



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA**

Thursday, 24 June 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. On the feast of St John the Baptist, your patron saint, you have wished to gather for a solemn celebration in St Peter's Basilica. I extend a welcome to each of you and I greet the entire Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which in these days has been holding its General Chapter.

I particularly greet the Prince and Grand Master, Fra Andrew Bertie, the Cardinal Patron, Pio Laghi, the Prelate, Bishop Donato de Bonis, and the Grand Chancellor and dignitaries of the Sovereign Council which has just been elected. I wish everyone great success in their service of God, the Church and the Order.

For over 900 years your distinguished Order has offered the world a witness faithful to its motto: "*Tuitio fidei, obsequium pauperum*", which corresponds to the Gospel command "*to love God and neighbour*".

2. You are convinced that defending and bearing witness to the faith is the basis of evangelization, and you would like to make your contribution so that the Gospel message will also illumine the now imminent third millennium of the Christian era. To this end, you feel obliged to express your fidelity to Christ in deeds, by a loving witness which becomes service to your brothers and sisters, especially the poor: what you rightly call the "*obsequium pauperum*".

This love of the least ones is effectively shown by your concern for the sick, the suffering, earthquake victims and refugees. It defines your religious and sovereign Order as a valid structure which shoulders the burden of human suffering.

Remain steadfast in your fidelity to Christ, to the Church and to the poor. Always remember Jesus' words: "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*" (Jn 15:12), and again: "*As you did it to one of the least of*

these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

As I hope that you will intensify your praiseworthy efforts, I implore for each of you the motherly protection of your heavenly patronness, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Philéremo, who has always accompanied you in your homeland and in exile. May you also be sustained by the Order's holy protector, St John the Baptist, the herald of Christ's entry into world history.

With these sentiments I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to the Grand Master, to everyone here and to the entire Sovereign Military Order of Malta, especially to the sick and the suffering whom you help in every part of the world.

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