



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO PILGRIMS FROM BAVARIA FOR THE PRESENTATION OF THE GIFT OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Clementine Hall

Friday, 13 December 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am delighted to welcome you on the day of the presentation of the Christmas tree, a fir tree which this year comes from Waldmünchen, a town in Bavaria, to bring a traditional sign of Christmas to St Peter's Square. I address my cordial greetings to each one of you, beginning with the Mayor of the town. I also greet the other civil authorities, particularly Madam Minister and the Undersecretary, along with the Delegations and Members of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See. With fraternal affection I greet the Bishop of Regensburg and the Bishop of Plzeň, the bordering diocese in the Czech Republic. Yes, this tree is 'international'! It grew just next to the border between Germany and the Czech Republic. Thank you for your presence!

This evening, after the ceremony of official bestowal, the lights which decorate the Christmas tree shall be lit. This stately fir will remain beside the Nativity Scene until the end of the Christmas season, to be admired by Romans and by pilgrims and tourists from every part of the world. I thank you, dear friends, for this large tree and for the other smaller ones, which shall be placed in other locations within Vatican City. With these gifts, which are greatly appreciated, you have wished to manifest the spiritual closeness and friendship which binds all of Germany, and especially Bavaria, to the Holy See, following the local Christian tradition which has made fruitful the culture, literature and art of your nation, and of the whole of Europe. I remain close to you through my prayer and I accompany you on the journey of your Christian communities and of the entire German people.

On this beautiful occasion, I warmly wish all those here present, and your fellow countrymen and

those of your region, a peaceful celebration of the Lord's Birth. At Christmas time, the joyful announcement of the angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem rings out everywhere: "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:11). The shepherds, the Gospel says, were enfolded in a great light. Also today Jesus continues to dispel the darkness of error and sin, in order to bring mankind the joy of the divine resplendent light of which the Christmas tree is a symbol and reminder. Let us allow ourselves to be enfolded by the light of its truth, so that "the joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium*, n. 1).

To each one of you I warmly renew my fervent best wishes for a Merry Christmas, and I ask you to bring them to your families and to all your fellow countrymen. I ask you to please pray for me, as I gladly invoke upon all of you the blessing of the Lord. May the Lord bless you and keep you, your families, your homeland and all the world. Amen.