

Pope: address to Order of Malta (full text)

(Vatican Radio) Pope Benedict XVI received Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta on Saturday, on occasion of the 900th anniversary of the document that created the organisation as an Sovereign Order under Papal protection. Below, please find the full English text of the Pope's remarks.



Dear Brothers and Sisters!

I am happy to welcome and to greet each one of you, Knights and Dames, chaplains and volunteers, of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. I greet in a special way the Grand Master, His Most Eminent Highness Fra' Matthew Festing, and I thank him for his kind words addressed to me in the name of all of you; I also thank you for the gift you wished to offer me, which I will dedicate to a work of charity. My affectionate thoughts go to the Cardinals and to my brother bishops and priests, in particular to my Secretary of State, who has just presided at the Eucharist, and to Cardinal Paolo Sardi, Patron of the Order, whom I thank for the care with which he strives to strengthen the special bond that joins you to the Catholic Church and most particularly to the Holy See. With gratitude, I greet Archbishop Angelo Acerbi, your Prelate. A final word of greeting goes to the diplomats and to all the high dignitaries and authorities who are present. The occasion that brings us together is the ninth centenary of the solemn privilege *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* of 15 February 1113, by which Pope Paschal II placed the newly created "hospitaller fraternity" of Jerusalem, dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, under the protection of the Church, and gave it sovereign status, constituting it as an Order in church law, with the faculty freely to elect its superiors without interference from other lay or religious authorities. This important event takes on a special meaning in the context of the Year of Faith, during which the Church is called to renew the joy and the commitment of believing in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world. In this regard, you too are called to welcome this time of grace, so as to deepen your knowledge of the Lord and to cause the truth and beauty of the faith to shine forth, through the witness of your lives and your service, in this present time.

Your Order, from its earliest days, has been marked by fidelity to the Church and to the Successor of Peter, and also for its unrenounceable spiritual identity, characterized by high religious ideals.

Continue to walk along this path, bearing concrete witness to the transforming power of faith. By faith the Apostles left everything to follow Jesus, and then went out to the whole world, in fulfilment

of his command to bring the Gospel to every creature; fearlessly they proclaimed to all people the power of the cross and the joy of the resurrection of Christ, which they had witnessed directly. By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, demonstrating the truth of the Gospel which had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the highest gift, the fruit of love: that of forgiving their persecutors. And by faith, down the centuries, the members of your Order have given themselves completely, firstly in the care of the sick in Jerusalem and then in aid to pilgrims in the Holy Land who were exposed to grave dangers: their lives have added radiant pages to the annals of Christian charity and protection of Christianity. In the nineteenth century, the Order opened up to new and more ample forms of apostolate in the area of charitable assistance and service of the sick and the poor, but without ever abandoning the original ideals, especially that of the intense spiritual life of individual members. In this sense, your commitment must continue with a very particular attention to the religious consecration – of the professed members – which constitutes the heart of the Order. You must never forget your roots, when Blessed Gérard and his companions consecrated themselves with vows to the service of the poor, and their vocation was sanctioned by the privilege *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*. The members of the newly created institute were thus configured with the features of religious life: commitment to attain Christian perfection by profession of the three vows, the charism for which they were consecrated, and fraternity among the members. The vocation of the professed members, still today, must be the object of great attention, combined with attention to the spiritual life of all. In this sense, your Order, compared with other organizations that are committed in the international arena to the care of the sick, to solidarity and to human promotion, is distinguished by the Christian inspiration that must constantly direct the social engagement of its members. Be sure to preserve and cultivate this your qualifying characteristic and work with renewed apostolic ardour, maintaining an attitude of profound harmony with the Magisterium of the Church. Your esteemed and beneficent activity, carried out in a variety of fields and in different parts of the world, and particularly focused on care of the sick through hospitals and health-care institutes, is not mere philanthropy, but an effective expression and a living testimony of evangelical love. In Sacred Scripture, the summons to love of neighbour is tied to the commandment to love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength (cf Mk 12:29-31). Thus, love of neighbour – if based on a true love for God – corresponds to the commandment and the example of Christ. It is possible, then, for the Christian, through his or her dedication, to bring others to experience the bountiful tenderness of our heavenly Father, through an ever deeper conformation to Christ. In order to offer love to our brothers and sisters, we must be afire with it from the furnace of divine charity: through prayer, constant listening to the word of God, and a life centred on the Eucharist. Your daily life must be imbued with the presence of Jesus, under whose gaze you are called to place the sufferings of the sick, the loneliness of the elderly, the difficulties of the disabled. In reaching out to these people, you are serving Christ: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). Dear friends, continue working in society and in the world along the elevated paths indicated by the Gospel – faith and charity, for the renewal of hope: faith, as testimony of adherence to Christ and of commitment to the Gospel mission, which inspires you to an ever more vital presence in the ecclesial community and to an ever more conscious membership of the people of God; charity, as an expression of fraternity in Christ, through works of mercy for the sick, the poor, those in need of love, comfort and assistance, those who are afflicted by loneliness, by a sense of bewilderment and by new material and spiritual forms of poverty. These ideals are aptly expressed in your motto: “*Tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum*”. These words summarize well the charism of your Order which, as a subject of international law, aims not to exercise power and influence of a worldly character, but in complete freedom to accomplish its own mission for the integral good of man, spirit and body, both

individually and collectively, with special regard to those whose need of hope and love is greater. May the Holy Virgin, Our Lady of Philermos, support your plans and projects with her maternal protection; may your heavenly protector Saint John the Baptist and Blessed Gérard, as well as the saints and blessed of the Order, accompany you with their intercession. For my part, I promise to pray for all those present here, for all the members of the Order, as well as the numerous worthy volunteers, including a significant number of children, and for all who work alongside you. Affectionately, I impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your families.