



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

In the Gospel of John, the resurrection of Jesus, which reminds us of Easter, is preceded by the resurrection of his friend, Lazarus.

Faced with Jesus Christ, who presents himself as "Resurrection and Life", we must convince ourselves that bodily death is not the end of everything. Jesus has opened the dark door of death once and for all and through that door we can also harmlessly walk. Beyond the lacerating experience of death, the only true and definitive reality for man is that we are invited during Easter to contemplate Christ, the Lord of life, He who triumphs over death.

Jesus is the only one who, faced with his friend's death, continues to preach hope. The resurrection of Lazarus is not only a "sign" of the future resurrection, but above all, the announcement of a gift that the Lord Jesus already makes to those who believe in Him.

We believers possess the "eternal life" as of now and we are waiting for it to reach its fullness when "seeing God as He is" (1 John 2: 2). Already in the present, Jesus is for all believers that divine, ineffable, eternal life that will never die.

The cry in which Jesus calls Lazarus to "come out" is the voice of Him who now calls the spiritually dead to rise and to live. It is not just an invitation to each person to leave the grave of his own selfishness, meanness, despair, but it is also an effective message that truly liberates and gives us the taste of true life, because He is Life. The Risen One calls us to wake up, to rise again, and to get up from our lifeless and immobile lives, asleep and useless; He calls us to do things that will remain forever.

Jesus Christ cried for Lazarus, his beloved friend and raised him up, but only for his earthly life: years later, in fact, Lazarus will die again.

Christ also cried for us. He, "in the days of his earthly life offered prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears to God" (Hebrews 5: 7), and by dying, He gave us a new life not only for now, but forever.

Faith in the Risen Christ is the foundation of our hope in the resurrection of the dead and in eternal life.

Jesus of Nazareth does- not contemplate resurrection as waking up from a deep coma and as a temporary return, but the beginning of a new dimension of reality that opens up to a profoundly new life and sheds new light, not only on His figure, but also on our life, our present and our future.

In fact, it refers to a definite victory over death and precisely from this certainty, Christian hope springs. St. Paul affirms "If Christ has not risen, your faith is vain" (1 Cor 15:17).

Referring to this text, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein writes: "If Christ did not rise from the dead, then he decomposed in the grave like any other man. He is dead and decomposed". For if that were the case, then Christ was a teacher like any other, and can no longer help; and once more we are orphaned and alone. So we have to content ourselves with wisdom and speculation. And if that is all we have, then: 'We are in a sort of hell where we can do nothing but dream, roofed in, as it were, and cut off from heaven.' If he wanted to be saved, to be redeemed, then wisdom was not enough; he needed faith. Perhaps we can say: only the love that redeems also believes in the resurrection; and perseveres in believing in it ".

"Death and Life confronted each other in a prodigious duel. The Lord of life was dead; but now He lives, He triumphed ". This is the proclamation of joy, which the believing community proclaims to the whole world by celebrating Easter. If it were fake news, we Christians would be impostors, but only because it is real, it makes sense to wish all of us a "Happy Easter".

Waiting to meet all of you during the upcoming Chapter General, I wish every member of the Military Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem to rejoice by a living faith, a fervent hope and an industrious charity.

Palm Sunday 2018

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