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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Appeal of the Holy Father

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.25 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: 6. *Clothed in Christ* (Bible passage: Letter of *Saint Paul to the Galatians*).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then launched an appeal for the troubling situation in the Holy Land and in the Middle East.

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!

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Today we conclude the cycle of catechesis on Baptism. The spiritual effects of this Sacrament, invisible to the eyes but operative in the heart of those who have become new creatures, are made explicit in the presentation of the white garment and the lighted candle.

After regeneration by washing, recreating man according to God in true holiness (cf. *Eph* 4: 24), it seemed natural, from the first centuries, to dress the newly baptized with a new, clean garment, recalling the splendour of life achieved in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The white garment, while symbolically expressing what happened in the Sacrament, announces the condition of being transfigured in divine glory.

Saint Paul reminds us of what it means to be clothed in Christ by explaining the virtues that the baptized must cultivate: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. ... And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (*Col* 3: 12-14).

The ritual presentation of the flame drawn from the Paschal candle also recalls the effect of Baptism: "Receive the light of Christ", says the priest. These words remind us that we are not the light, but rather the light is Jesus Christ (*Jn* 1: 9, 12, 46) Who, having risen from the dead, has conquered the darkness of evil. We are called to receive His splendour! As the flame of the Paschal candle gives light to individual candles, so the love of the Risen Lord inflames the hearts of the baptized, filling them with light and heat. And for this reason, since the first centuries Baptism was also called "enlightenment" and the baptized was named "the enlightened one".

This is indeed the Christian vocation: to always walk as children of light, steadfast in faith (cf. Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults, 226, *Jn* 12: 36). When it comes to children, it is the task of parents, together with godparents and godmothers, to be sure to nurture the flame of baptismal grace in their children, helping them to persevere in faith (cf. Rite of the Baptism of Children, 73). "Christian formation, which is their due, seeks to lead them gradually to learn God's plan in Christ, so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized" (*ibid.*, Introduction, 3).

The living presence of Christ, to be guarded, defended and expanded in us, is a lamp that illuminates our steps, a light that guides our choices, a flame that warms hearts in going out to meet the Lord, making us able to help those who make the way with us, until the inseparable communion with him. On that day, Revelation still says, "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever" (cf. 22: 5).

The celebration of Baptism ends with the *Lord's Prayer*, proper to the community of the children of God. Indeed, the children born again in Baptism will receive the fullness of the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation and will participate in the Eucharist, learning what it means to turn to God calling Him "Father".

At the end of these catecheses on Baptism, I repeat to each of you the invitation that I have expressed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*: "Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to Him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23)" (15).

Greetings in various languages

French

I welcome pilgrims from France, Switzerland and other French-speaking countries. I greet in particular the young

people and the pilgrims from the diocese of Le Mans. Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that the grace of your baptism is fruitful in each of you and supports your path of holiness. God bless you!

English

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, particularly those from Scotland, Ireland, Egypt, Mauritius, Indonesia, Canada and the United States of America. 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 warmly greet pilgrims from German-speaking countries, in particular the *Rapid Vienna* sports club team. On our journey to meet the Lord, let us share the flame of faith with all our brothers and sisters. In this way we will be able to help those who follow the same path with us, until inseparable communion with Jesus in the house of the Father. God bless you all.

Spanish

I give a special greeting to Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. I invite you to take the necessary steps for the grace of baptism to grow and bear fruit in your lives. Do not be discouraged by difficulties, and seek God again and again, because the Holy Spirit gives the strength necessary to achieve holiness in the midst of the circumstances we must live each day. God bless you. Thank you very much.

Portuguese

I extend a cordial greeting to Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, in particular to the retirees of the "Italy-Brazil Friendship Association" and the other Brazilian groups. Dear friends, all the baptized are called to be missionary disciples who live and transmit the faith. In all circumstances, try to give joyful witness of your faith. God bless you, and may the Virgin Mother protect you!

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, in particular the ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Italy with all the staff of the Embassy, and to the delegation of the Community of the Coptic Church of the diocese of Luxor. Dear brothers and sisters, let the grace of your baptism bear fruit on a journey of holiness. Do not be discouraged, this will be possible with the power of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I greet the Polish pilgrims and, in a special way, the former fighters of the Second World War who have come to commemorate the battle of Monte Cassino. The sadness, you remember wars ... the last century, two great ones; and now ... we never learn. God help us! May the tragedy of war lived by you, the strength of spirit, the fidelity to ideals and the witness of life become an appeal for the cessation of current conflicts in the world and for the search for ways of peace. I warmly bless you all, your homeland, the pilgrims present here, and among them the children receiving First Communion from the Church of Saint Stanislaus in Rome.

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome Italian-speaking faithful.

In particular, I am pleased to welcome the priests of the dioceses of Milan and Brescia, the Pallottine Fathers, and the parishes, in particular those of Stabbia and Oria. May your visit to the tombs of the Apostles increase in

you all the desire to adhere with renewed enthusiasm to Jesus and His Gospel.

I greet the AVIS Group of Viterbo, accompanied by the Bishop Lino Fumagalli; the San Carlo College of Milan; the Higher University Institute of Psycho-Educational and Social Sciences of Viterbo; the delegation of the Football Championship for people with mental disorders, and the prison group from Catania.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. May the Marian prayer which interweaves time during this month of May, sustain and motivate everyone to live well his or her presence in the family and in the workplace, bringing, with the enthusiasm of the disciples, the joy of life in Christ.

Appeal of the Holy Father

I am very worried and saddened by the escalation of tensions in the Holy Land and in the Middle East, and by the spiral of violence that is increasingly moving away from the path of peace, dialogue and negotiations.

I express my great sorrow for the dead and the wounded and I am close with prayer and affection to all those who suffer. I reiterate that the use of violence never leads to peace. War begets war, violence begets violence.

I invite all the parties involved and the international community to renew their commitment so that dialogue, justice and peace prevail.

Let us invoke Mary, Queen of Peace. "Hail Mary..."

May God have mercy on us!

I extend my cordial greetings for the month of Ramadan, which will begin tomorrow. May this special time of prayer and fasting help to walk the way of God which is the path of peace.
