



Christmas 2019

SAINT LAZARUS®

The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem

Christmas greetings!

All around us we encounter poverty and need as our Grand Master reminded us in his Advent letter. Rightly he referred to this social exclusion as the 'leprosy' of the 21st century. Care and compassion often seem in short supply in societies focused on the individual, success and wealth.

Attending the Heads of Jurisdiction meeting in Madrid recently I was struck by how much good work is done by members of the Order across the globe, not only in funding others to care but in concern for the poor and needy in their communities. This is also highlighted graphically in the Grand Hospitaller's Report.

Christmas reminds us that because of His love for us God gave unconditionally and without any thought of reciprocation. Too often our present giving is conditioned by the expectation of receiving in return. As St Francis of Assisi reminds us "it is in giving that we receive". I am touched by the number of Commanderies within our Jurisdictions who put this principle into practice throughout the year.

But, especially at this Christmas season let us all resolve to give to those who cannot give in return and, in so doing, bring unexpected happiness and joy to them as they realise that we care for and love them because He loved us first in his gift of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

May this be a joyful and blessed Season for all our members.

With warmest confraternal greetings

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**“We should not
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Christ once a year,
but every day,
because he lives again
in each one of us. “**

A Christmas message from our Ecclesiastical Grand Prior, the Archbishop of Monreale

Dear Confrères and Consoeurs,

In this society we live in of "sad passions", a society whose members fear the future, even those who continue to install the Nativity scene in their homes and decorate the Christmas tree, the symbol of the tree of life, there is the risk of treating Christmas as merely a traditional party, and totally forgetting about the birthday boy.

Christmas is not an event of the past, but a "mystery" that has been present in history, and so it continues. It is the announcement of the birth of a new man who has come to rebuild a new world. In this world there is room for everything that is authentically human, for daily holiness that brings us the joy of doing things in an extraordinary way, every day.

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God tells us that our life is wholly bound up with that of God and helps us remember the tenderness and greatness of the love of Jesus, who loves us in order to unite us, because we can also join him.

God is not relegated to the clouds, but presents himself with the face of a child who sleeps and eats, cries and smiles and raises his small hands towards each and every one of us to be welcomed into our arms. Jesus as a child brings us the smile of God; He comes to participate in our small joys and to dry our tears. That smile contains the overwhelming energy to start building a human society according to God's design.

In Jesus, the Father gave us his Son who frees us and lifts us from sin, He is the elder Brother, who unlike the brother in the famous parable of St Luke, comes looking for us when we leave home and participates in the Father's joy, the faithful friend who is always close to us and wants our joy to be complete. From the mystery of Christmas we are invited to get involved in the history of salvation, to feel ourselves contemporaries of Jesus Christ, who is alive and present in this third millennium after his birth, to follow him on the path of humility, meekness, poverty, that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the Cross of Golgotha.

After experiencing the joy of meeting Jesus and in order to make the Christmas mystery credible, we are called to announce this "Beautiful News" to everybody, bearing witness to his love with concrete actions of mercy in the service of brothers and sisters in need.

Christians must feel challenged by what Gandhi has written: "When I hear singing 'Glory to God and peace on earth to men of good will' today I wonder how glory is given to God and where there is peace on earth. Until peace is an insatiable hunger, until we can be reborn as men enlightened by the Spirit, to establish with our fellow human beings authentic relations of communion without forced smiles, envy, jealousy, false courtesy, diplomacy, until we have as a sense of life, the search for truth about ourselves, the right thing, the beautiful thing, until we can shed what is not authentic, what we have too much of at the expense of those who have nothing, until we continue to pursue more beautiful and deeper dreams, the Christ will never be born.



We should not celebrate the birth of Christ once a year, but every day, because he lives again in each one of us. Jesus was born and lived in vain if we do not learn from him to regulate our lives to the eternal law of complete love. When authentic peace has been affirmed, when we have eradicated the violence of our civilization, only then can we truly say that 'Christ was born in our midst'. Then we will not think so much about a day that is an anniversary, but about an event that can take place throughout our lives. Therefore, if you wish people a 'Merry Christmas' with no meaning to this prayer, the wish remains an empty formula."

Christmas gives us the certainty and joy that God is with us as our travelling companion and we are with Him, all children of the same Father, brothers of that Child, Son of God and the Virgin Mary, who now generates in us a newness of life.

I hope that the Redeemer's Christmas celebration will fill everyone's heart with joy and light, and I sincerely offer the most abundant thanks and blessings to you and your families.

Monreale, December 2019

+ *Michele Pennisi*

Archbishop of Monreale

Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of the Military Hospital Order of San Lazzaro

