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Priore Generale

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**The Blessed Virgin Mary
Patron of the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God.**

TO THE WHOLE ORDER

Dear brothers and sisters in Hospitality,

More than two and a half centuries have passed since today's Feast Day was instituted as the "Solemnity of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary", in order to express the special bond which unites our Order to Our Blessed Lady.

The roots of this bond lie in the particular filial affection and great devotion that our Founder, St John of God, always nurtured towards our Blessed Lady. This spiritual legacy can serve as a stimulus that spur us on, as Brothers consecrated in Hospitality, to nurture our filial devotion to Mary, Our Mother.

Our Lady remains for us the model par excellence of Hospitality, an icon to whom we can look for inspiration and guidance, a way of life that we should try and emulate, wholly devoted to our fellow men and women in their time of need and wholly focused on God. This drives us on to develop a deep relationship with our Lord in prayer and in meditation on his Word, as Mary did, seeking to perceive his Will for each one of us, and for the whole of our Order at this particular moment in its history. Our Blessed Mother confirms that the Word of God is an irreplaceable source on which to draw, the starting point for our path of Hospitality. We, who wish to heal the bodies of our suffering sisters and brothers, look to her who believed in the Word of God made flesh.

Mary was a simple woman, who lived like so many other women of her time, immersed in the humdrum daily round: she was a wife, a mother, a sister, a cousin, a neighbor. The way she lived her life still stands as an example to us today, and perhaps at this particular time, it takes on an even greater value. In particular, many women of every faith, who are suffering and in pain because of poverty, sickness, war... can look to her today as a woman like them who really understands what they are going through and how they feel.


There are many episodes in the Gospel which show us Mary's courage and determination, her total trust in the Lord, in order to do his Will. The Visitation, the stable in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the Wedding in Cana, her silent discipleship of Jesus during his public life and ultimately at his death on the Cross, abandoning herself entirely to the Will of God, Mary succeeded in receiving from it the strength and the hope that heaven alone can give.

Today's society is passing through difficult, and 'dark', times partly because many major values that were considered essential until only recently, have now gone. Our Lady's example offers us the image of a woman with a clear identity, an evident sense of belonging to God, committed to implementing God's plan. According to her model, we are also called to develop and encourage the sense of belonging to the Church, to the Order and to the family, practicing and fostering the values that people need today, helping them not to feel lost, and to recover the full meaning of life.

The Solemnity we are celebrating today offers us the opportunity to pray and to reflect once again on the part played by our Blessed Lady, the "Mirror of all holiness" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 41), in our Hospitaller mission. Her greatness, as Pope Benedict XVI has recalled, lies in the fact that she did not place herself at the centre of her own existence, but made room for God in prayer and in service. And this remains a fundamental standard by which we should also live, and which opens up the possibility for us to serve in a way which is ever more authentically consistent with the Gospel.

Let us entrust our whole Order to her Patronage, particularly the suffering and the needy people of the world, especially those in our care and those who look to us for help at a time of particular need in their lives, so that, through her intercession, she will help us to discern the will of God and to move forward in the light of His Word along the path of Hospitality.

I wish you all very happy Feast Day!
As always, fraternally yours in St. John of God.



Bro. Donatus Forkan
Prior General