



## Message for Easter 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem,

In John's Gospel the resurrection of Jesus is preceded by the resurrection of his friend Lazarus. Jesus is the only one who, in the face of the death of his friend, continues to hope. The resurrection of Lazarus is not only a symbol of the future resurrection, but it is also a sign of a gift that the Lord Jesus already offers to those who believe. The cry "Come forth" with which Jesus calls Lazarus is also the voice of the one who already calls the spiritually dead to rise and live. It is not only an invitation to each one to come out of the grave of their own selfishness, torpor, coarseness, despair; but it is also an effective word that really frees us and allows us to taste true life, because life is Him. Jesus Christ wept for Lazarus, his dearest friend, and raised him up, but only for earthly life: years later, in fact, Lazarus was to die again.

Christ wept for us too. By weeping and dying, He gave us new life not only for now, but forever. Faced by Jesus Christ, who presents himself as the resurrection and the life, we must remind ourselves that bodily death is not the end of everything, that Jesus opened the dark door of death once and for all and through that door we too can pass without harm. Beyond the lacerating experience of death, the reality that becomes true for us at Easter is that we are invited to contemplate Christ's victory over death.

Christ's resurrection marks his definitive victory over death. This certainty is at the origin of Christian hope. Saint Paul says "If Christ is not risen, your faith is vain" (1 Cor 15:17). The resurrection of Christ is an event that involves all Christians beyond all confessional differences.

The evangelical theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, killed by the Nazis, wrote: "If Christ is not risen, the foothold that supports our whole life falters and everything is shattered; our life declines towards meaninglessness. Every discourse concerning God is illusory, every hope evanescent."

In a sermon entitled "The Beginning of Life", the Russian Orthodox theologian Fr. Florensky, shot on December 8, 1937, said: "In the confused flow of events, a centre has been found, the point of support is revealed: Christ is risen! If the Son of God had not been resurrected, then the whole world would have become completely absurd, then the most precious treasure would have been definitively burned and beauty would have irrevocably died; then the bridge between earth and heaven would have collapsed for eternity. And we would have been left without either, because we would not have known heaven and we would not have been able to defend ourselves from the destruction of the earth."

The Anglican professor N. T. Wright states: "To be grasped by our contemporary risen Jesus is to know and love the one who defeated death by the power of love and the new creation. Every glass of fresh water, every tiny prayer, every confrontation with the bullies who oppress the poor, every song of praise or dance of joy, every work of art and music, nothing goes to waste. The resurrection will reaffirm it, in a way we cannot imagine, as part of God's new world. The resurrection is not only about a glorious future; it is about a present full of meaning."

I hope that the light of the Risen Jesus Christ will illumine the life of every member of the Order of Saint Lazarus called to contribute to the healing of lepers and people affected by every kind of disease, to bring the hope of a future of freedom, justice and peace to the whole world.

*Palm Sunday 2023*

**+ Msgr. Michele Pennisi**

***Archbishop Emeritus of Monreale & Ecclesiastical Grand Prior***