



The Holy See

LITURGY OF THE WORD AND SIGNING OF THE LETTER ON THE NATIVITY SCENE

Shrine of Greccio (Rieti)
Sunday, 1 December 2019

[Multimedia]

How many thoughts crowd the mind in this holy place! Yet before the rocks of these mountains so dear to Saint Francis, what we are called to do first of all is to rediscover *simplicity*.

The Nativity scene, which for the first time Saint Francis created in this small space in imitation of the poor grotto of Bethlehem, speaks for itself. There is no need for many words here, for the scene set before our eyes expresses the *wisdom* that we need in order to grasp the essential.

Before the crèche we discover how important it is for our lives, often so hectic, to find moments for silence and prayer — *silence* to contemplate the beauty of the face of the Child Jesus, the Son of God, born in the poverty of a stable; *prayer* to express our amazed gratitude for the immense gift of love which is made to us.

The great mystery of our faith is shown in this simple sign of the nativity scene, full of wonder, which popular piety embraced and passed down from one generation to the next: God loves us to the point of sharing our humanity and our lives. He never leaves us alone; he accompanies us with his hidden, but not invisible, presence. In all circumstances, in joy as in pain, he is the Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Like the Shepherds of Bethlehem, let us accept the invitation to go to the grotto to see and recognize the *sign* that God has given us. Our hearts will then be brimming with joy and we shall be able to take it wherever there is sadness; they will be full of hope, to share with those who have lost it.

Let us identify with Mary, who laid her Son in the manger because there was no room at the inn. With her and with Saint Joseph, her spouse, let us keep our gaze turned to the Child Jesus. May his smile, which blossomed in the night, dispel indifference and open hearts to the joy of those who feel loved by our Heavenly Father.

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