



EASTER 2014

TO ALL MEMBERS, CONSOEURS AND CONFRERES
OF THE MILITARY AND HOSPITALLER ORDER OF SAINT LAZARUS OF JERUSALEM

Jesus Christ resurrected Saint Lazarus and himself from among the dead. In this way he has revealed himself to be the Lord of Life, Him, who defeated death and definitely opened the door to Eternity through which we shall walk.

The resurrection of Saint Lazarus is not only the symbol of future resurrection, but also a gift that our Lord Jesus offers to those who believe. In the present, Jesus appears to all His believers as an indescribable eternal Life fulfilled with the divinity which will never cease.

The call that Jesus utters to Lazarus is not only an invitation to each one of us to step out of our grave of selfishness, insensitivity, meanness and desperation, but it is also the effective word that truly frees us and allows us to enjoy real life.

Just as Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus he also weeps for me: I am Lazarus, I am the friend, sick and loved, but also protected by Jesus from breaking down. In the tears of Jesus we discover the heart of God. The reason for our resurrection is in the love that melts into tears. We resurrect now, we will resurrect after death because He loved us. The love of God is stronger than death.

We are getting ready to celebrate Easter, an event that brings all of us Christians together despite confessional differences.

The Russian orthodox theologian P. Florenskii, executed by firearm on December 8th 1937 said in his homily: "The beginning of life": "In the continuous course of events and circumstances a center point has been reached, a grasping support point: "Christ has resurrected...!" If the Son of God had not resurrected, the whole world would become completely absurd, and Pilate's disdainful words: "What is the truth?" would have become true. If Jesus Christ was not resurrected, then the most precious treasure would definitely burn and beauty would irreversibly die. If the Son of God had not resurrected, the bridge that brings together Heaven and Earth would have collapsed for eternity. And we would have been left with neither of them, because we would never have been able to see Heaven nor fight against Earth's destruction.

The Evangelical Minister D. Bonhoeffer, member of the "Church of Confession", during Nazism in 1944 while in prison wrote a letter to a friend before being executed, where he said: "The resurrection of Christ is the true "Archimedes' point" from which it is possible to move the world..." If Jesus Christ was not resurrected, the point of support that governs our life stumbles and collapses; our life is bound to uselessness. Every speech that involves God would be an illusion; all hope would simply fade away.

Anglican teacher N. T. Wright says: "Allowing Jesus to take over our life today means recognizing and loving Him, the one who defeated death with the power of love and the new creation. All the glasses full of fresh water, all of the short prayers and fights against the

despots that oppress the poor, all the sung praises or joyful dances, all the pieces of art and music, nothing has been wasted. The resurrection will reaffirm it in an unimaginable way, as a part of God's new world. The resurrection is not only about a glorious future, but it is also about a meaningful present."

Pope Francis in the *Evangelii Gaudium* says: "Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew; it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power" (EG, 276).

The Easter victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death must develop in each one of us a profound change. Slavery and false idols, like power and money must be relieved by the free life of the children of our Lord. Against the sadness that dominates us due to the fear of the future there is a sense of happiness; confronting the selfishness that only allows us to look at ourselves, we encounter the love that is expressed in solidarity and responsible actions.

Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, became a stone of this new building that helps us, despite all troubles in our life, to be confident in a new future. A new society born, based on solidarity, legality and commitment, to become in our daily life, builders of peace, open to a faith that will never fade away.

In the same way that Jesus Christ removed the stone that sealed the Holy Sepulchre He can also remove the stone that does not permit us to recognize the signs of the presence of God in our time. Our stoned heart filled with selfishness and sadness can be transformed into a heart of flesh, capable of loving in the same compassionate way of Christ, and willing to take all mankind in a peaceful embrace.

May the compassionate Father strengthen us in the attention and responsibility towards all human misery so we can become dispensers of compassion. May He also give us his Spirit of love so we can resurrect with Christ, and sustained by Christian hope, aspire to eternal happiness.

Monreale, Palm Sunday, April 13th 2014

+ Michele Pennisi

Archbishop of Monreale, Sicily, Italy
Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem

