

The Importance of Being Catholic:

Combating Religious Indifferentism

"[E]nsure that the faithful are deeply and thoroughly convinced of the truth of the doctrine that the Catholic faith is necessary for attaining salvation." (Bl. Pope Pius IX)

- ✦ Do All "Good People" Go To Heaven?
- ✦ Does it Really Matter if I'm Catholic or Not?
- ✦ No Salvation Outside the Church?

Do All "Good People" Go To Heaven?

Today it not uncommon to hear people expressing the opinion that "all good people go to heaven". Even Catholics seem to put aside their faith in the hope that all people they consider "good" will be saved. And usually, their definition of "good people" is quite broad and may exclude only those very egregious violators of the natural law.

Perhaps they don't realize that our Lord has said "How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few" (Mt. 7:14) and "Many are invited, but few are chosen" (Mt. 22:14) and "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough" (Lk. 13:24). Maybe they have forgotten that Christ has said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him." (Jn. 3:36) Perhaps they have never reflected on the fact that Christ let those who couldn't accept his teaching on the Eucharist leave him. Maybe they have forgotten that there are various other duties/behaviors essential for salvation, even beyond reception of the sacraments [e.g. that we forgive one another (Mt. 6:14), obey the commandments (Mt. 19:17), deny ourselves (Mk. 8:34), carry our cross (Lk. 14:27), perform good works (Jms. 2:26), accept the kingdom of God like a child (Lk. 18:17), undergo hardships (Acts 14:22), act in righteousness (1 Jn. 3:10), refrain from lying (Rv. 21:27), be chaste (Rv. 21:8), etc.], and that a generic "being good" is simply not enough for salvation.

Perhaps they haven't taken to heart our Lord's admonition that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:20) and that "Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned." (Jn. 15:6)

Perhaps they do not realize that Church teaching tells us that God will not weigh one's whole life in a scale - but that those who die in mortal sin are subject to damnation - no matter how good their life was before that point. "Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, wherever it falls, there shall it lie." (Eccl. 11:3)

Perhaps they also forget that "the whole world is under the power of the evil one." (1 Jn. 5:19) and that "our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens." (Eph. 6:12)

Maybe they have forgotten St. Paul's writing that "We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end" (Heb. 3:14) or that "If we sin deliberately after receiving knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains sacrifice for sins but a fearful prospect of judgment and a flaming fire that is going to consume the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27) and that we are to "work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12)

How is it that such people are sure of the salvation of self-proclaimed "good people" (who they may or may not know very well - and certainly they cannot know the hidden thoughts of their hearts), but St. Paul himself was not sure of his own salvation? (see 1 Cor. 9:27) How is it they feel qualified to judge whether or not someone is worthy of salvation when judgment belongs to the Lord alone? Are they unaware that Church has infallibly taught that there is no salvation outside the Church?

Does it Really Matter if I'm Catholic or Not? / No Salvation Outside the Church

From Pentecost forward, the Church has always taught the necessity of being formally incorporated into the Church. In fact, St. Peter, the first pope, told the good Jews that they needed to be added to the Church to be saved. Just days previously, these devout Jews were practicing the true religion, but St. Peter, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, informed them that they needed to believe in Christ and be baptized into his Church for salvation. Those who would not heed his teaching were *not* "added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

Maybe some will argue now that today's "good people" are "at least in another Christian religion, and very active in religion at that". Surely that is "no big deal" as long as they are "good people", right? To treat matters of religion as if there was no real truth, or as if any religion was sufficient, is to deny truth. Scripture clearly tells us that "After a first and second warning, break off contact with a heretic, realizing that such a person is perverted and sinful and stands self-condemned." (Ti. 3:10-11) Scripture warns repeatedly about false teachers and even warns "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him in your house or even greet him; for whoever greets him shares in his evil works." (2 Jn. 1:10-11). In fact, St. John, the "Apostle of Love" lived up to his teachings so carefully that he would not even remain in a building with a heretic. His disciples and their disciples also would flee from and teach against heresy. [For example, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a hearer of St. John the Apostle, (c. 110 A.D.) teaches: "Do not err, my brethren: the corrupters of families will not inherit the kingdom of God. And if they who do these things according to the flesh suffer death, how much more if a man corrupt by evil teaching the faith of God, for the sake of which Jesus Christ was crucified? A man become so foul will depart into unquenchable fire; and so also will anyone who listens to him."]

But, they argue, the "good person" is really "enthused about Christ". In that case, we remind that Christ said that all who say "Lord, Lord" will not enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt. 7:21) and He also said to those He appointed that "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me." (Lk. 10:16) St. Paul reminds us that "whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves." (Rom. 13:2) By turning their back on the Church, they are turning their back on the only lawful authority on earth who can forgive their sins (cf. Mt. 16:19, Jn. 20:22-23). They are turning their back on the Church, called Christ's Body in Scripture (see Col. 1:18) and are literally turning their back on Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We can see that the first to reject the Eucharist were the first to leave Christ (see Jn. 6:66) - and Christ let them go.

We must also point out that the Church has consistently made statements confirming the necessity of being Catholic for salvation. In fact, the necessity of being Catholic for salvation has been put forward by the Church in an infallible - and therefore irrefutable - manner. Some statements confirming the well-known dogma of "no salvation outside the Church" include:

- "One indeed is the universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved..." (Lateran Council IV, 1215 A.D.)
- "The first condition of salvation is to maintain the rule of the true faith." (Fourth Council of Constantinople)
- "Outside the Church baptism can be put in you but it cannot avail you" (St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, 5th century A.D.)
- "All who wish to reach salvation outside the Church are mistaken as to the way and are engaged in a futile effort." (Pope Leo XIII)
- "No one can be justified unless he faithfully and unhesitatingly accepts the Catholic doctrine on justification." (Council of Trent)
- "If anyone is outside the Ark of Noe [that is, the Church] he will perish in the overwhelming flood." (St. Jerome, Doctor of the Church)
- "For unless one preserves the faith entire and uninjured, he will without doubt perish forever." (Bl. Pope Pius IX, "Qui Pluribus", 1846 A.D.)

- "Anyone who dares to secede from Peter's solid rock may understand that he has not part or lot in the divine mystery." (Pope St. Leo I the Great, Doctor of the Church, 445 A.D.)
- "The Church is like the ark of Noah, outside of which nobody can be saved." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")
- "[E]nsure that the faithful are deeply and thoroughly convinced of the truth of the doctrine that the Catholic faith is necessary for attaining salvation." (Bl. Pope Pius IX, "Nostis et Nobiscum", 1849 A.D.)
- "Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all, keep the Catholic faith; for unless a person keeps this faith whole and entire he will undoubtedly be lost forever." (Athanasian Creed)
- "Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." (Pope Boniface VIII, "Unam Sanctam", 1302 A.D.)
- "We know that salvation belongs to the Church alone, and that no one can partake of Christ nor be saved outside the Catholic Church and the Catholic Faith." (St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church)
- "He who will not willingly and humbly enter the gate of the Church will certainly be damned and enter the gate of Hell whether he wants to or not." (St. Bede the Venerable, Doctor of the Church)
- "The holy universal Church proclaims that God cannot truly be worshiped save within herself and asserts that all they who are without her pale shall never be saved." (Pope St. Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church, 6th century A.D.)
- "Indeed, as long as you remain outside the Church and severed from the fabric of unity and bond of charity, you would be punished with everlasting chastisement, even if you were burned alive for Christ's sake." (St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church)
- "Hold most firmly and never doubt in the least that no person baptized outside the Catholic Church can become a participant of eternal life if, before the end of this life, he has not returned and has been incorporated in the Catholic Church." (St. Fulgence of Ruspe, 6th century A.D.)
- "It is known that all men of Noah's time perished, except those who merited to be in the Ark, which was a figure of the Church. Likewise, they cannot now be saved who will have turned away from the Apostolic Faith and the Catholic Church." (St. Gaudentius)
- "Whosoever shall have separated himself from the Catholic Church, no matter how praiseworthy such a person may fancy his life has been, yet for that one crime of having cut himself off from the unity of Christ he shall not have eternal life, but the wrath of God shall abide with him for ever." (St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, 5th century A.D.)
- "Let no one, then, be persuaded otherwise, nor let anyone deceive himself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved. For if anyone go outside, he is guilty of his own death." [Origen ("the greatest scholar of Christian antiquity" - although he would eventually be excommunicated and be regarded as a heretic), 3rd century A.D.]
- "There is but one plain known road: when you wander from this, you are lost. You must be altogether within the House of God, within the walls of salvation, to be sound and safe from injury. If you wander and walk abroad ever so little, if you carelessly thrust hand or foot out of the Ship, you shall be thrust forth: the door is shut, the ocean roars, you are undone." (St. Edmund Campion)
- "According to the words of Saint Augustine, who takes up an image dear to the ancient Fathers, the ship of the Church must not fear, because it is guided by Christ and by His Vicar. 'Although the ship is tossed about, it is still a ship. It alone carries the disciples and receives Christ. Yes, it is tossed on the sea, but, outside it, one would immediately perish.' Only in the Church is salvation. 'Outside it one perishes.'" (Pope John Paul I, 1978)
- "[W]e have to be conscious of and absorb this fundamental and revealed truth, contained in the phrase consecrated by tradition: 'There is no salvation outside the Church'. From her alone there flows surely and fully the life-giving force destined in Christ and in His Spirit to renew the whole of humanity, and therefore directing every human being to become a part of the Mystical Body of Christ." (Pope John Paul II, 1981)
- "Anyone who is outside this Church, which received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is walking a path not to heaven but to hell. He is not approaching the home of eternal life; rather, he is hastening to the torment of eternal death. And this is the case not only if he remains a pagan without Baptism,

Continued on reverse...

but even if, after having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, he continue as a heretic." (St. Fulgence of Ruspe, 6th century AD)

- "We must mention and condemn again that most pernicious error, which has been imbibed by certain Catholics, who are of the opinion that those people who live in error and have not the true faith, and are separated from the Catholic unity, may obtain life everlasting. Now this opinion is contrary to Catholic Faith, as is evident from the plain words of Our Lord (Mt. 18:17; Mk. 16:16; Lk. 10:16) as also from the words of St. Paul (e.g. Acts 20:28-30) and of St. Peter (2 Pt. 2:1). To entertain opinions contrary to this Catholic Faith is to be an impious wretch." (Bl. Pope Pius IX)
- "A man cannot have salvation, except in the Catholic Church. Outside the Catholic Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honor, he can have Sacraments, he can sing alleluia, he can answer amen, he can possess the gospel, he can have and preach faith in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; but never except in the Catholic Church will he be able to find salvation." (St. Augustine, Doctor of the Church, c. 418 A.D.)
- "This holy Council first of all turns its attention to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself on scripture and tradition, it teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk. 16:16; Jn. 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it, or to remain in it." (Second Vatican Council)
- "The Bride of Christ cannot be defiled. She is inviolate and chaste. She knows but one home, and with a chaste modesty she guards the sanctity of one bedchamber. It is she that keeps us for God, she that seals for the kingdom the sons whom she bore. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church; nor will he that forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is an alien, a worldling, and an enemy. He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. If anyone outside the ark of Noah was able to escape, then perhaps someone outside the pale of the Church may escape" (St. Cyprian of Carthage, c. 251 A.D.)
- "Hold most firmly and never doubt in the least that the Sacrament of Baptism is able to exist not only within the Catholic Church but also among heretics who are baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; but outside the Catholic Church it cannot be of any profit; nay, just as within the Church salvation is conferred through the Sacrament of Baptism upon those who believe rightly, so too, outside the Church, if they do not return to the Church, ruin is heaped up for those who were baptized by the same Baptism. For it is the unity as such of ecclesiastical society that avails unto salvation, so that a man is not saved by Baptism to whom it was not given in that place where it is needful that it be given." (St. Fulgence of Ruspe, 6th century A.D.)
- "Urged by faith, we are obliged to believe and to maintain that the Church is one, holy, catholic, and also apostolic. We believe in her firmly and we confess with simplicity that outside of her there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins, as the Spouse in the Canticles (Sgs. 6:8) proclaims: 'One is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only one, the chosen of her who bore her,' and she represents one sole mystical body whose Head is Christ and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3). In her then is one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There had been at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring the one Church, which ark, having been finished to a single cubit, had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that, outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed." (Pope Boniface VIII, "Unam Sanctam", 1302 A.D.)
- "The third mark of the Church is that she is Catholic; that is, universal. And justly is she called Catholic, because, as St. Augustine says, she is diffused by the splendor of one faith from the rising to the setting sun. Unlike states of human institutions of the sects of heretics, she is not confined to any one country or class of men, but embraces within the amplitude of her love all mankind, whether barbarians or Scythians, slaves or freemen, male or female... Moreover to this Church, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets belong all the faithful who have existed from Adam to the present day, or who shall exist, in the profession of the true faith, to the end of time... She is also called universal, because all who desire eternal salvation must cling to and embrace her, like those who entered the ark to escape perishing in the flood." (Catechism of the Council of Trent)
- "[The Holy Roman Catholic Church] firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart 'into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41), unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; and that the unity of the ecclesiastical body is so strong that only to those remaining in it are the sacraments of the Church of benefit for salvation, and do fastings, almsgiving, and other functions of piety and exercises of Christian

service produce eternal reward, and that no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church." (Council of Florence, c. 1441 A.D.) [Denzinger 714]

- "Furthermore We teach and declare that the Roman Church, by the disposition of the Lord, holds the sovereignty of ordinary power over all others, and that this power of jurisdiction on the part of the Roman Pontiff, which is truly episcopal, is immediate; and with respect to this the pastors and the faithful of whatever rite and dignity, both as separate individuals and all together, are bound by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, not only in things which pertain to faith and morals, but also in those which pertain to the discipline and government of the Church [which is] spread over the whole world, so that the Church of Christ, protected not only by the Roman Pontiff, but by the unity of communion as well as of the profession of the same faith is one flock under the one highest shepherd. This is the doctrine of Catholic truth from which no one can deviate and keep his faith and salvation." (Vatican Council I, 1870 A.D.)
- "Among these heresies belongs that foul contrivance of the sophists of this age who do not admit any difference among the different professions of faith and who think that the portal of eternal salvation opens for all from any religion. They, therefore, label with the stigma of levity and stupidity those who, having abandoned the religion which they learned, embrace another of any kind, even Catholicism. This is certainly a monstrous impiety which assigns the same praise and the mark of the just and upright man to truth and to error, to virtue and to vice, to goodness and to turpitude. Indeed this deadly idea concerning the lack of difference among religions is refuted even by the light of natural reason. We are assured of this because the various religions do not often agree among themselves. If one is true, the other must be false; there can be no society of darkness with light. Against these experienced sophists the people must be taught that the profession of the Catholic faith is uniquely true, as the apostle proclaims: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Jerome used to say it this way: he who eats the [Eucharist] outside this house will perish as did those during the flood who were not with Noah in the ark." (Pope Pius VIII, "Traditi Humilitati", 1829 A.D.)
- "Now, if we look at what was done, Jesus Christ did not arrange and organize such a Church as would embrace several communities similar in kind, but distinct, and not bound together by those bonds that make the Church indivisible and unique after that manner clearly in which we profess in the symbol of faith, 'I believe in one Church.' ... Now, Jesus Christ when He was speaking of such a mystical edifice, spoke only of one Church which He called His own: 'I will build my Church' (Matt. 16:18). Whatever other church is under consideration than this one, since it was not founded by Jesus Christ, cannot be the true Church of Christ... And so the Church is bound to spread among all men the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ, and all the blessings that proceed therefrom, and to propagate them through the ages. Therefore, according to the will of its Author the Church must be alone in all lands in the perpetuity of time... The Church of Christ, therefore, is one and perpetual; whoever go apart (from it) wander away from the will and prescription of Christ the Lord and, leaving the way of salvation, digress to destruction." (Pope Leo XIII, "Satis cognitum", 1898)
- "But this supremacy of man, which openly rejects Christ, or at least ignores Him, is entirely founded upon selfishness, knowing neither charity nor self-devotion. Man may indeed be king, through Jesus Christ; but only on condition that he first of all obey God, and diligently seek his rule of life in God's law. By the law of Christ we mean not only the natural precepts of morality and the Ancient Law, all of which Jesus Christ has perfected and crowned by His declaration, explanation and sanction; but also the rest of His doctrine and His own peculiar institutions. Of these the chief is His Church. Indeed whatsoever things Christ has instituted are most fully contained in His Church. Moreover, He willed to perpetuate the office assigned to Him by His Father by means of the ministry of the Church so gloriously founded by Himself. On the one hand He confided to her all the means of men's salvation, on the other He most solemnly commanded men to be subject to her and to obey her diligently, and to follow her even as Himself: 'He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me' (Luke x, 16). Wherefore the law of Christ must be sought in the Church. Christ is man's 'Way'; the Church also is his 'Way' - Christ of Himself and by His very nature, the Church by His commission and the communication of His power. Hence all who would find salvation apart from the Church, are led astray and strive in vain." (Pope Leo XIII, "Tametsi Futura Prospicientibus", 1900 A.D.)
- "Now We consider another abundant source of the evils with which the Church is afflicted at present: indifferentism. This perverse opinion is spread on all sides by the fraud of the wicked who claim that it is possible to obtain the eternal salvation of the soul by the profession of any kind of religion, as long as morality is maintained. Surely, in so clear a matter, you will drive this deadly error far from the people committed to your care. With the admonition of the apostle that 'there is one God, one faith, one baptism' may those fear who contrive the notion that the safe harbor of salvation is open to persons of any religion whatever. They should consider the testimony of Christ Himself that 'those who are not with Christ are against Him,' and that they disperse unhappily who do not gather with Him. Therefore 'without a doubt, they will perish forever, unless they hold the Catholic faith whole and inviolate.' Let

them hear Jerome who, while the Church was torn into three parts by schism, tells us that whenever someone tried to persuade him to join his group he always exclaimed: 'He who is for the See of Peter is for me.' A schismatic flatters himself falsely if he asserts that he, too, has been washed in the waters of regeneration. Indeed Augustine would reply to such a man: 'The branch has the same form when it has been cut off from the vine; but of what profit for it is the form, if it does not live from the root?' (Pope Gregory XVI, "Mirari Vos", 1832 A.D.)

- "You know how zealously Our predecessors taught that very article of faith which these dare to deny, namely the necessity of the Catholic faith and of unity for salvation. The words of that celebrated disciple of the apostles, martyred St. Ignatius, in his letter to the Philadelphians are relevant to this matter: 'Be not deceived, my brother; if anyone follows a schismatic, he will not attain the inheritance of the kingdom of God.' Moreover, St. Augustine and the other African bishops who met in the Council of Cirta in the year 412 explained the same thing at greater length: 'Whoever has separated himself from the Catholic Church, no matter how laudably he lives, will not have eternal life, but has earned the anger of God because of this one crime: that he abandoned his union with Christ.' Omitting other appropriate passages which are almost numberless in the writings of the Fathers, We shall praise St. Gregory the Great who expressly testifies that this indeed is the teaching of the Catholic Church. He says: 'The holy universal Church teaches that it is not possible to worship God truly except in her and asserts that all who are outside of her will not be saved.' Official acts of the Church proclaim the same dogma. Thus, in the decree on faith which Innocent III published with the synod of Lateran IV, these things are written: 'There is one universal Church of all the faithful outside of which no one is saved.' Finally the same dogma is also expressly mentioned in the profession of faith proposed by the Apostolic See... Strive to eradicate these slithering errors with all your strength. Inspire the populace...to keep the Catholic faith and unity as the only way of salvation with an ever more ardent zeal, and, thus, to avoid every danger of forsaking it." (Pope Gregory XVI, "Summo Iugiter Studio", 1832 A.D.)

Note: Many More Quotations on This Topic Are Available

The doctrine of "No Salvation Outside the Church" has been always held and dogmatically defined. It should be noted that it is not even within the power of the Church to change dogmatically defined doctrines. As stated by the First Vatican Council...

"For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated. Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by holy mother church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding." (First Vatican Council)

Even if a priest or another person in power was to say differently, they have no authority to do so. Truths are not opinions and are not subject to change.

We must remember that Christ founded only one Church and entrusted St. Peter with the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Other so-called churches, even if they call themselves "Christian" were founded by men. They were not instituted by Christ and have not existed since Christ walked the earth. These so called "churches" deny Christ's flesh (the Eucharist) and his body (the Church). They cannot bind and loose sins or teach infallibly. Those who belong to them resist the ordering of God. In a matter of such importance, one must be especially careful to hold fast to the truth. Yes, it really does matter! One really must be Catholic. One's eternal future is at stake! Wishful thinking does not change this fact.

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