



Message for Advent 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The history of salvation, which the liturgy begins to retrace with the First Sunday of Advent, is essentially the history of God's initiative, the memory of so many of his "comings" to man which, together, form the great Advent that extends from creation to his final coming. Our history and the life of each one of us does not await an uncertain future that fills us with anxiety but awaits the Advent of Christ who fulfils the prophetic promises and fills us with hope.

Despite all the dramatic situations present in our world (the various wars, violence affecting minors and women, injustices and illegalities, diseases and pollution of the natural and human environment), Christian hope assures us that it is not an irreversible situation with no return, provided that we listen to the Word of God and prepare ourselves for a continuous conversion. God, precisely because he is the One who is always the same in his kingdom of infinite light, is also "the One who comes" to illuminate our darkness. Not only today but always. We have not only expectation, but also the memory of one who has already come into the mystery of Christmas that we are preparing to celebrate and the certainty of the presence of Christ who walks with us, at our side.

The endless messianic era of justice and peace, evoked by the prophets, will be born not so much from massive military operations and well-orchestrated diplomatic agreements, but from the worship of the one God on the part of men and women who decide to walk in the light of the Word of the Lord, recognizing him as the one Father and thus founding true universal fraternity. Our existence has meaning in this expectation of the Lord's coming, for which we are called to be prepared.

The coming of Christ is an ever imminent coming that requires our continuous and joyful vigilance. When the Lord comes, we are called to go out to meet him. God comes to men and women, but he does not meet them except those who set themselves on the way to him, those who "are ready". Our going to meet the Lord is not the going of the guilty towards the judge who condemns, but the going of the virgins with the lamps lit towards the Bridegroom who comes. It is no longer time to sleep but to watch, to recognize the signs of the presence of Jesus, the Christ, in our lives.

We cannot live the usual life - eating, drinking, taking wife and husband - as if the Lord will never come. The coming of the Lord gives a new meaning to eating and drinking, that must be done in praise of God and in sharing with those who lack food or clothing; a new meaning to marriage that becomes a sign that refers to Christ's love for the Church, his Bride; and the conception of life as the path to the 'Christ who comes' from whom we derive a new life, as a path to holiness, as continuous

vigilance, as a desire to please God alone. In order not to get lost or disoriented, it is necessary to seek to know the ways of the Lord and to be guided by his light, with the will to meet with good works the Lord who comes.

St. Paul's invitation to "put on the armour of light" is the invitation to put on Christ in order to walk in newness of life. The weapons of the believer indicated by Paul are:

- the shield of faith,
- the helmet of hope,
- the breastplate of charity and justice,
- the belt of truth,
- the shoes of zeal,
- the sword of the Word of God.

Faced with the certainty of having to appear before the Lord, who will judge us in love, we cannot live a frantic and banal life made up of dissipations that distract us and evasions that alienate us, of sterile actions and useless discussions. We are called to overcome lukewarmness, compromise and indecision. We are called to spread universal brotherhood, to be close to our brothers and sisters in need of food, clothing and care, and to leave this mother earth of ours better than we found it.

May the Lord who comes today and the Son of Man who will return at the end of time help us to look at all things, starting from their ultimate end, and give us the strength to be vigilant in waiting and assiduous in prayer, active in charity, ready every day to convert and to be witnesses of the Good News of God's love for all.

+ Msgr. Michele Pennisi

Archbishop Emeritus of Monreale & Ecclesiastical Grand Prior