



The Holy See

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

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Friday, 18 December 2015*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

I cordially welcome you and I thank you for the gifts that you prepared, they are very beautiful. It gives joy to think that they are not only presented to the Pope and to the pilgrims who admire them, but especially to the Lord Jesus, because he is the one being celebrated!

I thank Msgr Voderholzer, Msgr Bressan, Ms Merk, Mr Falk and Mr Thun for their warm intentions, for the help and for the projects. I greet all of you: the Authorities of the German municipalities of Hirschau, Schnaittenbach and Freudenberg, who donated the Christmas tree; the Representatives of the Province of Trento, who along with the Diocese prepared the nativity scene. I would also like to thank the little “artists” who decorated the tree, and I congratulate them: you are still very young, but you have already displayed your work in St Peter’s Square! This is wonderful. Have courage, continue! This is how Michelangelo started out!

The ornaments — which you created, thanks to the work of the Lene Thun Foundation — depict your dreams. These aspirations which you carry in your hearts are now in the most fitting place, because they are near the Child of Bethlehem: they are entrusted to him, who came to “dwell among us” (cf. Jn 1:14). Indeed, Jesus did not simply appear on the earth, he did not dedicate a little of his time to us, but rather he came to share our life and to embrace our aspirations. Because he wanted, and still wants, to live here, together with us and for us. Our world, which at Christmas became his world, is close to his heart. The nativity scene reminds us of this: God, in his great mercy, came down to us to remain with us forever.

The nativity scene also tells us that he never imposes himself with force. Remember this well, you

children and young people: the Lord never imposes himself with force. To save us, he did not change history by performing an elaborate miracle. He came instead with total simplicity, humility and meekness. God does not like grandiose revolutions of history's powerful, and he does not use a magic wand to change situations. Instead, he makes himself small, he becomes a child, so as to attract us with love, to touch our hearts with his humble goodness; to unsettle, with his poverty, those who scramble to accumulate the false treasures of this world.

These were also the intentions of St Francis when he invented the nativity scene. *Franciscan Sources* tell us that he wanted "to memorialize that Child who was born in Bethlehem", to enable "in some way that the disadvantages encountered by a newborn baby in his lack of basic necessities could be physically visible to the eyes". In that scene, in fact, "simplicity is honoured, poverty is exalted, humility is lauded" (468-469). Therefore I invite you to pause before the nativity scene, because the tenderness of God speaks to us there. There we contemplate divine mercy, which became human flesh and is able to soften our gaze.

Above all, however, he longs to stir our hearts. It is beautiful that there be present in this manger scene a figure which immediately grasps the mystery of Christmas. It is that character who performs a good deed, bending down to lend a helping hand to an elderly person. He not only looks to God, but also imitates him, because, like God, he bends down with mercy to those in need. May these gifts of yours, which will be illuminated tonight, draw the gaze of many and especially rekindle in life the true light of Christmas. I thank you! Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.