



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA
TO THE HOLY SEE**

Friday, 12 January 2001

Mr Ambassador,

1. With great pleasure I accept the Letters by which the Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous words you have addressed to me as you are about to assume the office entrusted to you, and I gladly offer you a cordial welcome.

Through you I would like to extend a respectful greeting to His Most Eminent Highness Fra' Andrew Bertie and to the Council which assists him in the governance of the order. I also extend my gratitude to all the members of the praiseworthy association you represent and to their respective families, assuring each one of my constant goodwill and my appreciation of their active witness to the Christian faith and to Gospel charity.

Today's meeting is being held a few days after the close of the Great Jubilee, during which the order's members did all they could to assist the pilgrims, generously dedicating resources and energy to meet their needs. Therefore, through you I would like to express my deep gratitude to the many volunteers and workers of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta for such attentive service.

2. After the enriching spiritual experience of the Jubilee, the Church is preparing to continue her journey. She advances into the third millennium, setting out anew from Christ, eager to bear witness to his love among all people.

It is also a great comfort for me to have heard you say, Mr Ambassador, that this Maltese institution, in fidelity to its charism of *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*, wholeheartedly joins in the Church's programme.

In view of a humanity thirsting for truth and solidarity, how can we fail to note the timely union and almost fusion of these two goals which characterize the distinguished mission of the Knights of the white octagonal cross? In my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, I noted: "Now is the time for a new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters" (n. 50).

As witnesses and ministers of God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4: 8, 16), the Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta are called to continue their activity as Good Samaritans with renewed dedication in the new millennium, ever ready to care for the wounds of man, to pour on them the oil of compassion and the balm of charity.

3. For over nine centuries, your praiseworthy order has always been characterized by a special bond with the See of Peter. My Predecessor Leo XIII recalled this in his Apostolic Letter *Solemne semper* by which he re-established the Grand Mastership of the Order of Malta in 1879. After him various Pontiffs have praised your sovereign institute for its constant and loyal harmony with the Apostolic See. This is how it has worked and continues to work, in dialogue with every culture, in order to help promote the civilization of love and peace. Its presence in the international context likewise avails itself of a special constitutive "Charter", which is based on the fundamental values of mercy and charity that have continually inspired the order through the ages.

These are the features, Mr Ambassador, which distinguish the illustrious association you represent. Fidelity to the Gospel ideal and to Peter's Successor throughout its history has cost many members of the order much blood and today still adorns your standard with honour. In the contemporary context, when impersonal mechanisms of great economic and technological changes are helping to enrich those who already possess the greatest fortunes, I ask you to intensify your efforts according to your possibilities. Continue to strive for a humanization and sharing of the resources that God intended in equal measure for everyone. In the presence of the harsh severity of "heartless" and "ruthless" competition (*Rom 1: 31*), may your action, never discouraged or restrained by any hindrance, continue to be that of *Hospitallers*, that is, men and women of faith with hearts full of mercy, generous and fearless in the defence of the causes and rights of the poor.

4. Mr Ambassador, as you begin your mission, I would like to assure your entire order, which you represent here, of my sentiments of esteem and affection. I sincerely hope that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta will continue to shine, as is its tradition, for its authentic and life-giving spirit of Christian charity, which can relieve, heal and rescue from poverty needy bodies no less than

souls, which are often in even worse straits.

With these sentiments, I invoke an abundance of divine graces on the Prince and Grand Master, and on all the Knights and Dames of the Order, as well as on you and the mission you are beginning today, and I confirm these wishes with the Apostolic Blessing that I cordially impart to you.

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