



# 1st International Conference of the Lazarite Academy of Saint Louis IX, King of France ECUMENISM: MEANING AND PROSPECTS

**Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sicily - January 23, 202626**



## **Greeting from the Rector of the Lazzarita Academy "King Saint Louis IX of France"**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Authorities, Esteemed Academician, Distinguished Guests, and All Members of the Order of Saint Lazarus,

It is with profound emotion that I take the floor in this prestigious setting to greet you on the occasion of the First International Congress promoted by the Lazarite Academy of King Saint Louis IX of France. This event was created under the aegis of the Grand Bailiwick of Sicily and enjoys the High Patronage of the Grand Master of the Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, His Excellency Don Francisco de Borbón, to whom I would like to address my first and most respectful thought: His presence today not only honors this assembly, but also confers undisputed academic authority on our meeting.

I feel compelled to express my deepest gratitude to His Excellency Archbishop Gualtiero Isacchi of Monreale, and to the Dean of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Sicily, Don Vito Impellizzeri. Thank you for sharing the burden and honor of the organizational effort with us and for welcoming us with generous hospitality in this splendid Aula Magna.

I respectfully greet the Catholic religious authorities and those of the various Christian denominations who honor us with their presence, a tangible sign of their desire for dialogue. A special welcome goes to the leaders of the Order of Saint Lazarus gathered here: the Grand

Chancellor, Marny Gilluly; the Grand Prior of Slovakia, Stanislav Holak; the Grand Marshal, Martin Kaser; and the Secretary of the International Academy of Malta, Carmel Bonello. With this latter institution, I proudly announce that we will sign a memorandum of understanding in October: an act that marks the beginning of a shared journey, inspired by the same values of charity and service.

My greetings extend to the Knights from the various jurisdictions, the Senators, and the members of the Academy of King St. Louis. Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to you, dear audience: your large presence is the most precious recognition of this initiative and testifies to the urgency of the topic that unites us.

Ecumenism today is no longer a mere theological reflection, but a pressing historical necessity. We cannot ignore the tragedy affecting our brothers in Christ: the data<sup>1</sup> are horrifying. Over 380 million Christians live under the yoke of persecution and discrimination; one in seven Christians globally is deprived of freedom, dignity, or even life itself. This is what Pope Francis has called the "ecumenism of blood"<sup>2</sup>: a shared sacrifice that requires us, today more than ever, to remain united.

An African proverb says: "He who wants to go fast runs alone; he who wants to go far goes with others." To achieve lasting goals and overcome obstacles beyond our individual strengths, the harmony of a shared journey is essential.

The Lazarus Academy, faithful to the legacy of King Saint Louis IX, aspires to be the space for this encounter. We do not seek a dull uniformity that obliterates identities, but a harmony capable of enhancing them in the name of universal charity. Today, Lazarus is the face of those suffering from war, hunger, and intolerance: our thoughts and actions are directed toward them.

I conclude with the hope that this congress will outline new perspectives and restore a profound meaning to the word "brotherhood." Our commitment does not end within these walls, but begins here, with the ambition of bringing a light of hope and reconciliation to society.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Watch List 2026 annual report published by the international humanitarian organization Open Doors.

<sup>2</sup> Video message for the Day of Christian Unity (May 2015) and in subsequent speeches, recalling how the persecutors do not distinguish between Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, etc., but see only Christians, thus united in martyrdom, overcoming theological divisions.

Thank you all, and best wishes to the speakers.

