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"Baptism is a gift from the Holy Spirit"

"Baptism gives us strength for our daily struggle, even the struggle against the devil who like a lion tries to devour us," Pope Francis said in his April 25 general audience.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

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

It is the Gospel that illuminates candidates and inspires adherence to 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, 1236). And faith is the surrender of oneself to the Lord Jesus, acknowledged as the “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4: 14), “light of the world” (Jn 9: 5), “the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25), as taught on the path, even today, of catechumens now about to receive Christian initiation. Educated by listening to Jesus, by His teaching and His works, the catechumens relive the experience of the Samaritan woman thirsty for living water, of the man blind from birth who opens his eyes to the light, of Lazarus coming out of the tomb. The Gospel carries within itself the strength to transform those who welcome it with faith, tearing them from the dominion of the wicked so

that they may learn to serve the Lord with joy and newness of life.

We never go the baptismal font alone, but rather we are accompanied by the prayer of the whole Church, as recalled by the litanies of the Saints preceding the prayer of exorcism and pre-baptismal anointing with the oil of the catechumens. They are gestures that, since ancient times, assure those who are preparing to be reborn as children of God that the Church's prayer will assist them in the fight against evil, accompany them on the path of good, and help them to escape the power of sin to pass into kingdom of divine grace.

The prayer of the Church. The Church prays, and prays for everyone, for all of us! We Church, let us pray for others. It is a beautiful thing to pray for others. How often we have no urgent need and so we do not pray. We must pray, joined to the Church, for others: "Lord, I ask

you for those who are in need, for those who do not have faith...” Do not forget: the prayer of the Church is always ongoing. But we must enter into this prayer and pray for all the people of God, and for those who are in need of prayers. For this reason, the path of adult catechumens is marked by repeated exorcisms pronounced by the priest (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1237), that is, by prayers calling for liberation from everything that separates from Christ and prevents intimate union with Him. Also for children God is asked to free them from original sin and consecrate them as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (see Rite of the Baptism of Children, 56). As the Gospels testify, Jesus Himself fought and cast out demons to manifest the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. *Mt* 12: 28): His victory over the power of the evil one leaves free space to the lordship

of God Who rejoices and reconciles with life.

Baptism is not a magic formula, but a *gift from the Holy Spirit*, which enables those who receive it to fight against the “spirit of evil”, believing that God “sent his only Son into the world to cast out the power of Satan ... to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness and bring him into the splendour of [the] kingdom of light” (cf. *Rite of Baptism for Infants*, 56). We know from experience that Christian life is always subject to temptation, especially the temptation to separate from God, from His will, from communion with Him, to fall back into the bonds of worldly seductions. And Baptism prepares us, gives us strength for this daily struggle, even the struggle against the devil who – as Saint Peter says – like a lion tries to devour us, to destroy us.

Besides prayer, there is also the anointing on the chest with the oil of the catechumens, who “receive strength to renounce the devil and sin, before approaching the source and being reborn to new life” (*Blessing of the Oils*, Premises, 3). Because of the oil’s property of penetrating into the body’s tissues and bringing it benefits, ancient wrestlers used to sprinkle with oil to tone the muscles and to slip more easily from the grip of their opponents. In light of this symbolism, Christians of the first centuries adopted the custom of anointing the body of candidates for baptism with oil blessed by the bishop,[1] in order to signify, through this “sign of salvation”, that the power of Christ the Saviour strengthens, to fight against evil and overcome it (cf. *Rite of the Baptism of Infants*, 105).

It is difficult to fight against evil, to escape from its deceptions, to regain

strength after a tiring struggle, but we must know that all of Christian life is a fight. But we must also know that we are not alone, that the Mother Church prays so that her children, regenerated in Baptism, do not succumb to the snares of the evil one but rather defeat them by the power of the Pasch of Christ. Strengthened by the Risen Lord, 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 this through Him Who gives me strength” (*Phil* 4: 13). We can all win, win everything, but with the strength that comes to me from Jesus.
