



SACRO MILITARE ORDINE COSTANTINIANO DI SAN GIORGIO

IL GRAN PRIORE

Città del Vaticano, December 13th 2019

Dear Knights and Dames,

we get ready to live fully and religiously the holy Christmas during the Advent season, as Pope Francis reminds us: *Advent is the time given to us to welcome the Lord who comes to meet us, also to verify our desire for God, to look ahead and prepare for the return of Christ. He will be back on Christmas Day, when we will be remembering his historic entry into the humility of the human condition; he comes into us every time we want to receive him, and he will come back again at the end of times to "judge the living and the dead"* (Angelus 3.12.17).

Therefore, we are invited to cherish this period that the liturgical year offers us. We are invited to live it according to its purposes so that it bears the desired fruits for our spiritual life. Our whole existence goes towards the Lord who is reaching us. Waiting for the Lord gives meaning to our life and establishes Christian hope. Being vigilant is the motto of this liturgical period: the vigilant person is the one who accepts the invitation to watch over, that is not to be overwhelmed by discouragement and lack of hope. Being vigilant is the condition that allows God to penetrate our existence, to give it meaning and value with his presence full of kindness and tenderness.

This year, with the apostolic letter *Admirabile signum* on the meaning and value of the nativity scene, Pope Francis helps us to enrich ourselves with the beauty of this tradition which makes us appreciate even more intensely the mystery of the Nativity of the Lord. *The admirable sign of the manger scene, - writes Pope Francis - which is so dear to the Christian people, always arouses amazement and wonder.*

*Representing the nativity means announcing the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God with simplicity and joy. The manger scene, in fact, is like a living Gospel, which overflows from the pages of Holy Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas scene, we are invited to set out spiritually, attracted by the humility of Jesus who has become a man in order to meet all other men. And we discover that he loves us so much that he joins us, so that we too can join him.*

Dear Knights and Dames, let's not lose the beautiful tradition of reproducing the nativity scene at home, with the commitment of the whole family and especially of our children. The nativity scene is not a simple decoration: it is the representation of the event that changed the course of history, it is the representation, inside our houses, of how much God loved us: we must not forget that the birth of this child is the gift of the love of God for all humanity: *And the Word became a man and he came to live among us; and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's son, full of grace and truth (Gv 1:14)*. The birth of this child commits us all: *he gave the power to become children of God to those who welcomed him: those who believe in his name were generated by God and not by blood or by the will of mankind. (Gv.1, 12-13)*.

The Pope, still in his message, reminds us that the manger scene reminds us of a specific responsibility: by looking at the manger scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of each Christian to be an evangelizer. Each of us becomes bearer of the Good News, testifying the joy of having met Jesus and his love through concrete actions of mercy.

Dear friends, let us live this Holy Christmas completely convinced of our traditions, animated by sincere charity, let us join our voices to the song of the angels: *Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to the men he loves*.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish you a holy and merry Christmas, entrusting you and your families to Mary's protection, Mother of Jesus and ours.

Renato Raffaele Martino

Proto-deacon of the Holy Roman Church