

Bailli Philipp Freiherr von Boeselager



**LOURDES
AND ITS IMPORTANCE
FOR US THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA**

**Edited version of a lecture at the Delegation South-West
of the German Association of the Sovereign Order of Malta**

Spring of 1997

Lourdes and its importance for us the Knights of Malta

The theme can best be presented when I tell you about the beginning of this service of the Order of Malta and about my own experience that has led me to found this work.

This report can only be very personal, although it is not common these days to speak about personal faith, whereas real intimacies are made public everywhere.

Though legends about my way to Lourdes exist already, I want to tell you first how it really was.

During the war I was commander of a cavalry regiment to which also a medical officer belonged. After the war we lost contact first, but soon enough we got in touch again.

In spring 1948 – more than 50 years ago – I received a letter from the doctor mentioned above in which he told me that he wanted to take his dying niece, who was his godchild, to Lourdes. The child's protestant parents had declared this plan as insane and refused. But as the child really was dying and had no other wish than to go to Lourdes and he wanted to fulfil her wish. As he himself was also protestant and had no idea of Lourdes and Catholic rules, he asked me to accompany him and his niece to Lourdes as he remembered that I was Catholic.

This request was very inconvenient for me. I knew from my aunt Lexi Salis, who before the war rendered often some service in Lourdes, that Lourdes was a place where a great number of people came together. Alone this was very suspect to me. Suspect because I attended the last mass meeting as Jesuit pupil from Godesberg at the Katholitentag in Essen in 1933 and experienced shortly after the mass demonstration how the official church was hiding in mouse-holes that could not be small enough.

Secondly this trip threatened to disturb my studies that I had planned to finish at Christmas 1948 after 6 semesters. But on the other hand I could not very well refuse the doctor's request as his wish seemed to be very serious.

So I agreed after all under the condition that he would organise everything for me and would only tell me what I had to pay, at which platform I had to be when.

In the meantime the doctor had made inquiries about a possibility to go with the first pilgrim train after the war from Germany to Lourdes. This pilgrim train was made possible, because the then Bishop of Lourdes, Excellence Theas, had invited German clergymen who had been with him in the KZ to come to Lourdes for the foundation of "Pax Christi" and the French had given the necessary permission. The trip started with 10 Reichsmark in our pocket, because this was the sum that we were allowed to take with us.

I got on the train in Cologne that had started in Oberhausen. The train had 4th class carriages and only one carriage had 3rd class compartments and of these we had one for the doctor, the sick girl and myself. The doctor had already got on the train in Oberhausen. The girl was lying on a rubber mattress and did not move.

In Paris the train was supposed to stop for a day to give the pilgrims the opportunity to visit the town. We discussed what we should do with the sick girl in the meantime. We did not have the money to take the girl to a hospital so I suggested that I should stay with the child in the

compartment as I knew Paris from the war and also did not think it would be attractive to walk about in Paris with 10 Reichsmark in my pocket. I asked the doctor to bring me a baguette and a bottle of red wine and this is what we did. After the pilgrims had left the train it was shunt to a suburb station and I stayed with the girl who showed no sign of life. She had not eaten during the last 24 hours and had only got a few drops that the doctor had given her through a pipette.

After half a day the doctor came back to look after us and noticed that the girl was dying. What should we do? Should we bring her to a hospital? I suggested that we should wait. In case she would die, it would be easier to bring her home from Lourdes than from any hospital in Paris. We took that decision and after further 12 hours we departed with the dying girl towards Lourdes.

From sheer boredom I read the girl's bulletin during the stay in Paris. Although I did not know anything about medicine I came to the conclusion that she had been bed-ridden for many years. We arrived in the evening in Lourdes and before we were aware of it some Brancardiers dashed in our compartment and carried the sick girl away on a stretcher. I did not know where to. I did not get a room in the hotel that was foreseen for me - right at the back on the Gave – after some time and I was taken to an inn in a village in the Pyrenees.

When I woke up in the morning the sun was shining, Lourdes lay just beneath and it promised a lovely day in the magnificent surrounding. I was looking forward to some calm, restful days, but a taxi arrived with a gentleman from the direction of the pilgrimage and took us – we were two – down to Lourdes.

Due to the fact that I had been separated from the hotel pilgrimage group I had lost touch with the pilgrimage train. During the following days I visited Lourdes alone and went to the different churches, the holy area and the grotto.

As I stood on one of these days in front of the baths, at the time they were situated in front of the Grotto where you now get drinking water from the many water-taps, suddenly the curtain opens of one of the baths and “my” girl was pushed out sitting on a stretcher. She had a visible nimbus around her head and I went numb. This could not be the girl I had been travelling with to Lourdes. She was sitting upright on the stretcher and moved her head and legs.

Whilst I was standing there numb she saw me and directed the Brancardiers who were pushing the stretcher towards me. When she reached me, she said: “We have seen each other in the train, you sat all the time on the neighbouring bank.” Thus I understood that I was neither drunk nor insane. No, this was “my girl” and she was cured.

The Brancardiers were also quite excited and were all talking at once. Then they pushed the girl to the hospital “Asyle” in the ward St. Pierre to Sister Marcelle. She was also overcome with astonishment. As it was lunchtime she gave the girl normal food, meat with carrots and peas. I was still out of breath as I knew very well that she had not eaten normal food for a long time.

When I was still sitting at her bedside a gentleman came to speak to her. He then asked whether I had brought the girl to Lourdes. I told him the story how I came to the trip to Lourdes. Later I learned that he was the President of the Hospitalité, Comte de Beauchamp. He asked me to visit him the next day in the office of the Hospitalité and showed me how to find the office.

I started to look in the hotels for the doctor, the child's uncle, and at last found him having a meal. When I told him that his niece was healed, he did not believe me. We rushed to the Asyle. There the doctor convinced himself of his niece's miraculous healing. At first he was totally bewildered.

I myself was so bewildered that it took me days to recover. In the meantime the President of the Hospitalité had asked me to see him and told me that before the 1st world war relatively many Germans had come to Lourdes also that there were relatively many German volunteers. Between the two world wars there were hardly any pilgrimages from Germany to Lourdes due to the poverty in Germany and the hatred. Miracles are always a sign, a challenge. As a knight of Malta I had to care for the sick as it was one of the duties of the Order of Malta. The hostility between Germany and France could only be wiped out through mutual prayer. The German members of the Order of Malta should come to Lourdes again and he would do everything to help them with the organisation. Should I have questions I should address his secretary, Monsieur Lebecqu, who would answer all my questions regarding organisation and charges.

The day before our departure from Lourdes the whole pilgrim group with the healed girl in its midst went to the Bishop whose palace was just above the Grotto. The Bishop implored us to pray for the peace of the world. The healed girl then got out of her wheelchair and greeted the Bishop who had heard of her healing. On our way back she went from carriage to carriage and gave an account of her illness and healing.

In Lourdes I understood why the Lord's miracles had so little effect. Although many had experienced the Lord's miracles, but only Mary and John stood under the cross and gave evidence of Christ.

During these days in Lourdes I realised that man is not capable to endure God's full presence. Like Moses who had to cover his head in front of the burning brier, because otherwise God's presence would have destroyed him, man is not able to bear God's power over nature.

One can only remain kneeling in the same place where the miracle has happened or one has to try to forget the superhuman that one encountered in the miracle in order to get on with life as a normal person.

Since this experience in Lourdes I do not only believe that there is a God I know that this is so. I am certain about it. I pray also in Lourdes when I kneel beside a sick person during the Holy Sacrament Procession that God in his omnipotence may heal the sick. But I also hope that I will not be witness of a new miracle. Because a miracle almost destroys us poor human beings as I tried to explain to you before.

After my return I told the President of the Rheinisch Westfälischen Malteser Assoziation, Rudolf Twickel, of the incident and asked him to be permitted to set up a German Malteser-Lourdes Krankendienst (Order of Malta service to the sick) as it was Comte de Beauchamp's wish. The president gave me the task to do so and the following year some gentlemen, like Johannes Twickel from Lembeck, Clemens Westphalen und Dieter Landsberg, went to Lourdes in order to inform themselves and to get instruction. The year after the first little troupe, 2 gentlemen and 2 former Red Cross sisters, Sophie Isenburg and Maria Groote, set off with three sick persons. Slowly year after year the number of sick and helpers increased; first with the Diocese Cologne, later also with Trèves and then more and more German Dioceses went to Lourdes with Malteser-Krankenhelfer-Teams (Helper Teams).

Based on the miracle that I have experienced I understand the importance of Lourdes for our faith, for our duty of “tuitio fidei”.

The Hebrew letter describes faith as “holding on to something one hopes for. Convinced of things one cannot see” (Heb. 11,1). This is also written in the catechism for adults.

From our childhood on we are all conversant with the miracles of God in the Old Testament that he worked to release his people out of the hands of Egyptians or to save from hunger and thirst. We also know of our Lord’s miracles in the New Testament.

Theses miracles happened for the healing of mankind and to testify Christ as God’s son. In the belief of God’s nearness and God’s strength grows the power of faith, the power for “tuitio fidei”, as it was demanded from the Knights of Malta during the Middle Ages when they were captured by the Turks in battle. They could save their lives by renouncing their faith and betraying the Order. In this connection the vow of “tuitio fidei” had its special meaning and kept its value till today. Due to this historical background the Knights of Malta are bound to the special defence of the Holy Father and Bishop.

The defence of faith, “tuitio fidei” is therefore one of the cardinal points of the spirituality of the Knights of Malta. For better understanding I would like to express some thoughts:

Every Order in our church has its own typical spirituality. In this connection I understand spirituality as the typical image for each Order. The Franciscans have the image of the suffering merciful Lord, who nearly collapses under the burden of the sins. The Dominicans have the image of the preaching Lord going from place to place, etc.

The Knight of St. John came originally for the most part from the South of Italy and Sicily, where the Normans ruled. Their image of God was that of the Almighty Ruler as we know him from many church apses in Sicily and South Italy, but also from the Reichenau and Maria Laach.

This Almighty Ruler had also the “Golden Nimbus”, the golden halo; in former times only the Persian King was allowed to have and one could hardly imagine somebody with more power than the Great King, the Kyrios.

Christ as son of this powerful God, the Almighty Ruler, was the king’s son. The hymns such as “Vexilla regis prodeunt”, ”Des Königs Banner schreiten voran“ from the 6th century or “Salve Regina” from the monk Hermann von der Reichenau originate from this spirituality.

We know from the Germanic and Norman myths that the King’s Son has to sacrifice himself when the people was in great danger. But the sacrifice had to be out of free will so that the divinity also accepted it. What was more obvious for the knights of the Order who came from this tradition than to see in Christ also the Son of God and to worship him, who offers himself out of free will to Godfather as sacrifice for man. The image of the crucified Christ with a golden king’s crown corresponds to the Almighty. He went out of his free will to the cross and stands at the cross with his head raised, because after all he is the victor over life and death.

The Knights of the Order took up their service for this hero out of their free will. Christ said: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”. Therefore, they call the sick “our Lords”.

I said in the beginning that the defence of faith “tuitio fidei” is one of the two cardinal points of the Order’s spirituality besides the “obsequium pauperum”, which I will take up later. For “tuitio fidei” it is absolutely necessary to lead a life in faith, as to live in faith means to trust God’s guiding.

The crucial test of our faith is to accept God’s will for instance when struck by a terminal illness. All of us know perfectly well that faith is a blessing, God’s gift. But we have to ask for this blessing again and again. Our and my personal experience says also that faith is present in our life. We will come across God somewhere and sometime during our life. It is unthinkable that at the end of a long life we only believe without ever having been confirmed in our faith.

But this faith is not our certain property it is always in danger. There is a double danger from inside and outside. Faith may become indifferent or can slowly die, no longer motivate man and this withering away you can precipitate by reading books against faith, etc.

You can also let faith wither by the lack of prayer. Through a more passive life in the Order, by not participating in an Order’s work, neither in the MHD nor in the Lourdes service of the sick, nor taking part in the general meeting and so on. It may go so far that one rattles off the “Credo”, that it does not require anything as faith has become completely sterile. At the same one finds oneself incredibly orthodox.

But there is no question of daily exercise of a life in faith. From there it is only a small step of a denial of faith in a discussion or doubt in faith out of one’s own free will. One is not in a position for “tuitio fidei” to defend one’s faith. Furthermore a tough discussion of faith would disturb tolerance. One would not like to come too near to another person. Faith that does not stir anything in a person cannot be defended nor can it convince others. One hardly knows the faith of the church, all the more one does not keep it up personally, because one has never acquired it.

Today’s “Credo” has become common practice in the church as the Apostles’ Creed relatively late (511). Before it was common use in Rome to request the “Credo” in front of the parish of somebody who came from abroad to the Roman church in order to prove the visitor’s orthodoxy. (Arianism and Monophysitism played a most important role). For the Romans themselves life in faith was more important than the formal Apostles’ Creed. It was more important to keep it alive and to arrange life accordingly and to live as a Christian. We all know the passage where it says: “See how they love one another “. By this a pagan will recognise a Christian. For the Christians of the first centuries the fruit of faith was crucial. This was very often bearing witness to Christ that led again and again to martyr death.

The Christians of the first centuries knew so much of and about Christ from eyewitnesses or their descendants that they were absolutely sure of their faith. They knew that Christ has lived that he rose from the dead, that he worked miracles during his lifetime; because those for whom he worked wonders were still alive. After the resurrection they were sure that Christ was the Son of God.

They were sure – and now I come slowly to Lourdes – that this Son of God was able “to work wonders” as the most important wonder, the miracle of the resurrection was worked on him. This was after all the most important. Let us be influenced again by the well-known story. The story says in Mark 16,5: They – meant are the women – on entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. And he said to

them: “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth....”. And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid. So far the story.

Why were they so amazed? They should have rejoiced. Why did they go to the tomb? Why do we always go to graves? We want to say goodbye, we want to talk once more intensively to the dead, to make him alive for us; because all this comforts us. It was to this purpose that the women went to the tomb of the Lord. But their purpose was blighted in a shocking way. They could not take farewell in peace at the graveyard, instead they were excited with what they met. A phantom said to them: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth. He has risen.” This went far beyond their comprehension, their hope, yes, it destroyed the intention with which they came to the graveyard.

This destroys human primordial experience, because if it was true what they had heard, then it was not a farewell, but on the contrary the spark of hope that was in spite of all in their hearts was right. The hope: he was and is the Son of God, after all Jesus did not come to an end.

But the women who were daily around Jesus did not really have that faith after the crucifixion. Now that faith flared up again. Their faith had always something to do with common sense and it is the same with our faith. But with God our very limited common sense comes to an end. If we get involved with him we must know that this has nothing to do with common sense. Perhaps we got involved out of love for our parents, perhaps a feeling of haven or as I mentioned before an experience with God. Faith has nothing to do with guarantee of common sense.

Are we really in a position to dare to go in our faith as far that God’s power and possibility to work miracles can be a reality? That this is not a matter of faith but a real possibility to us?

You realise that this question aims at Lourdes, is the core of Lourdes. I remind you of another gospel that always worries me. It is the healing of the paralytic. Due to the crowd that blocked up the road the men climbed on the roof and lowered the paralytic with his bed in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith he said to the paralytic: “ Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” In this healing it is not a matter of the paralytic’s faith, but that of his stretcher-bearers.

What kind of faith is it that helped the sick? Is that our usual faith to take for granted what God has revealed to us!

No, that is another dimension of faith that is the certainty of God’s power or of a supernatural power that in Christ and through Christ is in a position to eliminate natural law and like lightening in the natural world blaze up God’s power, abrogate the natural world for a moment, overcome the natural world at the moment and at a certain place.

This is the faith that my old friend at Lourdes, Monsieur Longuet, chef de piscine, who has died long ago, had and requested from us when he said: “Very often one hears that so few miracles happen at Lourdes. Do we believe that they can happen? We who are healthy are we doing penance for the recovery of the sick?”

Miracles happen also without the intercession of the people. But we can support them and what is worse prevent them. Yes man can hinder God to work miracles. This is a very astonishing and not understandable fact. But already in the Holy Scriptures we are being told by Mark 6,5-

6: “And he could do no mighty wonder there (Nazareth), except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief.” Or the same passage in Mathew 13,57-58: Jesus said to them: “A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house.” “And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”

How is it now with our faith? We have seen in these passages that our faith is really required in Lourdes. This faith the support that is not restricted to praying the Credo, but is an active faith, that is only made possible by a personal relation to God. A faith that requests and hopes that the sick next to me will rise. A faith that believes this is possible again and again in spite of everything.

But whoever kneels next to the sick without hope and without this faith when the Lord passes him in the procession should consider whether he can go to Lourdes or is allowed to go. Or whether he prevents a miracle by his unbelief.

For this reason we request that in the long run only the faithful – in this described sense faithful – go to Lourdes. We the Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta take the full responsibility for the faith of our team.

We have to make this clear to the team and pray together for this faith. Otherwise the passage: “He did not do mighty works there, because of their unbelief” fits in with us.

I am afraid I have alarmed you. But it is meant to be a beneficial alarm. It is beneficial because it is never too late to believe, beneficial because to believe is a grace, a present. But presents do not fall from heaven, but have to be prayed for. Perhaps right at the beginning of a pilgrimage we have to pray for belief for us and the whole team.

The “*tuitio fidei*”, the defence of faith has little to do with the sword in our time, but much with our own unbelief, our indifference, with our faith that has died, that does not move anything and thinks nothing is possible. Perhaps we are afraid that we will be seized by a faith that will move something.

To be a member of the Sovereign Order of Malta means – perhaps even more than in other Orders – to be a gentleman, to be a lady. That has something to do with loneliness and absolute responsibility. We have to be aware of our responsibility also for the faith of our team. Lourdes is more than only looking after the sick as best as we can. If they are our Lords, the “Lords the Sick” than such an approach is only possible out of faith, a bountiful faith as our ancestors have preserved it for hundred of years.

The second Order’s duty is “*obsequium pauperum*”, the service to the sick, the poor that is best experienced and learned in the mutual participation of a team. What importance this Order’s rule attaches to the promise of the service to the sick signifies the investiture ceremony of 1290, where the Grand Master says to the recipient: “And you give another promise that no other man expresses; you promise you will be the servant and slave of our Lords the Sick.

It must be requested from the helper of the Order of Malta who comes to Lourdes in our team that he respects the religious purpose of the pilgrimage, it is expected that he acts out of religious motivation. Of course it does not matter how conscious of this motivation the individual person is, because Christ enters as third person in this relationship between the sick and the helper and his presence in the sick is important for this relationship. “As you did it to

one of the least of these my bretheren, you did it to me.” Nikolaus Lobkowitz once defined it like this: “ The service of the believing Christian is carried out, because he knows that his small unimportant deeds are a small contribution to return the love of God. Our service to the sick, our Caritas lastly consists in a sense therein that the service does not concern the sick, but God himself, because we can return God’s love every day in the service to the sick.” In reverse the sick experiences his human dignity in accepting he accepts the service of the helper in proxy for Christ. The latter take “a share in the divine glory” as it says in an old regulation of the Order for the service of the sick. The profound understanding that Christ is present in the sick accordingly in the tradition of the Order they are called “the Lords the Sick”. This forms our service in Lourdes. Therefore, through our Lord who is present in the sick the nursing becomes a service to God. In Malta this was expressed by serving food to the sick with the same ceremony as to the Grand Master in contrary to the normal Knight of the Order. And therefore we take great care that the tables are nicely set and always decorated with flowers. The tables are set in the same way as at home when we receive guests.

In that way we also fulfil the request of Pius XII who said in an address to the members of the Order of Malta 1941: “ Are not content with just supporting the sick generously. No, you shall love them and meet and serve them with respect as the first followers of our mutual king!”

The wish to comply with the Holy Father’s request and the old tradition and rule of the Order of practised nursing by members of the Order - even the Grand Master nursed personally in Malta – brought the members of the Order of Malta to Lourdes. There we can be brought to our service in a team under the direction of people with experience in nursing without strain; there we can learn how to treat the sick.

Furthermore, Lourdes by its social component that appeals to many young people today, leads through this service of nursing also outsiders to get to know the church again, very often to an unobtrusive rejoining of the church. Faced with all the sick in Lourdes nobody can evade the question of the meaning of life. So in many cases there is a return to faith. Furthermore, in Lourdes it is perceptible that here at the Grotto heaven and earth are unified as through the appearance of the Blessed Virgin this part of the world was sanctified. At the Grotto one can pray, one can learn to pray.

Besides the Orders members’ promise to “tuitio fidei” and “obsequium pauperum” to the outside the Order has also a duty to its members to the inside. This is the care for the “sanctification of its members”, as it says in the Order’s Statute.

The sanctification of man requires the contact with God in prayer. And that is the prayer in all its patterns. The service to the sick is a prayer, if we do it in the right spirit. It is also a prayer when one returns in the evening to the Grotto after a strenuous Lourdes nursing day saying to the Holy Mother: ”adsum”, “here I am. I came here to be there for you”. If one sits with this attitude in front of the Grotto and has left the cosy bistro – in spite of exhaustion – then this is a prayer, even if one is unable to say a devout prayer. It is enough to become calm and to let go. God will tell us what he expects of us. Let me explain with an example what I want to say: I had a very good relationship with my father. When after an accident he was paralysed I went to visit him if possible every week once or twice. After I arrived we discussed first mutual questions after that we both took our books and read. It was then no longer important to talk. It was important that I was there for him that I took the time to be with him.

To be there for God one has to take the time to pray, because surely he has question for us and we have questions for him. In order to hear whether God wants to say something to me, it is

necessary to become quiet and the exhaustion in the evening stimulates this quietness. In this quietness one learns to pray. As I said before Lourdes is a school for prayer.

Besides this prayer that is just the “adsum”, “Lord here I am”, we should by all means try to learn to pray the Rosary as the Holy Mother requested. The Rosary is reputed to be simple and schematic. Yes, it is simple and includes in the Credo the whole faith of the Christians that is then contemplated in 15 decades. I would like to contradict seriously this remonstrance that the Rosary is schematic. Each decade with the Ave shall only indicate a space of time in which one can contemplate on the mysteries or express a special intention to Holy Mary Mother of God. To take two examples: Are we not very often seriously afraid before taking an important decision, or an argument, a visit to the doctor. Is it not obvious to pray the Sorrowful Rosary with the contemplation of the agony in the garden, consequently turn to our Lord, who in the olive grove was in agony of his suffering?

Is it not reasonable to pray for humility when we contemplate that a crown of thorns was put on Christ’s head? The Lord was crowned with thorns because of our haughtiness. I could give you many examples like that. Once one has learned to pray the rosary, one can pray when driving a car, hunting and in all situations.

I have tried to explain to you how Lourdes can help the members of the Order to fulfil their Order’s obligation and what other help Lourdes can give. Furthermore young people who are close to the Order are made familiar with the obligations that the Order demands from its members in a unique way and Lourdes shows everybody how one can fulfil these obligations with the help of the Holy Mother.

Let me say finally something about the importance of Lourdes for the whole Order. Some years after the foundation of the Order of Malta Lourdes Service to the sick the Bishop of Meissen in those days, Spühlbeck, requested our President Baron Twickel to build up a Catholic organisation corresponding to the “Red Cross” As the “German Red Cross” in the German Democratic Republic had become totally atheistic. In Lourdes we had experienced a Catholic Relief Service of the Order of Malta with the Irish, and so I suggested to the President of the Council, to ask Maxton Eltz, who had gone in a team to Lourdes several times, to build up such a service in Germany. After having studied the Irish organisation together in detail, the building up of the MHD started in Cologne very slowly under the direction of our late Confrère, Georg Trusczyński.

After the uprising in Hungary during the winter of 1956/57 one had the opportunity to test the experience that one had made in Lourdes. With the experienced Lourdes teams it was possible to help the Hungarian refugees who had fled from Hungary to Austria with bag and baggage during the night and fog in the bitter coldness. A Relief Service Office for Hungarians was installed in Vienna under the direction of Paula Salm. Ladies teams looked after mothers and children in the former Russian barracks at Eisenstadt and for weeks the gentlemen were awaiting the refugees at the Neusiedler See.

It was the first great operation of the Order of Malta that was also approved by the Order’s Government after some endeavours. Also members from other countries joined our team voluntarily and like this got to know the work in which the MHD was already involved.

As the centenary celebration of the appearance of the Holy Mary Mother of God in Lourdes approached I suggested to the Order’s Government to make a pilgrimage with sick together with all the European and North American Associations of the Order of Malta. And this took

place. In 1958 for the first time the members of the other Associations looked after their sick in Lourdes. Since that time the great Order of Malta pilgrimage takes place in Lourdes every year at the beginning of May.

Analogous to the MHD in the meantime in 20 European countries, now also in Eastern Europe, similar organisations under the direction of the Order's Knights and Ladies have been built up, and there is under the direction of the Order's Grand Hospitaller an international disaster relief that can help all over the world to put into action the "obsequium pauperum".

In Lourdes 50 years ago the Order has found its sources again for the personal care of the sick and for "tuitio fidei". We hope that Holy Mary will give it the strength to face today's problems. As far as it is true for the Church "semper reformanda" this is also true for our Order.

Let me come to an end with a word from the book of the Cardina Suenens about King Bauduin that could also be addressed to you as a member of the Order of Malta. "God has a dream that he would like to realise with you and through you. He has entrusted this task to you and at the same time gave you the grace – not only in abundance, but even more – to fulfil this task. In the Middle Ages the Knights of Malta prayed before the battle to the Holy Mary "Tu adesto". "Be with us." This is also our prayer, be with us now and at the hour of our death.