

The Baptism of the Lord – 01-11-2026

“Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying: In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.”

According to the Acts of the Apostles and this proclamation by the first pope of the Catholic Church, St. Peter, one might be tempted to think that the Sacrament of Baptism isn't really necessary at all for salvation – you just need to be a good person.

But what does the Church really teach?

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “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.’”

“God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.”

If a person knows better, then it's just not enough to be a good person. And to be truthful there really is no such thing as a bad person.

It is true people do bad things but God made every one of us in his image and likeness and redeemed us in his Son, so to be a good person is part of our essence even when we do bad things.

It is God's Will that everyone be baptized and be saved.

I once heard a story from a priest who told his personal story of the baptism of a well-known New York mafia boss. He said, he was approached by two very large men in suits who told him that Mr. so and so wanted to see him and he wanted to see him now. So he said, he got into their vehicle and they took him for a ride.

This priest immediately recognized the man's name and his men told him that he was dying. He also discovered that he believed that he had never been baptized.

When the priest arrived the mafia mob boss admitted to him that he had led a very bad life and he wanted to be reconciled to God.

Father was a bit skeptical of his claim that he had never been baptized because it would have been very unusual for an Italian not to have been baptized as a baby.

Most of us are baptized as infants at a time when we are not guilty of any personal sin so baptism only took away original sin and bestowed grace on us to live a good Catholic life in the future.

But since it was possible that this mafia boss had not been baptized and since his motives seemed authentic the priest went ahead and conditionally baptized him.

Since a person can only be baptized once the baptism was conditional because only God knew for certain whether this man had been baptized or not.

That was important because baptism takes away all sin – not just original sin – and all punishment due to sin.

That means that if this mafia boss had not been previously baptized and was truly repentant and if he managed to avoid sin after his baptism, he would have gone directly to heaven upon his death.

When the priest explained this to him he said in amazement that just doesn't seem fair.

He was right. It's not fair because none of us deserves heaven – it's a sheer gift from God – and baptism is the first Sacrament that opens the door to eternal life. We just need to try our best to live it.

As you can see from the above story God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.

It seems the word uprightly means something very different to God than it does to us.

It's just not enough to be a good person! We need the grace of all the Sacraments and it all begins with Baptism.