

*Did you know . . .*

## THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

Baptism is the one sacrament that all Christian denominations share in common.

As was stated in last week's column, it is baptism that takes away original sin. Thus the early Church Fathers wrote in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 381), "We believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states: "Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: 'Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.'" (CCC §1213)

This sacrament is also called "*the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit*," for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one "can enter the kingdom of God." (CCC §1215)

"The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are 'reborn of water and the Spirit.'" (CCC §1257)

Water baptism is a normative rather than an absolute necessity, for one can also be saved through baptism by desire or by blood. Baptism of blood refers to martyrdom for Christ; baptism by desire refers to an explicit or even implicit desire for baptism. About this, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill his will, are saved even if they have not been baptized" (CCC §1281).

Additionally, "With respect to children who have died without baptism, the liturgy of the Church invites us to trust in God's mercy and to pray for their salvation." (CCC § 1283) [Note: More on unbaptized infants next week]

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