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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.20 a.m. in St. Peter's Square, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian the Pope focused on Baptism: 5. *Regeneration* (Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, 6: 3-4).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The catechesis on the sacrament of Baptism leads us to speak today about immersion in the baptismal font, accompanied by the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity, or rather the central rite which truly "baptizes" – that is, *immerses* – in the Paschal mystery of Christ (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1239). Saint Paul reminds the Christians in Rome of the meaning of this gesture, first asking: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?", and then answering, "We were therefore [...] buried

with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead [...] through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (*Rm 6: 3-4*). Baptism opens the door to a life of resurrection, not a worldly life. A life in accordance with Jesus.

The baptismal font is the place in which one experiences the Pasch with Christ! The former man is buried, with his deceitful passions (cf. *Eph 4: 22*), so that a new creature can be reborn; truly the old things are past and new ones are born (cf. *2 Cor 5: 17*). The "catecheses" attributed to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, thus explain to the newly baptized what happens in the water of Baptism. It is beautiful, this explanation by Saint Cyril: "In the same instant you died and were born, and the same wave of health became for you both tomb and mother" (no. 20, *Mystagogy* 2, 4-6; *PG* 33, 1079-1082). The rebirth of the new man demands that the man corrupted by sin be reduced to dust. The images of the tomb and the maternal womb with reference to the font are indeed very incisive for expressing the great thing that happens through the simple gestures of Baptism. I like to cite the inscription in the ancient Roman baptistery of Saint John Lateran, where we read in Latin this expression attributed to Pope Sixtus III: "The Mother Church virginally gives birth by water the children conceived by the breath of God. Those of you reborn by this font, hope in the Kingdom of Heaven".^[1] It is beautiful: the Church gives us birth, the Church who is the womb, our mother, through Baptism.

If our parents have given us earthly life, the Church has regenerated us to eternal life in Baptism. We became children of His Son Jesus (cf. *Rm 8: 15*; *Gal 4: 5-7*). Upon each one of us too, reborn from the water and from the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Father makes resound with infinite love His voice that says: "This is my Son, Whom I love" (cf. *Mt 3: 17*). This paternal voice, imperceptible to the ear but easily audible to the heart of those who believe, accompanies us for all our life, without ever abandoning us. During all our life the Father says to us: "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter". God loves us greatly, like a Father, and He does not leave us alone. This is from the moment of Baptism. Reborn as children of God, we are thus for ever! Indeed, Baptism is not repeated, because it imprints an indelible spiritual seal: "No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1272). The seal of Baptism is never lost! "Father, but if a person becomes a brigand, one of the most notorious, who kills people, who is unjust, doesn't the seal go away?". No. For shame the son of God who is that man does those things, but the seal does not go away. And he continues to be a son of God, he who goes against God, but God never denies His children. Have you understood this last thing? God never denies His children. Shall we repeat this together? "God never denies His children". A bit louder, as either I am deaf or I did not understand [they repeat more loudly]. "God never denies His children". There, that is good.

Incorporated in Christ by means of Baptism, the baptized are therefore conformed to Him, "the firstborn among many brothers" (*Rm 8: 29*). Through the action of the Holy Spirit, Baptism purifies, sanctifies, justifies, to form in Christ, of the many, a single body (cf. *1 Cor 6: 11; 12: 13*). This is expressed by anointing with Chrism, which "signifies the royal priesthood of the baptized and enrolment into the company of the people of God" (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, 18, 3). Therefore, the priest anoints with holy Chrism the head of each baptized person, after pronouncing these words which explain its meaning: "God ... now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as a member of His body, sharing everlasting life" (*ibid.*, 71).

Brothers and sisters, the Christian vocation is all here: living joined with Christ in the holy Church, participants in the same consecration to carry out the same mission, in this world, bearing fruits that last for ever. Inspired by the sole Spirit, indeed, the entire people of God participates in the functions of Jesus Christ, "priest, king and prophet", and bears the responsibilities of mission and service thus derived (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 783-786). What does it mean to participate in the regal and prophetic priesthood of Christ? It means making oneself an offering, pleasing to God (cf. *Rm 12: 1*), bearing witness to Him through a life of faith and of charity (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12), and placing oneself at the service of others, following the example of the Lord Jesus (cf. *Mt 20: 25-28; Jn 13: 13-17*). Thank you.

[1] «*Virgineo fetu genitrix Ecclesia natos / quos spirante Deo concipit amne parit. / Caelorum regnum sperate*

hoc fonte renati».

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet French-speaking pilgrims, especially the faithful from Canada and France. Brothers and sisters, let us remember our baptismal vocation every day, making our life an offering pleasing to God and placing it at the service of others. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from England, Finland, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. In a special way, I greet the "small farmers" from various countries meeting in Italy, with gratitude for their contribution to feeding our world. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

German

I am pleased to welcome German-speaking pilgrims. I greet in particular the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of the Saint Hildegard Section and the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer who celebrate 25 years of religious profession. As the baptized, we are regenerated to a new life in Christ and called to continue His mission, bringing His love and His gospel to our neighbours. I warmly bless you all.

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. In this Easter season, I invite you to consider the greatness of the Christian vocation that we receive in baptism, and to live it united to Christ in the Church, so that it may bear abundant fruits in a life of faith and charity, at the service of our brothers. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, welcome! I cordially greet the various parish groups, the Redemptorist Missionaries and the Franciscan Family of Brazil, as well as the members of the "*Instituto para o Desenvolvimento Social*" of Lisbon. May this pilgrimage strengthen in your hearts the feeling and the living with the Church, persevering in the daily prayer of the Rosary. So you can meet each day with the Virgin Mother, learning from her to cooperate fully with God's plans of salvation for each one. May the Lord bless you and your loved ones!

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, the month of May is dedicated to Our Lady; I invite you to cultivate devotion to the Mother of God with the daily recitation of the Rosary, praying in particular for peace in Syria and throughout the world. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, yesterday the Church in Poland celebrated the solemnity of your patron, Saint Stanislaus, bishop and martyr. He gave his life as a defender of the Gospel, of moral values and of the dignity of every man. May his heroic example be for all of you a guide in your daily life, in your personal, family and social life. May his intercession support you in your journey on the ways of truth and love. God bless you!

Italian

I offer a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the participants in the General Chapters of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy; of the Missionary Daughters of Calvary; of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Child Jesus and of the Franciscan Servants of Mary. I encourage you all to be faithful to Christ so that, following the example of Mary Most Holy, you can make the joy of the Gospel shine.

I greet the Community of *Borgo Ragazzi Don Bosco* in Rome, the parishes, in particular those of Salerno and Preturo di Montoro; the Merciful Love Lay Association; the young people of Civitanova Marche and student groups, particularly those from Florence and Gioia del Colle.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. We are in the month of May, a time dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Cultivate devotion to Our Lady, through daily recitation of the Rosary, so that like the Mother of God, accepting the mysteries of Christ in your life, you may increasingly be a gift of love for everyone. Thank you.
