

COMMANDER'S COMMENTS AT THE CHURCH SERVICE

By S.K. Richard W. Van Doren

This morning marks something unusual for all of us. For the congregation, I understand that this might be your first encounter with Knights Templar. I hope that you have had a chance to read the short note about them in the bulletin. For the Knights, this may well be the first time in modern times that they have received a blessing prior to going on a pilgrimage. But in this Lenten Season – particularly today, Palm Sunday, it is fitting that we do so – all the while remembering that this day began Jesus' final pilgrimage to the Cross.

A pilgrimage is a special type of travel. By definition, a pilgrimage is “a journey, especially a long one, made to some sacred place, as an act of devotion; a journey made for a pious purpose, or to visit a place of honor. *Figuratively*: the course of mortal life is regarded as such a journey.”

During the Medieval period, the original Knights Templar would seek God's blessing prior to going forth on their missions of protecting pilgrims. They would do this prior to the journey's start from the various castles and fortresses which were established from the Holy Land, across the Mediterranean Isles, to the European countries on the Atlantic Ocean.

In Tomar, Portugal, the Templar Grand Master's palace has attached to it a round church, a copy of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. At one end are massive doors thirty feet high and twenty feet across. There is a high altar in the center of the church raised some four feet off the floor. Around the altar is a space of some 25 feet wide. Before dawn, under the illumination of torchlight – just prior to going forth on a mission or pilgrimage -- the Knights in full armor and banners and accompanied by their sergeants and others in the entourage, would ride their horses through the large doors at the end of the church to take communion and receive the priest's blessing for success of their journey.

And so we come here this day, to receive God's blessing for the success of this mission. Our mission is to bring fraternal love and greetings to our companion

knights of Greece and Rhodes. We also will be contributing to the charities toward the poor and helpless on those distant shores – protecting the Household of Faith as we have over the centuries.

For those not able to be with us on the journey, I would like you to consider the figurative concept of Pilgrimage as you complete the Lenten Season and enjoy that great Christian Holiday of Easter: namely, the course of your own mortal life as a metaphor for the journey that you have been on from its beginning. Fasten in your mind your destination. Be observant of your daily progress. Be attentive to and demonstrate kindness toward those that travel with you. And – most of all – be grateful to the One who protects, guides, and upholds us all through the trials and dangers along the way.

We thank you all for your gracious hospitality and wish you all the joys of the Easter Season.

S.K. Van Doren was Commander of Boston Commandery #2, KT 2008-2009. He resides in Groton, MA. These comments were made from the pulpit during the Palm Sunday service at the Congregational Church of Littleton, April 2010.