

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

At this time, we are looking more intently at Bethlehem. When the Holy Family cannot find room at the inn, they seek refuge in a stable. Those moments are marked by cold, poverty and that lack of welcome. And yet the newborn Jesus is surrounded by the affection of Mary and Joseph.

The neediness experienced in Bethlehem can be found again in many homes in our cities, especially this year, which is marked by social, work and health problems. In addition, many people are experiencing loneliness. Let us strive, with our prayer and material help, to bring warmth to as many people as possible and learn to contemplate in each of them the Christ Child's face: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*). What joy it gives to see the efforts of so many people to bring the hope of Jesus' birth to those most in need!

During these festivities we will also spend more time with family and friends. We will have the opportunity to share the Good News with them, as we recognize the particular situation of each person. As Saint Josemaría said, "more than in giving, charity consists in understanding" (*The Way*, 463). Thus, despite our personal littleness, this Christmas we can spread a light of hope to those around us. The birth of Jesus reminds us that, even in the middle of the coldest night, a flame is always enkindled. By bringing to our homes the intimate atmosphere of the stable at Bethlehem we ourselves will also be helped to discover or rediscover God's love for us.

With my most affectionate blessing, I wish you a happy and holy Christmas.

Your Father,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rome, 15 December 2021