



SAINT LAZARUS®

The Military & Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem

Holy Week 2025



O Lord Christ, Lamb of God, Lord of lords,
Bring us, in the fellowship of thy sufferings,
to the victory of thy cross,
O crucified Lord,
who with the Father and the Holy Spirit
lives and reigns one God,
almighty, eternal,
world without end.

Amen



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What's in a Name? – A reflection on the Order's name

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“What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”

So declares Juliet as she laments the name of her beloved in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* [*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, scene ii]. With a lover's fervour, Juliet uses the analogy to put aside her family's abhorrence of Romeo's family name, Montague, with the belief that Romeo's character remains sweet despite his last name which was an anathema to her family. However, a name proclaims one's comportment in society. It defines the individual. To use Juliet's analogy, calling a rose by its true name quickly brings to mind the actual flower with its sweet-smelling characteristics; simply calling it a 'flower' does not define its actual character and form.

These principles are even more relevant to associations. The chosen name of any association should clearly reflect its role in society – what it does and what it stands for. In a world of increasing secularization and self-centredness, it seems that the time is ripe to contemplate on the name assumed by our international philanthropic organization – the *Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem*. What message should the name convey to its members and to the general public? How does the name link up with the chosen stated aims of the organization? After all, an *Order* refers a group of persons committed to a purpose.

Our name incorporates three basic identifiable concepts: *St Lazarus*, *Hospitaller*, and *Military*. One should consider the true meaning of each of the three concepts to give a better understanding of the role and function of the Order in today's world, and the responsibilities one assumes when one becomes a member of the Order, especially when assuming a leadership role within the Order.

Saint Lazarus: The identity of Lazarus and his links to the Order have long been the subject of discussion. There is no doubt whatsoever that the original Order of St Lazarus established in Jerusalem during the Crusader Period referred to Lazarus of Bethany, friend of Jesus. This is clearly stated in the earliest available statutes of the Order held at the Seedorf Monastery in Switzerland.

However, the concept linking victims of leprosy to the name Lazarus has much earlier origins. This relationship was made by the 4th century Cappadocian Fathers of the Church who exhorted their congregation to support the victims of leprosy, rather than stigmatize them and exclude them from the community, by adopting the underlying principle expounded by Jesus's Parable of the Rich Man and the Leprous Beggar [*Luke 16:19-31*].

In the parable, the rich man was punished not because he carried out any direct harmful action but because he simply completely ignored and was impervious to the suffering of the leprosy beggar – he committed a 'Sin of Omission' rather than a 'Sin of Commission'. The Cappadocian Fathers' exhortations led to the establishment of hospices dedicated to the care of victims of leprosy [*sive lazarus houses or leprosaria*].

As members of the Order of St Lazarus, we should therefore be constantly alert to the suffering of our neighbours, be it in our community or even wider afield. As members of the Order, we have assumed the duty to care for those in need, especially those stigmatized by society – the modern-day lepers: the elderly, the migrants, sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQ+), etc. We are their Crusaders and thus we must help them by MILITARY and HOSPITALLER means – individually and institutionally. Anything less is a ‘sin of omission’.

Hospitaller: The Hospitaller element of the Order’s role in society had been adopted during the pre-Crusader Period with the Brethren of Saint Lazarus establishing Lazar houses. The hospitaller role was maintained throughout the centuries, changing in structure in accordance with the societal outlook towards leprosy. It was apparently lost during the 17-18th centuries when the Order in France was transformed into an honorific one with very little or no philanthropic work being organized under its auspices. During the mid-19th century, the remaining French members of the Order undertook to support the rebuilding of the monastery on Mount Carmel in Haifa thus readopting a philanthropic dimension to the Order’s *raison d’être*. This philanthropic and hospitaller dimension was formally codified when the Order reorganized itself in the early decades of the 20th century.

It is a role that has taken on a primary place in the objectives of the Order. In 2023, an equivalent total of about €29,000,000 was donated as monetary donations, in-kind goods or voluntary man-hours towards various needy causes. The members of the Order have certainly appreciated and adopted the meaning of the term ‘Hospitaller’.

Military: The Military element of the Order’s role was originally adopted during the early 13th century, possibly earlier. During the Crusader Period in the Outremer, the meaning of this role was very clear – it served to support the Christian forces against the Islamic threat in the region. Once expelled from the Outremer, the military facet of the Order appears to have rather diminished, except where the Islamic threat persisted [e.g. in the Kingdom of Hungary]. After the 16th century, the Order assumed a role in protecting the Roman Catholic Church from assumed threatening political and religious movements in Central Europe [16th century], in France [17-18th centuries], and in Italy [19th century]. Imbued by the Papal Zouave’s *Militia di Cristo*, to which many of the early 20th century Lazarites subscribed, the meaning of the MILITARY was very clear. They were to serve as ‘*Soldiers of Christ*’ whenever the need arose.

With changing attitudes brought about by the process of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, the actual Military facet has lost its role. A soldier’s primary role is to defend the country, maintain peace and order, and support humanitarian missions. The members of the Order are no longer expected to take up arms to fight against Islamic hordes or threatening forces to the Papacy. Simply wearing elegant uniforms during functions does not make the Order’s members *Soldiers of Christ*. The Order’s members need to reappraise their military role in society, otherwise we are simply boys and girls playing at soldiers.

In the modern world, true *Soldiers of Christ* are expected to ‘take up arms’ to defend the ethical and moral values of Christianity. We, as individuals, jurisdictions, and internationally, need to speak up whenever these Christian values are threatened; whenever the marginalized or lepers of modern society are victimized, whenever the weak and needy are ignored by society.

Let us not, as an international organization, "...just listen to God's word. (We) must do what it says. Otherwise, (we) are only fooling (our)selves." [James 1:22] We must "be on guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong." [1 Corinthians 16:13]. We do need to "put on all of God's armour so that (we) will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil" [Ephesians 6:11]. The antichrist is always with us in some form or another. Like the Salvation Army, let us adopt the words of the third stanza and refrain of the English hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers' written by Sabine Baring-Gould in 1865:

*Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;
We are not divided; all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before!*



*O God, who has chosen us to be an Order of Knights
under the blessed protection of Saint Lazarus,
grant that we, in full devotion to you and abounding in neighbourly charity,
may show ourselves invincible against the enemies of the Cross,
remaining faithful unto death,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*