



Message for Easter 2021

Dear Confreres and Consœurs of the Order of St Lazarus,

The joyful proclamation of Easter that the Church has made before the world for two millennia is this: "Jesus is risen; he is alive; he is still with us." This is an ancient but always new announcement because this year - like last year - the world is experiencing a dramatic moment due to the Coronavirus pandemic with its legacy of dead, sick or fearful people for whom we shed tears, without economic security and uncertain about their future.

An ancient homily defines Easter as the "Common feast of all beings, sending into the world the will of the Father, divine dawn of Christ on earth, perennial solemnity of angels and archangels, immortal life of the whole world, incorruptible nourishment for men, heavenly soul of all things".

Through the Passover of Christ, we want to tell everyone that our life, even if it goes through difficult times, is not overcome by the lack of hope. As Christians we are aware that God is present in history, even when his presence is not perceived. The risen Christ did not take evil out of the world, but he triumphed over it at the root, opposing the arrogance of evil through the omnipotence of his Love.

Christ's resurrection is the beginning of a new dimension of reality that reveals a truly new life, and sheds a new light, not only on the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, but also on our life, present and future. Christ's resurrection is not over; it will only be completed when we all share with him in the glory of the Father.

The angels have a particular mission in the proclamation of Jesus's Resurrection. It is from them that it is communicated to a group of women and from those women it has come to the Apostles and then to us through an uninterrupted chain of authoritative witnesses. All of us members of the Order of St Lazarus have also received the mission of "angels", messengers of Christ's resurrection, witnesses of his victory over evil and death, bearers of his divine love. The Christian hope that derives from Christ's Resurrection must be witnessed in everyday life characterised by joy, love, humility, meekness and the capacity for forgiveness and mercy.

The proclamation that Christ has risen is the heartbeat of the Church which gives us the guarantee that our sins are forgiven, our tears are dried, our existential loneliness is overcome, our immortal freedom is won. Oppressed and distressed by so many personal and global problems, by so many illusory promises, we need a hope that is not illusory. If Jesus Christ had not risen, human hope would remain an impoverished hope and injustices, violence, lawlessness, corruption and death would

continue to dominate inexorably. Our hope is not a utopia but a Person: the Lord Jesus whom we recognise alive and present in us, in the Church and in the world.

At Easter Christ reconciles us with God our Father who is rich in mercy, with our neighbour and with creation, which we are called to respect and whose resources we are called on to value in the service of mankind. The news of Christ's Resurrection opens up perspectives on the ultimate meaning of our lives and the destiny of the universe. We must shrug off sadness and resignation, open ourselves to the courage of hope, and work in harmony for the common good.

All this requires a newness of life. If we are still in our sins, then Christ died in vain for us; then he did not rise for us; then for us it is not Easter; then it is useless to exchange good wishes.

As Christians we are called to confront the events of life in the last days, burdened by the heavy baggage of suffering, pain and death, and we must offer an "Easter" reading of them in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. At this Eastertide, let us be renewed by the certainty of God's mercy which, like a river, can irrigate the deserts of our world, and let us become messengers of this mercy, committed to making justice and love flourish and to welcoming everyone into an embrace of peace.

I hope that the light of Jesus Christ risen will illuminate the life of every member of our Order as we are called to contribute to the healing of those suffering from and affected by leprosy and those affected by all kinds of diseases, in order that we may bring hope for a future of freedom, justice and peace to the whole world.

+ *Michele Pennisi*
Archbishop of Monreale & Ecclesiastical Grand Prior

Monreale, Palm Sunday 2021