



Message from Father General on the occasion of Christmas 2022

Dear Brothers

the Lord's Christmas offers itself to us as a memorial of salvation and a source of joy for the presence of God next to each one of us: no one can be said to be alone! Around the Holy Family we experience the joy and strength of communion which emanates from the One who came to reconcile all.

May our communities also find the unifying force in the person of Jesus. If he were not the gravitational centre, the point of convergence, if the Lord Jesus were not in the midst of our houses, Consecrated Life would not only be groundless but also meaningless. For whose sake, for the attractive force of what love, can we serenely face renunciation and detachment? To obey what voice do we silence our ego? If the Lord were not with us, if he had not taken a body, if he had not first renounced his being God, it would not be possible for us!

All those we meet around the grotto of Bethlehem, thanks to a call as loving as it is demanding, have made the pilgrimage from the land of the self to the Kingdom of God, from their own project of autonomy to that of God, to which they readily adhere. Christmas offers us the opportunity to give new impetus and vigour to our vow of obedience to God in order to reach out and bring "peace on earth to those beloved of the Lord" as the angels proclaim. It is certainly a gift, but it is above all a pressing request. Peace in our hearts, peace and joy in our communities, peace in the world is achieved in total adherence to God's plan, in obedience to the demanding demands of the Gospel.

Did not Mary, after having dialogued with the angel, after having manifested to him her distress and awareness of not knowing what to do and how to do it, let God act for her and in her? The Virgin put aside all her self-interest so that every word of God, in itself performative and efficacious, might be fulfilled in her. Mary then realised in amazement that all this was the source of her bliss: because you have looked upon the humility of your handmaid, because the Almighty does great things in me, then my bliss becomes a revelation of Him, a magnificent proclamation, uncontainable joy and an imperishable exclamation: All generations will know me and call me blessed!

Joseph too, having abandoned the familiar, as well as narrow, terrain of legalism, listens to the divine voice and obeying the angelic prohibition not to fear, gains the promised land, that of justice and mercy. He becomes the guardian no longer of the Law but of the very

heart of God, he becomes its father, welcoming Jesus. Ready to move, driven by the voice of God, Joseph teaches us that we must shake ourselves from our torpor, from the sleep in which we sometimes take refuge out of fear. We must keep watch, get up, act promptly. Joseph is the guardian of the Redeemer because he knows how to listen to God, he allows himself to be guided by his will, and this makes him all the more attentive to the people entrusted to him by heavenly goodness; Joseph watches, scrutinises and knows how to read events realistically, making wise and courageous decisions. In obedient silence, Joseph achieves the bliss of self-giving!

The shepherds, too, move in welcoming a word, a promise of joy, even if they are surprised to find themselves the recipients of such an announcement. They, to whom no one is addressed, welcome a gift of salvation that reaches the very limits of human existence, aware that they themselves are that peripheral humanity that others disdain and that instead God redeems by offering a King, his Son. Here too, obedience becomes a source of consoling new vitality. Their experience is encouraging, we are all precious in God's eyes, no service or work however simple or humble makes us less than beloved and redeemed children in whom God places his trust and whom he will never abandon. Every personal situation of ours, no matter how marked by frailty or inconsistency, no matter how punctuated by failure, is the object of God's mad gesture of love that is the Christmas of his Son Jesus!

To the Magi, men far removed from words and laws engraved on tablets of stone, a message is communicated, offered a sign of Creation converging on its Creator, and in setting out they obey a proclamation that is little more than a luminous trail in the sky, arriving at true joy! They lay at the feet of the One who is everything all their human aspirations for certainty, recognition and preservation, discovering new paths to return to life, abandoning the paths of power and oppression, of loneliness that makes them deaf and blind, completely incapable of meeting the Saviour!

I wish each of you, each community the joy and warmth that comes from the holy nativity scene. May the Heavenly Child fill our community and pastoral relationships with tenderness, joy, love and mutual care. May our homes be forges of peace, worthy of our Heavenly Patroness and guarded and guided by her!

Merry Christmas and Happy 2023!