



The Holy See

***GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DONORS OF THE NATIVITY SCENE AND CHRISTMAS TREE IN SAINT PETER'S
SQUARE***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 3 December 2022*

[Multimedia]

Brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I welcome you on the day in which the Nativity scene and Christmas tree are displayed in Saint Peter's Square, and [another] Nativity scene is presented in this Hall. I greet you all affectionately, starting with the Bishop of Trivento and the parish priest of Sutrio — representing the Archbishop of Udine — whom I thank for their kind words. I greet the civil authorities, in particular the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, the President of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, the Assessor of the Abruzzo region and the Mayors of Sutrio and Rosello. I thank you for the gift of these Christmas symbols, which will be looked upon by many pilgrims from all over the world.

I would like to address a special thought to the woodworkers, who have sculpted the statues of the Nativity scene; the young people of the “*Quadrifoglio*” structure in Rosello, who produced part of the Christmas tree decorations; and those who cultivated the fir tree and the smaller trees destined for other areas of the Vatican, in a nursery in Palena. My gratitude also goes to the technicians and staff of the Governorate, who are here with Cardinal Fernando Vérgez and Sr Raffaella Petrini.

The tree and the Nativity display are two signs that continue to fascinate young and old. The tree, with its lights, reminds us of Jesus who comes to illuminate our darkness, our existence which is often closed up in the shadow of sin, fear and pain. And it suggests to us further reflection: like trees, people too need roots. Because only those who have roots in good soil can stay firm, grow,

“mature”, and resist the winds that shake them, becoming a point of reference to those who look at them. But, dear friends, without roots none of this can happen; without a firm foundation one remains unstable. It is important to safeguard roots, in life as in faith. In this regard, the Apostle Paul reminds us of the foundation in which to root our lives in order to remain firm: he says to remain “rooted in Jesus Christ” (cf. *Col 2:7*). This is what the Christmas tree reminds us of: to be rooted in Jesus Christ.

And so we come to the Nativity scene, which speaks to us of the birth of the Son of God who became man to be close to each one of us. In its genuine poverty, the Nativity scene helps us rediscover the true richness of Christmas, and purify ourselves of the many aspects that pollute the Christmas landscape. Simple and familiar, the Nativity scene recalls a Christmas that is different from the consumerist and commercial Christmas: it is something else. It reminds us how good it is for us to cherish moments of silence and prayer during our days, which are often overwhelmed by frenzy. Silence fosters contemplation of the Child Jesus, helps us to become intimate with God, with the fragile simplicity of a tiny newborn, with the meekness of his being laid down, with the tender affection of the swaddling clothes that envelop him.

Roots and contemplation: the tree teaches us about roots, the Nativity scene invites us to contemplation. Let us not forget these two human and Christian attitudes. And if we truly want to celebrate Christmas, let us rediscover through the Nativity scene the surprise and amazement of smallness, the smallness of God, who makes himself small, who is not born in the splendour of appearances, but in the poverty of a stable. And to meet him one must reach him there, where he is. One must lower oneself, one must make oneself small, leave all vanity behind, to arrive where he is. And prayer is the best way to say thank you before this gift of free love, to say thank you to Jesus who wishes to enter our homes and our hearts. Yes, God loves us so much that he shares our humanity and our lives. He never leaves us by ourselves, He is at our side in all circumstances, in joy as in sorrow. Even in the worst moments, he is there, because he is the Emmanuel, the God with us, the light that illuminates darkness and the tender presence that accompanies us on our journey.

Dear brothers and sisters, I repeat my gratitude for the Christmas gifts of the tree and the Nativity display, and wish each of you, your families and your communities, a holy Christmas, entrusting you to the maternal protection of Mary, Mother of God and ours. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

