

Mansion House Speech

H.E. Michael Byrne KGCHS

18 March 2022

My Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress, your Excellency, Governor General Ambassador Leonardo Modrone, Your Grace, Archbishop Kevin McDonald, our Grand Prior emeritus and now Prior of the Southwark section, members of the Grand Magisterium, Your Excellency Enric Mas Vice Governor General and your excellency Professor Bart McGettrick, Chairman of the Holy Land Commission, your Excellency Bishop Kenneth Nowakowski, bishop of the Ukranian Eparchy in Great Britain, my lord Bishop Richard Moth, your excellency Peter Durnin the Lieutenant of Ireland and your wife, Your Excellency David Smith, Lieutenant of Honour, Very Rev Msgri, Rev Fathers, Knights and Dames, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We should also send greetings and best wishes for a speedy recovery to three guests who should have been here but cannot because of covid; they are H.E. the Chancellor of our Order, Ambassador Alfredo Bastianelli, our Grand Prior H.G. Archbishop John Wilson and his secretary Fr. Philip Andrews.

I welcome also Mrs. Laila Asfoura from Bethlehem who does so much to make our pilgrimages the success they always are.

It is strange that I find myself welcoming you all as guests in somebody else's house this evening, but on your behalf I particularly want to welcome and thank the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress for their hospitality in allowing us to use this occasion as an opportunity to put on display the work of our Order and the Lieutenancy of England and Wales in particular.

I particularly welcome his Excellency the Governor General. We are honoured by your presence here tonight, and we look forward to the time, I hope in the not too distant future, when we shall have the honour of welcoming H.E. the Cardinal Grand Master to pre-side at an Investiture. Although we have not actually met H.E. yet, he should know that we feel we know him intimately from his many thoughtful and prayerful podcasts, and reflections we receive from him on line, and I respectfully ask the Governor General to convey to His Eminence the loyal greetings from us all here tonight in the hope that we shall have the honour of welcoming him personally to our Lieutenancy soon.

My Lord Mayor, you and Amanda demonstrate that there are many ways of living a life of public service. You manage to combine your own professional responsibilities with your civic responsibilities together with your commitment to our Order.

Each of the 554 members of this Lieutenancy is in their own way committed to serving the Living Stones in the Holy Land and, I am delighted to say that in May after a gap of three years, we are now resuming our pilgrimages to the Holy Land and will resume our practice of two pilgrimages every year.

During the recent period of lockdown, we were not inactive. We organised two virtual pilgrimages over the internet. Based on the experience of the first, the second one was more

ambitious. It replaced our pilgrimage to Jordan celebrating Holy Week and Easter with the Christians there. It was a collaborative effort between the four Lieutenancies of England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Gibraltar, and the Magistral Delegation of South Africa. All five Grand Priors provided reflections as did priests from all the countries involved, and we concluded with His Beatitude the Patriarch Archbishop Pizzaballa and H.E. our Cardinal Grand Master on Easter Sunday. This endeavour showed just how much modern technology can be harnessed to assist in the work of the Order.

But I must emphasise there is no real substitute for personal visits. We have always found that it is the personal element of our pilgrimages that means so much not just to the Christians in the Holy Land themselves, but to us pilgrims also. While we assist them with practical aid, their steadfast faith and commitment to the Church in the face of adversity stands as a great example to us all, renews our own Faith, and increases our commitment to the work of the Order. In the fields of humanitarian aid, education and pastoral care, we join with them in their daily lives.

My Lord Mayor, as you are very well aware, jubilees are fashionable at the moment, and in 2024 we shall celebrate our own 70th. Anniversary of the founding of this Lieutenancy. Although the Lieutenancy has grown from strength to strength, the Lord still needs more workers in his vineyards, and there is an obligation on each of us to work to acquire new members.

As we travel on pilgrimage through Jerusalem, Galilee, Judea, Samaria, the West Bank and Jordan, we see families and communities who need our help. Schools and parishes, where we meet the pupils and the staff, our important Sunday visits to a parish community Mass, and to the Seminary at Beit Jala and the University. Many of them have become our personal friends and they all need our help.

My Lord Mayor, you are only the second member of our Lieutenancy to hold your high and honourable office, but this evening is unique in one respect. This is the first occasion that both the Lord Mayor and his chaplain are both members of the Lieutenancy. And so it is my honour to propose the toast to the Lord Mayor and the City of London Corporation.