



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 21 August 2024*

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. The Spirit and the Bride. The Holy Spirit guides the people of God towards Jesus our hope. 6. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me”. The Holy Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we reflect on the Holy Spirit who descends upon Jesus at the baptism in the Jordan, and spreads from Him into His body, which is the Church. In the Gospel of Mark, the scene of Jesus’ baptism is described thus: “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’” (Mk 1:9-11).

The entire Trinity met at that moment, on the banks of the Jordan! There is the Father, who is present with his voice; there is the Holy Spirit, who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove; and there is he whom the Father proclaims to be his beloved Son, Jesus. It is a very important moment of Revelation, it is an important moment of salvation history. It will be good for us to reread this Gospel passage.

What happened that was so important at Jesus' baptism that led all the Evangelists to recount it? We find the answer in the words Jesus utters, shortly afterwards, in the synagogue of Nazareth, clearly referring to the event in the Jordan: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*" (Lk 4:18).

In the Jordan, God the Father "anointed with the Holy Spirit"; that is, he consecrated Jesus as King, Prophet and Priest. Indeed, in the Old Testament, kings, prophets and priests were anointed with perfumed oil. In the case of Christ, instead of physical oil, there is the spiritual oil that is the Holy Spirit; instead of the symbol there is the reality: there is the Spirit himself who descends upon Jesus.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit ever since the first moment of his Incarnation. However, this was a "personal grace", incommunicable; now, instead, with this *anointment*, he receives the fullness of the gift of the Spirit, but for his mission which, as the head, he will communicate to his body, which is the Church, and to every one of us. This is why the Church is the new "regal people, prophetic people, and priestly people". The Hebrew term "Messiah" and the corresponding Greek "Christ" — *Christós*, both referring to Jesus, mean "anointed". He was anointed with the oil of joy, anointed with the Holy Spirit. Our very name of "Christians" was explained by the Fathers in the literal sense: "Christian" means "anointed in imitation of Christ" (cf. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis*, III, 1).

There is a Psalm in the Bible that speaks of a perfumed oil, poured on the head of the high priest Aaron, and which descends to the hem of his robe (cf. *Ps* 133:2). This poetic image of the descending oil, used to describe the happiness of living together as brothers, has become a spiritual reality and a mystical reality in Christ and in the Church. Christ is the head, our High Priest, the Holy Spirit is the perfumed oil, and the Church is the body of Christ in which it spreads.

We have seen why the Holy Spirit, in the Bible, is symbolized by wind and, indeed, takes its very name, *Ruah* — wind — from it. It is also worth asking ourselves why it is symbolized by oil, and what practical lesson we can draw from this symbol. During Holy Thursday Mass, consecrating the oil known as "Chrism", the bishop, referring to those who will receive the anointing in Baptism and Confirmation, says: "May those formed into a temple of your majesty by the holiness infused through this anointing and by the cleansing of the stain of their first birth be made fragrant with the innocence of a life pleasing to you". This rite dates back to Saint Paul, who writes to the Corinthians: "For we are the aroma of Christ to God" (2 *Cor* 2:15). Anointment perfumes us, and a person who lives his anointment with joy makes the Church fragrant, makes the community fragrant, makes the family fragrant with this spiritual scent.

We know that, unfortunately, sometimes Christians do not spread the fragrance of Christ, but the bad odour of their own sin. And let us never forget: sin distances us from Jesus, sin makes us become bad oil. And the devil — let us not forget this — the devil usually enters via the pockets.

Beware, beware. However, this must not distract us from the commitment to fulfil, as far as we are able and each in their own environment, this sublime vocation of being the good fragrance of Christ in the world. The fragrance of Christ emanates from the “fruits of the Spirit”, which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (*Gal 5:22*). Paul said this, and how good it is to find a person who has these virtues: a loving person, a joyful person, a person who makes peace, a magnanimous person, not stingy, a benevolent person who welcomes everyone, a good person. It is beautiful to find a good person, a faithful person, a meek person, who is not proud... If we cultivate these fruits, and encounter these people, without us realizing it, someone will smell some of the fragrance of the Spirit of Christ around us. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us more aware that we are anointed, anointed by him.

Special Greetings

I extend a cordial welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you all!

Today, memorial of Saint Pius X, the day of the catechist is celebrated in many parts of the world. Let us think of our catechists who do so much work and, in some parts of the world, are the first to carry the faith forward. Let us pray today for catechists, that the Lord may make them courageous and that they may continue.

Lastly, my thoughts turn to young people, to the sick, to the elderly and to newlyweds. Following the Holy Pontiff Pius X, whose feast we celebrate today, I encourage you to follow Christ by listening to his Word and through the witness of good works.

And please, let us not forget martyred Ukraine, which suffers so much. Let us not forget Myanmar, South Sudan, North Kivu and the many countries who are at war. Let us pray for peace. And let us not forget Palestine and Israel: may there be peace there.

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: In our continuing catechesis on the Holy Spirit, we now turn to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan. There, Jesus was revealed as the beloved Son of the Father and was anointed by the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his public

ministry. As the Messiah, Priest, Prophet and King, Jesus in turn bestows the Spirit upon us, the members of his mystical Body, the Church. In Baptism, each of us is anointed with the perfumed oil of chrism as a sign of our sharing in Christ's life and our mission to spread the fragrance of his saving presence in our world. May we daily cultivate this anointing and serve to spread "the good odour of Christ" (2 *Cor* 2:15) in the lives of all whom we meet.