



# The Holy See

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POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

*St Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 18 April 2018*

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**[Multimedia]**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue, in this Time of Easter, the catechesis on Baptism. The significance of Baptism stands out clearly in its celebration; thus let us turn our attention to it. By considering the gestures and words of the liturgy we can understand the grace and the promise of this Sacrament, which is always to be rediscovered. We recall it in the sprinkling with holy water that can be done at the beginning of Mass on Sunday, as well as in the renewal of the baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil. In fact, as happens in the celebration of Baptism, a spiritual dynamic arises which passes through the entire life of the baptized; it is the beginning of a process that allows one to live united to Christ in the Church. Therefore, returning to the wellspring of Christian life leads us to better understand the gift received on the day of our Baptism and to renew our commitment to conform to it in the condition in which we find ourselves today. To renew our commitment, to better understand this gift which is Baptism, and to remember the day of our Baptism. Last Wednesday, as homework I asked that each of us remember the day of our Baptism, the day on which we were baptized. I know that some of you know it, others do not; those who do not know it, ask your family members, ask those people, godfathers, godmothers...: "What is the date of my Baptism?". Because Baptism is a rebirth and it is as if it were a second birthday. Do you understand? Do this homework; ask: "What is the date of my Baptism?".

First and foremost, in the Rite of Reception, the candidate's name is requested, because the name indicates a person's identity. When we introduce ourselves we say our name right away: "My name is ...", so as to emerge from anonymity; an anonymous person is one who has no name. To emerge from anonymity we immediately say our name. Without a name one remains an outsider, without rights and duties. God calls each one by name, loving us individually, in the concreteness of our history. Baptism ignites the *personal* vocation to live as Christians, which will develop

throughout our lifetime. And it entails a *personal* response, not taken on loan, with a “copy and paste”. Christian life in fact is woven with a series of calls and responses: God continues to pronounce our name throughout the years, making his call to become conformed to his Son Jesus resonate in a thousand ways. Thus, one’s name is important! It is very important! Parents think about the name to give to a child even before birth: this too is part of expecting a child who, in his own name, will have his original identity, also for the Christian life bound to God.

Of course, becoming Christian is a gift which comes from on high (cf. Jn 3:3-8). One cannot buy faith, but ask for it, yes; and receive it as a gift, yes. “Lord, give me the gift of faith” is a beautiful prayer! “That I may have faith” is a beautiful prayer. Asking for it as a gift, but it cannot be bought; it is asked for. Indeed, Baptism is “the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ” (*Christian Initiation*, General Introduction, n. 3). The *formation of catechumens* and the *preparation of parents*, as listening to the Word of God in the very celebration of Baptism, tend to generate and reawaken a sincere faith in response to the Gospel.

Whereas adult catechumens personally manifest what they wish to receive as a gift from the Church, children are presented by their parents, with the godparents. The dialogue with them allows them to express the wish that the children receive Baptism and allows the Church to express the intention to celebrate it. “These purposes are expressed in action when the parents and the celebrant trace the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the children” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, Introduction, n. 16). “The sign of the cross ... marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1235).

In the ceremony we make the sign of the Cross on the children. But I would like to return to a subject that I have talked to you about. Do our children know how to make the sign of the Cross properly? So often I have seen children who do not know how to make the sign of the Cross. And you, dads, moms, grandpas, grandmas, godfathers, godmothers, must teach them how to make the sign of the Cross properly, because it is repeating what was done in Baptism. Do you understand clearly? Teach children how to make the sign of the Cross. If they learn it as children they will do it well later, as grown-ups.

The Cross is the badge that shows who we are: our words, thoughts, gaze, works are under the sign of the Cross, that is, under the sign of Jesus’ love to the very end. Children are marked on the forehead. Adult catechumens are also marked, on all their senses, with these words: “Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord”; “Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God”; “Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the word of God”; “Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith”; “Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 85). We become Christians

in the measure to which the Cross is imprinted on us as a “paschal” mark (cf. Rev 14:1; 22:4), making visible, also outwardly, the Christian way of confronting life. Making the sign of the Cross when we wake, before meals, in facing danger, to protect against evil, in the evening before we sleep, means telling ourselves and others whom we belong to, whom we want to be. This is why it is so important to teach children how to make the sign of the Cross properly. And as we do upon entering a church, we can also do so at home, by keeping a bit of holy water in a suitable little vase — some families do so: this way, each time we come in or go out, by making the sign of the Cross with that water we remember that *we are baptized*. Do not forget, I repeat: teach the children how to make the sign of the Cross.

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### ***Special Greetings***

Next Saturday the Spring Meetings of the World Bank will take place in Washington. I encourage the efforts that, through financial inclusion, seek to promote the lives of the poorest, fostering genuine integral development and respecting human dignity.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the United States of America. I offer a special welcome to the group of benefactors from Ireland, with gratitude for their support of the forthcoming World Meeting of Families in Dublin. 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 greet the pilgrims of the Order of the Mother of God on the 80th anniversary of the canonization of its Founder: Saint Giovanni Leonardi; the parishes, scholastic institutes, in particular the Highlands Institute of Rome; the flag bearers and musicians of Asti; the *Musica bene comune* Association of Rome.

I offer a special thought to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. I invite all to see in the Risen Jesus, living and present in our midst, the true Master of life; may his intercession obtain for you serenity and peace, and may his teaching be encouragement for you on the daily journey toward holiness.

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### **Prayers for Alfie**

I would like to call attention once again to Vincent Lambert and to little Alfie Evans, and I would like to emphasize and clearly confirm that the one Master of life, from the beginning to the natural end, is God! And our obligation, our duty is to do everything to protect life. Let us silently think and pray that the life of all people, and especially that of these two brothers of ours, be respected. Let us pray in silence.

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