

THE TRUTH ABOUT SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM THE PATRON OF OUR SOVEREIGN ORDER AND OF OUR STATE

The most important duty of the true Knights of St. John of Jerusalem is to honour and respect the fundamental basis of the creation and of the existence of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem as a knightly Hospitaller Order, and among those basis is the obligation to defend the Truth at all times.

Presently the Federation of Autonomous Priories - more than 111 years old –, also known by the acronym KMFAP, is the direct, legal and ONLY truly **Sovereign** descendant of the old Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

The Federation results of the decision to federate taken between 1908 and 1910 by the historical Priories that remained autonomous after the Order was shattered when fled from Malta to Russia, but some of those who, legally or illegally, pretend to be - and who call themselves - Knights of St. John and offsprings of the old Order of Saint John, also known as Knights of Malta, accuse KMFAP of not respecting the tradition of only accepting as knights of the Order with full rights, members of noble families. They frequently use lies and deception to defend their defenceless positions and they totally forget, or prefer to ignore, the Christian origins of the order they claim to belong to and, if some also pretend to be a State, they prefer to ignore the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights.

In fact, although KMFAP accepts, treats and respects in equal terms Knights and Dames of all religions and creeds with no discrimination, historically the Order of Saint John has a Christian origin and the only reason why the Knights of the old times were from noble families, was due to the fact that then only the nobles had sufficient money to buy and keep horses and to acquire the armours and weaponry and also to support their pages and squires, however, as we all know, the Apostles and followers of Jesus Christ were fishermen, farm workers, humble people, shepherds and poor, there were no nobles among them, so KMFAP continues to follow the Christian tradition of accepting that all men are born alike, and of making no discrimination whatsoever, mainly no discrimination, either positive or negative, based on family lineage which is respected but is not a distinctive factor.

For Jesus Christ - and for KMFAP too -, the true Nobles are those who in their lives act with nobility independently of their birth or of their ancestry, as Saint John of Jerusalem himself once said.

Fulfilling the obligation of defending the Truth it is important to make public an old deception regarding the true Patron of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, because St. John the Baptist, although very respected, admired and worshipped by all, has nothing to do with the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem and has never had...:

The true Patron, since the foundation of the Order, was and still is, St. John of Jerusalem in accordance with the own name of the Order itself.

St. John of Jerusalem, also known as St John the Merciful, as St. John the Almsgiver, or also as St. John the Almoner, was born in Amathus in the island of Cyprus, around the year 552 and his father was King Epiphanius, the Governor of Cyprus.

In his early life John married and had children, but his parents, his wife and children died very early and with little time difference, probably due to a plague, so, after the death of his beloved ones, Prince John dedicated himself entirely to the religious life abandoning his nobility titles.

Soon he was considered by all as a living Saint and that is probably the reason why, after the death of the Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria, and due to the very complicated local political and religious situation, the Alexandrians asked to Emperor Phocas of Constantinople to appoint as the next Patriarch of Alexandria John, who, at that time, was about Fifty years old.

One of the first steps that John, as the new Patriarch, took was to make a list of needy persons of Alexandria whom he took under his special care. In accordance with his biographers this list comprehended 7.500 names and these people in need, regardless their social class, received every day food and other help from the Church's income.

Naturally this attitude has caused a strong a reaction of the wealthier classes, because too many people were searching for the help of the Patriarch, so he decided to remain always on Wednesdays and Fridays by the doors of a church to listen to the personal problems of his people, and even, sometimes, to judge cases of injustice. If in one of these days nobody came for help he was sad and used to say that the humble John hasn't gained anything and hasn't brought anyone to God, for his sins.

Patriarch John always referred to the poor as his "Lords and Masters" and he assisted people of every social class who were in real need, without any discrimination.

Saint John was Patriarch of Alexandria from 606 to 616 and during this time he did all he could to stop the practice of simony (the buying or selling of ecclesiastical privileges, for example pardons or benefices), to strength the religious education, to combat heresy, and he even reorganized the system of weights and measures to help the poor, as they were frequently victims of less scrupulous merchants and officials.

Under the watch of Patriarch John, the number of churches increased from seven to seventy!

John was known by visiting the hospitals three times every week, and he was also known because he freed a great number of slaves, devoting the entire revenues of his Patriarchal See to buy the freedom of slaves and to the alleviation of those in need.

When the Persians from the Sassanian Dynasty sacked Jerusalem in 614, Patriarch John sent to this sacred city, for the use of the poor there, besides a large sum of money, one thousand sacks of corn, as many sacks of seeds of leguminous plants, one thousand pounds of iron, one thousand loads of fish, one thousand barrels of wine and one thousand Egyptian workmen to assist in rebuilding the churches of Jerusalem, all this besides receiving in Alexandria a large number of refugees from Palestine. He may have travelled himself to Jerusalem to deliver the help sent from Alexandria.

The best known of his biographers was his contemporary Saint Leontius, Bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, who wrote about Saint John's exemplar and remarkable life.

Another of his biographers said that Saint John *"quitted his country and the hope of a throne, and in Jerusalem he generously aided and assisted the knights and pilgrims. There he founded a hospital and organized a fraternity to attend upon the sick and wounded Christians and to bestow pecuniary aid upon the pilgrims who visited the Holy Sepulchre. Neither war, nor pestilence, nor the fury of the enemies, could deter him from his pursuits of Benevolence"*.

Even from the beginning of his service, Saint John, himself a noble from an important royal family, repeated, that **„if you desire nobility, seek it not in blood but in virtues, for this is true nobility”**, this is probably the reason why some tried to replace him by Saint John the Baptist as Patron of the Order that bears his name: Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

Eventually the Persians occupied Alexandria too, so in the year 616 or 619 Patriarch John, already in his old age, was forced to flee by boat back to Cyprus where he died somewhere between 616 and 620, on the 11th day of November.

Saint John is one of the very few saints to have been canonized by both the Greek Orthodox and by the Roman Catholic churches: Rome canonized him under the names of Saint John of Jerusalem, or Saint John the Almoner, and his festival among the Greek Orthodox occurs on the 11th of November – the day of his death -, while the Roman Catholic Church celebrates him on the 23rd of January.

THE MORTAL REMAINS (RELICS) OF ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM

After his death, the body of Saint John of Jerusalem was moved from Cyprus to Constantinople, and in 1249 some relics of this Saint were sent to Venice in Italy and his body was sent in 1489 by Sultan Bayezid II to the famous King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, who considered this as a very precious relic and placed it in Buda Castle in his private Royal Chapel which was dedicated to this saint, but we can ask ourselves how and why did the relic of St. John of Jerusalem, the Almoner get to Buda, the capital of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom? The question arises as to why a Greek who lived 1,000 years earlier was so important for King Matthias Corvinus, to the point of having the unspoiled body of the high priest of Alexandria in his royal court?

King Matthias, the Just King, was a figure who helped the poor and disciplined the rich who were often very greedy, so, naturally he worshiped the saints who helped the poor: János Kapisztrán, St. Margaret, St. Elizabeth, St. John of Jerusalem - the Almoner -, and, of course, the great royal saints: St. Stephen, St. Imre and St. Ladislaus, and in fact 532 years after the death of the great King Matthias his good deeds are kept in legends and in the common memory of people.

Within his very extensive diplomatic activity, King Matthias (1443 – 1490, ruled from 1458) had significant Greek connections and is well known the fact that he is a Europe-wide famous and

rich library had books in all languages, but the Greek books had a separate room, which were collected with care and attention and learning Greek had a prominent role in the upbringing of his only son, Johannes (János) Corvin.

The father of King Corvinus, the great warlord John Hunyadi, had built a Greek Catholic church in the family nest in Vajdahunyad, (Hunedoara) in Transylvania and he came into contact with the Greeks and their Culture during his military campaigns, having even fought side by side with them several times. Moreover, Constantine, the last Greek Emperor, made John Hunyadi the Ruler of Mesembria (now Nesebar, in Bulgaria) and the mother of John (János) Hunyadi was herself a descendant of the Greek imperial family, being his father the great King and Holy Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg, who spent a surprising amount of time in Constantinople in 1396 and has always kept close relations with the Byzantine Emperors ever since.

The Greek kinship also linked King Mathias to the Turkish sultan's family: as in 1489 he testified about this to the papal legate: *"Djem - the brother of the Sultan's claimant to the throne, whom I tried to free from the captivity of the Venetians and help him to the throne – he is also my blood relative, being the son of my grandmother's sister, she was taken Turkish captivity and became the Emperor's wife."*

When the Turks seized Constantinople in 1453, they demolished the Christian monuments and converted the churches into mosques, thus how could the body of St. John the Almoner be preserved in the centre of the Byzantine Empire for many centuries and remaining intact when we know that the Islam does not tolerate representations of the human body, even less as a relic?

The only explanation is that he was put under the guard of someone who was emotionally very attached to St. John of Jerusalem, the Almoner. Probably it was the aunt of King Matthias, who was captured and became one of the wives of the Emperor.

On November 11, 1489, the relics of St. John of Jerusalem, sent by Sultan Beyazit II, were received with great splendour in the royal court of Buda. The King, who was already struggling at the time, also went before him and accompanied him to the place of the Royal Chapel (Capella Regis) with a torchlight procession and musicians. The Capella Regis, the king's prayer chapel, stood in the inner palace of Buda Castle, overlooking the Danube, next to the library and the royal apartment. The chapel was decorated with marble sculptures, equipped with a water organ, a marble well and had its own choir. At the door of the chapel always sat two beggars, the Poor of the King.

Next to the chapel, King Matthias ordered a 40-man chapter under the direction of the archbishop.

After the celebration of the relics of St. John of Jerusalem, King Matthias convened the bishops, high priests, lords in the Royal Chapel, over the relics of St. John, and swore with them that after his death they would make his son, the Prince John Corvin king, which did not happen because after this event, in the first days of 1490, he set out on his last journey to Vienna - which he had occupied five years earlier - and made it as the capital of his big kingdom. By this he gave the country a king. He handed over Buda with the royal treasury, along with the

archives, the library, and the fortified castles involved along the way to his son. The Renaissance Summer Palace in Visegrád, the fortified castle and the Holy Crown were also given to his presumed successor. Moreover he also handed over the most important places of the conquered provinces to the Prince, so they arrived by the end of February in Vienna, where he died on April 6th of 1490, after 32 very successful years of rule.

In 1526, the Hungarian armies suffered a devastating defeat by the Turks, so it was decided to secure the relics and transfer them to Bratislava (Pressburg, now Bratislava / Slovakia), which was then the second largest city in the Kingdom of Hungary and was not a Turkish military target. The relics were first placed in the Monastery of Paulist Monks in Marianthal, then in 1530 the body of St. John of Jerusalem was taken to St. Martin's Cathedral, where much later the chapel of St. John of Jerusalem, the Almoner, was added in 1732, and below it the crypt.

When the central part of the Kingdom of Hungary and its capital Buda, came under Turkish occupation for about 150 years (1541-1686), Pressburg (today Bratislava) became the capital of Hungary. There, St. Martin's Cathedral, dedicated to a Saint of Roman origin, born in Savaria, in Pannonia Province, part of the Roman Empire (today Hungary), was built in Gothic style in the 15th century and consecrated in 1452. This cathedral has been the most significant monument in Bratislava along with the spectacular Bratislava Castle overlooking the Danube. Between 1563 and 1830, the St Martin Cathedral served as a coronation church, where eleven Hungarian rulers from the Habsburg Dynasty and eight Hungarian queens were crowned.

By the end of 17th century, after the expulsion of the Turks, Buda reclaimed back the body of St. John of Jerusalem, from Pressburg. According to the agreement, the right leg of the saint was returned to Buda, which can still be seen in Hungary, in the *Gara* Chapel of the iconic Matthias Church, the first and the last coronation church of the Hungarian Kings in the Buda Castle. It has also a chapel related to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights of Malta.

In 1991, in the midst of great celebrations, the relics of St. John of Jerusalem, the Almoner were taken back to his native Cyprus. However, his right foot remained in Hungary.

Presently Venice has a church dedicated to Saint John of Jerusalem, the Chiesa di San Giovanni Elemosinario, and some of his relics are preserved in the same city in the Chiesa di San Giovanni in Bragora, in a separate chapel.

A chapel in the city of Bormla / Cospicua, in the Republic of Malta, originally built in 1373 and rebuilt in 1682 is dedicated to him, and one of the Maltese bastions of the famous Santa Margherita lines, in the same city, is named after him.

Relics of the body of Saint John of Jerusalem still remain in the Saint John the Merciful Chapel, located in Saint Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava in the Republic of Slovakia.

KMFAP is very proud of its **true** Patron and of its contribution to the re-establishment of the truth about who the real Patron of the Order is.