

Homily

Concelebration Eucharistic prefestive on occasion of the XXVIIIth Pontifical Council of the Laity Plenary Assembly

A Dicastery for the Laity: between history and future ...

«*In Baptism –putting on Christ*»

XIIth Sunday Ordinary Time (C)

Pontifical International College
«*Maria Mater Ecclesiae*», Rome
June 18, 2016, 7:00pm

(Gal 3:26-29)

You Eminencies, Excellencies,
Dearest brothers in the episcopacy and priesthood,
Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ!

1. *Baptism – the great Christian novelty*

It seems to me a happy coincidence that the second reading of today's prefestive Eucharistic celebration is taken from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians (*Gal* 3,26-29). It reminds us of the almost fiftieth commitment of the *Pontificium Consilium de Laicis* (1967), renamed forty years ago *Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis* (1976), that is to put constantly into relief the meaning and the consequences of the sacrament of baptism.¹

We have just listened to the strong confirmation of the Apostle of the Gentiles: “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized in Christ have put on Christ” - “Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε: οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληγ, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ: πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ” (*Gal* 3:26-27).²

¹ Cfr. *Il Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici*, Città del Vaticano 2012.

² Cfr. Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, Editori Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht/St. Benno, 4^a ed., Göttingen/Leipzig, 1967, 171-176; Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, Collana: HThK NT, 260-266; Wilfried Eckey, *Der Galaterbrief*. Ein Kommentar, Editrice Neukirchener, Neukirchen 2010.

Here we find listed *three* basic concepts important for Christian life and for faith which are inter-dependent: through “*faith in Christ Jesus*”, we have become in *Baptism*, “*Sons of God*”, who has *put on us Christ*.

In our present XXVIIth and last Plenary Assembly, we have to remember that Baptism has always been *the* point of reference for our Dicastery, because it is the theological and existential base, the ultimate source and the moving force for lay apostolate. In this sense Saint/Pope John Paul II affirmed in *Christifideles laici* (n.10): “It is no exaggeration to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has as its purpose to lead a person to a knowledge of the radical newness of the Christian life that comes from Baptism, the sacrament of faith, so that this knowledge can help that person live the responsibilities which arise from that vocation received from God.”³

The words of the Pope remind us of the *two poles* of responsibilities of our Dicastery: leading people to *know* the meaning of Baptism and *motivating* them to daily live, in all fields of endeavor of life, the grace received through this first sacrament of Christian initiation.

2. *The meaning of the « baptismal investiture »*

“*Put on Christ*” : the image “put on” is not easy to be interpreted, in order not to remain simply on the exterior meaning of ‘dressing up’, instead it requires a deep analysis and reflection. Referring to the cited versicle (Gal 3:27), Saint John Paul II affirmed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis laici* (n. 12) that baptism strips away the *old man+ (from the baptized person) and covers him/her with *the new man+..”. This means baptism provokes an *existential transformation* that greatly surpasses any kind of exterior vestment. ”⁴.

Pope Benedict XVI following this line of thought affirmed that baptism is quite different from “an act of ecclesial socializing”⁵ or from “a slightly old-fashioned and complicated rite for receiving people into the Church” (a new association)⁶. It is also more than “a simple washing, more than a kind of purification and beautification of the soul”, and the pope emeritus reaffirmed

³ Cfr. Giovanni Paolo II, Esortazione Apostolica Post-sinodale *Christifideles Laici* su vocazione e missione dei fedeli laici nella Chiesa e nel mondo, 30 dic. 1988, in: Insegnamenti XI/4 (1988), 2083-2175, (= *ChL*).

⁴ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale nella Notte Santa, Basilica Vaticana, 15 aprile 2006, in: Insegnamenti II/1 (2006), 453-457,455.

⁵ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale 2006,455; Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale nella Notte Santa, Basilica Vaticana, 11 aprile 2009, in: Insegnamenti V/1 (2009), 595-600, 598.

⁶ Cfr. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Luce della Parola*, Commento alle letture festive, Traduzione a cura di Guido Sommaila S.I., Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1990, 323: „Si intende in tal modo non qualcosa di esteriore, ma una realtà, dentro la quale l'uomo si perde. Perciò i cristiani portano non ciascuno la sua veste personale, ma la veste di Cristo, il Cristo vivente li assume tutti in sé, così che diventano «Uno» in lui, e possono perciò anche partecipare intimamente («prendere su di sé la propria croce ogni giorno») al suo irripetibile destino. “

with strength: “ It is truly death and resurrection, rebirth, transformation to a new life” .⁷ Baptism is not simply an event of the past, but “a qualitative leap in the history of "evolution" and of life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself”.⁸

How can we understand in a proper way our basic “baptismal investiture”? I would like to answer to this question following traces marked by the emeritus Pope and offer a kind of synopsis of his thought regarding this notion of St. Paul apostle.

Here it is how Baptism completes itself [...] (Christ) gives us His own vestments and these are not something external. It means we enter in existential communion, where his and our being come together and are imbue each other. «It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me», is how Paul himself describes the event of his Baptism in his Letter to the Galatians (2: 20). Christ has put on our clothes: the pain and joy of being a man, hunger, thirst, weariness, our hopes and disappointments, our fear of death, all our apprehensions until death. And he has given to us his «garments».⁹

“*I live, but it is not I who live!*” The same ‘I’, essential identity of Paul from Tarso has been changed by Christ (“Subjektwechsel”). He still exists and he no longer exists. He has passed through a “not” and he now finds himself continually in this “not”: I, but no longer I – this is not describing a mystical experience.¹⁰ The pope emeritus commented: “No, this phrase is an expression of what happened at Baptism. My “I” is taken away from me and is incorporated into a new and greater subject. This means that my “I” is back again, but now transformed, broken up, opened through incorporation into the other, in whom it acquires its new breadth of existence.”¹¹

⁷ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale nella Notte Santa, Basilica Vaticana, 3 aprile 2010, in: *Insegnamenti* VI/1 (2010), 452-456, 455.

⁸ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* Veglia Pasquale 2006, Basilica Vaticana, 15 aprile 2006, in: *Insegnamenti* II/1, 453-457, 455.

⁹ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Santa Messa del Crisma, Basilica Vaticana, 5 aprile 2007, in: *Insegnamenti* III/1 (2007), 623-628, 624.

¹⁰ Cfr. Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* Veglia Pasquale 2006, 455 s.

¹¹ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* Veglia Pasquale 2006, 456; Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale nella Notte Santa, Basilica Vaticana, 7 aprile 2007, in: *Insegnamenti* III/1 (2007), 637-641, 638 s.; Benedetto XVI, *Discorso* in occasione dell'incontro con i partecipanti al IV Convegno Nazionale della Chiesa Italiana, Fiera di Verona, 19 ott. 2006, in: *Insegnamenti* II/2 (2006), 465-477, 467 s.: “Essa (la trasformazione) giunge a noi mediante la fede e il sacramento del Battesimo, che è realmente morte e risurrezione, rinascita, trasformazione in una vita nuova. È ciò che rileva sa Paolo nella lettera ai Galati: «Non sono più io che vivo, ma Cristo vive in me» (2, 20). È stata cambiata così la mia identità essenziale, tramite il Battesimo, e io continuo ad esistere soltanto in questo cambiamento. Il mio proprio io mi viene tolto e viene inserito in un nuovo soggetto più grande, nel quale il mio io c'è di nuovo, ma trasformato, purificato, "aperto" mediante l'inserimento nell'altro, nel quale acquista il suo nuovo spazio di esistenza. Diventiamo così "uno in Cristo" (*Gal* 3, 28), un unico soggetto nuovo, e il nostro io viene liberato dal suo isolamento. "Io, ma non più io": è questa la formula dell'esistenza cristiana fondata nel Battesimo, la formula della risurrezione dentro al tempo, la formula della "novità" cristiana chiamata a trasformare il mondo. Qui sta la nostra gioia pasquale. La nostra vocazione e il nostro compito di cristiani consistono nel cooperare perché giunga a compimento effettivo, nella realtà quotidiana della nostra vita, ciò che lo Spirito Santo ha intrapreso in noi col Battesimo: siamo chiamati infatti a divenire donne e uomini nuovi, per poter essere veri testimoni del Risorto e in tal modo portatori della gioia e della speranza cristiana nel mondo,

Benedict XVI underlined that this simple "fact" of Baptism - the gift of new being - presented by Paul to us in the *Letter to the Ephesians* has an *ongoing* task: "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life... and [you must] put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin..." (Eph 4: 22-26).¹²

The *second* field of commitment of the Pontifical Council for the laity consists in stimulating a *life* in harmony with the demands of «being in Christ». This is valid for all fields of life for family work free time social relationships public life (politics and economy). The Second Ecumenical Vatican Council resumes these various *responsibilities* using the term "secular nature" that characterizes lay faithful (*LG 31; CCC 897*).

Another point regards the two transformations baptism operates; that is unity and equality of all baptized as St. Paul reiterates in today's reading: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal, 3:27*).¹³

In the verse that follows (*Gal 3:28*) the Apostle of the Gentiles illustrates the baptismal transformation under another aspect speaking about the "promise", and asserts that it was given to an *individual - to one person*: to Christ.

He alone carries within himself the whole "promise". But what then happens with us? Paul answers: You have become one in Christ (cf. *Gal 3:28*). Not just one thing, but one, one only, one single new subject. This liberation of our "I" from its isolation, this finding oneself in a new subject means finding oneself within the vastness of God

in concreto, in quella comunità di uomini e di donne entro la quale viviamo."

¹² Benedetto XVI, *Omelia S. Messa del Crisma 2007*, 624; Benedetto XVI, *Omelia nella Veglia Pasquale della Notte Santa*, Basilica Vaticana, 3 aprile 2010, in: *Insegnamenti VI/1* (2010), 452-456, 454.

¹³ Benedetto XVI, *Omelia nella Veglia Pasquale della Notte Santa*, Basilica Vaticana, 22 marzo 2008, in: *Insegnamenti IV/1* (2008), 456-461, 457 s.: "Nel Battesimo il Signore entra nella vostra vita per la porta del vostro cuore. Noi non siamo più uno accanto all'altro o uno contro l'altro. Egli attraversa tutte queste porte. È questa la realtà del Battesimo. Egli, il Risorto, viene, viene a voi e congiunge la vita sua con quella vostra, tenendovi dentro al fuoco aperto del suo amore. Voi diventate un'unità, sì, una cosa sola con Lui, e così una cosa sola tra di voi. In un primo momento questo può sembrare assai teorico e poco realistico. Ma quanto più vivrete la vita da battezzati, tanto più potrete sperimentare la verità di questa parola. Le persone battezzate e credenti non sono mai veramente estranee l'una per l'altra. Possono separarci continenti, culture, strutture sociali o anche distanze storiche. Ma quando ci incontriamo, ci conosciamo in base allo stesso Signore, alla stessa fede, alla stessa speranza, allo stesso amore, che ci formano. Allora sperimentiamo che il fondamento delle nostre vite è lo stesso. Sperimentiamo che nel più profondo del nostro intimo siamo ancorati alla stessa identità, a partire dalla quale tutte le diversità esteriori, per quanto grandi possano anche essere, risultano secondarie. I credenti non sono mai totalmente estranei l'uno all'altro. Siamo in comunione a causa della nostra identità più profonda: Cristo in noi. Così la fede è una forza di pace e di riconciliazione nel mondo: è superata la lontananza, nel Signore siamo diventati vicini (cfr *Ef 2, 13*)."

and being drawn into a life which has now moved out of the context of «dying and becoming».¹⁴

We can reaffirm: in St. Paul's vision all baptized are not any longer many, one besides another, but «one body in Jesus Christ.»¹⁵ It is only the self-identification of Christ with us, only our merging in him that makes us bearers of the promise: the final goal of the assembly is unity. Becoming «one » with the Son let us enter, at the same time, in unity with the living God, so that God might be all in all (cf. *Gal* 3,29).¹⁶

“*I, but no longer I*”: this is the formula of Christian life rooted in Baptism, the formula of the Resurrection within time. “*I, but no longer I*”: if we live in this way, we transform the world. It is a formula contrary to all ideologies of violence, it is a program opposed to corruption and to the desire for power and possession.

3. *The Trier «Holy Garment»*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I would like to conclude my reflection giving a look on a relic - the «Holy Garment» - venerated in the most ancient German city, Trier, since the twelfth century. John's Gospel is the only one that mentions this Jesus' vestment that makes present one of the most dramatic moments of his life, and of his death on the Cross.

The fourth Gospel refers: «When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garment and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But his tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.”» (cf. *John* 19:23-24a)¹⁷

The Fathers of the Church see in this passage of John's Gospel a reference to the *unity* of the Church. On the occasion of the fifth centenary of its public exposition (2012), Pope Benedict XVIth wrote: «She (the Church) is founded like a unique and indivisible community on the love of Christ [...] The Saviour's love reunites what is divided. The Church is one in many. Christ does not abolish the plurality of men, but unites them in being Christians for and with others so that they themselves may become intercessors, in various ways, for others toward God. »¹⁸

¹⁴ Cfr. Benedetto, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale 2006, 456; Benedetto XVI, *Omelia* nella Veglia Pasquale nella Notte Santa, Basilica Vaticana, 22 marzo 2008, in: *Insegnamenti* IV/1 (2008), 456-461, 457 s.

¹⁵ Cfr. Wilko Teifke, *Offenbarung und Gericht*. Fundamentaltheologie und Eschatologie bei Guardini, Rahner und Ratzinger, Collana: Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie 135, Editrice Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2012, 227.

¹⁶ Cfr. Benedetto XVI, *Messaggio* al Vescovo di Trier per l'apertura del pellegrinaggio alla «Sacra Tunica» nel V Centenario dell'ostensione pubblica, in: *O. R.*, n. 88, 15 aprile 2012, CLII (2012), 7 (Cfr. l'originale tedesco, in: *Insegnamenti* VIII/1 (2012), 418-420).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The second characteristic of Christ's tunic is that was "without seam, woven from top to bottom" (cf. *John 19:23*). Also this fact describes another characteristic of the Church, that does not *live* of herself but *by God*. The Emeritus pope explained: «Like a unique and indivisible community, she is the work of God, not the product of (of) human beings and their skills. »¹⁹

The baptized person –whenever has put on Christ- enters this community, and becomes aware of the duty of remaining faithful to her origins, that her unity, her consensus, her effectiveness, her witness are created from above, are given only by God. In today's Gospel the confession of Peter acknowledging that Jesus is the «Christ from God » creates the mandate of his service in favor of the unity of the Church.²⁰

The third characteristic of the "Holy Garment" is its *simplicity*. «It is a modest garment which serves to cover and protect he who wears it, maintaining his privacy. This garment is an undivided gift of the Crucified One to the Church, which he sanctified with his Blood. Thus [...] it recalls the dignity proper to the Church. »²¹ The Pope Emeritus however does not hide the weaknesses and mistakes, that have wounded the integrity of the Body of Christ. For this reason he admonishes us: «There is a need for constant openness to conversion and humility, in order to follow the Lord with love and truth.»²²

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's passage reading of St. Paul to the Galatians reminds us the fundamental and irreplaceable value of baptism for each Christian. Being clothed with "Christ's garment" gives him/her immense dignity and, at the same time, great responsibility within and out of the believers' Christian community. The "baptismal garment" reminds him/her humility, dependence from God and the simplicity of the community to which him/her belong. We constantly have to remind ourselves our "being new in Christ" because it revitalizes, bears fruit, and makes us share in our life, as Christians worthy of such a name. This was the original task entrusted to the *Pontifical Council for the Laity*, this will continue to be from the upcoming 1st of September the task of the *Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and for Life*.

Amen.

□ *Mons. Josef Clemens,*
Segretario del Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici,
Città del Vaticano

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.