



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A DELEGATION FROM BAD SÄCKINGEN**

Saturday, 19 December 1998

Venerable Brother in the Episcopate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We all feel deeply honoured by the Christmas tree that you have brought to Rome from your country. The fir-tree from the Black Forest is a sign of your union with the Successor of Peter, and at the same time it is an eloquent greeting from the Church in Freiburg to those from the city of Rome and the whole world who come together at Christmas time in the centre of Christianity.

I thank all who have made this gift possible. In particular I greet Auxiliary Bishop Wolfgang Kirchgässner, who leads your group on behalf of Archbishop Oskar Saier. I ask you to give him my best wishes for a speedy recovery. In presenting the entire delegation, I would like to mention some particular individuals by name: the President of the State Parliament of Baden-Württemberg, the President of the Waldshut District and the Mayor of Bad Säckingen. I am pleased to know that you are building bridges to the different countries of Europe. I extend my cordial welcome to the representatives of your twin cities.

2. Over the last few days, as I looked down at St Peter's Square from the window of my study, the tree prompted some spiritual reflections. In my own country I always loved trees. When you look at them, they begin in a way to speak. A poet who was born not far from your country and who lived on Lake Constance saw trees as effective preachers: "They do not preach doctrines or remedies; they proclaim the fundamental law of life".

In the blossoming of spring, the ripeness of summer, the autumn harvest and the death of winter, trees tell the mystery of life. For this reason, since ancient times men have used the tree as an image for the fundamental questions of life.

3. Unfortunately, in our time the tree is also an eloquent reflection of how man often treats his environment, God's

creation. Dying trees are a silent warning that there are persons who obviously do not regard either life or creation as a gift, but only see what use can be made of them. It gradually becomes clear that wherever trees die, eventually man perishes, too.

4. Like trees, men need deep roots, because only those who are deeply rooted in fertile ground can remain steadfast. They can reach up to receive the light of the sun and at the same time resist the wind which shakes them. Yet the existence of those who believe that they can do without this foundation remains suspended in the air like roots without soil.

Sacred Scripture shows us the foundation in which we must root our lives if we are to remain firm. The Apostle Paul offers us the best advice: remain well rooted and founded in Jesus Christ, established in the faith as you were taught (cf. *Col 2:7*).

5. The tree in St Peter's Square turns my thoughts in another direction also: you placed it near the crib and decorated it. Does this not remind us of paradise, of the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? With the birth of the Son of God the new creation began. The first Adam wanted to be like God and ate from the tree of knowledge. Jesus Christ, the new Adam, was in the form of God: despite this he did not wish to be God's equal, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming like men (cf. *Phil 2:6* and ff.): from his birth until his death, from the manger to the Cross. Death came from the tree of paradise; life sprung from the tree of the Cross. The tree therefore is next to the crib and points precisely to the Cross, the tree of life.

6. Your Excellency, dear brothers and sisters, once again I express my profound gratitude to you for your Christmas gift. Please accept in exchange the message of the tree as the psalmist put it: "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 whose leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (*Ps 1:1-3*).

With these thoughts I wish you and your loved ones and friends a blessed and joyous Christmas. With the help of God may all that you begin in the new year prosper! May the patron of your homeland, St Fridolin, be your powerful intercessor. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.