



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A DELEGATION FROM THE MINICIPALITY
OF SAN MARTIN DE TOR IN VAL BALDIA (BOLZANO - ITALY)***

Clementine Hall

Friday, 14 December 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your visit! I gladly welcome you and the gift you have brought me: the Christmas tree which, with the crib that is being set up, will decorate St Peter's Square. I thank each one of you with all my heart, starting with Dr Luis Durnwalder, Head of the Regional Government of South Tyrol, and the Mayors of St Martin in Thurn whom I also thank for their friendly words expressing your common sentiments. I greet with respect the civil Authorities of South Tyrol, the representatives of the five municipalities of Val Badia and all those who have come here to show the typical elements of their Gader region with its traditional costumes, evocative music and local produce. I warmly greet your Bishop Wilhelm Egger and thank him for the brotherly words he has just addressed to me. With him, I also greet the priests and parish councils and willingly include in my greeting all the inhabitants of Val Badia who are represented here today.

I know that all the inhabitants of Val Badia have worked hard to prepare this special event, especially the school children who have taken part in a painting competition: "The Christmas Tree at the Vatican". I thank everyone for the marvellous gift of this red spruce and for the other trees that help to create a Christmas atmosphere in the Vatican. May this beautiful initiative reawaken in all the Christians of Val Badia the desire to witness to the values of life, love and peace of which the Solemnity of Christ's birth reminds us, year after year!

So this year the Christmas tree on St Peter's Square comes from the Trentino-Alto Adige, and precisely from the woods of the Val Badia, the *Gran Ega*, a marvellous sunny hollow located at the foot of the Dolomites, surrounded by enchanting peaks with the typical jagged silhouette of those mountains. This venerable tree, felled without causing damage to the life of the forest, will stand

by the Crib, suitably decorated, until the end of the Christmas festivities, and will be admired by the many pilgrims who come to the Vatican in the next few days. It is a meaningful symbol of Christ's birth because, with its evergreen leaves, it recalls a life that never dies. The fir tree is also a symbol of popular religiosity in your Valley, which is expressed in a special way in processions.

Keep alive these beautiful traditions that are so deeply felt and strive to increasingly make them manifestations of an authentic and hard-working Christian life. In this effort for evangelical witness, may St Joseph Freinademetz, a famous son of your Land, be an example to you. In him, a zealous missionary among the Chinese, the Ladin spiritual genius expressed one of its most mature fruits of holiness.

Dear friends, the tree and the crib are elements of that typical Christmas atmosphere which is part of the spiritual heritage of our communities. It is a climate steeped in religiosity and family warmth which we must also preserve in contemporary society, where the consumeristic rush and the search for material goods alone sometimes seem to prevail. Christmas is a Christian feast and its symbols - especially the crib and the tree decorated with gifts - are important references to the great mystery of the Incarnation and the Birth of Jesus, which the liturgy of the Advent Season and of Christmas constantly recall. The Creator of the universe, in making himself a Child, came among us to share in our human journey; he made himself little to enter the human heart and thereby to renew it with the almightiness of his love. Let us therefore prepare to welcome him with faith, enlivened by firm hope.

Dear friends, once again I would like to express my warm thanks to all of you and to those who helped you at home, to the sponsors and to all those who made themselves available to transport the tree. Thank you for the contribution that each one of you has made with great generosity. I take this beautiful opportunity to express to you my sincere good wishes for the Solemnity of Christmas and for the days of Christmas festivities. With these sentiments, I assure you that I will remember you, your families, the population of the Val Badia and the entire Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone in my prayers. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

Bun Nadé!