



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Audience with the organisers and artists of the Christmas Concert in the Vatican

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience the promoters, organisers and artists of the Christmas Concert in the Vatican, promoted by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the proceeds of which will be donated to the Pontifical Foundation *Scholas Occurrentes* and the Don Bosco Salesian Missions Foundation.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear friends, good morning and welcome!

I would ask Cardinal Versaldi not to broadcast these words at the concert: the concert is art, this has nothing to do with it: let art be allowed to express itself.

I am glad to be able to greet you before the Christmas Concert, which will take place tomorrow evening. Thank you, thank you very much.

Christmas invites us to turn our gaze to the event that brought God's tenderness into the world - a word that I stress, tenderness, that is so lacking - and thus inspired and continues to inspire joy and hope. Tenderness, joy, hope: feelings and attitudes that you artists also know how to revive and spread with your talents. Thank you.

Tenderness is born of love, it is like the language of love. When you love a child, you caress him; when you love your fiancé you caress him or her. This comes from love. The gesture of love is the simplest. In the Nativity scene we see the love of a mother who embraces her newborn child, the love of a father who protects and defends his family, we see pastors who are moved by the sight of the newborn, angels who celebrate the coming of the Lord... Everything is permeated by a sense of wonder and love that leads to tenderness. I wish to

repeat this: the language of God is closeness, compassion and tenderness. The three things together.

Saint Francis of Assisi, with his living Nativity in Greccio, wanted to represent what happened in the grotto in Bethlehem, so that it might be contemplated and adored. The *Poverello* was filled with a tenderness that led him to be moved at the thought of the poverty in which the Son of God was born.

It is precisely the love that transpires in this scene that generates *joy*. The blossoming of new life is always a source of joy, which helps to overcome suffering. The smile of a child melts even the hardest of hearts. We have seen it: some hard men, who do not greet anyone, melt when their grandchild is born. In the Christmas Concert you offer your artistic talents to support educational projects, especially for children and young people in two countries with very precarious conditions: Haiti and Lebanon. In Lebanon it is carried out by the Salesians, the good Salesians who always find a way to keep going forward. And this is a promise of life. In Haiti it is being carried forward by *Scholas Occurrentes*, the pontifical movement that Monsignor Zani looks after so well. Your music and singing help to open the heart so we do not forget those who suffer, and to make concrete gestures of sharing, which bring joy to so many families who wish to give their children a future through education.

Tenderness, joy and *hope*. In the grotto of Bethlehem, hope for humanity was kindled. The pandemic has unfortunately worsened the educational gap for millions of children and adolescents who are excluded from all educational activities. And there are other “pandemics” that prevent the spread of the culture of dialogue and the culture of inclusion. Today, unfortunately, the throwaway culture dominates. The light of Christmas makes us rediscover a sense of brotherhood and urges us towards solidarity with those in need. And in art you immediately create fraternity; before art there are no friends and enemies, we are all equal, all friends, all brothers and sisters. Yours is a fruitful language. Investing in education means helping children and young people to discover and appreciate the most important values and to have the courage to look to their future with hope. In education dwells the seed of hope: hope for peace and justice, hope for beauty, hope for goodness; hope for social harmony.

Dear friends, I thank you. Thank you, thank you very much for the generosity with which you support projects aimed at the younger generations. I wish you to always be messengers of tenderness, joy and hope. A Merry Christmas of fraternity and peace to you and to your loved ones. Thank you!
