



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

ANGELUS

Fourth Sunday of Advent, 19 December 2004

1. The Feast of Christmas, perhaps the dearest to popular tradition, is full of symbols connected with the different cultures. There is no doubt that the most important of them all is *the crib*, as I had occasion to emphasize last Sunday.

2. Next to the crib, as in St Peter's Square, we find the traditional "*Christmas tree*". This too is an ancient tradition that exalts the value of life, for in the winter season *the evergreen fir* becomes a sign of *undying life*. *Christmas gifts* are usually placed on the tree or arranged at its base. The symbol thus also becomes eloquent in a typically Christian sense: it calls to mind the "*tree of life*" (cf. Gn 2: 9), a figure of Christ, God's supreme gift to humanity.

3. The message of the Christmas tree is consequently that *life stays "evergreen" if we make a gift of it*: not so much of material things, but of life itself: in friendship and sincere affection, in fraternal help and forgiveness, in time shared and reciprocal listening.

May Mary help us to live Christmas as an occasion to savour the joy of giving ourselves to our brothers and sisters, especially the neediest.

After leading the recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father said:

Dear children of Beslan, I greet you on the occasion of the Nativity of Christ. I greet with great affection the children and young people from Beslan, Ossezia, who are staying with some friends of the Discalced Carmelites of Trent. Dear friends, may the good that you are receiving from so

many friends help you recover from the injuries of the terrible experience you have been through.
Happy Christmas!

I greet all the pilgrims present, especially the faithful from the Roman Parishes of St Tarcisius and St Frances Cabrini, and from Taranto and Castellaneta. A thought also goes to the "For Another Hope" Association from Verona.

Have a good Sunday and a Happy Christmas!

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