



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Visit of the Holy Father to the Franciscan Shrine of Greccio

This afternoon the Holy Father left the Casa Santa Marta and departed by helicopter from the Vatican heliport to pay a visit to the Franciscan Shrine of Greccio, in the diocese of Rieti.

The helicopter carrying Pope Francis landed at 15.40 in the square in front of the Franciscan Shrine. Before transferring by car to the Shrine, the Holy Father greeted some sick and disabled people, accompanied by their relatives, who awaited him in the square.

Upon arrival at the Franciscan Shrine of Greccio, the Pope was received by Bishop Domenico Pompili of Rieti, by the guardian of the Franciscan Shrine, Fr. Francesco Rossi, and by the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, Archbishop Rino Fisichella. The Holy Father then proceeded to the grotto of the Shrine, where after a moment of prayer, he signed the Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum* on the meaning and importance of the Nativity scene, and conversed with the friars and nuns in the grotto.

Then, after greeting the primary school children's choir, which sang a song from the musical "*Forza venite gente*", which tells the story of the life of Saint Francis, and some figures from the historical representation of the living Nativity, in traditional dress, in the Church of the Shrine, the Pope presided at the celebration of the Word. Before the final blessing, after the Holy Father presented it as a gift to those present, the Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum* was read aloud.

At the end, at 17.05, Pope Francis left Greccio by helicopter to return to the Vatican.

The following is the brief meditation that the Pope pronounced during the celebration of the Word.

Meditation of the Holy Father

How many thoughts crowd the mind in this holy place! Yet before the rocks of these mountains so dear to Saint

Francis, what we are called to do first of all is to rediscover *simplicity*.

The Nativity scene, which for the first time Saint Francis created in this small space in imitation of the poor grotto of Bethlehem, speaks for itself. There is no need for many words here, for the scene set before our eyes expresses the *wisdom* that we need in order to grasp the essential.

Before the crèche we discover how important it is for our lives, often so hectic, to find moments for silence and prayer — *silence* to contemplate the beauty of the face of the Child Jesus, the Son of God, born in the poverty of a stable; *prayer* to express our amazed gratitude for the immense gift of love which is made to us.

The great mystery of our faith is shown in this simple sign of the nativity scene, full of wonder, which popular piety embraced and passed down from one generation to the next: God loves us to the point of sharing our humanity and our lives. He never leaves us alone; He accompanies us with His hidden, but not invisible, presence. In all circumstances, in joy as in pain, He is the Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Like the Shepherds of Bethlehem, let us accept the invitation to go to the grotto to see and recognize the *sign* that God has given us. Our hearts will then be brimming with joy and we shall be able to take it wherever there is sadness; they will be full of hope, to share with those who have lost it.

Let us identify with Mary, who laid her Son in the manger because there was no room at the inn. With her and with Saint Joseph, her spouse, let us keep our gaze turned to the Child Jesus. May His smile, which blossomed in the night, dispel indifference and open hearts to the joy of those who feel loved by our Heavenly Father.
