



## Message for Advent and Christmas 2025

*Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem*

At the end of my mandate as Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, I would like to sincerely thank the Grand Master, His Excellency Don Francisco de Borbón Graf von Hardenberg, and congratulate His Excellency the Right Reverend (Bishop) Lindsay Goodall Urwin, the new Ecclesiastical Grand Prior of our Order, to whom I assure my remembrance in prayer that he may continue to support the Spiritual Council of the Order and] the Ecumenical Council to foster dialogue and fraternity between the different Churches and Christian confessions.

As Ecclesiastical Grand Prior Emeritus, I want to confirm to all the members of the Order that, within the limits of my abilities and skills and the condition of my health, I will continue to dedicate myself to the spiritual and ecumenical service of our Order. The faith professed 1700 years ago at the Council of Nicaea, which unites all Christians in a common profession of faith, impels us to continue the commitment to a spiritual ecumenism.

In this Advent season, in preparation for Christmas, I would like to address a message of good wishes to all the members of our Order. The life of each one of us does not await an uncertain future that fills us with anxiety; rather, the Advent of Christ fills us with hope, whose roots are set 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 that we are preparing to celebrate, and the certainty of the presence of Christ who walks with us, at our side.

Christmas is not just an historical event, in which we commemorate the birth of a person from the past, but is the announcement for each of us of the birth within us of a new person who knows the origin of their life and journeys towards the realization of their destiny of beauty, truth, justice and peace which finds its foundation in Christ.

A new world founded on justice and peace will be born not so much from massive military operations and well-orchestrated diplomatic agreements, but from the worship of the one God by those who decide to walk in the light of the Word of the Lord, recognizing him as the one Father and thus founding true universal brotherhood. When man does not notice God, then there is darkness in the soul, a darkness that the lights of a thousand coloured bulbs, the gold and silver of Christmas decorations, the notes of choral songs cannot overcome. Jesus is the

only light capable of dispelling the darkness of sin, loneliness and despair. With Jesus we too become children of light.

Saint Paul's invitation to put on "the weapons of light" (Rom 13:12) is an invitation to put on Christ so we may walk in newness of life. The weapons of the believer are the shield of faith, the helmet of hope in salvation, the breastplate of charity and justice, the belt of truth, the shoes of zeal, the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God (cf. Eph. 6:13-17)

Our responsibility in the world is to be a reflection of the light of Christ in love and service to him through love and service to others, to those we meet on our daily journeys, in the places where we live, so that they may know that light which has invested our lives. In this period of violence and war, the world of humanity reached by the proclamation of the Child Jesus, whose birth brings about the glory of God and peace among men, must rediscover its harmony.

All members of the Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus are called to welcome and serve Jesus Christ in the sick, the lepers, the little ones, the poor, the marginalized. I am pleased to see the commitment of members of our Order to those suffering from leprosy and other sick people with great generosity. On the occasion of the forthcoming Christmas celebrations, I hope that each one of you and your families will welcome Jesus Christ with faith in your hearts and recognize him as present, especially in children and the poor, in order to be builders of a new world in which justice, solidarity, fraternity and peace reign.

***Monreale, December 2025***

***+Michele Pennisi EGCLJ***

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