



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 9 May 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

The catechesis on the Sacrament of Baptism leads us to speak today about the holy immersion accompanied by the invocation of the Holy Trinity, that is, the central rite, which actually “baptizes” — that is, *immerses* — one in the Paschal Mystery of Christ (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1239). Saint Paul recalls the significance of this rite to the Christians of Rome, first asking: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”, and then responding: “We were buried [...] with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead [...], we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Baptism opens for us the door to a life of resurrection, not to a worldly life. A life according to Jesus.

The baptismal font is the place in which one experiences the Easter Passover with Christ! The old man, with his “deceitful lusts” is buried (cf. Eph 4:22), so that a new creature may be born; truly the old things have passed away and new things are born (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). The “Catechetical Lectures” attributed to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem thus explain to the newly baptized what has happened to them in the water of Baptism. This is Saint Cyril’s beautiful explanation: “And at the self-same moment you were both dying and being born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother” (n. 20, *On the Mysteries*, ii, 4-6; pg 33, 1079-1082). The rebirth of the new man requires that the man corrupted by sin be reduced to dust. The images of the *tomb* and of the *maternal womb* referring to the font, indeed, clearly express what great things come about through the simple rite of Baptism. I like the inscription found on the ancient Roman Lateran Baptistery, which reads, in Latin, this expression attributed to Pope Sixtus III: “Mother Church conceives her offspring by the breath of God, and bears them virginally in this water. Hope for the Kingdom of Heaven, you who are reborn in this font”.¹ It is beautiful: the Church that bears us, the Church which is womb, is our mother through Baptism.

If our parents have generated us in earthly life, the Church has regenerated us to eternal life in Baptism. We have become children in her Son Jesus (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5-7). Upon each one of us too, born anew through the water and through the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Father makes his voice resonate with infinite love, saying “You are my beloved son” (cf. Mt 3:17). This paternal voice, imperceptible to the ear but well audible to the heart of those who believe, accompanies us throughout our life, never abandoning us. Throughout our life the Father tells us: “You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter”. God loves us so much, as a Father, and never forsakes us. It is so from the moment of Baptism. We are reborn as children of God 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” (ccc, n. 1272).

The seal of Baptism is never lost! “Father, but if a person becomes an infamous brigand, who kills people, who inflicts injustice, does the seal not disappear?”. No. To his own shame a child of God is the person who does these things; but the seal does not go away. And he continues to be a child of God, who opposes God; but God never disowns his children. Do you understand this last point? God never disowns his children. Shall we all repeat it together? “God never disowns his children”. A little louder, because either I am hearing impaired or I did not understand: [they repeat, louder] “God never disowns his children”. There, that was better.

Incorporated in Christ through Baptism, the baptized are thus conformed to him, “the first-born son among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Through the action of the Holy Spirit, Baptism purifies, sanctifies, justifies, to form in Christ, of many, one single body (1 Cor 6:11, 12, 13). The *crismal anointing* “signifies the royal priesthood of the baptized and enrollment into the company of the people of God” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 18:3). Hence the priest anoints the head of every baptized person with the sacred chrism after pronouncing these words which explain the significance: God himself “anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain for ever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King” (*ibid.*, n. 62). Brothers and sisters, here lies the entire Christian vocation: to live united to Christ in the holy Church, participants in the same consecration in order to carry out the same mission, in this world, bearing fruits that endure for ever. Enlivened by the One Spirit, in fact, the whole People of God participates in the offices of Jesus Christ, “Priest, Prophet and King”, and “bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them”. (ccc, nn. 783-386).

What does it mean to participate in the royal and prophetic priesthood of Christ? It means making of oneself an offering acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1), bearing witness to him through a life of faith and charity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 12), placing it at the service of others, after the example of the Lord Jesus (cf. Mt 20:25-28; Jn 13:13-17). Thank you.

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!

I address a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. We are in the month of May, a period dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Cultivate devotion to Our Lady, with the daily recitation of the Rosary, so that, like the Mother of God, welcoming the mysteries of Christ in your life, you may be an ever greater gift of love for all. Thank you.

1 "*Virgineo fetu genitrix Ecclesia natos / quos spirante Deo concipit amne parit. / Caelorum regnum sperate hoc fonte renati*".