



Inauguration of 100 Nativity Scenes Exhibition in the Vatican

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“This year it is only right to remember the first nativity scene - that of Saint Francis, created at Christmas 1223 in Greccio,” said the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, as he declared open the “100 Nativity Scenes in the Vatican” exhibition.

He added: “The saint wanted a living nativity scene. And he really did achieve a miracle, that of ensuring that in the nativity scene no one felt like a stranger or a spectator, but rather a participant. What we hope is that each of us can experience this by visiting the “100 nativity scenes.”

The inauguration of the International Exhibition “100 Nativity Scenes in the Vatican” was held at 4pm on Friday 8 December 2023 under the left wing of Bernini's Colonnade, in St. Peter's Square, in the presence of Archbishop Fisichella, and the Ambassador of Italy to the Holy See, His Excellency Francesco Di Nitto. To celebrate this year's anniversary, which commemorates 800 years since the first representation of the Nativity, Father Ignacio Ceya, Vicar General of the Order of Friars Minor, and the Mayor of Greccio, Emiliano Fabi, also attended the inauguration.

Archbishop Fisichella continued: “A great French author, Charles Peguy, in one of his best-known writings says: ‘Hope was born on Christmas Day’. It is my desire that everyone should take this message to heart and by visiting the nativity scenes the torch of hope will be lit within us. Let's keep this torch alive because it is what helps us live well in the present, as we prepare to build a better future.”

Ambassador Di Nitto commented: "Our involvement with the nativity scene in Greccio allows us to remember, to celebrate and give proper recognition as we mark the 800 years of that happy intuition of St Francis who set up the first nativity scene in that little town, in the Rieti valley. From that intuition a tradition that has lasted centuries was born, a custom was created that is part of the tradition of many families, and which many of us recall as one of the fondest memories of our childhood, the period of waiting for Christmas. The nativity scene, as the Holy Father reminds us, does not only speak to believers but also impacts those who do not believe because it brings a message of peace and brotherhood. This message of peace and unity is what we want to launch today in memory of Saint Francis."

Father Ceya added: "It is also a great joy and an honor for us Franciscans to be present today at the inauguration of the nativity scene exhibition. We are celebrating the 800th anniversary of the first nativity scene that Saint Francis wanted to create. According to his biographer, he expressed the desire to contemplate with his own eyes the poverty and humility of the son of God made man. Saint Francis also celebrated the Eucharist close to the nativity scene, and this is because the nativity scene, like the Eucharist, reminds us of the humble love of God. This anniversary invites us, and the whole Church, to renew our capacity to see the signs in the world of the presence of God made man, the signs of hope, the signs of Jesus' presence. He invites us to see the presence of Jesus in our neediest brothers, who suffer because they are victims of the horror of war and violence. So, let's renew our faith in the God who wanted to become one of us with this exhibition. Let us renew our commitment to be like him, living in solidarity with the hopes and sufferings of this world."

Emiliano Fabi, the Mayor of Greccio, also spoke, putting special emphasis on the nativity scene's message of universal peace. "We tried to re-create what happened 800 years ago in our own village, a little community that reminded Francesco a lot of Bethlehem. The saint wanted to see with his own eyes the difficulties of giving birth in such difficult circumstances. For this reason, we have tried, thanks to the loan of some works on display here, to represent the originality and power of Francis's nativity scene, of that first Greccio nativity scene. It is a nativity scene that brings with it a particularly important and relevant message, namely that of universal peace – something that we desperately need especially in this period. We have tried to bring the full power of Francis's nativity scene to the center of Christianity."

The exhibition, which will remain open until 7 January, can be visited every day from 10am to 7.30pm. Entrance is free and is already proving highly popular, with tens of thousands of visitors flocking to see it in the first three days of opening.