



THE ORDER

The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem



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Spiritual Message

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Chaplain General

Instead of my normal column for this issue, I thought it would be good for the Order to read about the remarkable story of one of our members, Archbishop Gregory Aymond, ECLJ, Archbishop of New Orleans, who after having tested positive for COVID-19 and quarantining himself and recovering fully, was able to take to the skies above New Orleans to bless the city from the air. The full story of his flight- and then of a rabbi taking to the air immediately after he landed - follows:

“Seventy-year-old New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, ECLJ, climbed into the open-air cockpit of a World War II-era Stearman PT-17 biplane on Good Friday morning and roared off on a 25-minute mission.

As a pilot steered a course from the Lakefront Airport to Kenner to Gretna, to the French Quarter and back, Aymond blessed the population, which has been afflicted and isolated by the coronavirus, from a safe distance - 1,000 feet up.

New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond rode in a World War II era Stearman PT-17 biplane over the city of New Orleans, Friday, April 10, 2020. He took with him holy water from the Jordan River, where Christ was baptized, to sprinkle over the city, and the Eucharist, to bless those sick or deceased from the new coronavirus, as well as the front line responder.

As he flew, Aymond prayed for protection and healing for the people below, sprinkling holy water that came from the Jordan River as he went. As it turns out, sprinkling holy water in the slipstream of an airplane can be a challenge.

The flight was a sort of metaphor, the archbishop said: The plane was used in war and right now we're in a war with the coronavirus. He said he particularly asked God to offer grace to the health care workers, the first responders and the city leaders who are on the front lines of the battle.

Aymond recently recovered from his own fight with COVID-19. The archbishop said he experienced only a high fever and was spared the coughing and severe lung congestion that others have suffered when infected by the virus.

Aymond wasn't alone in taking to the skies on Friday morning. Rabbi Lexi Erdheim, 29, of the Congregation Gates of Prayer Synagogue in Metairie, also ventured into the sky aboard the 1943 vintage aircraft to offer a blessing during Passover.

Erdheim, who took off at noon, said the traditional blessing asks God for healing and wholeness. Customarily, she said, a rabbi would read the names of those in the community who were ill, but under the circumstances of the coronavirus crisis, she planned to make it a blanket prayer for the whole city.”

MacCash, Doug. “Holy water rains over New Orleans as Archbishop, rabbi perform flyover coronavirus blessing.” *The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate* [New Orleans], 10 April 2020, www.nola.com, https://www.nola.com/news/coronavirus/article_5e075f16-7b5e-11ea-8513-0bf89010a444.html.



Transforming Lazar Houses into Lazarettos

The victims of leprosy were always looked upon with horror and were shunned by the community. Written about 1512 BCE, the Leviticus of the old Testament clearly details the process as to how a leprosy victim was diagnosed and subsequently treated. “The leprosy person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” [cf *Leviticus 13:1-59*] Since man being a social animal, it is reasonable to assume that the victims of leprosy sought out each other and formed leper communities of course living in segregation from the health community, explaining why Jesus was affronted by a group of ten lepers seeking a miraculous cure. [cf *Luke 17:11-19*] With time, these leper communities were further supported and formally established as leprosaria by then authorities of the respective cities. The earliest known leprosarium to be established especially for the care of lepers is that which was founded by St. Fabiola outside the walls of Rome in 360 AD. Other leprosaria were set up in the Holy Land in the later fourth century by St. Basil the Great in Ptolemais [modern Acre] and by Empress Eudoxia outside Jerusalem. Since lepers were looked upon as the ‘living dead’ because of their apparent decomposing bodies, the victims were associated with St. Lazarus of Bethany who had been resurrected by Jesus. The leprosaria were gradually also termed Lazar Houses.

The shunning and enforced segregation of the victims of leprosy continued right through the Middle Ages. Many Lazar institutions, though not all, in the Outremer and in Christian Europe were in 1265 placed by Pope Clement IV under the direction of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem who had been transformed into a Crusader Order with the charisma of caring for victims of leprosy and also assuming a fighting role in the Outremer.

The segregation persisted right through the fourteenth century. However, the Black Death epidemics of the 14th century that killed an estimated quarter of the world’s population resulted in a near disappearance of leprosy in Europe leaving many Lazar houses depleted from inmates. The realization that the spread of epidemic disease was helped by social contact brought about the introduction of social isolations of communities from outside influence. The principles of quarantine were first introduced in 1377 in Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian Coast. The Republic of Venice extended the principles of quarantine to setting up the first permanent quarantine center or Lazaretto on the small island of Santa Maria di Nazareth, that had previously served as a leper colony, to segregate potentially diseased overseas visitors and diseased members of the community from the healthy population. Genoa adopted the Venetian system in 1467, while Marseille converted the Lazar institution into a lazaretto. Permanent quarantine establishments were established in the major ports of the Mediterranean ensuring that the spread of pandemic infections are controlled at their point of entry.