The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS ***GENERAL AUDIENCE***

St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 2 May 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Continuing the reflection on Baptism, today I would like to focus on the main rites, which take place at the baptismal font.

Let us consider first and foremost the *water*, on which the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked so that it may have the capacity to regenerate and renew (cf. Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5). Water is the matrix of life and wellbeing, whereas its absence causes all fruitfulness to die out, as happens in the desert. Water, however, can also be a cause of death, when one is submerged among its waves or when, in great quantity, it engulfs everything. Lastly, water has the capacity to wash, cleanse and purify.

Beginning with this natural, universally recognized symbolism, the Bible describes God's interventions and promises with the sign of water. However, the power to forgive sins does not lie in the water itself, as Saint Ambrose explained to the newly baptized: "You have seen the water, but water does not heal all things: healing water has the grace of Christ.... The action is of the water, the effectiveness is of the Holy Spirit" (cf. *On the Sacraments*, 1:15).

For this reason the Church invokes the action of the Holy Spirit on the water so that all those "who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism" may rise again with him to eternal life (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 54). The prayer of the benediction says that God "made a sign of the waters of baptism" and recalls the principal biblical foreshadowing: the Spirit moved over the waters of the origin to render them the seed of life (cf. Gen 1:1-2); the waters of the flood signaled the end of sin and the beginning of new life (cf. Gen 7:6-8, 22); through the waters of the Red Sea the children of Abraham were freed from slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex 14:15-31). In relation to Jesus, we recall his baptism in the Jordan (cf. Mt 3:13-17), the blood and water that poured from his side (cf. Jn 19:31-

37), and the mandate to his disciples to baptize all peoples in the name of the Trinity (cf. Mt 28:19). Strengthened by this memory, we ask God to instil the water of the font with the grace of the dead and Risen Christ (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 54). And thus, this water is transformed into water that carries within it the power of the Holy Spirit. And with this water, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we baptize people, we baptize adults, children, everyone.

Once the water of the font has been blessed, the heart must be prepared to accept Baptism. This occurs with the renunciation of Satan and the Profession of Faith, two actions which are closely connected. In the same measure with which I say “no” to the suggestions of the devil — the one who divides — I am able to say “yes” to God who calls me to conform to him in thoughts and deeds. The devil divides. God always unites the community, mankind, into one single people. It is not possible to adhere to Christ by placing conditions. It is necessary to detach oneself from certain bonds in order to truly embrace others. One is either well with God or well with the devil. For this reason, the renunciation and the act of faith go together. It is necessary to burn some bridges, leaving them behind, in order to undertake the new Way which is Christ.

The response to the questions — “Do you renounce Satan, all his works and all his empty promises?” — is made in first person singular: “*I do*”. And the profession of faith is made in the same way: “*I believe*”. I renounce and I believe: this is the foundation of Baptism. It is a responsible choice which demands to be transformed into concrete gestures of trust in God. The act of faith assumes a commitment which Baptism itself will help to keep with perseverance in the various situations and trials of life. Let us recall the ancient wisdom of Israel: “My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation” (Sir 2:1): that is, prepare yourself for battle. And the presence of the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to fight well.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we dip our hand into the blessed water — when entering a church, we touch the blessed water — and we make the sign of the Cross, let us think with joy and gratitude of the Baptism we received — this blessed water reminds us of Baptism —and let us renew our “Amen” — “I am happy” — in order to live immersed in the love of the most Holy Trinity.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly those from the United Kingdom, India, Thailand, Canada and the United States of America. In a special way, I greet the members of the Catholic Extension Society of the United States, with gratitude for their contribution to the work of rebuilding in Puerto Rico. 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!

A special thought goes to *young people*, *the elderly*, *the sick* and *newlyweds*. Today is the memorial of Saint Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. May his holiness, associated with

a sound doctrine, support the faith and strengthen the Christian witness of every person.

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