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Pope Francis celebrates the church as loving 'mamma'

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Pope Francis gave pilgrims attending his weekly public audience Wednesday what he called a "homework assignment" to find out the date they were baptized and celebrate it every year.

"How many of you remember the date of your baptism?" the pope asked the crowd in St. Peter's Square, then acknowledged a relatively small show of hands.

"Our baptismal date is the date of our birth in the church," he said. "When you go home today, look hard for the date of your baptism, so you can celebrate it and thank the Lord for this gift."

The pope's remarks came during a talk on the subject of the church as mother, for which he mostly used the informal Italian term "mamma."

"One doesn't belong to the church as to a company, a party or any other organization," he said. "The link is vital, like that one has with one's own mom, because the church is really the mother of Christians."

"A good mom helps her children come out of themselves, and not stay comfortably under the maternal wings, like a brood of chicks stays under the wings of the hen," he said. "The church, like a good mother, does the same thing: accompanies our growth, transmitting the word of God, which is a light that shows us the path of the Christian life; administering the sacraments."

"Do we love the church as one loves one's own mom, knowing also how to understand her faults?" the pope asked. "All moms have faults, we all do. But when one speaks of mom's faults, we cover them up, we love them.

"The church has its faults, too," he said. "Do I love it that way, like my mom? Do we help it to be more beautiful, more authentic, more like the Lord?"

As children of a common mother, members of the church are equal before God, the pope said: "All of us, pastors and faithful, live the maternity of the church."

"Sometimes I hear, 'I believe in God but not in the church,'" he said. "But the church is not only priests: We are all the church. And if you say you believe in God and don't believe in the church, you are saying you don't believe in yourself, and this is a contradiction."

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