

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The prodigal son effect: adult baptisms are booming in France

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Europe1, CNews, Franceinfo, Le Figaro and Le Monde: Even the mainstream press cannot ignore the boom in baptisms to be conferred on men and women in France during the forthcoming Easter Vigil. 10,384 adults, plus more than 7,400 young people, for a total of

almost 18,000 catechumens who will be baptised, in fact is an impressive figure that cannot be ignored. The results of the "[Catéchuménat 2025](#)" survey of the baptised show a further improvement in the positive trend of the previous year (+45%), which already showed a significant increase compared to 2023, the year of the turning point.

The average number of adult baptisms over the last ten years has been around 4,000 per year. In 2015 there were approximately 3,900, while ten years later there were more than 10,000, an increase of more than 160%. Among adults, the 18-25 age group (42%) outnumbered the 26-40 age group (39%) this year. There is a clear female predominance, with 63% of those to be baptised, as well as their professional background: 27% come from the world of university students, which in 2020 will represent only 17% of the total, while 36% are employed as clerks, workers or technicians, and 13% as teachers.

Most of these catechumens (52%) come from Christian families, i.e. from baptised parents who have chosen not to pass on the faith to their children; a significant proportion, around 18%, say they have lived without religion. Also interesting is the figure of 4% for conversions from Islam, which means that about 400 people will leave the religion of Muhammad to embrace the light yoke of Christ, often coming into conflict with their families.

Among the ecclesiastical provinces that recorded an increase of more than 50% in the number of catechumens compared to last year are Toulouse, Montpellier, Clermont, Lyon, Dijon, Tours, Besançon and Metz.

The figures for young people (aged 11-17) are more uncertain, as not all the French dioceses have sent in their data. However, there is a clear increase compared to last year (+33%) in the number of young people baptised on Easter night or Easter day, confirming a steady increase since 2023. Among the young people, there is also a clear predominance of women (65%).

The extremely positive data on catechumens should not, however, make us forget that the number of children baptised in France is falling dramatically every year. According to Le Monde, "in 1974, three quarters of children under the age of seven were baptised, in 1996 it was half, and in 2024 it will be only a quarter". [VaticanNews](#) points out that the absolute number of baptisms has drastically halved in twenty years, from 2000 to 2020. Nevertheless, the increase recorded in the last three years is cause for reflection and hope.

From some of the testimonies that have come to light, it seems that the "prodigal son" factor has been decisive, not necessarily because they left their father's house of their own free will, but because they have experienced that terrible hunger that tears at the core of the soul. Anaë, 20, from the diocese of Nantes, fell into a deep depression at the age of 12, probably caused by her mother's addictions. She tried to fill the emptiness that consumed her by drinking alcohol, taking drugs and having casual relationships. In **January 2022, she says,** "I couldn't get out of bed, I had nothing to do, I spent my days brooding. Then I heard about Lent. Without understanding why, at that moment I felt a force in my heart urging me to find out what it was all about. I wanted to know everything. Later I realised that my heart really wanted to know God. Two months later, on 2 March 2022, I began my first period of Lent. Since that day I have never left the Lord." She went to Mass, without really understanding or comprehending much, and then met the Christian community in Nantes: God came looking for me when I had hit rock bottom and I had no idea who He was. The Good Samaritan never rests, but tirelessly travels the road from Jerusalem, the city of God, to Jericho, the cursed city and the lowest city on earth (-250m above sea level), to help travellers who have fallen into the hands of robbers.

Lautalyne, 22, student in Lyon: "I was going through a difficult period in my life, I had health problems and was waiting for medical appointments that were two or three years late. One day, quite simply, I prayed and the next morning I had my medical appointments within a week. It is no coincidence that the Christian faith is based on the historical evidence that God shows the power of His hand precisely when there is no human hope left. He did so at the crossing of the Red Sea, a paradigmatic historical event (whatever some biblical scholars may say), where Yahweh intervened when the people had the sea in front of them and Pharaoh's chariots behind them; he did so at the resurrection of Christ, when the stone had already sealed the tomb.

There are no data that allow us to know how many of these catechumens come from particular ecclesial "paths" and how many were "fished" directly by the Lord, or how many were influenced by a friendship or perhaps a chance participation in the liturgy of the Church. The university context, however, seems to be fertile ground. Jean-Baptiste Siboulet, chaplain of the University of Nantes, says that almost every week he receives requests from young students who want to know more about Catholicism: "Young people want to understand, to know and to acquire solid theological foundations."

It seems clear that it is the encounter with the living God, the source of light and life, with His powerful mercy, that converts hearts, not the Christianity of values; hearts

that seek solidity because they are tired of exciting but fleeting fashions. It is the Good Samaritan who picks up the souls left half-dead on the road and takes them to the inn, where he asks His Church to take care of them, promising to repay all expenses on His return.

Numbers say a lot, but they hide even more; what will never appear in studies, surveys and statistics is that invisible but essential and decisive part that accompanies every conversion. Behind every wayfarer who comes closer to God or returns to God, there are the prayers, sacrifices and offerings of many people whose groans are known only to the Lord; a hidden network of intercessors that stretches across the world and crosses it to join the prayers of saints and angels. And Catholic France, which for centuries has suffered persecution in one of the worst forms of secularism, and not infrequently because of its pastors, is not lacking in such souls. There is no evil that God cannot turn into good.