



Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama

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Office of the Bishop

To: Pastors, Parochial/Chapel Administrators, School Principals, Religious Superiors, Leaders of Apostolates with Approved Chapels
CC: Ascension Health, EWTN, Cenacolo, St. Rose Academy
From: Bishop Steven J. Raica + sgm
Date: January 4, 2024
RE: **Plenary Indulgence Granted for Nativity Devotion in the Diocese of Birmingham**

I am pleased to share with you the news that as of yesterday, January 3, we received a decree from the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See granting a special plenary indulgence for our Diocese. This indulgence is in connection with the 800th anniversary of the Nativity Scene: in 1223, St. Francis of Assisi established the first Nativity in the town of Greccio, Italy – and now, practically all of our churches, chapels, and homes have such a scene in it at this time of the year.

Father Bryan Jerabek, Chancellor, has translated the decree from Latin to English and authored a commentary on it as well (enclosed). The commentary breaks down what must be done in order to gain the plenary indulgence.

In particular, I wish to note that the indulgence is available through February 2. The current liturgical books see the Christmas season ending with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (which is this coming Monday, January 9), and it is around that time that we usually take down our Christmas decorations in our churches. However, historically, there was a strong tradition of leaving decorations in place until the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (also called the Feast of the Purification) – February 2. That tradition is still observed in some places, even to some extent in Rome. Therefore, this gift from the Holy See takes advantage of that tradition to grant us sufficient time to make use of it – and to let us extend the joy of Christmas a little longer this year!

Therefore, as noted in the commentary, while you might be planning to take down your decorations in your churches and chapels next week, *please consider leaving up at least the Nativity Scene this year until February 2*, so that those who visit there may take advantage of this unique opportunity.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Father Jerabek at fatherjerabek@bhmdiocese.org, and he will answer or re-direct them accordingly.

This indulgence is a special gift from the Church for us in the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama this year, and I appreciate your flexibility in receiving and accommodating this late news. It will no doubt be of benefit to us all, as we strive to draw closer to our Lord Jesus Christ in this new year of Our Lord, 2024!

Email enclosures