



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PILGRIMS FROM LOWER AUSTRIA
WHO HAD COME TO BRING AS A GIFT TO THE HOLY FATHER
THE CHRISTMAS TREE WHICH WILL DECORATE
ST PETER'S SQUARE IN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON***

Hall of Blessings

Friday, 12 December 2008

A most cordial "Gruß Gott" to all of you who have come here to bring as a gift to the Holy Father and to the Church of Rome the Christmas tree which, along with the manger, will decorate St Peter's Square in this Christmas Season. I welcome in particular Dr Erwin Pröll, Regional Governor of Lower Austria, and extend my gratitude for the kind words he expressed also on behalf of all those present. I also greet Bishop Klaus Klüing of Sankt Pölten to you too, a cordial thank you for the words that have touched my heart! Representing the Delegation and all the guests from Lower Austria, I greet Mr Johann Seper, Mayor of the Municipality of Gutenstein, in whose territory this marvellous tree grew the tallest to date in the history of Christmas trees in St Peter's Square. My special greeting goes not lastly to the young singers of Altenburg and the musicians from Ziersdorf who have given our meeting a festive tone with their musical performance and who are, so to speak, messengers of the rich culture of your country and of its many traditions. I warmly thank you!

Where there is Austria, there is music: we can experience this today too in a wonderful way. The gift that comes from the woods of your beautiful country in which are also included the other firs that you have brought to create an atmosphere of Christmas in the Apostolic Palace and in various places in the Vatican, among them my study this gift from the woods of your region recalls to mind the Visit I was able to make to your homeland last year. On that occasion, I stayed in one of the great convents that are characteristic of your country and that bear witness to its profoundly Christian history. All the faithful will have to be committed to ensuring that in the future too this witness to Christ lives on to give men and women support and guidance in their lives, or as you, Mr Regional Governor, have said in a very concrete way a railing to lean on in order to go forward.

In the coming weeks, the Christmas tree will be a cause of joy for Romans and for the many pilgrims who will come to the Eternal City from every part of the world for the celebrations of Christ's Nativity. From my study window I too shall be able to look out joyfully again and again, when from above I will be able to admire anew the tree and manger. But there will also be the chance for me to go to it directly, praying before the Baby Jesus and rejoicing for the light of the tree and for its beauty. Its towering shape, its green colour and the lights decorating its branches are symbols of life. In addition, it refers us to the mystery of the Holy Night. Christ, the Son of God brings to the dark, cold and unredeemed world into which he is born a new hope and a new splendour. If man lets himself be moved and enlightened by the splendour of the living truth that is Christ, he will feel inner peace in his heart and will become a peacemaker in a society that so longs for reconciliation and redemption.

Dear friends, once again a sincere "Vergelt's Gott" for this beautiful gift! I also thank all the collaborators who are unable to be present today, the sponsors and all those who organized the transport of the tree. May the Lord reward you for the willingness with which you generously contributed to the tree's delivery. From today I express my best wishes for a Christmas celebration that is full of grace and I ask you kindly to convey these wishes to your families and to all your fellow countrymen. I assure you of my prayers for your families and for your wonderful country, and I commend you all to the intercession of Mary, Patroness of Austria, and to Leopold, the Patron of the region, who now, in the form of a beautiful sculpture, will be able to feel "at home" in my residence as well. May the Lord protect your land bless all Austria!

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