



## Message for Advent 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The season of Advent is always a precious gift for us believers, who are called to prepare for Christmas by opening our hearts to welcome the Lord who comes. We are invited to fix our gaze not on an uncertain future that is ever less predictable, but on Jesus Christ as we await his coming.

Christian hope prevents us from looking at history in a fatalistic way and helps us to live our commitment in the world with courage and trust. We Christians look to the future without fear, because the roots of our hope lie in the very heart of God. Ours is not only expectation, but also the memory of one who has already come in the mystery of Christmas which we are preparing to celebrate, and the certainty of the presence of Christ who walks with us, at our side.

To wait is to hunger and thirst for happiness, to turn one's eyes and stretch out one's hands to the Lord who comes. In all of us there is an aspiration for peace, joy, justice, forgiveness and salvation. We can have these good things not by our own strength, but with the help of God's grace.

*"O that you would tear the heavens and come down!"* (Is 64:1) is the prayer of this season of Advent. It is the invocation of those who know how to read history and do not resign themselves to the signs of death. It is our prayer, but above all it is that of the many who are waiting for someone to save them.

To be a Christian is to remain always open to the expectation of the newness of God that can turn our lives upside down. A society without Advent, without the desire for greater justice, for greater solidarity, for a broader and more stable peace, is sad. We are called to be always available to God's plan, capable of renewing the face of the earth.

The time of waiting is the time of hope, but it is necessary to recognize oneself as a sinner in order to experience the joy of forgiveness and the embrace of the Father's mercy. The gravest sin is to wait for no one, to live in passive resignation and fear without a living hope in the newness that comes from God.

On the basis of the free love that the Lord grants us, we are called to live in friendship with the Lord Jesus and with our neighbour, and to live in active and joyful vigilance and in responsible and hopeful fidelity.

Jesus repeats to us in the Gospel: "*Be careful, be vigilant, for you do not know when the time is*" (Mk 13:33). Jesus compares the believer to a doorkeeper who has to wait for his master to return. He stands by the door; he does not fall asleep, even if it is night, until the master of the house has returned. The door at which to watch is that of the heart. Unfortunately, our hearts are sometimes so full of themselves and so stunned by their own affairs that we do not hear the footsteps or the voice of the Lord knocking. "*Behold, says the Lord, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door for me, I will come to him and eat with him, and he with me*" (Rev 3:20).

In Advent, the Lord comes to meet us. If the Lord comes, we are called to meet him with our conversion, our adherence to the good news of his grace, our works of mercy as a consequence of the experience of this generous and merciful love. There is a justice to be sought, there is charity to be carried out especially towards the poor, the sick, the lepers. We are called to leave this world 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 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**

**Grammichele, 30 November 2023**