

**ASK, FATHER JAMES:**

**Would stillborn babies and aborted babies and unbaptized babies make Heaven?**

On January 19, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI asked the Catholic Church's International Theological Commission (ITC) to publish the 41 - page document on their research on this question; They published *The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptised*; addressing what happens to babies who, tragically die before they can be baptized and on whether the taint of original sin means that these infants are banned from heaven. The ITC document invoked the "prayerful hope," concept; explicitly acknowledging that the Church did not know the answer to the question, but nonetheless

encouraged the faithful to be optimistic that prayers for the salvation of unbaptized children are answered. The ITC

theologians noted that this question arises acutely in the case of aborted fetuses, as well as infants who died before

baptism and infants born into non-Christian traditions, neither of whom have any realistic opportunity to be baptized before they died.

In medieval times, some within the Church to answer this question had advocated the "limbo of infants"- That

unbaptized infants spend eternity in "limbo," where they would be deprived of the beatific vision of God but would not suffer the torments of hell. These Catholics were greatly influenced by the 14th century poet Dante who described limbo as the "first circle of hell" in his *The Divine Comedy*, where such souls were not punished but grieved for their separation from God. The ITC document concluded that Limbo probably does not exist and that there is no scriptural support for limbo, that it was never incorporated into the Catholic liturgy, and that it was never "endorsed as Catholic doctrine.

We know that God is truly benevolent and merciful and desires universal salvation and would not be a merciful and

benevolent God if he excludes infants, who have no personal sins from eternal happiness. The church of course acknowledges the doctrine of original sin, which purports that Adam and Eve, the first people introduced disorder into creation by disobeying a divine command and the state of original sin is transmitted from parent to child at conception. Jesus came and established, through the Church, the sacrament of baptism to erase the taint of original sin.

Every parent is encouraged to have their babies and infants baptized. Baptism is the only way to remove the stain of

original sin - which according to our Catholic faith we are all are born with. Parents are urged to continue to baptise their children. If any died before baptism, we are asked to keep on praying for their salvation. We rely on the promise of Jesus in Mark 10:13-31, where he commanded his disciples to let the children come to him for of such is the kingdom of God. God is merciful and wants all human beings to be saved. Grace has priority over sin, and the exclusion of innocent babies from heaven does not seem to reflect Christ's special love for the little ones.

***Please email/send your faith questions to Fr. James***

***he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins***

