Commitment

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A Message from the Editor

Reflections on the Great Siege of Malta

Life-long Commitments

Necrology
Dear Readers,

This issue of The Journal invites you to reflect on the theme “Commitment” as it applies to members of the Order of Malta. This past September, the people of Malta and the Order of Malta celebrated the 450th anniversary of the lifting of the Great Siege. Our Western Association President, H.E. Richard A. Grant, Jr., KM, offers a reflection on the Maltese people’s obviously deep religious devotion over the millennia. In a separate article, he describes the recent celebrations. Four hundred fifty years after the Great Siege, the Maltese president and Maltese prime minister formally “welcomed home” the Order’s members visiting from around the world during two state dinners. They, the Archbishop of Malta, and the Imam of the Malta Islamic Center stressed the continued role that the nation of Malta and Order of Malta need to play, particularly in the ongoing refugee crisis and in promoting peace and dialogue among religious groups.

The Order has three classifications of membership, each imposing certain obligations on its members. The Knights of Justice make the most intense commitment to the Order and its works. This past August, one of our own, Fra’ Jeffrey D. Littell, professed his perpetual vows as a Knight of Justice following six years of discernment and formation. An article describes how Fra’ Jeffrey came to embrace his vocation. This past June, thirty-two women and men, becoming Dames or Knights of Magistral Grace, publicly proclaimed their commitment to the Order, as Molly G. Brenner, DM and Jeanne M. Lyons-O’Brien, DM explain in their article. With them, two priests were admitted as chaplains of the Order. Thomas Pieronek, KM, the Association’s Hospitaller, describes in his article the breadth of the Association’s ongoing works throughout the Western United States. The need is truly overwhelming. But as our chaplain, Father Patrick Brennan, CP, suggests, we simply should “Keep calm and carry on.”

I hope you enjoy this issue of The Journal.

Jon L. Rewinski, KM
Editor, The Journal
Reflections on the Great Siege of Malta

First inhabited no later than 5200 BC (and possibly as early as 7200 BC), the Island of Malta, encompassing only about 122 square miles, has been at the crossroads of various Mediterranean civilizations for thousands of years. Nowhere is this more evident than in its places of worship.

During Malta’s Ġgantija era (3600 – 3200 BC), nearly a thousand years before the construction of the earliest pyramid of Egypt, Neolithic man constructed Ħaġar Qim, a megalithic temple complex on the rugged south coast of Malta overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Less than three hundred yards away, during Malta’s Tarxien era (3150-2500 BC), Neolithic man constructed the Mnajdra temple complex. Both are marvels to behold in scale and precision, rivaling a similar megalithic complex built around 2600 BC.

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at Stonehenge. For the Haġar Qim and Mnajdra temples, large hunks of honey-colored limestone rock weighing tons were hewn into interlocking shapes and placed to form covered rooms, atriums, apses and worship spaces. The largest stone in Hagar Qim measures 220 square feet and weighs twenty tons. Not unlike Stonehenge, Malta’s Haġar Qim and Mnajdra temple complexes are precisely aligned to mark the position of the rising sun on the first day of spring and autumn equinoxes and the first day of summer and winter solstices. Within both temple complexes, archaeologists have uncovered statuettes and decorated stone altars. The nature of observances practiced in these temples has been lost in time, as has the origin and fate of the engineers and people who built these extraordinary structures.

Malta’s strategic position and sheltered deep harbors have attracted visitors, refugees, merchants and maritime empires over the centuries—Phoenicians (until about 264 BC), Romans (264 BC – 395 AD), Byzantines (395-870 AD), Moors (870-1091), Normans and Sicilians (1091-1282), the Spanish (1282-1530), the Knights of Malta (1530-1798), the French (1798-1800) and the British (1800-1964). Malta gained its independence from Great Britain in 1964 and formally joined the European Union in 2004.

Most of Malta’s sites and cities bear Arabic names such as its ancient, interior, fortified cities L-Imdina and Ir-Rabat. Likewise, the Maltese language is closely related to Arabic. Other Arabic influences can be seen in the architecture throughout the island. By tradition, Catholicism literally

***The largest stone in Haġar Qim measures 220 square feet and weighs twenty tons.***
landed on Malta in 60 AD, when the Apostle Paul, a prisoner being taken to Rome, was shipwrecked in what is now called St. Paul’s Bay in northwestern Malta.

Once we had reached safety we learned that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary hospitality; they lit a fire and welcomed all of us because it had begun to rain and was cold. Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire when a viper, escaping from the heat, fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man must certainly be a murderer; though he escaped the sea, Justice has not let him remain alive.’ But he shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm. ... In the vicinity of that place were lands belonging to Publius, the [Roman] chief of the island. He welcomed us and received us cordially as his guests for three days. It so happened that the father of Publius was sick with a fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and, after praying, laid hands on him and healed him. After this had taken place, the rest of the sick on the island came to Paul and were cured. They paid us great honor, and when we eventually set sail [three months later] they brought us the provisions we needed. (Acts 28, 1-10.)

Luke’s account of the Apostles in Acts makes no mention of preaching, only of Paul’s humility and care for the sick. Today ninety-five percent of the Maltese population, about four hundred twenty-five thousand, are Catholic. There are 366 Catholic churches on Malta, and each citizen pays an annual tax of 150 Euros to support them. Each church has its own story adding color to the island’s rich history of temples, churches and tumult.

A case in point is the Church of the Assumption in the city of Il-Mosta. The church’s dome is one of the largest in the world, and its circular floor plan is indicative of the Moslem presence and dominance on the island in the Middle Ages. While under British rule, Malta was the most heavily bombarded nation during World War II. Thousands died. Countless homes, offices and historic treasures, such as Fort Saint Michael on Senglea and Fort Saint Angelo on Burgu were wholly or partially destroyed. The Maltese people again suffered mightily. On April 9, 1942, at 4:30 PM, a German bomb plunged through the dome of the Church of the Assumption of Il-Mosta while three hundred parishioners were at prayer. The bomb crashed through the marble floor and imbedded itself in the substructure of the Church, but it did not detonate, and no one was injured. A replica of the bomb is on display adjacent to the Church of the Assumption sacristy. It was simply a miracle.

The tiny 122-square-mile Island of Malta and its four hundred twenty-five thousand residents continue to be impacted by the tumult of world events. Although it is already one of the most densely populated countries in the European Union, it has allowed eighteen thousand refugees from the conflicts in the Middle East and Africa to encamp on Malta. That is up from fourteen thousand last year. Although the refugees are being repatriated to other European Union countries at the rate of 150 persons a week, the refugees continue to comprise roughly five percent of the island’s population.
The Great Siege of 1565

Early in 1565, spies brought to the Island of Malta and to Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette news that a huge Turkish force would soon depart from the Golden Horn in Istanbul, the home of Suleiman the Magnificent, intending to lay siege to the Island of Malta. The Turkish force, estimated by some to number over forty thousand, sailed in record time, landing on Malta on May 19. The siege ended on September 8, 1565. As the Order’s historian, H.J.A. Sire, writes, “The defence of Malta is one of the epics of military history.”

Grand Master de la Valette, realizing that victory could only come from withstanding the Great Siege, ordered that all Maltese farmers, along with their livestock and crops, be brought within the fortifications of L-Imdina (Malta’s interior, ancient capital), Birgu (which included Fort St. Angelo) and Sanglea (which included Fort St. Michael). Birgu and Sanglea are peninsulas jutting into Malta’s Grand Harbor across from modern day Valetta. The Grand Master razed all buildings outside of the fortifications of Burgu and Sanglea to diminish the threat from sharpshooters during the siege.

Mount Sciberras is a narrow strip of hillside on Malta’s northeastern coast. It overlooks the Grand Harbor to the east and the Island’s other great harbor, Marsamuscetto, to the west. At the northern tip of Mount Sciberras lies Fort St. Elmo, protecting the entrance to both harbors. Believing that holding Fort St. Elmo as long as possible would be critical to defending the Island, the Grand Master increased its fortifications. He also augmented the fort’s regular defensive force, which consisted of only six knights and six hundred other men, by adding forty-six more knights and two hundred Spanish infantrymen.

The Turkish force, with over 190 ships, landed on Malta on May 19, 1565. Although Grand Master de la Valette expected the Turkish fleet to first attack Marsamuscetto and Fort St. Elmo, the Turks sailed instead around to the southern part of the island, past the islet of Fyfla, and anchored near the town of Il-Munqar. The fleet then backtracked to the southern harbor at Marsaxlokk. The attack came overland from the south. The Turks quickly took the city of Iz-Zejtun, about a half mile inland from Marsaxlokk. From there, they marched to Il-Imdina to the west and the highlands overlooking the Order’s fortresses around the Grand Harbor.

Having encamped on Mount Sciberras above Fort St. Elmo, the Turkish leaders expected to take the fort within three days. The bombardment began on May 24. According to historian Ernle Bradford, on most days, an average of six to seven thousand shots were discharged at St. Elmo. The battle was so ferocious that the din could be heard across the sea in Sicily.

As the ramparts of Fort St. Elmo began to crumble, Turkish Janissaries inundated the fort. Again and again, the knights and soldiers of St. Elmo repulsed attacks with bullets and incendiary weapons. The attack on St. Elmo cost the Turkish army over four thousand men, including one of its leaders, Dragut Rais. Fort St. Elmo finally fell on June 23. All its defenders died in the battle. Bradford writes that Mustapha Pasha, acknowledging the victory at St. Elmo, but looking across the Grand Harbor to Fort St. Angelo and Fort St. Michael, cried out, “Allah! If so small a son has cost us so dear, what price shall we have to pay for such a father?”

After the fall of Fort St. Elmo, the Turkish army focused...
its attention on Senglea and Fort St. Michael. Here too, the Turks used the island’s topography, including the hills of Corradino overlooking Senglea, to their advantage. They bombarded Senglea from above. They also attempted to attack the city by boat, with ten vessels manned by one thousand Janissaries. The Order’s hidden five-gun battery on Fort St. Angelo, commanded by Knight Francesco de Guiral, literally blew the Janissaries out of the water. Another two thousand Turkish soldiers died in the land attack on Senglea.

The island’s climate also took its toll. Summer temperatures are regularly in the mid-nineties with humidity often at or above seventy percent. Nevertheless, both forces pressed on. On August 2, the Turks mounted another massive attack simultaneously on Senglea (and Fort St. Michael) and Birgu (and Fort St. Angelo). From the captured fort of St. Elmo, Mount Sciberras, Mount Salvatore and Gallows’ Point (at the tip of the Grand Harbor), the Turks bombarded the Birgu and Fort St. Angelo. From Corradino, the Turks simultaneously bombarded Birgu and Fort St. Michael. It was the siege’s largest bombardment, continuing for six hours. At the end of the day, the Order’s banners still stood. The Turks continued attacking for another five days.

Then on August 7, the Turkish army again stormed the ramparts, but on the point of breaching the walls of Fort St. Michael, Mustapha Pasha ordered a retreat. He had received a false message that a relief force from Spain had landed on the island. Although no relief force had come, Knight Don Mesquita, the Governor of L-Imdina, heard the bombardment and assumed that the Turkish army was fully engaged in the battle for Senglea and Birgu. Leading a garrison, he quickly laid to waste much of the Turkish camp before disappearing again behind the walls of L-Imdina.

On August 18, with time beginning to run out, Mustapha Pasha led another coordinated attack against Senglea and Birgu. In addition to continuing the bombardments and mounting another ground assault, he detonated mines beneath the bastion of Castille immediately behind Birgu. The bells of the Conventual Church of St. Lawrence tolled, signaling that the Order’s fortifications had been breached. At that moment, Grand Master de la Valette, who was seventy-one years old, impetuously led the charge to repulse the invaders. It worked for a short while, but the Turks attacked again at nightfall. More died, including the Grand Master’s nephew, Henri de la Valette.

Senglea and Birgu had endured nearly two months of steady bombardment. The Turks’ siege towers towered over the Castille fortifications, but the Turks had not yet captured the forts. In the meantime, dysentery and fever were taking a toll on the invaders. Moreover, Sicilian galleys were intercepting Turkish supply lines from North Africa. For the Turks, food, water and gunpowder were becoming scarce, and the two surviving Turkish leaders, Mustapha Pasha and Admiral Piali, were becoming more openly divided. On August 20, the Order successfully repulsed another major assault, mounted by eight thousand Turks, on Fort St. Michael.

Meanwhile, the Order’s remaining knights considered their prospects. During a Grand Council meeting on August 23, they advised the Grand Master to abandon Birgu, whose walls were crumbling, and retreat to Fort St. Angelo. The Grand Master refused, believing that abandoning Birgu would inevitably lead to the loss of Senglea.

At the end of August, concerned about the possibility of wintering on Malta, Mustapha Pasha decided to divert some of his troops to an attack on L-Imdina. As the Turks approached L-Imdina, they saw a large force within the city manning its battlements and greeting the invaders with blasts of cannons and guns. Demoralized and fearing another St. Elmo, Mustapha ordered a retreat. In fact, Knight Mesquita had a remarkably small number of knights and soldiers within the city’s gates, but he dressed many of the women and children as soldiers, thereby giving the impression that he had at his command a much larger army. It worked.

On August 25, a relief force of knights under Don Garcia of Toledo set sail from Syracuse on Sicily for the Island of Malta. It was delayed, however, by a heavy gale, forcing the ships to return to Sicily. The Mediterranean’s winter winds and storms were beginning. In the meantime, the Order’s troops repulsed further attacks on Birgu and Sanglea. On September 4, Don Garcia’s relief force again set sail, this time reaching Malta’s northwestern tip on September 7. The news reached Mustapha and the Grand Master at about the same time. The Turks began their retreat. On September 8, the Feast of the Nativity of the Our Lady, nearly four months after their arrival, the Turks left Malta. The bells of the Order’s conventual Church of St. Lawrence on Birgu rang out, and Grand Master de la Valette led the survivors in the Te Deum. *
Between September 6 and 8, the Maltese Association of the Order of Malta, led by its president, H.E. Daniel de Petri Testaferrata, KM, hosted a three-day commemoration marking the 450th anniversary of the end of the Great Siege of 1565. Given the Island of Malta’s strategic location in the middle of the narrow strait between Sicily and Tunisia, a strait that divides the Eastern and Western Mediterranean Sea, the Great Siege had an enormous impact not only on the Island of Malta and the Order, but also on the history of Europe and Christianity.

The unlikely defense of the island by the Maltese people and around 540 knights of the Order, led by Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette, against a Turkish force estimated to number forty thousand, led by Suleiman the Magnificent’s commanders Mustapha Pasha, Piali Pasha and Dragut Rais, inspired grateful European monarchs and leaders to send unprecedented amounts of money to rebuild and strengthen the island. With this money, the Order rebuilt its fortresses of St. Elmo, St. Angelo and St. Michael, constructed additional fortifications throughout the island and developed Mount Sciberras, a hill dividing Malta’s Grand Harbor and its secondary harbor named Marsamuscetto. It is from the heights of Mount Sciberras that the Turks launched devastating attacks against Fort St. Elmo (at the tip of Mount Sciberras) and Forts St. Angelo and St. Michael (across the Grand

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Harbor). The newly developed Mount Sciberras ultimately became Malta’s new capital city, Valetta, named after the Grand Master, in which the Order built the Grand Palace for the future Grand Masters, several residences for future knights, the Order’s hospital (at the foot of Mount Sciberras near Fort St. Elmo), and the ornate St. John’s Co-Cathedral. (Although the bishop of a diocese typically has one seat, or cathedra, the archbishop of the apostolic see of Malta has two cathedrae, at St. Paul’s Cathedral in L-Imdina and St. John’s in Valetta. Hence, the church in Valetta is named St. John’s Co-Cathedral.) The Great Siege put the Island of Malta on the map.

The Mediterranean has always been a two-edged sword to seafarers. It provides swift trade routes during the summer months. Between the end of August and May, however, winds and storms from Africa, Europe and the Middle East can instantly turn the Mediterranean into a graveyard. On the Island of Malta, the strength of the wind can make walking difficult. In addition, the island has no natural lakes or streams. Drinking water must be captured during the winter rains and stored in cisterns. And although parts of the island are arable, there is not enough soil to grows crops sufficient to feed a large army. As a result, for all practical purposes, a force invading the Island of Malta must achieve its objective by the end of August.

Faced with these realities, the Turks lifted the Great Siege on September 8, 1565, the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady. Indeed, Grand Master de la Valette attributed the Order’s survival to the intercession of Our Lady. Throughout the Great Siege, he prayed regularly before the precious icon brought from the Order’s former chapel on Mt. Philermos on the Island of Rhodes, which, at the time, was kept in the Order’s first conventual Church of St. Lawrence near Fort St. Angelo in Birgu. It is for this reason that the Order celebrates the Church’s September 8 Feast Day as a Solemnity honoring Our Lady of Philermo.

The 450th anniversary officially opened on Sunday, September 6, with an afternoon inter-religious prayer service for peace and for those who died during the Great Siege. Appropriately, the prayer service was held in the Church of St. Lawrence, in which Grand Master de la Valette had led a Te Deum upon the lifting of the Great Siege. About three hundred knights and dames from around the world, including almost all of the Order’s Sovereign Council and eight knights and dames from the Western Association, processed in robes through the streets of Birgu into the Church of St. Lawrence. The procession was led by Most Reverend Charles Scicluna (the Archbishop of Malta), Imam Mohammed ElSadi, (the Imam of the Malta Islamic Center), and H.E. the Venerable Fra’ Ludwig Hoffmann von Rumerstein (the Grand Commander of the Order).

Archbishop Scicluna opened the service with a prayer for peace:

“O God of peace, who are peace itself and whom a spirit

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of discord cannot grasp, nor a violent mind receive, grant that those who are one in heart may persevere in what is good and that those in conflict may forget evil and so be healed. O God, Creator of the world, under whose governance the design for all the ages unfolds, be attentive, we pray, to our petitions and grant to our times tranquility and peace, that we may exult with unceasing joy in praise of your great mercy.”

Imam ElSadi followed with another prayer for peace:

“In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful: Praise be to the Lord of the Universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy inclines toward peace, do thou also incline toward peace, and trust in God, for the Lord is one that hears and knows all things. And the servants of God Most Gracious are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say 'Peace.'”

Archbishop Scicluna then read excerpts from the homily that Pope Francis gave at Sarajevo this past June 6. “Christ says, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers,’ that is, those who make peace. Crafting peace is a skilled work: it requires passion, patience, experience and tenacity. Blessed are those who sow peace by their daily actions, their attitudes and acts of kindness, of fraternity, of dialogue, of mercy…For God sows peace, always, everywhere: in the fullness of time He sowed in the world his Son, that we might have peace! Peace-making is a work to be carried forward each day, step by step, without ever growing tired.”

The Imam followed, leading the assembly’s prayer for the dead. “O Allah! You are Peace. You are the maker of peace. Peace is from you. Help us and our leaders to choose the way of peace and to settle disputes in peaceful means. Help us to live in peace with ourselves, with our brothers and sisters in humanity and with the environment. Help us to show solidarity with the needy and the oppressed to achieve peace. Grant us strength and courage to combat oppression and the wicked to establish peace. O Allah! Forgive all the dead, have mercy upon them and admit them to heaven. O Allah! Hear and respond to our prayers. You are the Merciful and Almighty.”

The entire assembly then asked God to grant eternal rest unto the dead, with the perpetual light shining upon them. A choir then sang the Te Deum, just as Grand Master de la Valette had done in that same space 450 years earlier.

Following the prayer service, the procession of dames and knights, led by the Archbishop and the Imam, exited the Church of St. Lawrence and wove its way uphill and around the block in the sweltering afternoon heat to the neighboring Misraħ Ir-Rebħa, that is, Victory Square, for the laying of a wreath at the monument of the fallen at the Great Siege. A band played, and there were three sleek, hooded Maltese falcons and their keepers on hand in honor of the occasion.

Later Sunday evening, the president of Malta, H.E. Marie-Louise Coliero Preca, and her husband, invited the visiting dames and knights to an official, black-tie, state dinner at Verdala Palace, which sits on the western side of Malta near Had-Dingli.
in the island’s only real woodlands. The limestone palace was built in 1588 as the summer palace and hunting lodge of Grand Master Hugues Loubenx de Verdalle (1531-1595). It is now the summer residence of Malta’s president and is open to the public only once a year.

The setting for the gala outdoor dinner was a broad garden terrace overlooking the center of the island. During her remarks, President Preca welcomed the Order’s knights and dames to “your home.” She thanked the Order for its past and present support for Malta and its people and for traveling from around the world to commemorate a great event in the island’s history. She also spoke of Malta’s current financial, social and political issues, including caring for refugees from war-torn Africa. H.E. Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, the Order’s Grand Chancellor, also spoke, thanking President Preca and the Maltese people for their hospitality. On the issue of refugees and immigration, Baron von Boeselager spoke of the Order’s view that all people are created in God’s image and must be respected and treated humanely.

The following Monday morning, September 7, dames and knights had an opportunity to visit several of Malta’s main historical sites, including the ancient temple complex of Haġar Qim and the former capital of L-Imdina. At midday, Maltese Prime Minister H.E. Joseph Muscat and his wife hosted a luncheon for the Order’s knights and dames in the Sacra Infermeria, the Order’s spacious, limestone-walled, vaulted, subterranean infirmary adjacent to Fort St. Elmo. It is said to be the longest single room in Europe. In its time, the infirmary was noted for its advanced practices in the care of the sick. The development of those practices dated back to the Order’s origins in Jerusalem. The prime minister’s luncheon speech highlighted Malta’s place in today’s commercial world.

Monday evening, a delegation of the forty knights and dames accompanied the Grand Commander to the Mellieha Parish Church on the island’s northwest coast for a Pontifical Mass in honor of Our Lady of Victory. Mellieha is where the knights first landed after leaving Rhodes in 1530. In his homily commemorating Victory Day 2015, Archbishop Scicluna said, “We are not here today to renew a belligerent spirit or to humiliate those who came, saw and returned home empty-handed. In a particular way, this year the commemoration of the Great Siege should help us reflect upon some pertinent issues which we are presently facing.”

Paraphrasing the Catechism of the Catholic Church’s sections on war and Pope Francis’s 2013 apostolic exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, the Archbishop said: “How truly wonderful it is when people of different and diverse cultures live together in harmony. The true Christian strives for peace among nations, and also defends his liberty. Above all, he executes the law of love.” The Archbishop continued, “It is a great pity when religion becomes an instrument or an excuse for a military campaign of war and aggression. It is a great pity that many human atrocities which are being performed by the Islamic State are being justified by a cruel interpretation of the Koran...As Pope Francis rightly teaches us: ‘Our relationship with the followers of Islam has taken on great importance, since they are now significantly present in many traditionally Christian countries where they can freely worship and become fully part of society. We must never forget that they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore one, merciful God who will judge humanity on the last day.’”

Referencing Evangelii Gaudium again, the Archbishop said, “Indeed where faith and reason are concerned, there is no place for violence, for force, for aggression.” He concluded, “On several occasions the Maltese people were on the edge of danger and were liberated through the intercession of the sweet Mother of Jesus and of St. Paul, our father in faith. Today, as we respectfully commemorate the past, let us renew ourselves with a spirit of reconciliation and solidarity among nations, among religions, with creation and between peoples.” At the end of the Mass, Archbishop Scicluna announced his elevation of Our Lady of Victory Mellieha Parish Church to the rank of Basilica to mark the 450th commemoration. The parishioners and government officials who packed the church responded with thunderous applause.

Following Monday’s Mass, the full complement of dames and knights arrived from Valetta for an evening of festivities hosted by the Mellieha town council and the parish. The evening ended with a spectacular display of fireworks over St. Paul’s Bay, where, by tradition, St. Paul, a prisoner being transported to Rome, was shipwrecked in 60 AD and introduced Christianity to the island.

The September 8 observance of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Our Lady of Philermo began when the assembled dames and knights, in church robes, fell into formation in ranks of four and began to process from the former residence of the French Langue on Merchant Street to St. John’s Co-Cathedral for a 9:15 AM Pontifical High Mass. The procession, led by two flag bearers, spanned three blocks. Two Knights of Justice bore the sword and silver crucifix of Grand Master de la Valette. The cathedral bells resounded over Valetta as the knights and dames entered the magnificently decorated cathedral nave with its exquisitely patterned floor marking the burial places of some four hundred knights.
This year we are commemorating the 450th year since the Great Siege. From May to September 1565, Malta was besieged by the strong and powerful Ottoman fleet. The tragic and epic account of this siege gives testimony to the cruel acts which people are capable of inflicting upon one another, as well as the courage of those who are in danger. History records that both parties not only incurred victims, but were also witness to heroic acts. No modern recounting of the story can possibly alter the fact that in 1565, the Muslim Turks attacked the territorial integrity of Malta with the aim of forcing out of the Island the Knights of the Order of St John and converting the Maltese to Islam, or taking them as slaves, as they did in Gozo in 1551. For this reason, it is right and fitting that every year, on the 8th of September, we celebrate our victory over those who came to enslave us and recall that our cultural and religious heritage was earned and redeemed by the precious blood of some very brave men.

We are not here today to renew a belligerent spirit or to humiliate those who came, saw and returned home empty-handed. In a particular way this year, the Commemoration of the Great Siege should help us reflect upon some pertinent issues which we are presently facing.

The first reflection which I wish to share with you is that any form of aggressive attack of one country over another for the purpose of advantageous conquest is unjust, no matter who the aggressor happens to be.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states that: “The fifth commandment—thou shalt not kill—forbids the intentional destruction of human life. Because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the Church insistently urges everyone to prayer and to action so that the divine goodness may free us from the ancient bondage of war. All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war.” (CCC 2307 – 2308)

“Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation. A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons—especially atomic, biological, or chemical weapons—to commit such crimes.” (CCC 2314)

“Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust, and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war. Insofar as men are sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and will so continue until Christ comes again; but insofar as they can vanquish sin by coming together in charity, violence itself will be vanquished and these words will be fulfilled: ‘They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore’ (Is 2:4).” (CCC 2317)

How truly wonderful it is when people of different and
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diverse cultures live together in harmony. The true Christian
strives for peace among nations, and also defends his liberty.
Above all, he executes the law of love.

To quote Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium (n. 101):
“Let us ask the Lord to help us understand the law of love.
How good it is to have this law! How much good it does us
to love one another, in spite of everything. Yes, in spite of
everything! Saint Paul’s exhortation is directed to each of us:
‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’
(Rom 12:21). And again: ‘Let us not grow weary in doing
what is right’ (Gal 6:9). We all have our likes and dislikes,
and perhaps at this very moment we are angry with someone.
At least let us say to the Lord: ‘Lord, I am angry with this
person, with that person. I pray to you for him and for her’.

It is a great pity when religion becomes
an instrument or an excuse for a military
campaign of war and aggression.

To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful
step forward in love, and an act of evangelization. Let us do
it today! Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal
of fraternal love!”

It is a great pity when religion becomes an instrument
or an excuse for a military campaign of war and aggression.
It is a great pity that many human atrocities which are being
performed by the Islamic State are being justified by a cruel
interpretation of the Koran.

As Pope Francis rightly teaches us: “Our relationship
with the followers of Islam has taken on great importance,
since they are now significantly present in many traditionally
Christian countries, where they can freely worship and
become fully a part of society. We must never forget that
they ‘profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together
with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge
humanity on the last day.’ The sacred writings of Islam have
retained some Christian teachings; Jesus and Mary receive
profound veneration and it is admirable to see how Muslims
both young and old, men and women, make time for daily
prayer and faithfully take part in religious services. Many
of them also have a deep conviction that their life, in its
entirety, is from God and for God. They also acknowledge
the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and
with mercy towards those most in need.”

“In order to sustain dialogue with Islam, suitable
training is essential for all involved, not only so that they
can be solidly and joyfully grounded in their own identity,

but so that they can also acknowledge the values of others,
appreciate the concerns underlying their demands and shed
light on shared beliefs. We Christians should embrace with
affection and respect Muslim immigrants to our countries
in the same way that we hope and ask to be received and
respected in countries of Islamic tradition. I ask and I
humbly entreat those countries to grant Christians freedom
to worship and to practice their faith, in light of the freedom
which followers of Islam enjoy in Western countries! Faced
with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our
respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid
hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper
reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.”
(Evangelii Gaudium nn. 252-253)

Indeed, where faith and reason are concerned, there is no
place for violence, for force, for aggression.

In order to be in regard of human dignity “man’s response
to God in faith must be free: no one therefore is to be forced
to embrace the Christian faith against his own will … The
act of faith is of its very nature a free act (Vatican Council
II, Dignitatis humanae, n. 10). ‘God calls men to serve Him
in spirit and in truth, hence they are bound in conscience
but they stand under no compulsion … . This truth appears
at its height in Christ Jesus’ (Vatican Council II, Dignitatis
humanae, n. 11). In fact, the Lord’s missionary mandate
includes a call to growth in faith, yet he never forced anyone.
‘Christ invited people to faith and conversion, but never
coerced them.’ For he bore witness to the truth but refused
to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His
kingdom... grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on
the cross, draws men to himself.” (CCC 160)

“With regards to choice of religion, the human person
should not be forced to act against his conscience. This
freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion
on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any
human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act
in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately
or publicly, whether alone or in association with others,
within due limits’. (Vatican Council II, Dignitatis humanae,
n. 2). This right is based on the very nature of the human
person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the
divine truth which transcends the temporal order. For this
reason it “continues to exist even in those who do not live up
to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it.”
(CCC 2106)

On several occasions, the Maltese people were on the
edge of danger and we were liberated through the intercession
of the sweet Mother of Jesus and of St. Paul, our father in
faith. Today, as we respectfully commemorate the past, let us
renew ourselves with a spirit of reconciliation and solidarity
among nations, among religions, with creation and between
peoples. *
Fra’ Jeffrey Dean Littell Makes His Perpetual Vows

by Jon L. Rewinski, KM

On August 22, 2015, at St. John the Baptist Church in Costa Mesa, California, Fra’ Jeffrey D. Littell made his perpetual religious profession as a Knight of Justice in the Order of Malta. He is believed to be the ninth person born in the Western Hemisphere to become a Knight of Justice in Perpetual Vows. Through those vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Fra’ Jeffrey is making the deepest commitment possible to the Order and its works. Although he joins sixty-two other Knights of Justice in Perpetual Vows around the world, Fra’ Jeffrey’s path has been very much his own.

Fra’ Jeffrey was born in Michigan but moved to Costa Mesa, California when he was eight. His father worked as a metallurgist in the aerospace industry, and his mother was a homemaker. They were not religious. Fra’ Jeffrey studied accounting at the University of Southern California and, after graduation, worked primarily in a private family office where he managed a large portfolio of real estate and other assets.

During college Fra’ Jeffrey was introduced to Catholicism. Not long thereafter, he joined St. John the Baptist Parish in Costa Mesa. After many months of formation, he was admitted into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil in 1987. Many years later, two friends he met through Legatus, Susan Strader and Sherry Van Meter, proposed Fra’ Jeffrey for admission to the Order of Malta. He was invested as a Knight of Magistral Grace in 2008. Not long thereafter, Pat Ortiz, returning from the Order’s strategic planning session in Venice, told Fra’ Jeffrey about the Grand Master’s interest in developing further vocations to the Knights of Justice. That vocation is only open to unmarried Catholic men in good standing with the Church who are prepared to profess vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and who are willing to make a deep commitment to the work of the Order. Pat suggested that Fra’ Jeffrey consider this step. He did.

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Formation for the Knights of Justice is necessarily a lengthy process. It begins with a discernment period of unspecified duration. Once a candidate believes that he is called to this vocation, he is permitted to undertake a year of aspirancy. After that year is completed, he may be admitted into the novitiate for another one to two years. Following the novitiate, the candidate may apply for permission to take Temporary Vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Order of Malta. If permitted, during a Mass of the Order, the candidate publicly professes, “I … vow to Almighty God, imploring the assistance of Mary Immaculate, of St. John the Baptist, and Blessed Gerard, to observe poverty, chastity and obedience for one year to whichever superior I may be assigned by the Holy Order, and I intend to make these vows in the spirit of the statutes and laws of the Order of Malta.” After professing his Temporary Vows for at least three years, the candidate may petition the Grand Master for permission to make his Perpetual Religious Profession.

Throughout the formation process, a candidate is assigned a formation master (a Knight of Justice already in Perpetual Vows) and a spiritual adviser (a chaplain of the Order). The candidate generally meets at least monthly with his spiritual adviser. He is required to study scripture and sacred texts, in addition to the Order’s Constitutional Charter, Code, and Regulations. He is required to study the history of the Order. He is required to participate in a private retreat annually of three to eight days. As with other Knights of Justice, he is required to attend Mass daily whenever possible, recite daily the Rosary (particularly when he is unable to attend Mass), recite daily the morning and evening prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours, and satisfy the vows. He is required to participate actively in the charitable works of the Order, to participate annually in the Lourdes pilgrimage, and fulfill any separate obligations, such as additional retreats, imposed by the Subpriory.

The Rite of Perpetual Profession is an elaborate, two-part ritual augmenting the Mass. For Fra’ Jeffrey’s Mass on August 22, Reverend Eric M. Hollas, OSB, the principal chaplain of the Subpriory of Our Lady of Philermo, was the principal celebrant and homilist. His concelebrants included Very Reverend Reginald E. Martin, OP, also a chaplain of the Subpriory, Most Reverend Edward W. Clark, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, Right Reverend Eugene J. Hayes, OPraem, the abbot of St. Michael’s Abbey, several other chaplains of the Order, and Reverend Augustine Puchner, O.Praem., the pastor of St. John the Baptist Church. H.E., the Venerable Bailiff Fra’ Ludwig Hoffman von Rumerstein, the Grand Commander of the Order of Malta, served as the Grand Master’s Delegate.

For his Mass, Fra’ Jeffrey was permitted to select the readings. He chose excerpts from Ezekiel (36:24-28: “I will sprinkle clean water to cleanse you… I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you…”), Paul’s letter to the Colossians (3:5-17: “Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly…”), and Matthew’s Gospel (14:22-33: on Peter’s attempt to walk on water). Following the readings and homily, the chancellor of the Subpriory, Dr. Willa O’Day Olsen, DM, commenced the first part of the Rite by reading the authorization announcing that the Grand Master, upon advice of the Sovereign Council and without objection from the Prelate of the Order, has permitted Fra’ Jeffrey to make his Perpetual Profession.

After Father Hollas blessed the insignia, Fra’ Jeffrey, upon promising to apply himself at all times to the defense of the Church and the Faith and to have particular concern for the poor, dispossessed, orphaned, sick and suffering, formally asked to be counted and enrolled in the Order. He was then presented with a sword and belt and, kneeling, was dubbed by the Grand Commander. That is, the Grand Commander struck Fra’ Jeffrey’s left shoulder with the flat of the sword. As he did so, the Grand Commander said,

The Coat of Arms of Fra’ Jeffrey Dean Littell

A Rosary terminating with the Maltese Cross encircles a larger Maltese Cross that illuminates a shield over Fra’ Jeffrey’s motto, “Per mare, ad astra,” (through the sea, to the stars). The Rosary recalls Fra’ Jeffrey’s devotion to Our Lady of Philermo and his daily prayer that she intercede for the poor and sick throughout the world. The Maltese Cross, in white to signify purity, has eight sides representing the Beatitudes.

The predominant color of the shield is blue, reflecting Fra’ Jeffrey’s passion for the ocean. He has covered over seventeen thousand miles at sea. The white stars represent the countless stars that one sees at night while at sea. In the center of the shield are three roses on a white banner, representing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and recalling, too, the roses at the feet of Saint Bernadette.

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“Although this deed is one of great disgrace for noble men, it will recall to your mind that you have received three blows as a token of your final humiliation in death.”

After receiving the sword, Fra’ Jeffrey was presented with golden spurs. “Just as instruments such as these are used to quicken horses to vigor and swiftness, so you, too, must keep a spur in your heart to urge you towards the virtue and service of God in all your enterprises and endeavors.” Likewise, the placement of the spurs on Fra’ Jeffrey’s feet symbolizes his promise to avoid greed and abhor riches. With this ended the first part of the Rite.

After reciting the Prayers of the Faithful and completing the Communion Rite, the Grand Commander commenced the second part of Fra’ Jeffrey’s Rite of Perpetual Profession, in which Fra’ Jeffrey formally asked “to be counted worthy to enter the Order of Brothers of Holy Religion named after the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem.” When the

Grand Commander confirmed that Fra’ Jeffrey was willing to live in chastity, was not a professed member of any other Religious Order, had no matrimonial obligations, and owed no significant financial debts, Fra’ Jeffrey was invited to make his Perpetual Profession. He did so with deep peace and satisfaction.

“I, Jeffrey Dean Littell, vow and promise to God Almighty, to the Blessed Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of God, and to Saint John the Baptist that, with the perpetual help of God, I will serve with true obedience any superior who is appointed over me by our sacred Order of Religion and by

our Most Eminent Prince and Grand Master. I also vow and promise that I will live henceforth in poverty and chastity.”

The Grand Master confirmed his acceptance of Fra’ Jeffrey’s vows by enrobing him in the habit of the Knights of Justice and presenting him with the Knight of Justice’s stola with its images depicting Christ’s Passion. After all recited the Prayer of the Order, Father Hollas concluded the Mass and Rite of Perpetual Profession with a blessing and dismissal.

Without question, a vocation to the Knights of Justice carries with it certain obligations, but it does not require a Knight of Justice to forsake his family, his professional life, his social relationships, or his avocations. Outside of the work of the Order, Fra’ Jeffrey has two great passions—sailing and photography—both of which he intends to continue to pursue. Fra’ Jeffrey’s love of sailing is evident from his coat of arms. The predominant color is ocean blue. The stars remind him of nights at sea. His motto, *Per Mare, ad Astra*, means “Through the sea, to the stars.” Fra’ Jeffrey has sailed over seventeen thousand miles.

Fra’ Jeffrey developed his passion for photography while studying at USC. Although his teacher is a renowned portrait photographer, Fra’ Jeffrey prefers capturing images of nature. Looking for the right landscape shot, he may spend hours or even days roaming in a desert, on a sea-coast, or through a forest. He readily admits that luck plays a major role in photographs of fauna, especially birds in flight, but the results for him can be magical.

According to Fra’ Jeffrey, devoting quiet time to discerning the wonders of creation only strengthens his commitment to God and the Order.
Sermon Delivered on August 22, 2015 on the Occasion of Fra’ Jeffrey D. Littell’s Profession of Perpetual Vows

by Reverend Eric M. Hollas, OSB

One of the key themes in the human story has been the wish to start over from scratch every now and then. We’ve all had those moments, and biblically we can trace this back to the story of Adam and Eve. The Bible doesn’t tell us what Adam and Eve may have said as the angel escorted them from the Garden, but we can guess what we would have said had we been in their place. “Couldn’t God forgive us just this one time? Couldn’t we have a do-over and erase this from the record?” And yet, whatever Adam and Eve may have thought, it was not to be. And it wasn’t because God was incapable of forgiveness. Rather, sin was now part of the story of Adam and Eve, and they would carry it with them from that day forward.

In the three readings we’ve just heard there is this same desire to start over in life. In Ezekiel 36: 24-28 God tells his people that he will sprinkle clean water upon them and cleanse them from all their iniquities. God will put a new spirit within them, and the end product of this new relationship will be this: God and his people will live in harmony.

The reading from Colossians 3: 5-17 is especially rich in this theme of starting over. The passage begins with a litany of sins which we should shed like worn-out clothing, and instead we should clothe ourselves in the highest of aspirations. And over all this we should put on love. And if we can do that, then the peace of God will reign in our hearts.

And finally, the gospel passage from Saint Matthew 14: 22-33 gives us a very colorful example of a moment of regret. Peter has dared the Lord to allow him to walk on water. He’s tempted the Lord into performing a cheap carnival trick; but instead Jesus turns it into a test of faith. Almost at the last minute Jesus reaches out and pulls Peter out from his own foolishness. And then Jesus lets Peter take his place back in the boat with the rest of the disciples, and he continues the journey.

Today we’re privileged to witness as Frá Jeffrey professes solemn vows as a Knight of Justice in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta. In one sense it’s true that he becomes someone new and enters a state in life where he has not been before. But on the other hand he does not discard the life he has led up to this point. The fact of the matter is, anyone who takes religious vows, or is ordained, or vows themselves to married life brings who they already are to this new relationship. They bring their highest aspirations as well as a history of sin and mistakes that they’ve made along the way. The life they’ve led up to this point is part of the deal, because the Lord has walked with them up to this point. And if sometimes it’s been a crooked road, the Lord has still been there as a silent partner, just as the Lord will continue to walk with us from this day forward.

That journey with God, that pilgrimage of life, is the nature of Christian life, and it’s at the core of a vocation in the Order of Malta. But by their very nature, vows are a public expression of where we hope the Lord will lead and direct our lives. Vows also point to the values and aspirations with which we intend to clothe ourselves as we travel forward from this day.

And such is the case for Frá Jeffrey today, and for all who would commit themselves to the Lord and to the service of his people. Later in this rite Frá Jeffrey will receive the habit of the Order, and it’s important to remember that it’s not meant to be a robe of honor. Rather, it’s a sign of the commitment to serve the sick and the poor. It’s the badge of how he hopes to live his life in identification with all those suffering souls whom God has called to be his own. And in doing that, he strives to be forgetful of himself, as the daily prayer of the Order reminds us.

And finally, from this day on, he takes the title of “Frá.” Once again, this is not meant to earn a higher place at the table of the Lord. When we address people as “father” or “abbot” or “brother” or “sister,” it’s never meant to exalt them above others. Rather, it reminds those people — and all the rest of us — of the Christian way of life to which God calls each of us.

But today’s rite is also a reminder that neither Frá Jeffrey nor the rest of us are yet at the heavenly banquet. We are all still on pilgrimage, and so it is that today we are at a profession of religious vows — not at a canonization. Today, as professed and as Christians, we bring ourselves, warts and all, and we present ourselves to the Lord. Today is yet one more step on our long pilgrimage in search of the Lord. So let us pray that as Jesus reached out to pull Saint Peter to safety, so we will have the vision to see that the Lord reaches out to us as well. And together may we walk along the paths of the Lord, confident that the Lord walks with us.

Fr. Hollas is a chaplain of the Western Association and of the Subpriory of Our Lady of Philermo. The Subpriory is a separate body of the Order, led by a Regent who reports directly to the Grand Commander. The Subpriory of Our Lady of Philermo is comprised of members of the Western Association who are Knights of Justice or Knights or Dames of Magistral Grace who, after a formation period, have made an additional promise of Obedience.
Committing to the Order: 
New Members Invested on June 26, 2015

by Molly G. Brenner, DM and Jeanne M. Lyons O’Brien, DM

At the extreme western side of the nave of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, above the baptistery, hangs the internationally renowned tapestry designed by Santa Barbara artist John Nava depicting John baptizing Christ in the Jordan River. Forty-five feet high and fifteen feet wide, it is an image of humility and humanity, of a seed being planted and watered in the desert. The Baptism of Christ Cathedral Tapestry reminds us of the role that John played in launching Christ’s public ministry. As the patron saint of the Order, John similarly launches us into public ministry. The tapestry sends a fitting message to members of the Order. Because we have been called to serve Christ, we best begin on our knees, fully mindful of our humility, and there we renew our commitment to nurture the Faith and serve the poor and sick.

Forty-five feet high and fifteen feet wide, it is an image of humility and humanity, of a seed being planted and watered in the desert.

On June 25 and 26, 2015, having completed a two-year period of discernment required of all candidates, nineteen men and thirteen women were invested as Knights and Dames of Magistral Grace of the Order of Malta, and two priests were invested as chaplains. The candidates and their proposers convened at three o’clock on Thursday, June 25, at Our Savior Catholic Church adjacent to the University of Southern California, consecrated in December of 2012. The new building has been described as a lavish Romanesque church with a seventy-six-foot bell tower, a gold-leaf apse and
eight large, stained glass windows depicting the beatitudes. The artisans of Rolf & Associates Design Co. fabricated the church’s many liturgical appointments including its sculpture, sacred paintings, carvings, glasswork and more.

The Reverend Monsignor Steven D. Otellini, the Western Association’s principal chaplain, officiated at the Vespers Service, assisted by Jeanne M. Lyons O’Brien, DM, the Western Association’s membership chair, Wade C Hughan, KM, the regent of the Subpriory of Our Lady of Philermo, and Reverend Eric M. Hollas, OSB, the Subpriory’s principal chaplain.

After an opening hymn invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit upon all assembled, Monsignor Otellini began the Vigil with a prayer. Mr. Hughan then reminded the candidates of the significance of the Order’s insignia, including the Order’s distinctive eight-point, white cross recalling the commitment Christ made to humanity through the crucifixion and the beatitudes he enjoined on the faithful. Following Mr. Hughan’s words, Mrs. O’Brien reflected on the Promise of Fidelity that each candidate would publicly proclaim at the following day’s Investiture Rite. The Promise is a life-long commitment to the Faith, the Order, and the Order’s works of nurturing the Faith and serving the poor and sick. That commitment will require ongoing sacrifices of time, talent and treasure, as members of the Order work together locally and abroad in Lourdes and elsewhere. It will require members to remain faithful in times of trial.

Following Mrs. O’Brien’s reflection, Fr. Hollas formerly invited each candidate to examine his or her conscience and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Nearly a dozen priests assisted with confessions. During the confessions, Fra’ Jeffrey Littell led the rest of the assembly in a recitation of the Rosary.

After a short break, the Vigil continued with Vespers of the Solemnity of Saint John the Baptist, with the assembly chanting the psalms and canticles antiphonally. Through Psalms 113 and 146 and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the cantor recalled that Elizabeth, an elderly woman who had been childless, gave birth to John, the greatest of men born to a woman, who prepared the way for the Lord who lifts up the lowly and redeemed us. “Put no trust in princes,” rather, “Give praise to the Lord.”

Entrance for the Rite of Investiture, June 26, 2015, Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral, Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of Balfour Photography.

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Following the reading and responsory, Monsignor Otellini temporarily suspended the Vespers Service to conduct the Robing Ceremony, during which a proposer formally placed the Order’s Robe onto his or her candidate. “Receive this robe emblazoned with the white Cross, white that signifies purity. You are to carry this Cross over your heart and to keep it unsullied, without any sort of stain or blemish.” Monsignor Otellini explained each of the Beatitudes and the four virtues required of each knight and dame of the Order: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. “Enrobe yourself with these four virtues and make them your own.” After being enrobed, the candidates joined the assembly in reciting the Prayer of the Order. The Robing Ceremony completed, Monsignor Otellini concluded the Vespers Service with the Magnificat, the intercessions, and a closing prayer.

On Friday, June 26, the candidates were formerly invested into the Order in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. H.E. Joseph F. Contadino, KM, the Western Association’s president, Richard A. Grant, Jr., KM, the chancellor, Mrs. O’Brien and Monsignor Otellini led the Investiture Rite. Following a blessing of the insignia, Mr. Contadino, as president, invited the candidates to recite together the Solemn Oath of Fidelity. In it, each candidate declared him or herself ready “as a member of the Order of Malta to care for our lords, the poor and sick, with all my strength and ability.”

Each candidate declared him or herself ready “to obey the Constitution, the Statutes, and the Rule of the Order, and to fulfill with fidelity and diligence whatever the Order and my superiors impose on me.” Mr. Contadino then formerly and individually invested each new knight and dame into the Order and presented each with the Order’s insignia. He then invested the Most Reverend Kevin William Vann, Bishop of Orange, and the Reverend Monsignor John Joseph Talesfore, the pastor of St. Matthew Parish in San Mateo. In addition to making the Promise of Fidelity, each promised “to nurture the spiritual lives of the Members of the Order.” Mr. Contadino then concluded the Investiture Rite, asking the assembly to reflect on the promises made this day. During the reflection, the Order’s choir sung the Prayer of Being by Mark Hayes.

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Men and women admitted into the Order, June 26, 2015, Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral, Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of Balfour Photography.
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Immediately following the Investiture Rite, the Most Reverend Edward W. Clark, DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, Conventual Chaplain ad honorem of the Order, offered the Mass. Numerous chaplains of the Order and other priests concelebrated the Mass. Members of the Order participated in the choir. Alma R. Arrendondo, DM, proclaimed the first reading from Isaiah, and Dr. William M. Costigan, KM, proclaimed the reading from the Acts of the Apostle. Deacon Thomas F. Kelly, KM, proclaimed the Gospel from Luke describing the birth of John the Baptist. In his homily, Bishop Clark congratulated the Order’s new members, and concluded by urging them “to get to work.”

Investees expressed great joy at the culmination of their long journey towards becoming knights and dames. One newly invested knight remarked, “The discernment I experienced over the course of eighteen months was invaluable in my preparation for investiture. Prior to that I was reluctant, not understanding why our Lord would choose me. Fellow dames and knights assured me I was not alone in my initial reluctance. They said, ‘Just believe; you have been called.’” A newly invested dame commented, “At the Investiture Vigil, the Regent’s meditation on the symbolism of our insignia and robes, together with the antiphonal chanting of Vespers, encapsulated, for me, the religious nature of the Order, to which I had long felt a vocation. Having read the history of the Order and its spirituality, the heaviness of the cape which I was given reinforced, in a visceral way, the weight of the life-long commitment I was about to make, filling me with awe, as well as doubts of my own worthiness. After making my commitment and receiving the insignia at the Investiture the following day, however, I was filled with

After making the commitment...I was filled
with the joy of becoming a member of a
wonderful, world-wide and ancient family.
A Commitment To Serving the Poor and Sick: The Western Association’s Hospitaller Projects

by Thomas Pieronek, KM

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul proclaims the unity of the Church, one in Christ, but comprised of individuals with different talents that build up the body. He writes:

*May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life. Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love, and experience this love, which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself. To him, whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, world without end. Amen. (Eph. 3:17-21.)*

Paul urges us to work together with kindness and compassion. Charity, he says, must be the root of our lives. If it is, Paul assures us, great things can happen.

Before one is admitted into the Order, the president candidly tells him or her, “Admission into our Order, which you ask, belongs only to those who commit themselves to follow the banner of Christ.” In response, each new member promises, “I declare myself ready as a member of the Order of Malta to care for our lords, the poor and sick, with all my strength and ability.”

For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2014, our members contributed nearly $1.7 million to the Western Association’s annual appeal. Of this, about $296,000 was allocated to the Lourdes Pilgrimage, allowing the Order to bring fifty-one malades and their companions to the Grotto. The Order’s free clinics in Oakland and Los Angeles, through which the sick without insurance receive basic medical attention and referrals to necessary care, each received $155,000. The Order’s relatively new program at St. James Mental Health Center in Seattle received $25,000.

Our members’ generous donations to the annual appeal also supported some of the Order’s international works. Twenty thousand dollars went to CRUDEM, the Order’s Sacre Cœur Kipital in Haiti. Fifteen thousand went to the Order’s medical clinics in Lebanon. The Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem received $80,000, and $75,000 went to Malteser America to be used for assistance throughout North and South America.

The remaining $873,000 was allocated among sixty local projects spread throughout the Western Association. Several of those projects assist the elderly poor, such as our members’ work with the Little Sisters of the Poor in San Pedro and Oakland, with the Carmelite Sisters at Santa Teresita in Duarte, at Mercy Retirement Center in Oakland, at St. John of God Care Center in Los Angeles, in the wellness ministries at St. John the Baptist in Costa Mesa, and at John XXIII Service Center in San Jose. Several projects—in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Monterrey, Oakland, Orange County, Phoenix, San Francisco, San Jose, and Seattle—provide food for the homeless. A project in Phoenix serves children and youth. Several projects focus on the needs of women.

*May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life.*

But our members’ generous financial support measures only part of our commitment. No local project receives the Order’s financial support unless the Order’s members personally volunteer there, working hands-on and together to serve the poor and sick. For the year ended June 30, 2015, our members and volunteers served 51,900 hours working hands-on in the sixty local projects that receive financial grants from the Western Association. In many of our locations, we have multiple opportunities to serve every week. As Paul promised, together our members can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine. For that and for your ongoing commitment, as your association hospitaller, I am truly thankful. If you have any questions about the schedule of projects in your area, please contact me or your local leaders, or visit the Calendar of Events page on the Western Association’s website at www.orderofmaltausawestern.org. ♦
In 1939, after the outbreak of World War II, the British people were in the midst of a terrible time and experiencing all the horrors that make war such a devastating thing. With morale sinking, the Ministry of Information was asked to design posters that would boost the spirits of the British people and the nation as a whole. Generally the posters would be bold in color, bearing the crown of King George VI, and marked with a saying or expression that was intended to instill hope or confidence in such uncertain, unsteady times. One of the posters offered a statement that has since become an expression so characteristic of the English people. On a field of red, the poster simply announced, “Keep Calm and Carry On.”
Keep calm and carry on. In some unique way these words speak to me today about what it means to be committed as we live out our lives as Christians who follow Jesus, and as members of the Knights and Dames of Malta who dedicate ourselves to serving our lords the poor and sick. Keep calm and carry on. Don’t get lost in distraction and confusion. Don’t let the tidal waves of challenge and change trouble your souls. Just stay steady and do what you are called to do! And so, carrying on is one aspect of what commitment is all about.

The concept of commitment is quite meaningful to me personally as I celebrate this year, my fiftieth anniversary of professing vows as a Passionist religious. It was fifty years ago that I knelt before one of our Passionist missionaries and professed vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, as well as a special fourth vow typical of all Passionists—a promise to do everything I can to keep alive in the hearts of the faithful the “memoria passionis,” the memory of the sacred Passion and death of Jesus, our Crucified Lord. It strikes me now, looking back over all these years, that maybe one thing I did do, in spite of all the changes, challenges, and detours, was simply to carry on, to just carry on day by day! This is, I hope, one way that I have sought to persevere in my vocation—to carry on. (I am not so sure about the keeping calm part however!)

It seems to me that this is what commitment is all about. We are all personally called and blessed by God with an amazing faith. We are also asked to live out that faith, with which we have been entrusted, and to make a difference in the lives of others. To be committed means that we realize we have been entrusted with something profound and that we are sent forth to carry that treasure, Jesus the Lord, into the marketplace, changing lives and bringing hope, love, and encouragement. Such a task is not easy, but, as a good friend pointed out, St. Thomas Aquinas would also suggest that to have true commitment, one must also have a great deal of fortitude!

This past October, a delegation of Knights and Dames of Malta conducted another Guadalupe pilgrimage, embarking for Mexico City, joining brother and sister knights and dames from Mexico, and going to what is, perhaps, the most sacred ground in all of Mexico, el Tepeyac, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It was in this place that the first church was built by Bishop Fray Juan de Zumarraga after the humble Indian peasant, Juan Diego, revealed to the bishop the wondrous image miraculously imprinted upon his tilma, a simple apron covering his clothing. Through a series of five apparitions, our Blessed Mother revealed to an entire nation that they were loved by God and so very precious to her as a loving mother in spite of all their suffering and mistreatment at the hands of soldiers and opportunists who came to their shores from supposedly faith-filled lands. Not surprisingly the Guadalupe story evokes an abundance of examples of what it means to be committed to our Faith and to live it out fully.

Like the humble San Juan Diego, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a self-effacing servant who desired nothing more than to be the Lord’s handmaid. Mary’s act of commitment came at the time of the angel Gabriel’s visit, inviting her to enter into the most profound mystery of all, the Incarnation. Without comprehending what such an invitation could possibly mean, Mary pronounced her great fiat and began her own personal journey of carrying on day by day, never looking back, only trusting and living out those unforgettable words, “Be it done to me according to thy word.”

And Mary, who was told by the angel Gabriel not to be afraid, did the same when she spoke intimate words to the bewildered Indian peasant, San Juan Diego, words meant not only for him but for all the people of Mexico:

“Am I not here, I who am your Mother?
Are you not under my shadow and protection?
Am I not the source of your joy?
Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms?
Do you need something more?
Let nothing else worry you or disturb you.”

Virgen de Guadalupe, Madre (Our Lady of Guadalupe).
Life-long Commitments

It seems to me, Juan Diego would have much to worry about when he was asked by this never-before-seen Indian princess to go to Tenochtitlan, seek an audience with the bishop himself, and tell him that a church was to be built on the little hill of Tepeyac, a place where ancient worshipping of the sun and moon had taken place for generations before. And yet, with the very first miracle of the roses on that wintery morning, it all unfolded just as la Virgencita surely knew that it would!

From these Guadalupe events, all of us today can learn something very important about commitment and the steadfast living out of our Catholic faith. First of all, we discover that commitment begins with trust and surrender. Just as Mary surrendered to God’s plan with her fiat, and Juan Diego did the very same as he climbed the hill picking winter roses and then making his way to the bishop’s residence, we are invited to trust and surrender in very much the same way. Our commitment to the credo of the Order of the Knights of Malta, serving and caring for our lords, the poor and sick, begins with an awareness that it is Jesus himself who invites us to say “yes” to this great apostolate and ministry. For our part we are called to surrender to a divine will greater than our own, simply saying, as did Jesus in the garden, “Thy will be done.”

And, as has been enunciated above, commitment means that we persevere and carry on. Challenges may arise, even moments of discord or disappointment. Though an order in the Church and blessed by God’s own grace, the Order of Malta will always have obstacles to overcome and challenges to deal with. Nonetheless, inspired by the courage of the humble Maiden of Nazareth and the heretofore unknown peasant of Tepeyac, we too must follow through and persevere in the various missions entrusted to us by our Lord and by the Order of Malta itself.

It may be on a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in a city clinic ministering to the infirm, while serving the hungry and poor in a food line on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes or in whatever place the Lord, through his Blessed Mother, invites us to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to bring his love and mercy to those in need. This is the great mission entrusted to us all and it is for us, then, to remain committed or, in other words, to “Keep calm and carry on.”

Fr. Brennan is a chaplain of the Western Association. This year he celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of professing his vows as a Passionist religious. In addition to his many services to the Order of Malta, Fr. Brennan is a spiritual advisor in residence at the St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat and Conference Center in Detroit.

Anniversary

Once the dames and knights were in place, the twenty-four-member cathedral choir processed in, singing Dona Nobis Pacem. The liturgical procession followed with Archbishop Scicluna and twelve priests, including several of the Order’s visiting chaplains. Imam ElSadi and representatives of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre and the alliance Orders of Malta were honored guests. The first reading from the prophet Micah foretold the birth of the savior, the future ruler of Israel, “whose origin is from of old, from ancient times,” from Bethlehem-Ephrathah, a place “too small to be among the class of Judah.” (cf. Micah 5, 1-4) In his homily, the Archbishop applied this theme—something very small producing something great—to the Island of Malta and, indeed, the Order.

Notwithstanding their small sizes, the Island of Malta and the Order of Malta fended off the Sultan’s warriors in 1565, thereby changing the course of history. From a small hospital in Jerusalem, the Order of Malta grew into a worldwide humanitarian religious order employing tens of thousands of workers and volunteers to serve the poor and the sick. The Order was, in many ways, the precursor to the modern European Union. Today, the Archbishop noted, the Island of Malta and the Order of Malta are being called to give witness to the Roman Catholic faith by tenaciously persevering in the cause of peace. After the Te Deum was sung and the Mass ended, the Knights of Justice and High Charges went to the crypt below St. John’s Co-Cathedral to pray for peace at the tomb of Grand Master de la Valette.

The 450th anniversary celebration demonstrated vividly that the Island of Malta and the Order of Malta share a glorious past draped in the full panoply of human experience—suffering, perseverance, poverty, wealth, life, and death. But it also demonstrated a shared commitment to facing in faith all current and future obstacles that life will bring.
## Necrology of the Western Association

**June 1 to October 31, 2015**

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