



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DELEGATIONS FROM VERONA AND CATANZARO
FOR THE GIFT OF THE CRIB AND THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN ST. PETER'S SQUARE**

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 19 December 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I meet you on day the Crèche and Christmas tree are inaugurated in St Peter's Square, and I thank every-one who cooperated in various ways for their realization. I greet you all cordially, starting with your Pastors, Bishop Giuseppe Zenti and Bishop Vincenzo Bertolone. With them I greet the Authorities and representatives of the institutions who generously sponsored this initiative. Thank you for these two beautiful Christmas gifts, which will be appreciated by many pilgrims from every part of the world.

The Nativity scene of life-size terracotta statues, donated by the Arena Foundation of Verona, and the great fir tree along with the other trees allocated for the different places of the Vatican, offered by the Province of Catanzaro, express the traditions and spirituality of your regions. The values of Christianity have, indeed, enriched the culture, literature, music and art of your lands; and still today these values constitute a precious patrimony to be conserved and passed down to future generations.

The Crèche and Christmas tree are symbols of Christmas always evocative and dear to our Christian families: they recall the Mystery of the Incarnation, the the Only Begotten Son of God made man to save us, and the light that Jesus brought to the world with his birth. But the crib and the tree touch the hearts of all people, even those who do not believe, because they speak of brotherhood, intimacy and friendship, calling all men and women of our time to rediscover the beauty of simplicity, of sharing and of solidarity. They are an invitation to unity, harmony and peace; an invitation to give space, in your personal and social life, to God, who does not come in arrogance to impose his power, but offers us his omnipotent love through the fragile figure of a

Child. The crib and the tree therefore bring a message of light, of hope and of love.

To all of you present, to your families and to the inhabitants of your Regions, Veneto and Calabria, I hope that you spend the Birth of the Lord in serenity and intensity. He, the Messiah, was made man and came among us to dissipate the darkness of error and sin, bringing to humanity his divine light. Jesus will say of himself: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). Let us follow Him, the true light, so as not to wander and in order, in our turn, to reflect light and warmth on those undergoing moments of difficulty and interior darkness.

Dear friends, thank you for your gifts! I invoke on each one of you the motherly protection of the Holy Virgin and from my heart I bless you. Please do not forget to pray for me! Merry Christmas!