

# SPEECH OF THE GRAND MASTER TO POSTULANTS

CHATEAU BÉLA, SLOVAKIA

15 JUNE 2024

Dear Postulants,

In a few minutes you will become Knights and Dames of Saint John, also known as the Knights of Malta, and you may ask yourselves some questions such as:

- 1- We know about Knights, but we've never heard about Dames: is that a modern thing ?
- 2- Does Knighthood make any sense in the 21st century ?
- 3- How shall I behave as a Knight or a Dame of Malta ?

Regarding the first question: the concept of Lady Knight comes from the time of the Romans, who called them "Equitissa" or "Militissa". In the Middle Ages, the French called them "Chevalière" and in History there are many examples of Dames leading armies and fighting battles:

You all know Jeanne d'Arc (*Joan of Arc*) who fought for France in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but there were many others before her, like Florine of Burgundy, a French Crusader of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, or Ida of Austria who led her own army in a Crusade in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ignes Randolfo, Countess of Dunbar and Moray, born in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, who defended her castle against a British invasion for 6 months until the invaders were forced to retreat, or Johana from Flandres who led the fight in the war for the succession in Bretagne against Charles du Bois, among many others,

So, as in our Sovereign Order and State all persons have equal rights and as we respect history, we have Dames in equal terms with the Knights.

Replying to the question about what sense Knighthood makes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I would like to remind you that Darwin proved that it is not the strongest species that survive, but the ones who are more adaptable to change, so, of course, Knighthood, as it was in the Medieval Times, makes no sense now, but the Knightly Principles of Virtue, Truth, Honesty, Defence of the poor, the weak and the ill never change !!!

We as an order have changed and updated ourselves, but our principles have never changed, and to prove it you have seen the presentation of our Humanitarian Work all over the World.

To the question of how you shall behave as Knights and Dames, I will reply: simply be a good Human Being, there are a lot of opportunities in this area and very little competition...

In fact there is a lot to be done:

According to UNICEF 27.792 children die every single day in the World, and their assassins are known !! Their names are: Misery, Starvation, Diseases, Illnesses, War and Terrorism.

But this is only a part of the drama, and no tv, radio or newspaper will mention that 2,5 billion people in the world lack access to improved sanitation; 1 billion children are deprived of services essential to their survival and development; 101 million children do not attend primary school; 22 million infants are not protected from diseases by routine immunisation and vaccines; Millions of new-borns die in the first years of their lives and more than half a million women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

However, our Sovereign Order and our State of Knights does not help and assist only children: we also assist people in need and the elderly in many countries and on different continents.

Of course, we alone will not change the world,

Of course we can not assist everyone who need us,

And we can not prevent every child from dying, but for many years we have been making the difference by saving many lives, by assisting the poor within our possibilities, and by really caring for the ill and those who need us.

We do not work to win prizes, medals or honours,

We do not work for recognition,

We do not work to be important.

No, the prizes and medals we win are the lives we have saved,

The honours and decorations we receive are in the eyes and smiles of the orphans and of the children whom we help to feed and study,

The recognition we receive comes from the critical patients we rescue and evacuate to safety with our land and air ambulances.

But yes, we want to be important: we want to continue being very important to those whom we assist and whose lives we save.

And there is another recognition that we have received and that is very, very dear to us:

This is the 50<sup>th</sup> Ceremony that this dream team has organised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Since the year 2000 more than 1.000 postulants have been Knighted, more than 1.000 new Knights and Dames have trusted us and joined our work, and this is our best prize, our highest honour, the most valuable medal we can receive.

This is what encourages us to serve the ill and the needy, but to continue this work we need all those who, like us and like you, care about the more fragile people and about the environment.

For this we need you, dear postulants, each of you is important to us, each and of you is precious for us and for our humble service.

As Sir Ken Robinson once wrote: *"What you do for yourself dies with you when you leave this world, what you do for others lives on forever."*

So we, - all of us and our work - are here to stay on and live forever.

Real immortality is what we offer to you.

So, dear postulants, we are counting on you, not to solve the problems of the world, but to continue making a difference,

And by continuing our humble service, we all will live on... Forever.

Be welcome, brothers and sisters.