

**Mass with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem  
Mass for Tuesday of the 21<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, Cycle 1  
August 26, 2025**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacon(s), Esteemed Knights and Ladies, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass for the annual gathering of the members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is one of the oldest and most historic Chivalric Orders of the Roman Catholic Church. The Order originates from the time of the First Crusade in 1099, which reclaimed Jerusalem and the Holy Lands from the Turks and established a guard of honor to protect one of the region's most sacred sites – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Today, the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is the only lay institution of the Vatican State charged with the task of providing for the needs of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and for all the activities and initiatives which are necessary to support the Christian presence in the Holy Land.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Order traces its history back over many centuries, some of the terminology may sound antiquated and in need of explanation.

First, the word “Equestrian” comes from the Latin word *equus*, which means “horse.” So the “Equestrian Order” refers to the Order’s historical origins, when many of the Crusaders fought their battles on horseback. I am not aware of too many of the Knights or Dames of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem who continue to travel on horseback, but keeping the name “Equestrian” is a way of honoring the rich history of the Order!

The Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is the tomb where Jesus was buried when He was taken down from the cross and from which He rose from the dead. It is for that reason obviously a very sacred place and the primary focus of any pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

A “Patriarchate” refers to a diocese whose bishop is called a “Patriarch,” a title typically used only by some of the more ancient dioceses in the Church. Here in the United States, we use the title Archbishop who is also the Metropolitan of an ecclesiastical province. Our Province is comprised of the six dioceses in Illinois and our Metropolitan is the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago. The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is a

particular Catholic Church whose territory includes Cyprus, Jordan, Palestine and Israel. The Latin Patriarch is His Eminence Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa.

In our prayers at this Mass, we ask God to bless and strengthen the Order in its mission:

- to strengthen its members the practice of Christian life, observing as its foundation the principles of charity which make the Order a fundamental means of assistance to the Holy Land;
- to sustain and aid the charitable, cultural and social works and institutions of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land;
- to support the preservation and spread of the Faith in those lands; and
- to uphold the rights of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land.<sup>2</sup>

Since there are so few Christians in the Holy Land these days, the support of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is crucial to fund the ongoing mission of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem also help to support Bethlehem University and Caritas Baby Hospital in Bethlehem, the Daughters of our Lady of Sorrows, Project HOPE (Holy

Land Outreach Promoting Education), and the School and Summer Camp at Holy Family Parish in Gaza, which was struck by an Israeli tank last month, killing three people and injuring several others, including the Pastor. We continue to pray for peace in the Middle East.

Joining the Order means taking on a commitment for life: the commitment to be a Witness to the Faith, to lead an exemplary Christian life of continuing charity in support of the Christian communities in the Holy Land, and to practice the true charitable commitment of a Christian.

As Jesus cautions us in today's Gospel passage (Mt 23:23-26) against doing things only for show and Saint Paul urges us in today's first reading (1 Thes 2:1-8) to do good works not to please others or receive their praise, the purpose of joining the Order is not to become a member of a prestigious organization in order to boast of one's status or acquire personal benefits and advantages. Rather, the purpose of joining the Order is to serve the Catholic Church and to carry out acts of charity to make the operations to maintain the Christian presence in the Holy Land possible. For this, we are grateful!

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eohsjeastern.org/the-order/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/institutions\\_connected/oessh/en/cenni\\_storici\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/institutions_connected/oessh/en/cenni_storici_en.html)