

# What is Heaven?

We all have our own vision of heaven and the joys that place will contain. But in reality, heaven offers us much more than we could ever hope to attain here on earth. Heaven is the promise to live eternally, in perfect friendship, with the Most Holy Trinity, our Holy Mother Mary, and all the angels and saints. We have been offered this gift because our souls have been saved through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. While Jesus offered himself freely for all people, God was humble enough to allow us to choose salvation. We can choose to accept Jesus' sacrifice and live our life as a child of God, or we can reject it. As Catholics, we believe that those who die in God's grace and friendship, those who chose to accept salvation, will reach heaven.

## Salvation Outside the Church

One of the most misconstrued teachings of the Church, is that "outside the Church there is no salvation." In other words, all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body (CCC 846). While true, it is important to note that this is "not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church." Indeed, if these people seek God with a sincere heart, and try, in their actions to do his will as they know it, they may also attain heaven (CCC 847).

**Baptism of Water:** All who have heard the Gospel, and who have had the possibility of asking for baptism, need to be baptized in order to attain salvation. Jesus affirms the necessity of this sacrament saying, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). However, our God is a merciful and loving God. While he has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, God is not bound by his sacraments.

**Baptism of Blood:** The Church has always taught that those who die for the sake of the faith, before they have received the sacrament of Baptism, are baptized by their death for and with Christ.

**Baptism of Desire:** An individual who were to die before being baptized, but had expressed a clear desire to receive this sacrament, and repented for his/her sins, would be assured salvation.

## God's Mercy and Our Mission

We must always remember the great mercy of God. The Holy Spirit offers every person, in a way known only to God, the possibility of being made partakers of the Paschal mystery (Lumen Gentium, 16). "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved" (CCC 1260).

So, in short, no, you do not have to be Catholic to go to heaven. However, as Catholics, we should be aware of our God-given duty to evangelize, to make disciples of all people. Have the courage to live your life in such a way that emulates Jesus', have the courage to speak truth in a time when so many people are afraid of it!

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