



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PILGRIMS FROM WALLOON, BELGIUM
WHO HAD COME TO BRING AS A GIFT TO THE HOLY FATHER
THE CHRISTMAS TREE WHICH WILL DECORATE
ST PETER'S SQUARE IN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON**

Clementine Hall

Friday, 18 December 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome all of you who have come here to offer the Christmas tree which, together with the crib, will decorate St Peter's Square during the celebrations of the Nativity. I address a special welcome to the Minister of the Economy of the Walloon Region and to Bishop Aloys Jousten of Liège and thank them for their kind words to me. My cordial greetings also go to H.E. Mr Franck De Coninck, Ambassador of Belgium to the Holy See, as well as to the local political authorities who have made this journey. I likewise greet the choristers and the representatives of the Walloon Agency for Export and Foreign Investments who initiated the project. I extend my gratitude to all who have offered their collaboration with this gift but are unable to be here today. I also thank those who saw to the delicate transport of this imposing tree.

In the forest the trees are close to each other and each one contributes to making the forest a shady and sometimes dark place. And here, chosen from among a multitude, the majestic fir that you are offering me today is lit up and covered with sparkling decorations like as many marvellous fruits. Having abandoned its sombre dress for a scintillating splendour, it is transfigured and becomes the messenger of a light that is not its own but bears witness to *the true Light that comes into this world*. This tree's destiny is comparable to that of the shepherds: while they were watching in the shadows of the night, here they are illumined by the Angels' message. This tree's destiny is also comparable to our own, for we are called to bear good fruits to show that the world has truly been visited and redeemed by the Lord. Standing beside the crib, this fir, in its own way, demonstrates the great mystery that was present in the simple, poor place of Bethlehem. To the

inhabitants of Rome, to all the pilgrims and to all who will visit St Peter's Square through the television images broadcast across the world, it proclaims the coming of the Son of God. Through this tree, the ground of your land and the faith of the Christian Communities of your Region greet the Infant God, the One who came *to make all things new* and to call all creatures, from the humblest to the most exalted, to enter into the mystery of Redemption and to be associated with it.

I pray that the populations of your region will stay faithful to the light of the faith. Brought a long time ago by men who ventured into the valleys and forests of the Ardennes, from your area the light of the Gospel was then taken by a great number of missionaries, who left their native land to spread it, sometimes even to the ends of the world. May the Church in Belgium, and especially the Diocese of Liège, continue to be a land where the seed of the Kingdom, that Christ came to scatter on earth, generously germinates.

Dear friends, once again I address to you a heartfelt "thank you", for this beautiful present. I offer you from this moment my very cordial good wishes for a beautiful and holy Christmas, which I ask you to pass on to your families, your collaborators and all those who are dear to you.

May the Lord bless you, your Region and the whole of Belgium!

We are glad that a Belgian tree is here to illuminate the world from St Peter's. I hope for you all that the light of this tree may bring joy to your hearts and that you will be able to celebrate Christmas with a greater inner joy. May God bless you all! Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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