



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE UKRAINIAN DELEGATION
THAT DONATED THE CHRISTMAS TREE FOR ST PETER'S SQUARE***

Clementine Hall

Friday, 16 December 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am glad to welcome you and to address my cordial greeting to each one of you. I greet H.B. Sviatoslav Schevchuk, Major Archbishop of Kyiv-Halyč, Archbishop Mieczysław Mokrzycki of Lviv for Latins and Bishop Milan Šašik, Eparch of Mukachevo, together with my other Brothers in the Episcopate and in the presbyterate of the Greek-Catholic Church and the Latin Church. I extend my affectionate thought to all the faithful of Ukraine represented here. I greet with respect the civil authorities and in particular Mr Kolesnikov Borys, Vice-Prime Minister. I thank him for his courteous words and for the gift of the fine Christmas tree that adorns St Peter's Square as well as for the Icon. I address a special thought to the distinguished representatives of the Orthodox Church, with the Archbishop of Poltava and Myrhorod, expressing my sincere appreciation of their meaningful presence. Lastly, I greet all the Ukrainians, those in the homeland, those scattered across the world and also those present here in Rome.

This decorated tree will stand beside the crib, until the end of the Christmas festivities, to be admired by the inhabitants of Rome and by the pilgrims coming here from every part of the world. It is a significant symbol of Christ's Nativity because, with its evergreen branches, it evokes the continuing of life. The fir is also a sign of the popular piety of your land and of the Christian roots of your culture. I hope these roots will increasingly strengthen your national unity and foster the promotion of authentic and shared values. Down the centuries your country has been a crossroads of different cultures, a meeting point between the spiritual riches of East and West. Adhering tenaciously to the values of faith, may it continue to respond to this particular vocation.

You have wished to accompany this impressive red fir-tree with smaller trees for the Apostolic

Palace and other parts of the Vatican. These plants, together with the traditional costumes, evocative music and local produce will make known to Rome come characteristic elements of your country. May this pilgrimage of yours awaken throughout the Christian Ukrainian community a renewed desire to live and witness joyfully to faith and to promote the values of life, solidarity and peace which Christ's birth presents to us every year anew.

In this Advent season the Church invites us to prepare ourselves for the Nativity of the Saviour, intensifying our spiritual journey and our relationship with Christ. Our epoch needs holy Christians, enthusiastic about their faith! The Virgin Mary is our model and our guide: to understand God's will for her life and the meaning of the events that concerned the Son of God, she adopted a unique contemplative approach: listening, observing, preserving, meditating and praying. How necessary it is to recover the taste for prayer! How careful we must be not to let ourselves be swept on by the hectic pace of life that prevents us from re-entering ourselves and finding ourselves as we stand before the marvellous mystery of God who dwells in our heart!

Dear friends, the tree and the crib are elements of the typical Christmas atmosphere that is part of our communities' spiritual legacy: an atmosphere steeped in religious devotion and family closeness that we must also preserve in today's society, in which consumerism and the quest for material goods sometimes seem to prevail. Christmas is a Christian feast and its symbols are important references to the great mystery of the Incarnation and Birth of Jesus, which the liturgy constantly calls to mind. The Creator of the universe, in making himself a child, came to live among us to share our journey. He made himself little to enter the human heart and thus to renew it with his love. Let us prepare to welcome him with faith.

I express my deep gratitude anew to all of you, to your collaborators who have stayed at home and to all those who contributed to the transport of the tree. Thank you for the contribution that each one of you has made with great generosity.

I take this favourable opportunity to offer you my most fervent good wishes for Christmas, now at hand, and for the Christmas celebrations. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for you yourselves, for your families, for Ukraine and for all the Ukrainians, as I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you. Happy Christmas!