

repentance for past sins, will avail them to grace and righteousness” (Marian Publications, 1972, p.179).

In 1949 the Holy See taught, and backed its teaching with an excommunication of those who obstinately reject it, that the saving desire can be merely implicit, but that it must be informed by perfect charity and have with it supernatural faith, “If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation, but are superfluous, and that, although all are not necessary for every individual, without them or without the desire of them through faith alone men obtain from God the grace of justification; let him be anathema” (*Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 847 Can. 4.).

Vatican II teaches that God welcomes all who fear him and does what is right (see *Lumen Gentium* 9). To be saved one must be converted to the Lord Jesus, for there is no salvation except in him. Nevertheless, “God in ways known to himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him” (*Ad gentes* 7). No one can be saved outside the Church, but obviously some can be saved who are ignorant of the gospel and so who would not consider themselves Christians or be counted as such (see *Lumen gentium* 16).

“The universal salvific power of Jesus corresponds to the all-embracing salvific will of the Father, who “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2.4-5). God wants everyone to know Jesus, but his redemptive love comes to some even before they enjoy this great blessing, if

they do what is right as God enlightens them to know what is right.

We must say with the Church that, “There are people who are in ignorance of Christ’s Gospel and of his Church through no fault of their own, and who search for God in sincerity of heart; they attempt to put into practice the recognition of his will that they have reached through the dictate of conscience. They do so under the influence of divine grace; they can attain everlasting salvation” (Pius XII, encyclical *Mediator Dei*, II, 80, August 12, 1950). By implication, children who die before the age of reason can also be saved.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes this topic as follows:

“For *catechumens* who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament” (§1259).

“Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery. 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. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity” (§1260).

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## **Salvation Outside the Church and the Baptism of Desire**

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There are several documents issued by the Church’s Magisterium which deal with the revealed doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. The latest editions of Denzinger’s *Enchiridion Symbolorum* carry more than twenty citations directly pertaining to this dogma, taken from different official documents issued by the Holy See and by Ecumenical Councils. If a person wants to learn exactly how the Catholic Church understands and teaches this revealed truth, one can best obtain this information by reading and studying these documents.

However, it is not necessary to study each of these documents individually. There are eight documents that should suffice for a thorough understanding, which, taken together, reveal the Catholic teaching on the subject.

The eight documents are:

- (1) A profession of the Catholic faith issued by the Fourth Lateran Council, Session 12, in 1215.
- (2) The Bull *Unam sanctum*, published by Pope Boniface VIII, November 18, 1302.
- (3) The decree for the Jacobites, the Bull *Cantate Domino*, published by Pope Eugenius IV, February 4, 1442, and included in the *Acta* of the Council of Florence, 1442.
- (4) The allocution *Singulari Quadam*, delivered on December 9, 1854, the day after the solemn definition of Our Lady’s

Immaculate Conception, by Pope Pius IX, to the Cardinals, Archbishops, and bishops gathered in Rome for that definition.

- (5) The Encyclical *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, addressed by Pope Pius IX to the Bishops of Italy on August 10, 1863.
- (6) The encyclical letter *Mystici Corporis Christi*, published on June 29, 1943 by Pope Pius XII.
- (7) The letter *Suprema Haec Sacra*, sent by the Holy Office, at the command of Pope Pius XII, to His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop of Boston, on August 8, 1949.
- (8) The encyclical letter *Huamani Generis*, issued by Pope Pius XII on August 12, 1950.

As authoritative statements of the Church, each of these documents must be accepted with true internal consent by all Catholics.

Catholic theologians maintain that communion with the Church is necessary for salvation; and likewise claim that it is not necessary to be united with her in fact, but that it is sufficient to be in communion with her in desire, if actual union is impossible.

While St. Thomas Aquinas stated the constant teaching about the general necessity of membership in the Church for salvation, he also conceded that a person may be saved extra sacramentally by a baptism of desire and therefore without actual membership by reason of his at least implicit desire to belong to the Church:

“Man receives the forgiveness of sins before Baptism in so far as he has Baptism of desire, explicitly or implicitly; and yet when he actually receives Baptism, he receives a fuller remission, as to the remission of the

entire punishment. So also before Baptism Cornelius and others like him receive grace and virtues through their faith in Christ and their desire for Baptism, implicit or explicit: but afterwards when baptized, they receive a yet greater fullness of grace and virtues.” (Question 69, article 4, Reply OBJ 2).

This distinction between union with the Church *in act* and union *in desire* dates even further back into Christian antiquity. St Ambrose employed it in his treatise on Valentinian who died a catechumen (and therefore, without the Sacrament of Baptism). His whole line of argument tends to show that in his mind Valentinian was really baptized because he had the *desire for baptism*.

“But I hear that you grieve because he did not receive the sacrament of baptism. Tell me now what else have we if not desire and will? He in very truth had this wish that, before he came to Italy, he should be initiated into the Church and immediately baptized by me...Had he not then the grace he demanded? Certainly, for he who demands receives. Why did not he who had your spirit, receive your grace? But if it is a fact that because the sacraments are not solemnly celebrated they have no value, then the martyrs if they were only catechumens would not receive the crown of glory; for no one is crowned who is not initiated. But if people are absolved in their own blood, then this man’s piety and will absolved him” (*De obitu Valentiniani, Consolatio*, n.51-53).

Since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 defined that “The universal Church of the faithful is one, outside of which no one is saved,” there have been two solemn definitions of the same doctrine, by Pope

Boniface VIII in 1302 and at the Council of Florence in 1442.

According to God’s universal salvific will, we believe that somehow he gives all persons the opportunity of salvation. There is such a thing as baptism of desire, as defined by the Council of Trent; and it was this Tridentine teaching that supported all subsequent recognition that actual membership in the Church is not required to reach one’s eternal destiny.

“In these words a description of the justification of a sinner is given as being a translation from that state in which man is born a child of the first Adam to the state of grace and of the “adoption of the sons” [Rom. 8:15] of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior; and this translation after the promulgation of the Gospel cannot be effected except through the laver of regeneration [can. 5 *de bapt.*], or a desire for it, as it is written: “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” [John 3:5] (Council of Trent, Session VI, *Decree On Justification*, (Jan. 13, 1547).

*The Catechism of the Council of Trent* recommends that the baptism of adults be delayed to ensure that those who approach the Sacrament are properly disposed.

“On Adults, however the Church has not been accustomed to confer the Sacrament of Baptism at once, but has ordained that it be deferred for a certain time. The delay is not attended with the same danger as in the case of infants, which we have already mentioned; should any unforeseen accident make it impossible for adults to be washed in the salutary waters, their intention and determination to receive Baptism and their