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Francis: this week, imagine Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem

After praying the Angelus, the Pope greeted the Romans and pilgrims from various countries in St. Peter's Square, and asked them all to pray "that dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo take place with serenity so as to avoid any type of violence and for the good of all the country".

He also praised the work of UNITALSI, the Italian association engaged in the transport of the sick to Lourdes and international shrines, and thanking them for the live Nativity scene they set up in St. Peter's Square, in which disabled people took part.

He added, "I wish to thank all the people and institutions who have sent me their good wishes. Many thanks".

"Next Sunday will be Christmas Day", he said. "In this week, please, let us try to find a moment to pause in silence, and to imagine Our Lady and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem. Let us imagine how they go: the journey, the weariness, but also the joy, the emotion, and then the anxiety of finding a place to stay, the worry... and so on. In this the Nativity display helps us. Let us enter into the true Christmas, that of Jesus, Who comes close to us, God-with-us, near to us – to receive the grace of this feast, which is a grace of closeness, love, humility and tenderness. And in those moments, remember to pray for me too. Have a good lunch, and goodbye".