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Audience with the delegations of donors of the Christmas Tree and Nativity Display in Saint Peter's Square

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the delegations from the Huancavelica region of Peru and from Andalo in Trentino for the gift of the Nativity display and the Christmas tree in Saint Peter's Square this year.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I welcome you on the day of the inauguration of the Christmas tree and Nativity display in Saint Peter's Square, as well as the Nativity display in this hall.

I extend my heartfelt greetings to the Peruvian delegation of Huancavelica, the department in which the village of Chopcca is located, from which the large Nativity display in the Square comes. I thank Bishop Carlos Salcedo Ojeda for his words, and I extend my gratitude to the civil and ecclesial authorities, especially the Peruvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to all those who have collaborated. The characters in the crib, made from materials and clothing characteristic of those territories, represent the peoples of the Andes and symbolise the universal call to salvation. Jesus came to earth in the concrete reality of a people so as to save every man and woman, of all cultures and nationalities. He made himself small so that we could welcome him and receive the gift of God's tenderness.

Next to the crib is the majestic spruce tree from the woods of Andalo, in Trentino. I greet the delegation that has come from there: the authorities, the priests, and the faithful accompanied by Archbishop Lauro Tisi, whom I thank for his words. Tonight, at the end of the official handing-over ceremony, the lights decorating the tree will

be switched on. The tree will remain next to the crib until the end of the Christmas season and will be admired by pilgrims from many places. The fir tree is a sign of Christ, the tree of life (cf. *Rev 2:7*), a tree to which man had no access because of sin (cf. *Gen 2:9*). But with Christmas, divine life is joined to human life. The Christmas tree, then, evokes rebirth, the gift of God who unites himself with man forever, who gives us his life. The lights of the fir tree recall that of Jesus, the light of love that continues to shine in the nights of the world.

Dear friends, Christmas is this, let us not let it be polluted by consumerism and indifference. Its symbols, especially the Nativity scene and the decorated tree, bring us back to the certainty that fills our hearts with peace, to the joy of the Incarnation, to God who becomes familiar: he lives with us, he gives a rhythm of hope to our days. The tree and the Nativity scene introduce us to the typical Christmas atmosphere that is part of the heritage of our communities: an atmosphere of tenderness, sharing and family intimacy. Let us not experience a fake Christmas, please, a commercial Christmas! Let us allow ourselves to be enveloped by the closeness of God, this closeness that is compassionate, that is tender; enveloped by the Christmas atmosphere that art, music, songs and traditions bring to our hearts.

Those who come here, to the Paul VI Hall, in the coming days will be able to savour this atmosphere also thanks to the Nativity display that will now be inaugurated. It was made by young people from the parish of *San Bartolomeo in Gallio*, in the diocese of Padua, who are present here with Bishop Claudio Cipolla, whom I thank for what he said. I am grateful for this gift, the fruit of commitment and reflection on Christmas, the feast of trust and hope. The reason for hope is that God is with us, he trusts us and he never tires of us! And he never tires of forgiving: it is we who tire of asking for forgiveness. He comes to dwell with men, he chooses the earth as his dwelling place to be with us and take on the realities where we spend our days. This is what the Nativity scene teaches us. At Christmas, God reveals Himself not as one who is on high in order to dominate, but as the One who stoops down, small and poor, a companion on the road, to serve: this means that in order to resemble Him, the way is that of lowering oneself, of service. For it to be truly Christmas, let us not forget this: God comes to be with us and asks us to take care of our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the weakest, the most fragile, whom the pandemic risks marginalising even more. This is how Jesus came, and the Nativity display reminds us of this.

May Our Lady and Saint Joseph help us to live Christmas in this way. I reiterate my gratitude to all of you, to your countries and your families. God bless you. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
