

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 181207e

Friday 07.12.2018

Audience with the delegations of the Donors of the Christmas tree and the Nativity display in Saint Peter's Square

At 12.15 today, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the delegations from the regions of Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto for the gift of the Christmas tree and the Nativity display in Saint Peter's Square.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

Thank you for your visit! I welcome you and receive with such gratitude the gifts you have come to present to me: the Christmas tree and the nativity scene, already set up in Saint Peter's Square and which will be admired by many pilgrims from all over the world. I address my cordial greetings to each of you, beginning with the Patriarch of Venice and the bishop of Concordia-Pordenone, whom I thank for their fraternal words. I also address a respectful greeting to the civil authorities, and I extend my affectionate thoughts to all the inhabitants of Jesolo, Pordenone, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, whom you represent here. I thank all those who cooperated to produce these signs of Christmas, especially the four sculptors from different countries, who carved the nativity scene, and the technicians and staff of the Governorate.

The tree and the nativity display are two signs that never cease to appeal to us; they tell us about Christmas and help us to contemplate the mystery of God made man to be close to each one of us. The Christmas tree with its lights reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world, the light of the soul that drives away the darkness of enmities and makes room for forgiveness. The spruce that this year is placed in Piazza San Pietro, coming from the Cansiglio forest, suggests further reflection. With its height of over twenty meters, it symbolizes God Who with the birth of His Son Jesus lowered himself down to man, to raise man to Himself and lift him from the fogs of selfishness and sin. The Son of God assumes the human condition to draw it to Himself and to make it

participate in his divine and incorruptible nature.

The nativity scene, located in the centre of the Square, is made with sand from Jesola, originally from the Dolomites. The sand, a poor material, recalls the simplicity, the smallness, and also the fragility- as the Patriarch said – with which God showed Himself with the birth of Jesus in precariousness in Bethlehem.

It may seem that this smallness contradicts divinity, so much so that some, from the very beginning, considered it only as appearance, a façade. But no, because smallness is freedom. Those who are small – in the evangelical sense – are not only light, but also free from any desire to appear and from any claim to success; like children who express themselves and move spontaneously. We are all called to be free before God, to have the freedom of a child before his father. The Child Jesus, Son of God and our Saviour, whom we place in the manger, is Holy in poverty, smallness, simplicity and humility.

The Nativity and the tree, enchanting symbols of Christmas, can bring to families and meeting places a reflection of the light and tenderness of God, to help everyone to live the feast of the birth of Jesus. Contemplating the Child God Who emanates light in the humility of the nativity scene, we can also become witnesses of humility, tenderness and goodness.

Dear friends, I renew my gratitude to all of you and offer you the best wishes for a Merry Christmas. A happy and holy Christmas! I ask you to pray for me and I cordially bless you, your family and your fellow citizens. Thank you.
