

BAMBINELLI SUNDAY

"Bless the Baby Jesus"

This wonderful tradition originates in the papacy of Pope St. John Paul II and is celebrated when the children of Rome and their families fill St. Peter's Square on Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, for the blessing of the Gesu Bambino, the 'little baby Jesus.' On this day the children bring from home their Christ-child figures, their bambinelli, in hands, in pockets, in backpacks, from their own family nativity scenes. Some will even bring the bambinelli of friends and neighbors unable to attend. Then, during the noontime Angelus address, the Holy Father invites all to hold up their bambinelli for a special blessing of the Christ-child figures, the children and their families. Upon returning home the figure is set safely out of sight for the remainder of Advent until happily placed in the creche with the arrival of Christmas. What a beautiful, tangible way to keep the anticipated coming of the Lord Jesus into our homes and hearts central to our holiday preparations.

A suggestion is that following the blessing, your 'bambinello' is taken home, put in a gift box, wrapped, and placed in a place of honor to await Christmas. Let this be the first gift your family opens on Christmas as together you place the blessed Christ-child figure in the manger and welcome Christmas into your home.

POPE BENEDICT'S BLESSING

God, our Father, you so loved humankind that you sent us your only Son Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, to save us and lead us back to you.

We pray that with your Blessing these images of Jesus, who is about to come among us, may be a sign of your presence and love in our homes. Good Father, give your Blessing to us too, to our parents, to our families and to our friends.

Open our hearts, so that we may be able to receive Jesus in joy, always do what he asks and see him in all those who are in need of our love.

We ask you this in the name of Jesus, your beloved Son, who comes to give the world peace. He lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

The blessing of the "Bambinelli" [Baby Jesus figurines] as they are called in Rome, reminds us that the crib is a school of life where we can learn the secret of true joy. This does not consist in having many things but in feeling loved by the Lord, in giving oneself as a gift for others and in loving one another. Let us look at the crib. Our Lady and St Joseph do not seem to be a very fortunate family; their first child was born in the midst of great hardship; yet they are full of deep joy, because they love each other, they help each other and, especially, they are certain that God, who made himself present in the little Jesus, is at work in their story. And the shepherds? What did they have to rejoice about? That Newborn Infant was not to change their condition of poverty and marginalization. But faith helped them recognize the "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" as a "sign" of the fulfillment of God's promises for all human beings, "with whom he is pleased" (Lk 2: 12, 14).

~ Pope Benedict XVI, 2009.

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