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Audience with the Delegation of Donors of the Christmas Tree and Nativity Display in Saint Peter's Square

At 11.45 today, in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Delegations from Poland and the Abbey of Montevergine for the gift of the Christmas tree and the Nativity display in Saint Peter's Square.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is a joy for me to welcome you in this circumstance, and to address to you my thanks for the gift of the nativity display and the Christmas tree in Saint Peter's Square. I offer a heartfelt greeting to you all, starting with the authorities and representatives of the Institutions that organized this initiative. I greet the Abbot of Montevergine, for the gift of the Nativity display; the archbishop of Warmia and the bishop of Elk in Poland, from where the tree comes, with the Directorate of Bialystok State Forests. In addition, I greet the children treated in the oncological wards of various Italian hospitals and in the areas of Central Italy affected by earthquakes, coordinated by the "Contessa Lele Thun" Foundation, who made the decorations.

Every year the Nativity display and Christmas tree speak to us with their symbolic language. They make more visible what we grasp in the experience of the birth of the Son of God. They are the signs of the compassion of the heavenly Father, of His participation and closeness to humanity, which experiences not abandonment in the night of time, but is instead visited and accompanied in its difficulties. The tree points upwards and inspires us to reach towards "the greater gifts" (cf. *1 Cor* 12: 31), to rise above the fog that obscures, to experience how beautiful and joyful it is to be immersed in the light of Christ. In the simplicity of the Nativity display we encounter and contemplate God's tenderness, made manifest in that of the Child Jesus.

This year's Nativity display, produced as a typical expression of Neapolitan art, is inspired by the works of mercy. They remind us that the Lord said to us: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (*Mt* 7: 12). The Nativity display is the evocative place where we contemplate Jesus Who, taking on

Himself the miseries of mankind, invites us to do likewise, through acts of mercy. The tree, from Poland this year, is a sign of the faith of the people who, with this gesture too, wished to express their fidelity to the See of Peter.

Dear children, my thanks are addressed above all to you. In your works you have transferred your dreams and your desires to rise to heaven and to be known to Jesus, Who made Himself a child like you to tell you that He loves you. Thank you for your witness, for having made more beautiful these signs of Christmas, that pilgrims and visitors from all over the world will be able to admire. Thank you! Thank you! This evening, when the lights of the Nativity display and the Christmas tree are switched on, the wishes you transferred to your work in decorating the tree will also be luminous and seen by all. Thank you!

May the Nativity of the Lord be the opportunity to be more attentive to the needs of the poor and of those who, like Jesus, do not find anyone to welcome them. To you present here, to your loved ones and those you represent, I heartily wish a happy Christmas. I assure you of my prayers so that the Lord may welcome you and fulfil your expectations. I ask you too to pray for me and for my service to the Church.

And I will give my blessing to you all, but first let us all pray to Our Lady, together.

[Hail Mary...]
