

Another pilgrim lived in oppressive resignation in the face of his joyless fate as a handicapped invalid. Every memory of happy times was buried. At one of the services he was struck by a word. He began to speak to his sick roommate about it and, encouraged by him, he received the sacrament of reconciliation. This paved the way for him to find his own meaning in life.

Another pilgrim, who often went on pilgrimages and had a deep and trusting faith, found new strength in prayer and a renewed belief, as he had the last time. The annual pilgrimage is for him like a service station; he fills up on faith for the coming year.

"Ourdes changed my life" is a phrase not seldom stated. This is manifested in the numerous charitable activities that are taken up once home. Many of the modern activities of the Order of Malta Speaking for the Order of the Knights of Malta would be unthinkable today if this source did not exist.

Also the priest who goes along on the pilgrimage is strengthened in his pastoral duty by what he experiences. As well as the accompanying doctor who has experienced some things, which bring him closer to his vocation as "medicus alter Christus".

And despite everything, the pilgrim's company made up of the sick, the disabled and their helpers is mostly a cheerful lot. "I haven't had such good laughs in years" is one of the greatest compliments and, fortunately, not an all-too rare one.

Taking leave of the company at the hometown station is then all the more difficult. Many tears of farewell make clear that close personal relationships have been formed. They speak for the fact that the difficulty of returning to everyday life has not been abolished. But they also speak for the happy moments that convey new strength for mastering it.

Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager

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## 7. PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES WITH DISABLE CHILDREN

Pedro Merry del Val,  
Marqués de la Villa de Orellana

(Translated from Spanish)

During several years, as a member of the group of Pilgrims from the Spanish Association of the Order, I have participated in the International Pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes organized by the Sovereign and Military Order of Malta. This annual date has a deep significance for me, and always arises many and diverse thoughts which I am trying to sort in these pages.

Every year, within the tradition of our Order, the Pilgrims of the Spanish Association accompany and serve a group of children who have different health problems, either because they have physical or, more frequently, psychic handicaps. (In the same way that other countries' Associations belonging to our Order do, the Spanish Association also takes part in the Young Handicapped International Summer Camp.)

Concerning the Pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, I have to mention some of the activities, like the participation in religious ceremonies, some of them organized by the Order of Malta for all the pilgrims (the procession of the "Candles" is particularly moving for the children and the volunteers), and other events specially organized for these children by the Spanish Association of the Order. Entertainment activities are also organized: games, visits around Lourdes in "the little train", or visits to Betharam caves. Several of the eldest children also go to the pool.

The children have different impressions about the Pilgrimage, which obviously depend on how much are they handicapped. I must point out that the children who are taken care of by nuns in Spain, have a greater

religious experience than others. Some of these nuns accompany us to the Pilgrimage.

For all these children, the change from their daily environment is a “present” from which they get a lot of pleasure: to be immersed in the religious joy which constitutes Lourdes' atmosphere, and to be able to return to their daily lives being more happy and carrying with them a new experience which for some of them is of the utmost importance. Besides, there is often a reason for deep thinking the fact that at Lourdes all of us can see that we are not the only ones who have problems.

These children are particularly affectionate. They love and get them to be loved. In fact, they have a fluent and loving communication with the young volunteers which are numerous among the pilgrims of the Spanish Association. (In the slang that young Spanish people use to speak nowadays we could say that there is “a good chemistry” between them.) So much so, that these young volunteers visit the children during the year and organize some other activities like excursions or visits to the amusement park.

We always remember during this Pilgrimage, the great importance of the children's presence during the life of Our Lord Jesus, which the Gospel reveals to us: “If you are not like children you will not form part of the Kingdom of God”. “Taking a child, He put him amongst them and took him into His arms”. “Anyone who would cause scandal to one of these children who trust in Me, should have a millstone tied to his neck and be thrown into the sea”. “Let the children come near Me, and do not forbid them to do so, since if you do not become like children you will not form part of the Kingdom of God”. The sufferers are also present in the Gospel; there are many miracles, but we could remember the ones which concern the children and youngsters, like the resurrection of the twelve years old daughter of Jairo, the recovery of the son of the centurion of Capernaum, and the resurrection of the widow' s son in Naim.

Which are the common points between the Order of Malta and this Pilgrimage with handicapped children? The first one is the mission to serve Our Lords the Sick. There is also the devotion to the Virgin of the Order, and we must remember the emblem of the Order with the eight pointed Cross as a symbol of the Beatitudes of the sermon of the Mountain (Gospel of Saint Mathew). Several of them seem to make reference to these children.

After this Pilgrimage all the children and volunteers return to our daily routine happier, comforted, hopeful, thanking Our Lord for so many things, having drunk from the “source of spirituality” which the Sanctuary of Our Lady the Virgin of Lourdes is, and also realizing that we have received from these children much more than we can ever give to them.

Pedro Merry del Val,  
Marqués de la Villa de Orellana

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## 8. THE ORDER OF MALTA AND THE PILGRIMS TO SANTIAGO

Don Joaquín Ignacio Mencos,  
Marquès de la Real Defensa

(Translated from Spanish)

After the loss of Jerusalem, the assistance which our Order offered to pilgrims in the Holy Places was redirected and concentrated on the pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela. As a result, numerous commanderies of Saint John sprung up along the pilgrimage route. Among the best known and most emblematic are the commanderies of Cizur-Menor and Puente la Reina in Navarre, Navarrete in La Rioja, Puente Fitero in Castille, the Hospital de Órbigo in León, and Portomarín in Galicia.

Many more existed, but only their vestiges remain. For example, in Navarre alone we have identified and located the ruins of houses of the Order in five locations bordering the route: Bargota, Igúzquiza, Arandigoyen, Cogullo and Melgar.

We must not forget that for several centuries, and coinciding with the great surge of pilgrimages in the middle ages, the Knights of Saint John were the leading supporters of these hospitals for pilgrims. Their labors should fill us with just pride but at the same time their example should constitute a call to continue this work of mercy, which is so necessary, and to assist, as best we can, those who call at our doors in growing numbers seeking a place of rest. Together with experienced and useful advice, the pilgrims will find a friendly hand which offers them a glass of cold water with a smile, a cure for blisters or a massage for aching feet. These gestures are usually hidden behind a personal anonymity so that gratitude is appropriately reserved for the Order and its hospitaller works, which are symbolized by the flag that presides over and identifies us. We have been preparing to meet the challenge of this Holy Year for several months to insure that we uphold the justly deserved image of the Order in the eyes of the thousands of pilgrims, from more than eighty countries in five continents, that will visit us.

Assistance to pilgrims travelling to Santiago is only one facet of the many hospitaller works of the Order which, in this case, maintains a tradition of centuries while clearly providing a modern service to those in need. The Order, in response to the request of the authorities of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, also maintains a first aid station in the Cloister of that temple, the ultimate goal of the pilgrims, and thereby insures that the service provided by the shifts of volunteers, under our supervision, is an effective, attentive and charitable one.

In this Jubilee Holy Year the call of the tomb of the Apostle Saint James, the Patron Saint of Spain, will move thousands of men and women to make the pilgrimage to Compostela, and today, as in former years, at the Commandery of Cizur-Menor (Navarre), a beautiful location four kilometers from Pamplona, the hostel which has been maintained by the Order since 1999, will once more be open to all those who come for assistance. Since a large increase in the number of pilgrims is expected, the hostel, which open on 29 May, will prolong its service for a period of eighteen weeks. Based on the experience of the last five years, we estimate that almost four thousand pilgrims will spend the night at our installations. The work of the members of the Delegation of the Order in Navarre, with the help of a group of volunteers, is very gratifying because its evident usefulness. These contacts with the pilgrims are also an extraordinary opportunity to provide information about the Order and its many activities, which are largely unknown to the majority.

During the past five summers, our hostel was used by more than 13,300 pilgrims. At the beginning we never imagined that the number would be so great and represent so many countries. Since we keep accurate records of the pilgrims who stay with us, we are able to offer very concrete data: exactly 6,531 pilgrims were from Spain (49%); 6,810 pilgrims were nationals of 62 foreign countries, 60% of whom came from only four countries: France, Germany, Italy and Brasil. Many of the travellers noted their impressions in the books of signatures at their disposition at the entrance to the hostel: the majority manifested their gratitude and highly valued our efforts, especially on the days in which the demand for lodging surpassed our capacity.

The marked increase in pilgrims to Santiago has caused the number of occupancies to soar. Last year the average was more than 110% of our possibilities. That meant that on many days our 27 beds were occupied shortly after the hostel opened at 12:00 noon. The pilgrims who arrived later were accommodated on mattresses placed inside the church and so one third of the time we had to use the romanesque nave of the

Commandery as a second hostel. This summer, since it is within the Holy Year, we are sure that what on other occasions was an exception will now become the rule, and the church will again be used to lodge pilgrims who arrive at Cizur-Menor and find that all the hostels in this area are full.

In view of our desire to also address the religious aspect of the pilgrimage, and considering the good results obtained last year, we are again encouraged to organize a Mass at the Commandery on Sunday afternoons, since the only Mass in the village is celebrated at 11:00 in the morning, before any of the pilgrims have arrived. The Mass is attended by the pilgrims who wish to do so, by the volunteers, and by Dames and Knights of the Order and always ends with the singing the Salve before the Virgin of Philermo and with the solemn blessing of the pilgrims, following the ritual of the Collegiate Church of Roncesvalles. The ceremony is a truly memorable one for all who attend.

Don Joaquín Ignacio Mencos,  
Marquès de la Real Defensa

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**9. PILGRIMAGE AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Hugh P. Kennedy

**Pilgrimage at the very roots of our Order**

When the Blessed Gerard gathered a small community to form the hospice in Jerusalem it was primarily to provide shelter for strangers and for pilgrims who had come to visit the Holy Sites. The role of pilgrimage and the care of those who undertake Christian pilgrimage have thus been central to the ethos of our Order from its beginnings. It is therefore reassuring to see today that in so many countries where the Order of Malta exists among the main duties of its members is the active participation in national and local pilgrimages. The presence of the members of the Order of Malta at such shrines particularly in offering assistance to those pilgrims who are sick or disabled provide us with a direct link with our very foundations so many centuries ago. One common feature in all these pilgrimages is the presence of young volunteers, who by their dedication and enthusiasm provide skilled assistance to those who come as pilgrims. These efforts are realised in a very strong way during the International pilgrimage to Lourdes, when young people from many countries come together to make a common witness of Christian compassion under the cross of Malta. It is encouraging to see the attention they give to our sick pilgrims and the patience they show. Lourdes for many of our young people also offers a means by which they can foster friendships with those of their own age who come from different countries and yet share the common ideal of the Order of Malta. For many young people the pilgrimage combines that desire of youth to offer physical help to those in need with a desire to form friendships with those from other countries. However at the heart of this time together the motivation must ultimately lead the participants to recognise that it is Christ that they serve in the sick. A time of pilgrimage is not just about undertaking works of kindness but also should lead to a desire to deepen ones own personal faith. For “every member of the Church is a pilgrim along the path of personal sanctification”.

**Pilgrimage is making a journey of faith**

One of the strongest realities of this generation is the ease of international travel. Young people have become accustomed to making journeys from one part of the world to another that would have daunted previous generations. However for the Christian every journey has a purpose and is simply not to be seen as an aimless wandering. The Vatican Council's document on the Lay Apostolate refers to this in addressing travellers "– They should keep in mind that no matter where they may be they are the travelling messengers of Christ, and should bear themselves really as such" [14]. A pilgrimage takes on a deeper significance than ordinary recreational travel. A pilgrimage is a journey with a purpose and that purpose is to come closer to God. In the majority of cases pilgrimages are a public journey towards God, made in the company of others. As we make a pilgrimage with others so their faith and their shared ideals strengthen and encourage us. This has special relevance for the youth who accompany us with the Order of Malta in the various pilgrimages that we undertake. Pope John Paul in reflecting at the end of the Jubilee Year of 2000 wrote of his experience of seeing the large crowds waiting to enter the Holy Door at St Peter's. Basilica; "In each of them I tried to imagine the story of a life, made up of joys, worries, sufferings, the story of someone whom Christ has met, and who in dialogue with him was setting out again on a journey of hope". [N.M.I.8]. For many young people the opportunity of going on pilgrimage offers this sense of solidarity with people of their own age who are seeking true friendship, but who are also seeking an authentic meaning to their life. It is essential that at the heart of every pilgrimage no matter how many duties we have there should time for be personnel prayer. At Lourdes so many times I have felt humbled at seeing the dedication of the young people in their care for our sick and I have been delighted as people coming from different experiences and backgrounds have made strong friendships. But I have also noticed a deep desire among so many of the young to make these days of pilgrimage a time of prayer. The duty schedule for our young people at Lourdes is busy and the times for relaxation can also be hectic. However on those occasions when I have gone down to the Grotto late at night there is always some of our young volunteers quietly at prayer either as individuals or in small groups. At the heart of every pilgrimage thus there has to be a spirit of prayer, it is that which gives meaning to whatever assistance we offer to those who are suffering, and it is prayer which transforms what could be a mere vacation into a pilgrimage. It is in these moments for our young volunteers that a pilgrimage takes on its true challenge to offer personal conversion and spiritual growth. Towards the end of his period as Rector of the Shrine at Lourdes the Abbé Michel de Roton wrote of his observations of the many pilgrims he had witnessed. For the pilgrims who come to Lourdes he suggested there is more than a physical journey, "rather their journey is an interior journey, a spiritual adventure a fundamental experience of the heart".

**Strengthen in faith and love your pilgrim Church on earth**

Just over twenty years ago the experience of the International Pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Order inspired some young people to organise short holidays each summer with disabled people of their own age. From the small nucleus of this group coming together the Order of Malta's International Camp for Young Handicapped has grown to bring hundreds of young people together each summer. While these weeks are in many ways different from the pilgrimage at Lourdes, nevertheless with all the relaxation and forming of friendships there is at the very heart of this meeting a spiritual foundation. I was struck by the reality of this a few years ago. When the Camp was hosted in Italy in 1999 we were located overlooking the sea at Lignano Sabbiadoro. Behind the Camp there was a forest, and in the forest there was a small church many centuries old. Most evenings as part of the camp schedule there were various entertainments and discos. One evening however some of the young people present organised as an alternative a quiet period of reflection to be held in this old church. It was impressive to see the young people pushing their friends in wheel chairs through the forest to the little church. The service of prayer was simple with short readings from scripture accompanied by tranquil music, but the service mainly comprised of periods of quiet prayer. In this special time together we had this church, a building several hundred years old filled with young people at prayer together. A community of friendship and compassion inspired by faith. This is the image of the Church and particularly when it is gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist. It is this image that is presented to us in the Third Eucharistic Prayer, when we ask God "to strengthen in faith and love your pilgrim church on earth".

**"Did not our hearts burn within us as we walked along the road"**

There are many journeys mentioned in the Gospels, but among the most emotive is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter evening given in Luke's Gospel. This journey becomes a journey of faith, a true pilgrimage for these two disciples. So distracted are they with their worries that they do not recognise that the stranger walking besides them is their risen Lord. Christ does however walk with them, he

listens to them as they pour out to him their disappointments and their pain. Christ gives them time to articulate what their hopes had been, and how they are now confused in their faith. He even hears the cynicism they speak on those who continue to believe that their Lord is indeed risen from the dead. Only when he has first walked with them, only when he has listened to them does he begin to instruct them. It is then that they realise that his message has vibrancy and offers a joy that is truly fulfilling for them. The “heart speaking to the heart”. They desire to stay in his presence, even though he makes as if to continue his journey. “It is nearly evening and the day is almost over”. It is then in the “breaking of bread” that they recognise that this “seeming” stranger is in reality Jesus. It is the strength of this reality that they now have the courage to retrace their steps back to Jerusalem, back to the community of the Apostles to proclaim their renewed faith in their risen Lord.

The road to Emmaus echoes the journey that so many young people make today. There is so often confusion in their faith, for some young there may even be a disappointment that the Church seemingly does not match the ideal that they would hope in. Yet Christ gives us the example as he did that we are called to listen to their pain, to walk with them and then offer them new hope, that will lead them to the “breaking of bread”, in the Eucharist. As an Irish poet has written we are called “in an employment to make all world ways Emmaus roads”. In a particular way the time of pilgrimages offers such an opportunity. The order of Malta has the valuable gift of the co-operation and support of so many young people, particularly in the various pilgrimages that the Order undertakes. In the work that they undertake for the Lord, we should not forget the Lord of the work. Speaking of young people, the Pope wrote at the end of the year 2000, “ the jubilee has given us an encouraging testimony of the generous availability of young people. We must learn to interpret that heartening response by investing that enthusiasm like a new talent (Mt.25:15), what the Lord has put into our hands so that we can make it yield a rich harvest”. [N.M.I. 40].

Hugh P. Kennedy

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