



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 11 April 2018

[Multimedia]

The 50 days of the liturgical Easter Time are propitious for reflecting on Christian life, which, by its nature, is the life which comes from Christ himself. We are, in fact, Christians to the extent that we allow Jesus Christ to live in us. Where then do we begin to rekindle this awareness if not from the beginning, from the *Sacrament which ignited Christian life within us?*

This is *Baptism*. Christ's Passover, charged with newness, reaches us through Baptism in order to transform us into his image: the baptized *belong to Jesus Christ*. He is the *Lord* of their existence. "Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213). It is the first of the Sacraments, inasmuch as it is *the door* which allows Christ the Lord to dwell in our person and allows us to be immersed in his Mystery.

The Greek word "to baptize" means "*to immerse*" (cf. ccc, 1214). To bathe with water is a rite common to various beliefs to express the passage from one condition to another, a sign of purification for a new beginning. But for us Christians it must be noted that if the body is immersed in water, *the soul is immersed in Christ* in order to receive the forgiveness of sin and to shine with divine light (cf. Tertullian, *On the resurrection of the dead*, viii, 3: ccl 2, 931; pl 2, 806). By virtue of the Holy Spirit, Baptism *immerses us in the death and Resurrection of the Lord*, drowning in the baptismal font the 'old' man, dominated by sin which separates him from God, and giving birth to the new man, recreated in Jesus. In Him all the children of Adam are called to new life.

Therefore, Baptism is a rebirth. I am certain, quite sure, that we all remember our date of birth: certain. But I ask myself, a little doubtfully, and I ask you: do each of you recall the date of your Baptism? Some say 'yes' — okay. But it is a rather weak 'yes', because perhaps many do not remember this date. But if we celebrate birthdays, why not celebrate — or at least remember — the day of rebirth? I will give you a homework assignment, a task to do today at home. Those of

you who do not remember the date of your Baptism, ask your mother, aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, ask them: “Do you know the date of my Baptism?”; and never forget it. And thank the Lord for that day, because it is the very day on which Jesus entered me, the Holy Spirit entered me. Do you understand what your homework is? We should all know the date of our Baptism. It is another birthday: the date of rebirth. Do not forget to do this, please.

Let us recall the last words of the Risen One to the Apostles; they are a precise mandate: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). Through the baptismal bath, those who believe in Christ are immersed in the very life of the Trinity.

Indeed, the water of Baptism is not just any water, but the water upon which *the Spirit*, the “giver of life” (Creed) is invoked. Let us consider what Jesus said to Nicodemus in order to explain to him birth into divine life: “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:5-6). Thus Baptism is also called ‘*regeneration*’: we believe that God has saved us “in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5).

Baptism is therefore an effective sign of rebirth, in order to walk in the newness of life. Saint Paul reminds the Christians of Rome about this: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4).

By immersing us in Christ, Baptism also makes us *members of his Body, which is the Church*, and sharers in her mission in the world (cf. CCC, 1213). We baptized are not isolated: we are members of the Body of Christ. The vitality which springs forth from the baptismal font is illustrated by these words of Jesus: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (Jn 15:5). A selfsame life, that of the Holy Spirit, flows from Christ to the baptized, uniting them in one Body (cf. 1 Cor 12:13), anointed by the holy unction and nourished at the Eucharistic table.

Baptism allows Christ to live in us and allows us to live united with him, to cooperate in the Church, each according to his or her condition, for the transformation of the world. Received only once, the baptismal bath illuminates our whole life, guiding our steps all the way to the Heavenly Jerusalem. There is a before and an after to Baptism. The Sacrament presumes a journey of faith, which we call *catechumenate*, evident when it is an adult requesting Baptism. But from antiquity, children, too, have been baptized in the faith of their parents (cf. *Rite of Baptism for children*, Introduction, 2). And I would like to tell you something about this. Some people think: ‘But why baptize a child who does not understand it? We hope that as he grows, he will understand and that he himself will request Baptism’. But this means not having confidence in the Holy Spirit,

because when we baptize a child, the Holy Spirit enters that child, and the Holy Spirit cultivates in that child, from childhood, Christian values that will then flourish. This opportunity must always be given to everyone, to all children, to have within them the Holy Spirit who guides them during life. Do not forget to baptize your children!

No one can earn Baptism, which is always a gift freely given to all, adults and infants. But as it happens for a seed full of life, this gift takes root and bears fruit in a soil nourished by faith. The baptismal promises that we renew each year in the Easter Vigil must be rekindled every day so that Baptism may “christify”: we must not be afraid of this word; Baptism “christifies”. Those who have received Baptism and are “christified”; they resemble Christ, are transformed in Christ and it truly renders them another Christ.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from England, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia and the United States of America. I offer a particular welcome to the representatives of the British All Parliamentary Group on the Holy See. 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!

I offer a particular thought to *young people, the elderly, the sick* and to *newlyweds*. May the Easter announcement continue to enflame your heart, so that each one may experience Christ in his or her own journey and adhere to His teachings.