

## **THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM**

The word "spirituality" is not one that is generally understood. For those who do understand what the word means, its application to themselves appears puzzling. To those persons who are or who wish to become members of the Order the idea of personally committing themselves to the "spirituality" of the Order seems daunting.

What is required to achieve an understanding of and a commitment to the spirituality of the Order is firstly knowledge of what is the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The Equestrian (the word comes from the Latin word: equites meaning knight which was a rank below that of the patres/patricians in ancient Rome and is reckoned as being the equivalent to what to-day might be called "middle-class" as distinct from "aristocratic")- Order is a public and lay association within the Catholic Church of men and women who belong to the Catholic Church. The special distinguishing feature of the Order is the commitment of its members to the Holy Land.

Canon 298 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church describes the nature of a public association (sic):

c. 298, §1 In the Church there are associations which are distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. In these associations, Christ's faithful, whether clerics or laity, or clerics and laity together, strive with a common effort to foster a more perfect

life, or to promote public worship, or Christian teaching. They may also devote themselves to other works of the apostolate, such as initiatives for evangelisation, works of piety or charity and those which animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit.

§2 Christ's faithful are to join especially those associations which have been established by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre specifically goes back to the first knights who joined the Crusades and under the leadership of Godfrey de Bouillon were organized as a guard around the sepulchre of Our Lord after the conquest of Jerusalem from the Saracens in 1099. These knights were approved as a distinct knightly order by Pope Pascal II in February 1113.

The long and convoluted history of the Order is a topic, for another paper. What is the focus here is the spirituality peculiar to the Order.

There are two major features or elements that underpin the Order's spirituality. These two features are: The **poor** Christ and the crucified **Lord**.

### **The Poor Christ**

When Jesus read the lesson in the synagogue at Nazareth, He chose the passage which said that the Spirit of the Lord was on the Servant of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). When Jesus stated his credentials to the disciples of John the Baptist his answering statement ended with the words: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Mtt. 11:5). Then the beatitudes begin with the saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit..... "(Mtt. 5:3).

In Hebrew the words "ani"(poor) and "ebion"(needy) lie behind the Greek word for poor which is "ptochos" and which is used in the Septuagint or the Greek version of the first seven books of the Hebrew Old Testament. Both "ani" and "ebion" over many generations developed in meaning.

At first these words simply meant lacking in this world's goods and in need (Dt. 15:4; 15:11)

Then the two words came to describe those who because they lacked the necessities of life were down trodden and oppressed (Amos 2:6; 15:11).

Then the two words took on their third level of meaning. For someone who was poor and needy and therefore vulnerable to oppression and subjugation such a person had no power no prestige, could not look to others for help and could only look to God. Therefore the "poor" the "anawim" describe people who have come to put their complete and total trust in God (Psalms 10; 12; 14; 68;).

So when Jesus said: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" it meant: Blessed be that person who is conscious of a desperate need and recognizes her/his own helplessness but who is utterly certain that in God and in God alone can all things be supplied.

Members of the Order in their lives are called upon to place their reliance on God. Social status, financial security, professional qualifications and a luxurious life-style - all these things can never become substitutes for placing one's trust in God and reaching out in service to those in need.

## **The Crucified Lord**

It was not long after three o'clock in the afternoon when Jesus died (Mk.15:34). The next day was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath began at 6.00pm on the Friday. According to the Jewish law a criminal's body might not remain on its cross over the Sabbath day. The body of Jesus had to be quickly taken down and disposed of.

Among the followers of Jesus was an influential person. Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy, a member of the Sanhedrin and in secret a disciple of Jesus. Joseph went to Pilate and requested that the body of Jesus be given a decent burial. The request was granted.

Joseph's own tomb, as yet unused, was chosen as the burial place. Nicodemus came with the burial party carrying spices to embalm the body. The body of Jesus was wrapped in long linen bandages with the spices and then laid on one of the shelves within the rock tomb. There was no door. But there was a great circular stone (like a cartwheel) which ran in a groove and this was wheeled up to close the opening.

All the Sabbath day, our Saturday, the body of Jesus lay in the tomb. The tomb had no visitor, for the Sabbath day was the day of rest. To have made even the short journey from the city to the tomb would have meant breaking the Sabbath law. With the first streaks of dawn on the first Easter Sunday, even though it was still dark, women came to the tomb to complete the hasty embalming of the body of Jesus that had been done on the previous Friday. There was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and maybe others including possibly the mother of Jesus. They were worried about the problem of gaining entry to the tomb. The tomb had been sealed. There were guards posted. The stone closing the entrance needed to be rolled away and it was heavy.

When the women reached the tomb, there were no guards, no seal and the stone was rolled away. However, there was a messenger, a *young* man dressed in a white robe. The women were told by this young man that Jesus was risen and had gone before them into Galilee (Mk. 16:1-11; Mtt. 28: 1-7; Lk. 24: 1-11). The women fled.

In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek word " Kurios" or Lord is used regularly to translate the name of God. In the New Testament the word" Kurios" is used like that 150 times. This is the title the Christians of the early Church gave to Jesus of Nazareth resurrected from the tomb. Jesus the crucified Lord.

When members of the Order speak of **Jesus Christ the Crucified Lord** we mean:

- Jesus is the absolute and undisputed owner and possessor of my life
- Jesus is the master whose servant I am for all of my life
- Jesus is the head of a great family of which I through Him have become a member
- Jesus is the help of the helpless
- Jesus has absolute authority over all my life
- Jesus is He to whom I give homage, allegiance and loyalty
- Jesus died for me and as the Divine One I worship and adore Him.

The word" Lord" is therefore a one-word creed, a one-word expression of devotion and a one-word expression of reverence. Therefore along with the early Church the members of the Order sum up and affirm their faith and belief in the phrase: **Jesus Christ is Lord.**

### **The virtues of Chivalry**

Since the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem first emerged as a formal entity in the Middle Ages it was from its beginnings associated with that spirit of chivalry which the Church encouraged as a means of embodying a Christian spirit and value system within the social mores of medieval society.

Virtue is described as a habit that gives to a person both the inclination and the power to readily do what is good. In the Christian value system following from the clear teaching of Christ **LOVE** is the greatest of the virtues (ICor. 13)

Members of the Order find the source of our call to imitate the love of God in the close following of love personified in Jesus Christ. In practical terms this means that members endeavour to show support and solidarity especially to the Christians who live in the land where Jesus once lived

The medieval oath of fealty of a knight to his lord is replicated in the undertaking given by all members of the Order to assist in whatever ways they can to enhance the life and vitality of the Church. **LOYALTY** to the Church of Christ means all members need to be well informed about the contemporary guidance offered by His Holiness the Pope and the teachings of the Church's magisterium. Support for the successor of St. Peter is a characteristic of the Order.

To go the extra mile, to give one's cloak, have always been marks of generosity that all Christians try to live out in acknowledgement of the blessings given to them by God. Members of the Order pledge their time and their resources, both great and small, to live out their vocations in life with **GENEROSITY** especially for the people and the land where Jesus once lived.

Chivalry has always carried the connotation of **COURTESY**. Members of the Order are expected to show respect and ready co-operation with all other Christian Churches and members of other faiths especially in those practical projects and initiatives of the Order which seek to benefit Catholic, Christian, and Non-Christian communities in the Holy Land.

Finally, all members of the Order are called upon to be people of **PRAYER**. It is said that prayer is the oxygen of a person's spiritual life, the vital sap that gives strength and guides our actions, the guarantee of God's grace. Jesus Himself taught us to pray and set us an example. The Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from which the Order takes its name is not only the tomb that reminds us of the place where the body of Jesus was laid but it is the place from where Christ rose and from where redemption from sin and reconciliation with God is offered to the world.

This then is what can be offered as the **spirituality** that ought to characterize the life of those who are members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. The headings listed below can serve as the sign posts that mark the journey of a member of the Order in her/his life as a disciple of Christ.

**The Poor Christ**

**The Crucified Lord**

**Love, Loyalty, Generosity, Courtesy**

**Prayer**

Paper composed by Rev. Dr. Anthony Malone, OFM, KHS.

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