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Pope Francis greets a child after he baptized him during Mass in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican Jan. 12, 2025, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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When children are baptized, their parents and the church are giving them the greatest gift ever: the gift of faith, Pope Francis said before baptizing 21 infants in the Sistine Chapel.

"Let us ask the Lord that they grow in the faith, a true humanity (and) in the joy of family," he said in his brief homily at Mass on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord Jan. 12. Afterward, he led the recitation of the Angelus prayer with visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Like last year, Francis led the baptismal prayers and poured the water over the heads of the infants and was assisted in anointing the babies by Cardinals Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, and Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State.

When an infant was accompanied by an older sibling, the pope would help the older child make the sign of the cross on the infant's forehead after he and the parents performed the ritual.

After the fathers lit their child's candle from the Paschal candle during the Mass, the pope told the parents to always keep the candle in their homes as a reminder of the day.

"And when there is some kind of problem or difficulty, light the candle to ask the Lord for grace for your family," he said.

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Surrounded by Michaelangelo's stunning frescoes in the chapel, the pope thanked the parents, who are Vatican employees, for bringing their children to be baptized. As he normally does at baptisms, the pope encouraged the parents to do what they had to to make sure the babies were comfortable.

"If they are hungry, nurse them, so they don't cry. If they are too hot, change their clothes," he said. What is important is that "they feel at ease because today they are in charge and we have to serve them with the sacrament, with prayers."

In his Angelus address later, he told the crowd gathered in the square that "today's feast makes us contemplate the face and the voice of God, which are manifested in Jesus' humanity."

"So, let us ask ourselves: do we feel loved? Do I feel loved and accompanied by God, or do I think that God is distant from me? Are we capable of recognizing his face in Jesus and in our brothers and sisters? And are we accustomed to listening to his voice?" the pope said.

He also asked Catholics who did not know or remember the date of their baptism to find out.

The date is important, he said, and it should be celebrated "as if it were a new birthday: that of our birth in the Spirit of God."