

The Spirituality of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Christine M. Fletcher M.A. (Oxon.) Ph.D.

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Your Excellencies, Honorable civic leaders, Reverend Monsignors, Very Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and religious, Knights and Ladies, ladies and gentlemen.

I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the spirituality of being a Knight or Lady in the Equestrian OHS. Our Lieutenant has a great elevator speech that tells people the mission of our order — to support the Christians of the Holy Land with our presence, our prayer and our financial support—a succinct and memorable way of remembering why we are here. But how does this form our spirituality?

All of us were active practicing Catholics before we were members of the order, and so we have our own spirituality. A healthy spirituality does two things, it directs us to our Creator God, and to action for our brothers and sisters. This fulfills the great commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22: 37-38 NRSV). If a spirituality is only about my own soul, and doesn’t lead me to God and to my neighbor, I am on the wrong path.

For Christians, all our varied spiritualities are based on the Incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. As we progress in the spiritual life, we learn to see Christ’s face more clearly in the faces of our neighbor, and we are moved beyond the prison of our own desires into the freedom of the children of God.

Becoming a Knight or Lady of the Holy Sepulchre adds a new dimension to this journey. Our order has a particular gift which enriches the lives of all of the members and the people we serve. I hope that what I am presenting today will help you see how the vows you took or are going to take as a Knight or Lady of the Order will help you deepen your relationship

with the Lord, especially through a relationship with the Christians of the Holy Land.

The first aspect of being a Knight or Lady of our Order is a special relationship with the Church of Jerusalem. Our order exists to support the Patriarchate; when we go on pilgrimage, the Patriarch honors us with the Pilgrim Shell. We are his partners in sustaining a living Christian presence in the Holy Land.

We have a special relationship with Church in Jerusalem, and with the Holy Land itself. This aspect of the Order, the pilgrimages we take to the Holy sites, having Mass in the Holy Sepulchre, is an affirmation of the Incarnation: that Christ was truly Man and truly God. This is a witness to something our age would rather forget. Many are happy with Jesus as a great moral teacher, but not as God, who demands a response from us. But our God took flesh. Dorothy Sayers wrote about the Incarnation:

Christianity is not the only religion that has found their best explanation of human life in the idea of an incarnate and suffering god. ...But in most theologies, the god is supposed to have suffered and died in some remote and mythical period of pre-history. The Christian story, on the other hand, starts off briskly in St Matthew's account with a place and a date: When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King.' St Luke, still more practically and prosaically, pins the thing down by reference to a piece of government finance. God, he says, was made man in the year when Caesar Augustus was taking a census in connexion with a scheme of taxation. (*Creed or Chaos*, 2)

Going to the Holy Land brings home the astounding claim of the Christian religion: God, GOD, has put on flesh, emptied himself and walked among us. In Bethlehem we see his birthplace; in Nazareth, the place he grew to maturity, and where, when he returned with his message, the neighbors who had watched him grow up, tried to kill him.

We sit on the Mount of the Beatitudes and see the Sea of Galilee, the hills around us. If we are lucky enough to go in a March after a wet winter, we see the lilies of the field, who toil not, neither do they spin, yet outshine Solomon in all his glory.

We go up to Jerusalem, passing through Jericho. Do we recognize our blindness and ask the Lord for sight? We see the desert places, and a line of green where a hidden spring gives life. Suddenly the psalms about God

leading me to green pastures and beside the still waters take on a new meaning.

We see the Kidron valley, and walk from the Chapel of the Our Father, past *Dominus Flevit*, to the garden of Gethsemane. About this place Jerome Murphy O'Connor wrote:

On his way up the Kidron Valley, he could not have avoided seeing the tombs in the bright moonlight. Awareness of the imminence of death struck him with great force: he had to stop and be alone for a moment because a decision had to be made. His enemies would come from the city, but ten minutes fast walking would bring him to the top of the Mount of Olives with the open desert before him. Escape would be easy, he could postpone the inevitable. Only in prayer could he find the answer to the agonizing question of whether to stand or retreat. (*The Holy Land*, 128)

Standing in this place, we begin to see Christ's true saving work in his constant trust in and obedience to the Father.

We go to St. Peter Gallicantu, we walk on the pavement where Christ himself walked on the night of his trial. We go into the depths of the Church and experience the darkness and loneliness he suffered for us.

We walk along the Via Dolorosa, praying the Stations of the Cross, watching the crowds ignoring us. It brings home what the passion really involved: political machinations, plots, mobs stirred up to violence, a venal high priest and corrupt political leader. When we are safely home in our parishes, it is easy to forget what a dirty business it was, judicially murdering God (another Sayers phrase).

We enter the tomb. There is a challenge for orthodoxy: do we really believe that Jesus died? It is a great test of our faith. I believe, help my unbelief.

As Knights and Ladies, we witness to this scandal, that God has put on flesh and dwelt among us, in this time and place.

Jerusalem, and particularly the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is known in Greek Orthodoxy as the Center of the Universe. They have it right. This place is the true center of the universe, the point in time and space where everything changed, when heaven and earth were reconciled and the Kingdom began. We guard this place and witness to its significance.

The church itself houses a great variety of Christians. Sadly, the witness we give as Christians is often flawed, even sometimes by fistfights in

the church itself between members of different Churches. Our spirituality should lead us to reconciliation, to pray and work for peace not only between the Palestinians and the Israelis, but between the Christians in the Holy Land.

Our mission is not only to guard the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, it is to support the living stones of the Church in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the People of God who are there, trying to raise their families, make a living, and practice their faith amid difficult circumstances, at the mercy of local and world-politics.

To look at this aspect of our spirituality, supporting the living stones, I am using a framework from *Living Without Enemies*, a work by Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells, formerly of Duke Divinity School, now Vicar of St. Martin in the Fields, London. *Living without Enemies* is the story of the engagement of Christians in Raleigh, NC, where Duke is located, with the violence in their city. As such it is particularly appropriate for us, who are working in an area of the world where violence is the people's everyday experience.

Dr. Wells asks us to move past our comfortable understanding of ethics and spirituality and begin to live without enemies. To do this he offers some categories which I am going to use: 'working for', 'working with', and 'being with'. Using this framework will help us come to a deeper understanding of the spirituality of being a Knight or Lady of the Holy Sepulchre.

Working for

Working for is our default setting. Many of us spend most of our lives in this way, we work for our family, for our company, for our parish, and for our charities. We are skilled and talented people who have used those talents for the service of others, and that is right and good. It is part of being a good steward of the gifts God has given us and of our vocation as laity in the world.

Working for is the essence of the professions: the lawyer, the doctor, the engineer works for the client, or the patient. They supply expertise and knowledge the client does not have but needs. They fulfill those needs because they have a specialized knowledge of how to help. Often times people who are working for others have little or no direct contact with them, air traffic controllers for example. They are working for all of us, even though they have no personal contact with the passengers in the planes or living on the flight path.

One characteristic of the working for relationship is that there is an inequality: the lawyer knows more about the law, the doctor about the human body and illness than the client. We accept this difference, indeed it is of the essence of this relationship: that is why we are in their office in the first place.

However, the lack of relationship, or the limited nature of the relationship, has its downsides. We can forget about the people that we are working for. We all know of humanitarians who loved humanity but hated actual people. Or doctors who treat 'the gall bladder in 203'. Working for engenders a problem-solution mentality. Instead of a relationship, we have a transaction. This may get the client out of our offices quickly and with good, sound, advice, but we have not had the relationship we could have had with them.

By its very nature the inequality sets up a helper/victim relationship which may serve the helpers well, and do many good things for the 'victim.' It is not, though, the best relationship, and we should remember that.

When we move into work for justice and peace and for charity, it becomes even more challenging. As members of this Order, we are tempted to bring the problem-solution mentality with us. We want to make a difference, to change the unjust situation, to help the people of the Holy Land. That is why we join this Order. Yet, that is not the major purpose of the Order, nor is there any realistic hope of our doing that in anything but the very long term. There is nothing in that important mission of prayer, pilgrimage and financial support, that involves solving the political, economic, and social problems of the Holy Land.

We may find this frustrating for deep cultural reasons. We are a nation of pragmatists. We do something when there is a problem. We have a 'can do' spirit that is one of the best parts of our national culture. We also are a pioneer people who are not afraid of new things. All of us (except for any Native Americans) are here because we or one of our ancestors was fed up with the status quo and struck out for a new country and a new life. We have kept that spirit. When things are a problem, we get up and move to a new place. Staying where one is hated, persecuted and reviled is not the American way. When I was teaching our troops who had served in Bosnia, the question I constantly heard was 'why didn't these people move?' Many Bosnians did, of course, and are proud, can-do, problem-solving Americans today.

This drive is a good thing, and should be encouraged. But it should not blind us to the reality of the world. We will never solve all problems; in fact as we solve problems, we create new ones demanding even greater efforts. The problem-solution mentality is based on the lie that we are in control. We are not.

As Christians we need to reorient ourselves to the basics of our faith: God did not promise us that things would be perfect, he promised that they would be redeemed. Our liturgy celebrates the bloody, painful execution of the one truly innocent man. We cannot think that life is meant to be without pain and suffering. We must hear our Lord when he tells us to take up our Cross.

Our drive and determination to make the world a better place needs to be channeled a different way. We have a larger concern than the political, economic and social problems in the Holy Land looked at solely as problems to be solved. We see the people of the Holy Land, Muslims, Jews, Christians, non-believers, as our brothers and sisters. We need to imitate Jesus and be with people. Remember, Emmanuel means God *with* us. So instead of working *for* we work *with* the people of the Holy Land.

A way to illustrate the difference between working for and working with is the doctor: does he treat the gall bladder in 203, or does he treat Mrs. Symons? The first is a working for relationship, the second a working with relationship. Many doctors today are frustrated because the pressures of medical practice do not give them the time they need to cultivate the relationships they want to have with their patients, because they know that they will be better physicians, and the patients will be better cared for in a partnership. The difference between the two is what Catholic Social Teaching calls solidarity. When we are working with, we recognize the other as a fellow human being, and recognize them as our equal.

This model of working with, and recognizing the people as equal partners rather than someone who needs our 'help' (as if we didn't need their help) is changing development work. Georgetown University is doing a large medical project in south Asia. Their first step was not the standard needs assessment of statistics about illness, but developing relationships with the villagers in the area the project targeted. They listened to the villagers and heard what they saw as needs, rather than imposing a 'solution' to the wrong problem.

In the Order, we give up control. We work with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and trust that they know their people, and that they have a better idea of the needs than we do. Our Grand Magisterium works with the Patriarch to see that the money we raise is used wisely and well, and for the purposes we gave it. We, as members, trust in both the Patriarch and his staff and in our own Grand Magisterium. We give up control.

Giving up control requires the humility to admit that we do not know best. This humility is the basic requirement for a spirituality. The Rule of St Benedict describes humility as a ladder. We ascend to love by increasing our humility. When we are working with, we have moved from being the expert with answers to a real brother and sister, who knows that in a family everything is not perfect, but the relationship endures forever.

At the same time, with our financial support we are doing more than simply funding schools and clinics, or apartments for young families. We are ensuring that the sacred places of the Holy Land are home to Christians who stay there for us.

Preserving the sites without the living stones would be to turn the sites into museums: venerable historically, but not the living Body of Christ today. For that we need the people, who have lived in that land and kept the faith. Our financial support is more like sending a check to the family member who is having a hard time than sending money to a charity to support 'the needy.'

As a spiritual practice it builds humility and gratitude in us, if we let it. We fulfill Paul's command to 'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2 NRSV). This humility and obedience is tested, as the situation never seems to get better. In fact, for many members, things in the Holy Land now are much worse than they were when they first joined, before the Second Intifada.

We may ask ourselves if our work is of use. Why are we educating all these Catholics to be unemployed? We are in fact making it possible for many Palestinians to emigrate, and yet we are asking others to stay. I find this a particular challenge, but now see that I am slipping back into the problem-solution mentality. I need to move not only to working with, but to the even harder call of **being with**.

Being with means that the relationship is primary; the emphasis is on being not on doing. It involves really looking at the other person, seeing them as the gift of God they are. Dr Wells uses the movie *The English Patient*

to explain this. If you do not know the movie, the crux is that the heroine is badly injured in a place three days journey from Cairo. Her lover must decide whether to stay with her, or to attempt a dangerous journey to get help which may or may not be available and may or may not arrive in time. This encapsulates the difference between being and doing; they are responses to different concerns. If you think the worst thing is death, then **doing** something looks like the right choice. If, however, you think that isolation is the worst, then **being** with the beloved is the right choice.

Here we enter the depth of the Christian mystery. For the Christian death is not the issue. For the Christian life is changed, not ended, at death. The Christian sees not death but isolation as the primary concern, because isolation from our brothers and sisters is isolation from God. Isolation, however, haunts us as long as we are on earth.

We, who serve a God of Love, must end this isolation; we must be with those in our lives. Being present is the beginning of any true vocation to love. Many of us have experienced times when there were too many long days at the office, too many meetings at night, and too much time away from our home. Our kids miss us, even if they don't talk to us when we are home. We need to be present there for them. As Knights and Ladies, it means we must be present to the Christians in the Holy Land. This is why we emphasize pilgrimage. It is not just seeing the Holy Places; it is meeting the living stones, being present with them, letting ourselves feel their suffering.

Being with means opening ourselves to others in the way Jesus did: no one is the enemy. Everyone is a person worthy of love and attention. The Muslims, Jews, and Christians are all our brothers and sisters. Injustices will still abound, people will still be difficult but God gives us everything we need to be with another person. Dr. Wells warns us, though, that 'If you are going to change the world, you have to be willing for the world to change you.' (63)

Being with is presence, presence that enters into another's suffering, letting ourselves feel it, knowing that we cannot 'solve' this. It means rejecting the idea that some are enemies, and recognizing that God has no enemies.

The archetypal *working for* approach is to remove or disable or even destroy enemies on others' behalf, or at least to limit the damage enemies can do. The characteristic *working with* approach is either to join forces to overcome enemies together or to enlarge the group, so that those who previously might have been enemies become partners

for a larger cause. But the being with philosophy is to hear God whispering, "I have no enemies." This is a plea to see every relationship as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. (Wells, 69)

Being with means we let others speak, or we are silent together. For us as Americans who can only go to be with the living stones for a short time, it may seem to us that we are not doing anything very much. I felt intensely uncomfortable on our pilgrimages when we would visit parishes or schools and disrupt their day. We had such a short time with the Palestinian Christians, and I couldn't see that simply visiting them was important. Someone explained to me the importance of those visits, that these were now particular faces, people I knew as individuals not as a group or stereotype: 'Arabs' or 'Palestinians'. Our taking time to be with the people was a mutual gift. I saw their faces, and they now knew people who were praying for and supporting them in their difficult mission.

When we were in Nablus, visiting the Christians there, I met a woman, roughly my age, who hadn't seen her son for ten years. He had emigrated and couldn't get a visa to visit her. She did not expect to see him again in her lifetime. I didn't want to feel this sadness knowing that there was nothing I could do. It seemed that I was doing no good at all, just coming in for a day visit with the others in our group, but that is the problem-solution mentality taking over. She didn't need my solutions, she needed me to hear her, and know her pain.

Visiting the living stones, seeing the faces of those we hold in our prayers and support with our offerings shows us that we are brothers and sisters, we are one in the Lord.

Our spirituality of being with the people of the Holy Land demands that we face the reality of suffering in the world, especially the suffering of the innocent, and our helplessness in the face of it, especially in the complicated reality of the Holy Land. We will not escape it; we will not run from it. Our spirituality demands that we face this reality, accept it, let it break our hearts so that we repent of our fear and hatred, of all the times we have set barriers between us and others. When we are discouraged we should remember Dr. Wells' words:

What will finally succeed [in situations which seem hopeless] is years and years of being with, building trust, caring about people for their own sake, expecting to see the face of God in them for the wonderful

creation they are. It may not look like much, but it is the way Christ spent most of his incarnate life (46).

Working for and being with the people of the Holy Land, through prayer, pilgrimage and financial support: that is the particular spirituality of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre.

Works Cited

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