

SPIRITUALITY IN ACTION

900th Anniversary Special

PILGRIMAGE TO MALTA, September 2013:

We are extremely grateful to Christopher Hyland, KM, for sharing this story about the Malta Pilgrimage, which was undertaken this September in celebration of the 900th Anniversary of the Papal Bull.

For the forty members of the pilgrimage to Malta and Gozo, celebrating the 900th anniversary of the Papal Bull which established the Order of Malta, our weeklong journey, between September 5th and 12th 2013, included the historic and the profoundly spiritual.

Initiated by President Jack Pohrer and dubbed by him the “900”, the pilgrimage was organized by Christopher Hyland, whose near fifty year association with the island resulted in a highly personal experience for the pilgrims, of many avenues of Malta life, history and religious dedication.

The first Mass was celebrated at Saint Anne’s Church atop Fort Saint Angelo, the first church of the Order in Malta. Now within an area occupied by the Order, the pilgrims were received by Knight Resident Fra’ John Critien. Monsignor William Fadrowski, assisted by Executive Director Reverend Dr. Jeffrey Trexler, officiated at the Mass. Maestro Carmel Grech led an outstanding musical program.

This historic beginning of the program would be followed by meetings with the Honorable Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta, Madame the Honorable Acting President of Malta and the Honorable Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, Ambassador of the United States to Malta, at whose residence, the Villa Apap Bologna, a Baroque concert of the Order’s music and a reception were held. Preceding the concert, the pilgrims visited Villa Bologna and the great gardens surrounding this most historic of Malta houses, led by the owner, Jasper de Trafford.

Chancellor Richard Milone and Councillors Carole Barta Less and Peter Muratore also participated in the pilgrimage, which included two Masses at St. John’s Co-Cathedral, officiated by the Archbishop of Malta. Knights and Dames placed a wreath at the memorial for Knights slain during the Great Siege of 1565. The American Association wreath read, “Now Hallowed Ground for Peace: We Remember”. This epitaph is also the name given to the etching which Pilgrimage Director Christopher Hyland commissioned from Austin Camilleri to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the Papal Bull. Fifty-seven etchings have been made, including several given to, among others, the Grand Master, the National Library of Malta, and the American Association Order of Malta.

The President of the Malta Association, Order of Malta, Philip Farrugia Randon, also placed a commemorative wreath, his Association having graciously asked the American Association to join them

during these two days of annual thanksgiving and commemoration. Philip delivered an outstanding, insightful commentary on the life of Caravaggio under the artist's opus magnus, *The Beheading of Saint John*. Philip's book on the painter is considered by many to be best on the subject. Following his talk, Dane Munro, KM, conducted an extensive tour of Saint John's Co-Cathedral, one that in particular focused on the hundreds of tombstones and memorials that cover the floor and walls. His book is the seminal text on the subject.

Fine dining was enjoyed at Casino Maltese, a private club in Valletta, the nation's capital. From its balcony, the Pohrer party viewed the Magisterial Palace, the Changing of the Guard and a lively band processing. An evening meal at Xara Palace Hotel, located on the high bastions of the fabled city of Mdina, afforded pilgrims a spectacular view of most of the island nation. Peter and Billie Darmanin received the Pohrer party for drinks on their townhouse rooftop terrace before dinner at their iconic restaurant, San Giuliano. Our group hosted a luncheon for Bishop Mario Grech, his family, including his brother, Maestro Carmel Grech, at Ta Cenc Hotel on the island of Gozo.

Before the Ta Cenc luncheon, the brothers Grech provided our pilgrimage with both memorable liturgy and music at Ta Pinu Basilica, the highlight of our daylong pilgrimage to Gozo. During the early evening of the pilgrimage, Father John Muscat organized a prayer and hymn service led by Monsignor Fadrowski, with Deacon Trexler in Saint John's Church, the fourth largest free-standing dome in the world. The Archpriest of Saint John's whisked us in an elevator up to the base of the dome where he provided a wonderful reception including a delicious walnut cake.

Most importantly, our pilgrimage engaged the Order's commitment to the ill and needy. Funds were expended to the Malta Community Chest Fund, the Malta Association Order of Malta for their Gozo Ambulance and their General Fund, and to the Convent of St. Ursula. The latter hosted us after a Mass in their church, during which the nuns sang. Thirty malades participated in the High Mass at Ta Pinu Basilica and were hosted by the pilgrims to box lunches and refreshments. Christopher Galea, KM, organized the Malta Ambulance to transport the malades, who presented the offerings at the Mass.

The group visited Malta to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the Papal Bull. We were rewarded by a rare visit to the National Library, during which the Papal Bull was unveiled in tandem with other moving and historic documents, all made possible by the good work of Ms. Maroma Camilleri.

We were reminded of the island's nautical history by viewing from atop Valletta's bastions the annual Regatta, during which small traditional Maltese boats, driven by oar power, compete beneath the ramparts of the Grand Harbor. Only a few days before, in a craft of traditional design, we toured the harbor areas surrounding Valletta, witnessing views that have impressed seafarers for hundreds of years.

As much as our pilgrimage was steeped in the deep Catholic history of Malta, as a group, we were extremely impressed by the ancient prehistoric sites that we toured, made very much alive by the outstanding narrative of Daniel Cilia, the great photographer and documentarian of Maltese history and culture.

As part of our cultural programme, we attended at the Manoel Theatre the second performance of the Hyland

Mass, A Prayer for Unity in Diversity, composed by Maestro Joseph Vella, which had premiered a month before at St. George's Basilica, Gozo. Commissioned by Christopher Hyland, it includes at the end a fanfare and anthem, the latter with lyrics by Lisa Zeiger. Our entire party occupied the principal boxes opposite the stage, including the Presidential box. Following the performance, Chairman Michael Grech of the Manoel Theatre held a reception for us in adjoining rooms. The theatre was built by a Grand Master in 1731 and is one of the oldest theatres in Europe still in use.

The pilgrimage as a totalized experience of a history, culture and devotional practice to which we are all connected and committed constituted an extraordinary immersion which fostered the spiritual.

We are indebted to President Jack Pohrer for having initiated this remarkable journey.

We, the "900", will always share this extraordinary experience.

Dr. Walter Klein took numerous photos during the Pilgrimage that have been posted to Shutterfly here: <http://share.shutterfly.com/share/received/welcome.sfly?fid=90ac76dbca287df1&sid=3BcuWbZu1ZW4>. They were sent to in previous e-mails to many Knights and Dames.

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