



Message for Lent 2021

Dear Confreres and Consoeurs of the Order of St Lazarus,

During this Lent we are called to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to experience the joy of the Passover of Resurrection, the foundation of our hope. At a time when we have not been spared suffering, fear, uncertainty about the future and the death of loved ones, the start of the vaccination plan begins to allow us to see the light at the end of the tunnel and to start a more serene life again.

The season of Lent prepares us to celebrate the great Mystery of Jesus's death and resurrection. Starting from the experience of the Father's merciful love, we are invited to the sincere conversion of our minds and hearts. This stems from listening to and welcoming the Good News of Jesus's death and resurrection as a Mystery of Love, thanks to which God's mercy was given to us.

Conversion means changing our mentality and our conduct by reminding ourselves that before God we are only dust and ashes, fragile people into whom an invisible virus can put fear. Fasting, prayer and alms are the conditions and practical expression of our conversion.

Jesus refocuses the religious and penitential practices of Judaism: alms must be hidden; fasting, joyful; and prayer, humble. The path of deprivation through fasting, the works of mercy for wounded and sick humanity and dialogue as children with our Father through prayer allow us to embody a sincere faith, a living hope and an active charity.

Lent is a good time to renew the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity which are three closely united aspects which, starting from the insuppressible desire for God inscribed in the heart of man, express the spiritual life of the Christian, who freely responds to grace and who, in Jesus Christ, fulfills the divine promise. The relationship between the three theological virtues is grasped by Charles Péguy in a poetic way. Faith is compared to a faithful bride, charity to an older sister, hope to "a little girl from nothing" who stands in the middle and "leads her older sisters".

Even in the current context of concern for the future, in which everything seems uncertain, we Christians are called to "hope against all hope" (*Romans 4:18*). Living Lent with hope means feeling that we are witnesses of the new life in Jesus Christ, in which God "makes all things new" (cf. *Revelation 21:1-6*). It means receiving the hope of Christ who gives his life on the cross and whom the Father resurrects on the third day, and being "always ready to respond to anyone who wants a reason for the hope that is in us" (*1 Peter 3:15*).

May the appeal to live this Lent as a path of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods help us to revisit, in our community and in our hearts through our personal experience, the faith that comes from Christ alive, the hope animated by the breath of the Spirit and the love whose inexhaustible source is the merciful heart of the Father. In wishing you a good Lenten journey, I invite you to accept this appeal to allow yourselves to be reconciled with God and to fix the gaze of your heart, with hope, on the Paschal Mystery.

May the blessing of the Risen Christ accompany us on the journey to the Paschal light.

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

Monreale, 24 February 2021