



## Message for Lent 2021

Dear Confreres and Consoeurs of the Military Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem,

Lent, this year, brings with it so many hopes along with so much uncertainty and suffering, still linked to the pandemic and its psychological, social and religious consequences which we have been experiencing through trial and error for about two years. To these are added the dramas of the war in Ukraine and other countries and the combination of old and new poverty.

The forty days that prepare us for Easter are a pressing invitation to turn to the Good News of the presence among us of the Kingdom of God, which gives deep meaning to our existence in a renewed encounter with Jesus, the crucified and risen Christ.

In this Lent Pope Francis exhorts us: *"Let us never tire of doing good; for if we do not give up, in due time we will reap our harvest. Therefore, where we have the opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal 6:9-10a)*. The beauty of our life lies *"not so much in having as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing good and sharing"*.

Sowing good frees us from the narrow perspective of personal gain and gives our actions the broad breath of generosity, placing us in the wonderful perspective of the Father's plan of salvation, rich in mercy and benevolent to all. In order to sow good and to reap its fruits, fasting prepares the soil, prayer irrigates it, charity makes it fruitful.

Let us not tire of praying. We need to pray personally and communally because we need God. To be self-sufficient is a dangerous illusion. No one is saved alone, because we are all in the same boat amid the storms of history; but above all no one is saved without God, because only the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ gives us the certainty of victory over death.

Faith does not take us away from the tribulations of life but allows us to address them united to God in Christ, with the great hope that does not disappoint and whose pledge is the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom 5:1-5*).

Let us not tire of eradicating evil from our lives through bodily fasting to strengthen our spirit for the fight against sin and to share the deprivations of so many people affected by wars, climate change and various forms of poverty.

Let us not tire of doing good in active charity towards our neighbour.

If it is true that our whole life is a time to sow good, let us take advantage of this Lent in a special way to take care of sick people, to make ourselves close to those brothers and sisters who are wounded on the road of life, to open ourselves to solidarity and acceptance towards Ukrainian refugees.

Lent is an ideal time to seek, and not to avoid, those in need; to call, and not to ignore, those who want to listen and to receive a good word; to visit, and not to abandon, those who suffer loneliness. By practising fraternal love for all, we are united to Christ, who gave his life for us, and we have a foretaste of the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Lent invites us to turn around, to change our mentality, so that life has its truth and beauty not so much in having as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing good and in sharing.

During Lent we are called to respond to God's gift by accepting his Word which is "alive and effective" (*Heb 4:12*). Reading, meditating and praying the Word of God means preparing the heart to love without limits.

Listening first transforms the listener, avoiding the risk of presumption and self-centredness. Listening to the Word of God and listening to our brothers and sisters go hand in hand.

Lent reminds us every year that "good, as well as love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they must be worked at every day".

I therefore invite you to accept the call to let ourselves be reconciled with God, to fix our hearts' gaze on the Paschal Mystery and to be converted to listening to the voice of God, which reaches us through Scripture, our neighbour and the events of life.

I wish you a good Lenten journey.

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

*Monreale, Ash Wednesday 2 March 2022*