



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO A DELEGATION FROM UPPER AUSTRIA
WHOSE REGION DONATED THE CHRISTMAS TREE
FOR ST PETER'S SQUARE***

*Vatican's Hall of Blessings
Saturday, 17 December 2005*

Dear Friends,

Welcome! I am pleased to receive you with deep friendship on the occasion of the presentation of the fir tree set up in St Peter's Square, which comes from the woods of Eferding in Upper Austria.

I address my cordial greeting to each of you, starting with Mr Josef Pühringer, President of Upper Austria, whom I thank for the kind words he has just addressed to me on behalf of everyone present. I also greet the Region's civil Authorities, with a special thought for the Administrators of the Municipality of Eferding. I then greet with fraternal affection Bishop Ludwig Schwarz of Linz and Bishop emeritus Maximilian Aichern. I likewise offer an affectionate greeting to the members of the Choir and Chapel (Stadtkapelle) of Eferding as well as to the women's folklore group, the "Goldhaubenfrauen".

This evening at the end of the official ceremony for the presentation of the Christmas tree the lights that decorate it will be lit. The majestic fir will stand beside the Crib until the end of the Christmas festivities and will be admired by the numerous pilgrims who come to the Vatican from every part of the world. Thank you, dear friends, for this large tree and for the smaller ones that will decorate the Apostolic Palace and various places in the Vatican.

With your much-appreciated gifts, you have wished to express the spiritual closeness and friendship that have long bound Austria to the Holy See, in the wake of the noble Christian tradition that has nurtured the culture, literature and art of your Nation and of all Europe with its spiritual values. I would like to assure you that the Pope is close to you and accompanies with his

prayers the journey of the Christian communities and of the entire People of Austria.

This is also a favourable occasion for me to offer to all of you present here my warm wishes that you will spend the Nativity of the Lord serenely. I extend these good wishes to your fellow citizens who have stayed in the Homeland and to the inhabitants of your Region who, for various reasons, are living abroad. At Christmas, the glad tidings of the Redeemer's birth ring out in every part of the globe: the awaited Messiah was made man and came to dwell among us.

With his shining presence, Jesus dispelled the darkness of error and sin and brought humanity the joy of the dazzling divine light, of which the Christmas tree is a sign and reminder. I hope you will accept in your hearts the gift of his joy, peace and love. Believing in Christ means letting oneself be enveloped by the light of his truth which gives full significance, value and meaning to our lives, for precisely by revealing to us the mystery of the Father and his love for man, he also fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22).

I warmly renew to each one of you my most fervent good wishes for Christmas, and ask you to express them to your families and all your compatriots. I assure you of my prayers for you and your loved ones, and I very willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to everyone.

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