

PARENTS AND GODPARENTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The Catholic Church desires the baptism of all of its members and indeed all children. However, this is strictly the free choice of the parents. In both Church law and civil law, no other persons may intervene or presume to baptize another's children without the consent of the parents. Privacy laws make that an illegal act. This is to prevent horror stories of the past, when children were baptized to make them Catholic even though their parents were actually Protestant, Jewish or no religion at all. That is an infringement of parents' civil rights and religious liberty.

When one or both of the parents are Catholic, whether married or unmarried, they themselves can request to have their children baptized in the Catholic Church. The only requirement of parents is that they will raise their children in the Catholic faith. As a matter of fact, the parents could hypothetically be atheistic, but are still willing to raise their children Catholic for whatever reason, and the Church can honor their request for baptism. The child has a right to be baptized if the parents consent, even when the parents are not practicing Catholics. This is why the Church insists that at least one of the Godparents of the child for baptism be in full communion with the Catholic Church, that is, baptized, confirmed, and having made their first Holy Eucharist. This person must also receive instruction from the Church in the duties of a Godparent, be at least 16 years of age and, if married, married according to the norms of the Catholic Church. In other words, a person must be in right relationship with the Catholic Church to be a Godparent. Therefore, when the parents are not in good standing in the Catholic Church, the Godparent will represent the Church.

Will the infant or child who is not baptized go to Hell or remain in Limbo for all eternity? No! Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 rescinded completely the notion of a "Limbo" for the un-baptized with original sin. Unlike Purgatory or Heaven, Limbo was never a doctrine of the Church. It was simply a pious teaching that soothed our consciences when infants died before first being baptized. Limbo became a cruel fate for children, who through no fault of their own, were not baptized and therefore they would never see God. That would make God into a very cruel person. Pope Benedict said that we must all trust in the love, mercy and compassion of God. God does not judge, punish or condemn innocent children, but will take care of them eternally.

When parents are not practicing their Catholic faith, married or unmarried, the birth of their child becomes an evangelizing moment for us, the Church. They are children of God and so is their child. We need to help them to understand that the Church is not going to judge, punish or condemn them either. In love, mercy and compassion, the Church extends the hand of reconciliation to them and offers them the Good News of Salvation. It may be an opportunity to rectify their marriage or to encourage them to better practice their faith, but this may not be a condition for them to have their child baptized. Jesus came to save and we are his disciples. Final Judgment only takes place on the Last Day when Jesus returns. In the meantime, we are called to be witnesses of Jesus' patience and gentleness with us and with them. Pray for them!