



Prot. (1) 403/2025

To the diocese of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Lenten Letter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Jubilee year we begin Lent by listening together once again to the proclamation which, through the mouth of the Apostle Paul, fills this special time with hope: *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:19, second reading of the Ash Wednesday Mass).

Allow me to share with you some short reflections.

1. The Cross of Christ

This is the heart of Easter, this is the place where the great hope of the Church and the world is born and founded: The violent words of rancor and hatred, the presumptuous speeches of conflict and re-primination cannot prevent God from speaking the word of reconciliation in Christ: *Ave Crux, spes unica!*

May Lent, the sacramental sign of our reconciliation, be a new opportunity for us, a renewed gift of the Spirit who leads us into the desert with Christ so that together with him, we can listen, once again to the word of grace and forgiveness. Easter, which we will celebrate in forty days, is in fact not simply the memory of a past event, but the living and present memorial of God's grace, which reconciles us with himself in the Cross of Christ and makes us new creatures. Through the power of God, we see a reversal of human criteria in the cross of Christ: from vengeance to forgiveness. It is the paschal transformation of death into life, it is the evangelical overcoming of condemnation through forgiveness: *"He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come."* (2 Cor. 5:15.17).

We need this new word, the word of the Cross, which may seem like foolishness to the powerful and wise of this world and of our time. It is the only word that can reopen paths of hope and peace, by overturning worldly criteria. The Way of the Cross, along which we learn with difficulty, but with joy, the new logic of gift and forgiveness, calls for men and women, young and old, families and children, who are ready to walk it, by renewing their way of thinking and their attitude. Only in this way can we hope for a future in peace.

Therefore, I would like all of us, individuals and communities, to find space and time during these holy days to contemplate the Cross of Christ, to read and meditate on the Passion narratives, to participate in the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross and, for those who have the possibility, visit the places marked by the Lord's passage to Calvary and the Sepulcher: may the Crucified One shine in new light before our eyes, who here in this land, took our sin upon himself, even more: "For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5:21).

2. The Sacrament of Reconciliation

"And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).

However, in order to be effective, the word of reconciliation must become a ministry, i.e. the commitment of individuals and communities. The gift is not magical, but must be received, witnessed, lived and shared. So let us all, pastors and lay people, religious men and women, get involved and feel jointly responsible for carrying the word and ministry of reconciliation into the world: *"For we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* (2 Cor. 5:20). The grace of reconciliation needs our word, our service, our own life, which reconciles and thus becomes a sign and instrument of reconciliation. It would be superfluous for me to repeat here what I have never tired of repeating everywhere in the terrible months we have experienced. However, we cannot fail to hear the desire, indeed the cry for reconciliation, emanating from so many people and situations that have been wounded, humiliated and offended by the violence and evil that has affected us. Alongside the devastation of the land, there is a devastation of the heart, of relationships, of people, that cries out to be rebuilt. We Christians, who glory in the Cross of Christ, reconciled to God, are called to reconcile with one another and then spread words, gestures and styles of reconciliation.

In this context, I would like to invite everyone, pastors and the faithful alike, to an authentic, devout and frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in which the experience of the grace of forgiveness becomes alive and concrete and can therefore inspire and enlighten life.

If we acknowledge and confess our sin, the evil we indulge in and which leads us astray from the way of the Lord, if we receive the grace of the sacrament which transforms us from enemies to friends and from sinners to the righteous, if we rediscover ourselves as forgiven, accepted and loved, then we will be more ready to accept, love and forgive the enemy too.

3. Fasting, prayer and attention to poor

"We cause no one to stumble in anything, in order that no fault may be found with our ministry; on the contrary, in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left." (2 Cor. 6:3-7).

Peace, the Easter gift of the Risen Lord to his own and to the world, springs from His glorious wounds, from His life, which He gave out of love to the end. Let us therefore not be afraid to "pay"

with the gift of ourselves for the rebirth of reconciled and fraternal communion, of relationship and communion in the midst of so much death and hostility. Restoring and enlarging the spaces, exterior and inner spaces where God's voice and the expectations of so many brothers and sisters can resound and be heard again can and sometimes does require us to give up something of ourselves, even that which is rightfully ours. We become men and women of reconciliation and peace to the extent that we are also willing to give up even what is rightfully ours, so that love and forgiveness can shine as our way of life.

Therefore, I ask for a practice of fasting. A renunciation that becomes a gift, returning to fasting with conviction and determination, accompanied by moments of prayer in the family and supported by special attention to the poor in our community. The renunciation of food and everything that burdens the mind and heart, an intense atmosphere of prayer and attention to the poor are the essential foundation of our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. They are an essential condition for the logic of the gift that shares everything to flourish again. The Easter Eucharist, which we will joyfully celebrate in forty days, will then have the true flavor of the love that conquers death.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not waste this time given to us by the mercy of God. It is not just another Lent: if we want it to be, it can become a different, a new Lent! This holy time can indeed become a jubilee, that is, a time of consolation and reconciliation for this land of ours. It is true that the temptation of resignation is great, given the fragility of social, political and sometimes even community balances and the difficulty of imagining a future. **However, we want to dare to hope, which is the daughter of faith.** Seventeen hundred years after the Council of Nicea, we firmly affirm that Jesus is truly the eternal Son of God who became man for us. Through his death and resurrection he has sown an immortal seed of life and redemption in the furrows of history. In the duel between Death and Life the Lord of Life won and His victorious love has triumphed. Let us fight the good fight of faith with Him, in the sure hope that our Christian witness and our ministry of reconciliation will bear fruit!

May you all have a Holy Lent!

Jerusalem, March 3, 2025



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