

*Homily of Archbishop William E. Lori, KC*HS
Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre – Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy
Ceremony of Investiture and Solemn Eucharistic Liturgy
Votive Mass of Our Lady of Palestine
Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
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Introduction

First, congratulations to our newly invested Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre. Thank you for your readiness to serve the Church's mission in a new and wonderful way. May the Lord bless you in the commitment you have made today!

Dear friends, from the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has taught us that the Church should accompany people on the journey of faith. In his Apostolic Exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," the Holy Father puts it this way: "The Church will have to initiate everyone in 'the art of accompaniment', [an art] which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other" (EG, 169). In speaking in this way, the Pope is urging us not merely to walk alongside others simply for the sake of doing so, simply for the sake of befriending them, important or desirable as that truly is. Rather, the Pope is urging us to walk along-side of others for the sake of spreading the Gospel, for the sake of evangelization. Again, to quote Pope Francis: "Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization" (EG, 173). And, indeed, throughout his papacy, Pope Francis continues to teach us through example the art of accompaniment, by his outreach to refugees, his love for the poor on the streets of Rome, and his closeness to those who have been marginalized in our global society. In a word, he teaches us how to engage in 'a charity that evangelizes'.

And, while it is common to hear the words "accompany" and "accompaniment" in homilies and talks, and to find those words in a variety of Church documents, it is far less common to encounter genuine accompaniment in today's society. We live in a self-absorbed, individualistic

society, a “me-first” culture that has little time or inclination to slow down so as to walk with another whose pace of life or whose direction may be at variance with one’s own. To put it another way, in our driven, competitive culture, we may be reluctant to take the time not only to listen to others but also take detours from the path of the life’s journey that we’ve mapped out for ourselves. Accompanying others thus requires us to be forgetful of self, to put the other at the center, and to be more interested in the other than we are in ourselves and in our plans and priorities. What’s more, it challenges us to become those persons whose personalities are a bridge, and not an obstacle to Christ. And so, Pope Francis rightly speaks of accompaniment as an art, as something to be learned from a textbook but rather from experience, experience that is touched, purified, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

Learning the Art of Accompaniment

From its earliest days, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre has accompanied pilgrims who came from afar to the Holy Land, seeking to pray at those places made sacred by the earthly life and ministry of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ, but most especially by his saving Death and glorious Resurrection. This accompaniment has involved by turns the defense of these uniquely holy places, the protection and care of pilgrims who faced the dangers & rigors of medieval travel. In our own day, the Order continues to accompany the Christian community in the Holy Land, most especially by its support for the educational ministries of the Church, ministries that serve not only Christians but indeed the entire population. The Order also accompanies the Christian community in the Holy Land by sponsoring and encouraging pilgrimages from around the world, pilgrimages in which members of the Order have a unique opportunity to walk in the presence of the LORD and to walk with those who claim the Holy Land as their home.

Yet, to reiterate, there is nothing easy or automatic about accompaniment. We do not become adept at the art of accompaniment merely by being members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Rather, our membership in the Order should prompt and spur us to open our hearts to the never-ending challenge of learning, and learning well, what it means to accompany another along the journey of life and faith, most especially those who live in situations very different from our own. From whom shall we learn the art of accompaniment? Who shall teach it to us? Who shall illustrate for us in a living way what this life-changing notion really means?

May I suggest that our gentle and loving teacher in the ways of spiritual accompaniment is none other than the Virgin Mother of God, none other than Our Lady of Palestine, the Patroness of our beloved Order? We meet her today in the Votive Mass that we celebrate and in the Scriptures that were proclaimed for us only moments ago. Let us see how Mary teaches us the art of walking with others in faith.

The Visitation and Mary’s Presence to the Nascent Church

First, Mary teaches us this lesson by her Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. Amid the joyous news that she was to be the Mother of the Savior, Mary also learns from the Angel that her cousin Elizabeth is with child. Because of her advancing years, it was thought that Elizabeth was barren but God in his omnipotence made it possible for her to conceive a child, a child who would become “the prophet of the Most High”, St. John the Baptist. Upon learning this news, Mary did not sit at home but rather made the dangerous journey through the hill country, a

journey she made carrying the Christ in her womb. She went out of her way to see Elizabeth, to minister to her in her need and to celebrate with her the dawning of salvation from on high. When Mary arrived at Elizabeth's doorstep, a most beautiful encounter of faith occurred as Elizabeth recognized Mary's faith and as Mary sang the praises of the Most High God who had done great things for her. It was a moment when human need and deepest faith met in the beauty of an encounter immortalized in the memory of the Church. Thus we learn from Mary that accompaniment entails true concern for the needs of others coupled with a living faith, a faith that is ready to celebrate God's great and mighty deeds of love.

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we meet Mary yet again, this time gathered with the Apostles in the Upper Room, to watch and wait and pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Scripture says, "All of these [the Apostles] devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers" (AA 1:14). Just as Mary had conceived the her divine Son in the power of the Spirit and walked with him, even if from afar, as his first and best disciple, so now Mary accompanies the Apostles to the Upper Room where the mission of the Church to spread the Gospel will be quickened by the Spirit through whom the Christ had entered human history. Later on in AA, we discover that Mary continued to accompany the Apostles as they gathered to celebrate what may have been the first Eucharistic celebrations of the nascent Church. And indeed Mary continues to accompany us whenever we gather for Eucharist. Mary is always with us, always praying with us and for us, always leading us to her Son who becomes present through the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the words of consecration.

Thus Mary teaches us that we cannot engage in spiritual accompaniment unless Christ truly comes to birth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and unless we walk with Christ as his disciples throughout our own journey of life. Mary also teaches us that spiritual accompaniment is always deeply prayerful. It is not the mere chatter of casual conversation but rather a praying for the other, a prayer uttered with great openness to the Holy Spirit who pours into our hearts the love of God and a desire to do his will.

Our Lady of Palestine

What Mary did in her earthly lifetime, she continues to do today as she watches over the Holy Land, walks with pilgrims, prays with them and for them, and leads them by the path of her Son's death on the Cross to the glory of the Resurrection. As we celebrate this investiture let us invoke our Patroness, Our Lady of Palestine, asking for the grace to learn anew, every day, the art of accompaniment, so that we too might walk with others, on our way to the new and eternal Jerusalem.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!