



The Holy See

***GREETING OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE POLISH AND ITALIAN DELEGATIONS WHO DONATED THIS YEAR'S
CHRISTMAS TREE AND NATIVITY SCENE IN SAINT PETER'S SQUARE***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 7 December 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a joy for me to welcome you on this occasion and to extend to you my gratitude for the gift of the Nativity scene and the Christmas tree standing in Saint Peter's Square. I wholeheartedly offer you my greeting, beginning with the Authorities and representatives of the Institutions that have supported this initiative. I greet the Abbot of Montevergine, for the gift of the Nativity scene; the Archbishop of Warmia and the Bishop of Elk in Poland, from which the tree came, with the Administration of the Białystok State Forest. Additionally I greet the children in treatment at the oncology departments of several Italian hospitals and from the earthquake-stricken areas of Central Italy, coordinated by the "Contessa Lene Thun" Foundation, who have crafted the ornaments.

Each year the Nativity scene and Christmas tree speak to us through their symbolic language. They render more visible what is understood from the experience of the birth of the Son of God. They are the signs of the heavenly Father's compassion, of his interest in and closeness to humanity, which does not feel abandoned in the darkest of times, but sought out and accompanied in its difficulties.

The tree reaching upward spurs us to reach for "the higher gifts" (cf. 1 Cor 12:31), to rise up above the cloudy haze in order to experience how beautiful and joyful it is to be immersed in the light of Christ. In the simplicity of the Nativity we encounter and contemplate God's tenderness, manifested in that of the Baby Jesus.

The Nativity scene, this year created in the typical fashion of Neapolitan art, is inspired by the works of mercy. These remind us that the Lord said to us: “whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Mt 7:12). The Nativity is the evocative place where we contemplate Jesus who, taking upon himself the miseries of mankind, invites us to do likewise, through acts of mercy. The tree, which has come from Poland this year, is a sign of the faith of those people who, also with this gesture, wished to express their faithfulness to the See of Peter.

Dear children, my thanks are addressed to you above all. Through your work you have passed on your dreams and your wishes to raise up to the sky and to make them known to Jesus, who becomes a child like you in order to tell you that he loves you. Thank you for your witness, for having made these Christmas symbols more beautiful, which pilgrims and visitors from all around the world can admire. Thank you! Thank you!

This evening, when the Nativity and Christmas tree lights are lit, the wishes that you have imparted in your decorative work for the tree will be bright and seen by everyone. Thank you!

May the Birth of the Lord be an occasion for being more attentive to the needs of the poor and of those who, like Jesus, found no one to welcome them. To those of you present here, to your loved ones and to those whom you represent, I express heartfelt Merry Christmas wishes. I assure you of my prayer that the Lord may receive and fulfil your hopes. You too, pray for me and for my service to the Church.

Now I shall bestow my blessing to all of you, but first let us all pray together to Our Lady: Hail Mary....