

**Message for Lent 2020**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Saint Lazarus,

Lent is that demanding time each year which prepares us to celebrate the Mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus; it is the cornerstone of personal and communal Christian life and, starting with our experience of the Father's merciful love, urges us to sincere conversion, prayer, joyful fasting and determined charity.

It is a time when we are invited to revive the memory of baptism, reaffirming that Jesus is the Lord of our lives and we are encouraged to reconfirm the essential purpose of our lives in matching his free love.

I suggest you meditate on some specific gospel passages that help us adjust to Lent and prepare for Easter.

The triple temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4, vv. 1-11) helps us to walk the Lent path with the strength of the Word of God, asking Christ victorious over the devil to support us in the moment of temptation and not to succumb to the charm of sin.

The beauty of Jesus transfigured (Matthew 17, vv. 1-9) gives us the strength to walk in the light of the Gospel and to open ourselves to the message of the Word of the Lord, to welcome in our lives the saving mystery of the cross that introduces us to the blazing glory of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4, vv. 5-42) awakens in us the desire for the living water of grace that springs from Christ and arouses the resolve to profess our faith and announce with joy the wonders of God's love.

The healing of the man blind from birth (John 9, vv. 1-41) frees us from the darkness of disbelief, so that the Spirit may open our eyes to the full knowledge of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world, our only salvation.

The resurrection of Jesus' friend Lazarus (John 11, vv. 11-45) in which Jesus is revealed as "the Resurrection and Life", helps us to weep with those who weep for the death of their loved ones, to pray for those who have died because of sin; helps us, above all, to rise from our own little death, the quiet life that prevents us from engaging in the search for the common good, the lack of courage in the struggle for justice, the addiction to corruption, confidently awaiting the Spirit of the purveyor of the new life.

Our conversion comes from listening and welcoming the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a mystery of love, through which God's mercy has been bestowed upon us; it resides in the heart that listens to prayer that is not merely dutiful but which expresses the need to correspond to the love of God, who always goes before us and supports us.

The practice of fasting helps us overcome the temptation to devour everything in order to satisfy our greed in its many manifestations. In addition to fasting from food, there are, in fact, many other valuable forms of abstinence: for example, abstaining from smoking, or alcohol, from excessive use of the internet and the media, as well as from gossip.

Our charity will allow us to feel compassion for the wounds of Christ crucified, as manifested in those who suffer in body and spirit, and will open us to the sharing of our goods with the neediest through alms; in this way we participate in building a more just, more supportive, more fraternal world.

In wishing you a good Path of Lent, I invite you to accept the call to open yourselves to reconciliation with God and reconciliation with others in the spirit of fraternity, as we contemplate the images of Christ crucified and risen. I also invite you to become the salt of the earth and light of the world. (Matthew 5, vv. 13-14).

Monreale, February 26th, 2020

**Michele Pennisi , Archbishop of Monreale**

**Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of the Holy Military Order of St. Lazarus**