

CATECHESSES
ON
BAPTISM
AND
CONFIRMATION

(11 April – 6 June 2018)

POPE FRANCIS

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PART I:
BAPTISM

— CHAPTER I —

**The Sacrament which Ignited
Christian Life within Us**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 11 April 2018*

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.

— CHAPTER II —

The Celebration of Baptism

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 18 April 2018*

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.

— CHAPTER III —

The Sacrament of Faith

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 25 April 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue our reflection on Baptism, always in the light of the Word of God.

The Gospel enlightens the candidates and elicits the response of faith: “Indeed Baptism is ‘the sacrament of faith’ in a particular way, since it is the sacramental entry into the life of faith” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1236). And faith is the delivery of oneself to the Lord Jesus, recognized as “a spring of water ... to eternal life” (Jn 4:14), “the light of the world” (Jn 9:5), “the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25), as taught by the path that catechumens approaching Christian initiation still take today. Instructed by listening to Jesus, his teachings and his work, the catechumens relive the experience of the Samaritan woman who thirsts for living water, the man born blind who opens his eyes to the light, Lazarus who walks out from the tomb. The Gospel has within it the power to transform those who accept it with faith, tearing them away from the control of the evil one so that they may learn to serve the Lord with joy and newness of life.

One never goes alone to the Baptismal font, but is accompanied by the prayers of the entire Church, as recalled in the litanies of the Saints which precede the Prayer of Exorcism and the Anointing Before Baptism, with which the catechumens are anointed with oil. These are gestures which, from antiquity, assure those who are preparing to be reborn as children of God that the prayers of the Church assist them in the battle against evil, accompany them on the path of good, help them elude the power of sin in order to enter into the kingdom of divine grace. The prayers of the Church. The Church prays, and prays for everyone, for all of us! We, the Church, pray for others. It is a beautiful thing to pray for others. Often, we have no urgent need and we do not pray. United to the Church, we must pray for others: “Lord I ask of you on behalf of those who are in need, on behalf of those who have no faith...”. Do not forget: the Church’s prayers are always in action. But we must enter into this prayer and pray for all the People of God and for those who need prayers. For this reason, the path of adult catechumens is marked by repeated exorcisms pronounced by the priest (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1237), that is, prayers which invoke liberation from sin and from everything which separates us from Christ and prevents intimate union with him. For children too, we ask God to free them from original sin and to consecrate their dwelling in the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 49). Children. Praying for children,

for spiritual and corporeal health. It is a means of protecting children with prayer. As the Gospels attest, Jesus himself fought and cast out the demons to manifest the advent of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12:28): his victory over the power of the evil one leaves room for the Lordship of God who brings joy and reconciles with life.

Baptism is not a magical formula but a *gift of the Holy Spirit* who enables those who receive him to ‘*fight against the spirit of evil*’, believing that God has sent his son into the world to destroy the power of Satan and to transfer mankind from darkness into the Kingdom of infinite light (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 49). We know from experience that Christian life is always subject to temptation, especially to the temptation to separate oneself from God, from his will, from communion with him, to fall again into the snares of worldly seductions. And Baptism prepares us. It gives us strength for this daily struggle, even for the battle against the devil who, as Saint Peter says, tries to devour us, to destroy us like a lion.

In addition to prayer, there is also the anointing of the breast of catechumens with oil: “it strengthens the candidates with the power to renounce the devil and sin before they go to the font of life for rebirth” (*Blessing of Oils and Chrism*, Introduction n. 2). Due to the ability of oil to penetrate and benefit bodily tissues, combatants in ancient times would spread oil over

their bodies to tone their muscles and to escape more easily from the grip of their adversary. In light of this symbolism, Christians in the early centuries adopted the use of anointing the bodies of Baptismal candidates with oil blessed by the Bishop¹ to show through this “sign of salvation” that the power of Christ the Saviour strengthens us to fight against evil and defeat it” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 87).

It is tiring to fight against evil, to escape its deceit, to regain strength after an exhausting battle, but we must know that all of Christian life is a battle. We must also know, however, that we are not alone, that Mother Church prays so that her children, reborn in Baptism, do not succumb to the snares of the evil one but overcome them through the power of the Paschal Christ. Fortified by the Risen Christ who defeated the prince of this world (cf. Jn 12:31), we too can repeat with the faith of Saint Paul: “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). We all can overcome, overcome anything, but with the strength that comes from Jesus.

— CHAPTER IV —

The Rites at the Baptismal Font

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 2 May 2018*

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.

— CHAPTER V —

**The Holy Immersion and
the Invocation of the Holy Trinity**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 9 May 2018*

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 Baptistry, 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.

— CHAPTER VI —

The Spiritual Effects of Baptism

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 16 May 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today we conclude the series of catecheses on Baptism. The spiritual effects of this sacrament, invisible to the eye but active in the heart of one who has become a new creature, are clearly seen in the consignment of the white garment and of the lighted candle.

After the washing of regeneration, capable of recreating the person in the likeness of God in true holiness (cf. Eph 4:24), since the first centuries, it has seemed natural to clothe the baptized in a *new white garment*, reflecting the splendour of life received in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The white garment, while symbolically expressing what has occurred in the sacrament, announces the condition of having been transfigured in divine glory.

Saint Paul recalls what it means to be clothed in Christ, when he explains *the virtues that the baptized must cultivate*: “put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and ... forgiving each other. And above all these, put on love, which binds

everything together in perfect harmony” (cf. Col 3:12-14).

Even the ritual consignment of the *flame drawn from the Easter candle*, recalls the effect of Baptism: “Receive the light of Christ”, says the priest. These words recall that we are not the light, but rather, the light is Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:9; 12:46), who, Risen from the dead, overcame the shadows of evil. We are called to receive his splendour! As the flame of the Easter candle gives light to each single candle, so the love of the Risen Lord enflames the hearts of the baptized, filling them with light and warmth. And this is why, since the first centuries, Baptism has also been called “enlightenment”, and the one who was baptized is called “enlightened”.

This is indeed the Christian vocation: “Walk always as children of the light and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, n. 321; cf. Jn 12:36). If children are involved, it is the duty of the parents, together with the godfathers and godmothers, to take care to nurture the flame of baptismal grace in their little ones, helping them persevere in the faith (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 100). Children have the right to Christian formation, which “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, n. 3).

Christ's living presence, which is to be safeguarded, defended and expanded in us, is the lamp which lights our steps, the light which directs our choices, the flame which warms hearts on the journey to encounter the Lord, making us capable of helping those who journey with us, until the inseparable communion with Him. From that day forth, Revelation also states, "night shall be no more; and they shall need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (cf. 22:5).

The celebration of Baptism concludes with the prayer of the *Our Father*, which belongs to the community of the Children of God. Indeed, children reborn in Baptism will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit fulfilled in Confirmation and will participate in the Eucharist, learning what it means to address God by calling him 'Father'.

At the conclusion of these catecheses on Baptism, I repeat to each of you the invitation I thus 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)" (n. 15).

PART II:
CONFIRMATION

— CHAPTER VII —

**Bearing Witness to the
Anointing of the Holy Spirit**

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 23 May 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

After the catecheses on Baptism, these days which follow the Solemnity of Pentecost invite us to reflect on the witness that the Spirit inspires in the baptized, setting their life in motion, opening it to the good of others. Jesus entrusted a great mission to his disciples: “You are the salt of the earth; You are the light of the world” (cf. Mt 5:13-16). These are images that lead us to consider our behaviour, because both a lack and an excess of salt spoil the taste of food, just as a lack or an excess of light impede vision. Only the Spirit of Christ can truly become the salt that gives flavour and protects against corruption, and the light that illuminates the world! And this is the gift we receive in the Sacrament of Confirmation, or Chrismation, on which I would like to pause and reflect with you. It is called ‘*Confirmation*’ because it *confirms* Baptism and strengthens its grace (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1289); and also ‘*Chrismation*’, from the fact that we receive the Spirit through the anointing with ‘*Chrism*’ — a fragrant oil mixture consecrated by the Bishop —, a term

which refers to *Christ* Anointed by the Holy Spirit.

The first step is being reborn to divine life in Baptism; it is important to behave as children of God, or to conform ourselves to Christ who works in the Holy Church, allowing us to engage in his mission in the world. This is what the anointing of the Holy Spirit foresees: “without His strength, man has nothing” (cf. Sequence for Pentecost). Without the power of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing: it is the Spirit who gives us the power to go forth. As Jesus’ entire life was enlivened by the Spirit, so too is the life of the Church and of each of her members under the guidance of the same Spirit.

Conceived by the Blessed Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus undertakes his mission after, having emerged from the water of the Jordan, he is consecrated by the Spirit who descends and remains upon him (cf. Mk 1:10; Jn 1:32). He proclaims this explicitly in the Synagogue of Nazareth: it is beautiful how Jesus presents himself, which is Jesus’ identity card in the Synagogue of Nazareth! Let us hear how he does it: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). Jesus presents himself in the Synagogue of his village as the Anointed One, the One who was anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and is the source of the Spirit promised by the Father (cf. Jn 15:26; Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8, 2:33). In reality, on the evening of Easter, the Risen One breathes on his disciples, saying to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22); and on the Day of Pentecost the power of the Spirit descends upon the Apostles in an extraordinary form (cf. Acts 2:1-4), as we know.

The “Breath” of the Risen Christ fills the Church’s lungs with life; and in effect the mouths of the disciples, “filled with the Holy Spirit”, are opened in order to proclaim to all the great works of God (cf. Acts 2:1-11).

Pentecost — which we celebrated last Sunday — is for the Church what was for Christ the anointing of the Spirit received at the Jordan, that is, Pentecost is the missionary impulse to expend life for the sanctification of mankind, to the glory of God. If the Spirit works in every sacrament, it is in a special way that in Confirmation “the faithful receive the Holy Spirit as a Gift” (Paul vi, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae Consortium Naturae*). And at the moment of anointing, the Bishop says these words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”: the Holy Spirit is God’s great gift. And we all have the Spirit within. The Spirit is in our heart, in our soul. And the Spirit guides us in life so that we may become the true salt and the true light for mankind.

If in Baptism it is the Holy Spirit who immerses us in Christ, then in Confirmation it is Christ who fills us with his Spirit, consecrating us as his witnesses, participants in the same principle of life and of mission, according to the design of the heavenly Father. The witness given by the confirmed shows reception of the Holy Spirit and docility to his creative inspiration. I wonder: how can one see that we have received the Gift of the Spirit? If we fulfil the works of the Spirit, if we speak the words instructed by the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:13). Christian witness consists in doing only and all that the Spirit of Christ asks of us, giving us the strength to accomplish it.

— CHAPTER VIII —

Confirmation in Light of Christian Initiation

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 30 May 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Continuing with the theme of Confirmation, or Chrismation, today I would like to highlight “the intimate connection which this sacrament has with the whole of Christian initiation” (*Sacro-sanctum Concilium*, n. 71).

Before receiving the spiritual anointing that confirms and strengthens the grace of Baptism, the confirmands are called to renew the promises made one day by their parents and godparents. Now they themselves profess the faith of the Church, ready to respond “I believe” to the questions asked by the Bishop; ready, in particular, to believe “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to [them] sacramentally in confirmation” (*Rite of Confirmation* [rc], n. 23).

As the coming of the Holy Spirit requires hearts gathered in prayer (cf. Acts 1:14), after the silent prayer of the community, the Bishop, extending his hands over the confirmands, asks God to instil in them his Holy Spirit Paraclete. There is only one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:4), but in coming to

us he brings with him an abundance of gifts: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and awe in the presence of God (cf. rc, n. 25). We have heard the Bible passage with these gifts which the Holy Spirit brings. According to the Prophet Isaiah (11:2), these are the seven virtues the Spirit poured out on the Messiah for the fulfilment of his mission. Saint Paul also describes the abundant fruits of the Spirit which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22). The one Spirit distributes the multiple gifts which enrich the one Church: he is the Author of diversity, but at the same time the Creator of unity. Thus the Spirit gives all these riches which, although different, create harmony, that is, the unity of all these spiritual riches that we Christians have.

Through the tradition established by the Apostles, the Spirit, who completes the grace of Baptism, is communicated through the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 8:15-17, 19:5-6; Heb 6:2). To this biblical gesture, to better express the outpouring of the Spirit which permeates those who receive it, early on an anointing with perfumed oil called *chrism*¹ was added, which is still in

¹ Here is a passage of the prayer of Consecration of the Chrism: “*And so, Father, we ask you to bless † this oil you have created. Fill it with the power of your Holy Spirit through Christ your Son. It is from him that chrism takes its name and with chrism you*

use today, in both the East and West (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1289).

The oil — chrism — is a therapeutic and cosmetic substance which by entering the bodily tissues medicates wounds and perfumes the limbs; because of these qualities it is used in biblical and liturgical symbolism to express the action of the Holy Spirit who consecrates and permeates the baptized, adorning them with charisms. The Sacrament is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, administered by the Bishop by the imposition of his hand and with the words: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit”.² The Holy Spirit is the invisible *gift* that is bestowed and the chrism is its visible *seal*.

In receiving on the forehead the sign of the cross with fragrant oil, confirmands thus receive an indelible spiritual imprint, the ‘character’, which confirms them more perfectly to Christ and

have anointed for yourself priests and kings, prophets and martyrs”.... For those “anointed with this chrism” may it “wash away the evil they have inherited” and “make them temples of your glory, radiant with” the fragrance of a holy life (cf. Blessing of Oils and Chrism, n. 25).

² The phrases “Receive the Holy Spirit” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit” are found in Jn 20:22, and Acts 2:38, 10:45-47.

gives them the grace to spread the ‘good aroma’ among men (cf. 2 Cor 2:15).

Let us listen again to Saint Ambrose’s invitation to the newly confirmed. He said: “recollect that thou hast received the spiritual seal ... and preserve what thou hast received. God the Father hath sealed thee, Christ the Lord hath confirmed thee, and hath given the earnest of the Spirit in thy heart” (*On the Mysteries*, 7:42; csel 73:106; cf. ccc n. 1303). The Holy Spirit is an unmerited gift, to be received with gratitude, making room for his boundless creativity. It is a gift to be safeguarded with care, yielded to with docility, allowing oneself to be moulded, like wax, by the warmth of his charity, so as to “reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, n. 23).

— CHAPTER IX —

The Spiritual Effects of Confirmation

*St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 6 June 2018*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Continuing our reflection on the Sacrament of Confirmation, let us consider the effects that the gift of the Holy Spirit ripens in the newly confirmed, leading them to become, in their turn, a gift to others. The Holy Spirit is a gift. Let us remember that when the bishop anoints us with the oil he says: “Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. That gift of the Holy Spirit enters us and makes us fruitful, so that we can then give him to others. Receiving is always for giving: never receive and keep things within, as if the soul were a storehouse. No: receiving is always for giving. God’s grace is received to be given to others. This is the life of a Christian. Indeed it pertains to the Holy Spirit who shifts us from our ‘I’ in order to open us up to the ‘we’ of the community: receiving in order to give. We are not at the centre: we are an instrument of that gift for others.

Completing the likeness to Christ in those who are baptized, Confirmation *unites them more closely as living members to the mystical body of the Church* (cf. *Rite of Confirmation*, n. 22). The Church’s mission in the world proceeds

through the contribution of all those who are part of her. Some think there are bosses in the Church: the Pope, the bishops, the priests, and then there are the others. No: the Church is all of us! And we all have the responsibility to sanctify one another, to take care of the others. The Church is all of us. Each one has his or her work in the Church, but she is all of us. Indeed, we should think of the Church as a living organism, made up of people we know and with whom we journey, and not as an abstract and distant reality. The Church is we who are journeying; the Church is we who are in this Square today. We: this is the Church. Confirmation binds us to the universal Church spread throughout the world, at the same time, actively involving confirmands in the life of the particular Church to which they belong, with the Bishop, who is the successor of the Apostles, at the helm.

This is why the Bishop is the *original minister* of Confirmation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 26), because he introduces the confirmand into the Church. The fact that in the Latin Church this sacrament is usually conferred by the bishop demonstrates clearly that “its effect is to unite those who receive it more closely to the Church, to her apostolic origins, and to her mission of bearing witness to Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1313).

This ecclesial incorporation is well demonstrated by the sign of peace which concludes the

Rite of Confirmation. Indeed the Bishop says to each confirmand: “Peace be with you”. Recalling Christ’s greeting to the disciples on the evening of Easter, filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:19-23) — as we have heard —, these words illuminate a gesture which “demonstrates ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful” (cf. ccc, n. 1301). In Confirmation, we receive the Holy Spirit and peace: that peace that we must give to others. But let us think: each one think of his or her own parish community, for example. There is the ceremony of Confirmation, and then we offer each other peace: the Bishop offers it to the confirmand, and then in the Mass, we exchange it among ourselves. This signifies harmony; it signifies charity among us; it signifies peace. But then what happens? We go out and begin to speak ill of others, to “excoriate” others. Gossip begins. And gossip is war. This will not do! If we have received the sign of peace with the power of the Holy Spirit, we must be men and women of peace, and not destroy, with the tongue, the peace that the Holy Spirit has created. Poor Holy Spirit: the work we give him, with this habit of gossiping! Think carefully: gossip is not the work of the Holy Spirit; it is not the work of unity in the Church. Gossip destroys what God has made. Please: let us stop gossiping!

Confirmation is received only once, but the spiritual dynamism inspired by the holy anointing

perseveres over time. We will never finish fulfilling the mandate to diffuse everywhere the good fragrance of a holy life, inspired by the fascinating simplicity of the Gospel.

No one receives Confirmation for oneself alone, but to cooperate in the spiritual growth of others. Only in this way, by opening and coming out of ourselves to meet our brothers and sisters, can we truly grow and not merely delude ourselves of doing so. In fact what we receive as the gift of God must be given — the gift is to be given — in order to be fruitful, and not instead buried due to selfish fears, as the Parable of the Talents teaches (cf. Mt 25:14-30). The seed too: when we have the seed in hand, it to be sown, not put away, in the dresser, to be left there. We have to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to the community. I exhort confirmands not to “confine” the Holy Spirit, not to resist the Wind that blows, that pushes them to walk in freedom; not to smother the ardent Fire of charity that leads one to expend one’s life for God and for brothers and sisters. May the Holy Spirit grant to all of us the apostolic courage to communicate the Gospel, in deed and word, to those we meet on our way. With deeds and words, but good words: those which build up. Not the words of gossip, which destroy. Please, when you leave the church, consider that the peace received is to be given to others: not for destroying with gossip. Do not forget this.