



GRAND MASTER

Madrid, 9th of August, 2011

On the occasion of the recent death of H.I.R.H. the Archduke Otto of Habsburg, Protector of our beloved Order in Austria, one journalist wrote that, with him, *the last Chevalier of Europe* had died. It is certainly true that the Prince personified to a notable degree in his life and actions the virtues of an ancient medieval knight, in a Europe which seems to be afflicted with as many sources of disagreement, danger and strife as it ever suffered during the Middle Ages.

There is no doubt that to remain faithful to the ideals of chivalry is for today's "Chevaliers" as exacting and arduous a commitment as it was for their medieval predecessors. For a knight must remain, in spite of everything, one who, with extreme generosity and grace, devotes himself to others; one who is faithful to the word he has given; one who, armed with the Christian Faith, ceaselessly endeavours to follow the example of our blessed Saviour. By these criteria, Otto of Habsburg was a perfect knight of both ancient and modern times. An Order of Chivalry remains today what, in essence, it has always been: a religious organization populated by lay people (though reliant always on chaplains for spiritual guidance) dedicated to social and Hospitaller care. However, it is not merely a charitable body. Its members must, by the way they conduct themselves in the world at large, display their dedication to the moral principles of Christianity and give practical expression to the Gospel message. But, one may ask, does not this responsibility apply to all Christians? Yes, indeed. Yet the Christian knight is called to demonstrate in the highest degree the imitation of Christ. In him, there is no place for pride, arrogance or vaingloriousness – all is humility, tolerance and absence of ostentation. In the words of St. Ignatius Loyola, himself a soldier:

"To give and not to count the cost;

To fight and not to heed the wounds;

To toil and not to seek for rest;

To labour and not to ask for any reward,

Save that of knowing that we do Thy will."


If we consider today's world, we shall find ample reason for concern. The economic crisis affects everyone, and in Europe we are confronted with an aging population and steeply rising costs for pensions and healthcare. In the Middle East, there is serious civil unrest and political failure; in parts of Africa, there is political failure, made worse by natural disasters. Everywhere we find social and economic problems, and the victims thereof. Most important of all, perhaps, is the need for us to learn to live together in a multicultural society.

This demands respect for one another and an earnest desire to listen to the wishes and desires of others, including those with whom we may have fundamental disagreements. The tensions of the 21st century can be resolved only by sharing. Through the solidarity which comes from selfless sharing – of wealth, resources, wisdom and understanding – many problems can be solved. Given the goals and ideals of our noble Order, it must be possible for us to make a difference – but only if we work together in unity of purpose, setting ourselves at nought and praying daily for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

A military order such as ours, born in the Holy Land, which has survived so many historic comings and goings, so many setbacks, is uniquely summoned to act as a beacon of Christian morality in a world that cries out for salvation – as, indeed, it has always done. The maintenance of the Unity and good Governance of the Order, which is a supreme value, requires a united command firmly committed to the traditions of chivalry.

With the help of God, without which we can do nothing, and the prayers of all the Knights and Dames of our Order, living and dead, we may come so to conquer our own failings that we can at last address those of the world at large under the leadership of Jesus Christ, our unseen captain.

Atavis et Armis

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "The Marquis of Almazan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the word "Almazan".

Carlos Gereda de Bourbon
Marquis of Almazan