



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
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Audience with a delegation of donors of the Nativity display and Christmas tree in Saint Peter's Square

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of donors of the Nativity display and Christmas tree in Saint Peter's Square, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am very pleased to meet you on the day on which the tree and Nativity display will be inaugurated in Saint Peter's Square, and here, in this Hall, the "Nativity of Bethlehem 2024" will officially be opened.

I greet the delegation from Grado, from whose territory the Nativity display in the centre of the Square originates, and that of Ledro, from whose forests comes the imposing 29-metre-high spruce tree; as well as the representation of the Embassy of the State of Palestine, tormented Palestine, which has come to present, on behalf of the City of Bethlehem, this "Nativity", created by the craftsmen of Bethlehem. I extend a cordial welcome to the civil and ecclesiastical Authorities present, in particular the Special Representatives of the president of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas – he has come here several times –, the President of the Regional Council of Friuli Venezia Giulia and the president of the province of Trento, the archbishop of Gorizia, the mayors of Grado and Ledro.

The majestic solemnity of the tree is striking. Cut down with respect for the ecological principles of the natural replacement of the forest, it bears the signs of many years, the numerous stratifications of the solid trunk, the old giving life to the young, the young who envelop and protect the old, all rising together upwards. It can be a beautiful image of the Church, people and body, from which the light of Christ spreads in the world precisely due to the succession of generations of believers who gather around the single origin, Jesus: the old gave life to the young, the young embrace and protect the old, in a mission in the world and on a journey towards Heaven. In this way, the holy faithful people of God goes forward.

Then, in the shadow of the great spruce tree, the Nativity display reproduces a “*casone*” of the lagoon of Grado, one of the fishermen’s houses that were built with mud and reeds and where the inhabitants of the “*motes*”, the small lagoon islands, during the hard work of fishing, shared the joys and sufferings of everyday life. This symbol, too, speaks to us of Christmas, in which God becomes man in order to share in our poverty, coming to build his Kingdom on earth not with powerful means, no, but through the weak resources of our humanity, purified and strengthened by his grace.

Regarding the Nativity display, there is another sign I would like to highlight: the “*casoni*” are surrounded by water, and a “*batela*”, the typical flat-bottomed boat that makes it possible to move over shallow waters, is needed to get there. And a boat is needed to reach Jesus, too: the Church is the boat. One does not reach him “alone” – never – we reach him together, we reach him as a community, on that great little boat that Peter continues to lead and on which, huddling together a little, there is room for everyone. In the Church, there is always room for everyone. One might say: “But what about sinners?”. They are the first, they are the privileged, because Jesus came for the sinners, for all of us, not for the saints. For everyone. Do not forget this. Everyone, everyone, everyone, everyone inside.

Finally, let us look at the Nativity displays of Bethlehem, built in the land where the Son of God was born. They are different, but they all bear the same message of peace and love that Jesus left us. Before it, let us remember the brothers and sisters who, instead, right there and in other parts of the world, are suffering from the tragedy of war. With tears in our eyes, let us raise our prayer for peace. Brothers and sisters, enough war, enough violence! Do you know that one of the most profitable investments here is in arms production? Profit for killing... But how come? Enough wars! May there be peace in all the world and for all men, whom God loves (cf. *Lk 2:14*)!

Dear sisters and brothers, thank you for coming and for your precious gifts. And we thank the Directorate for Infrastructure and Services of the Governorate, for the creative and generous effort made to organize all of this. I bless you, I bless your families and all your fellow citizens. And please, do not forget to pray for me, but please, do not pray against – for! Thank you!
