



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO PILGRIMS FROM CARINTHIA

Saturday, 16 December 2000

1. With the Christmas tree that you have brought to Rome from your homeland, you are making us a precious gift. Three years ago you decided to donate the Christmas tree for St Peter's Square in the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Already at that time the Holy See accepted the offering you have made today. The Christmas tree is an eloquent greeting from the Federal Region of Carinthia and from the Church of Gurk-Klagenfurt to everyone, in the city of Rome and all over the world, who is united with the centre of Christianity on the occasion of holy Christmas.

I would like to thank all those who have offered this gift. I extend a special greeting to venerable Bishop Egon Kapellari and to all the pilgrims, including the regional governor of Carinthia with an official delegation, and the Mayor of Gurk with a group from the municipality.

2. In the past few days, every time I have looked out of my study window at St Peter's Square the tree has uplifted my spirit. I always loved trees in my homeland. When one looks at them, in a certain way they begin to speak. One poet considers trees as preachers with a profound message: "They do not preach doctrines or precepts, but announce the fundamental law of life".

In the flowering of spring, in the ripeness of summer, in the autumn fruits and in the death of winter, a tree tells of the mystery of life. This is why, since ancient times, people have used the image of the tree to reflect on life's most important questions.

3. Like trees, human beings also need deeply anchored roots. Only those who are rooted in fertile soil have stability. They can reach up high to receive the sunlight and at the same time can resist the winds around them. But those who think they can live without foundations, live an uncertain existence, like roots without soil.

The Holy Scriptures show us the foundations in which we can root our lives for a solid existence. The Apostle Paul gives us good advice: like trees rooted in him [Christ], be established in the faith, just as you were taught (cf. *Col 2: 7*).

4. The tree prompts me to think of something else. In our houses and homes there is the good custom of putting the Christmas tree beside the crib. How can we fail, in this context, to think of paradise, of the tree of life, but also of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The new creation began with the birth of the Son of God. The first Adam, wanting to be like God, ate of the tree of knowledge. Jesus Christ, the new Adam, although he possessed the divine nature, did not consider taking advantage of his equality with God but preferred to empty himself, taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men (cf. *Phil 2: 6-7*): from his birth to his death, from the crib to the Cross. Death came from the tree of paradise, from the tree of the Cross life was restored. Thus the tree belongs to the crib, alluding to the Cross, the tree of life.

5. Dear Bishop, dear brothers and sisters! Once again I express my deep gratitude for your Christmas present. Also accept as a gift the message of the tree which the Psalmist put into words: "Blessed is the man [...] whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (*Ps 1: 2-3*).

With these sentiments I wish all of you and your families and friends at home a Happy Christmas in the Holy Year 2000. With God's help, may all your good intentions be successful in the New Year. May your country's saints be powerful intercessors for you. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you.

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