

and theologians across the centuries. The Catholic Encyclopaedia of the early 20th century went so far as to say: *"it may confidently be said that, as the result of centuries of speculation on the subject, we ought to believe that these souls enjoy and will eternally enjoy a state of perfect natural happiness; and this is what Catholics usually mean when they speak of the limbus infantium, the "children's limbo."*" It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that I was taught along those lines some 60 years ago. The fact is, however, that the Church has never expressed an authoritative position. The CCC does not mention the word 'limbo' in its text. At para 1261 it states: *"As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God...Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children....allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism."* In 2007, a report of the International Theological Commission, available on the Vatican website for any seeking an in-depth analysis (1), reiterated this position and described limbo as no more than *"a possible theological hypothesis."*

(1)https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html

-Stephen S.

Entrance antiphon: The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world and that which contains all things understands what is said, alleluia.

First Reading: Acts 2:1-11

Psalms 103: Response: Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.

Second Reading: 1Corinthians 12: 3-7,12-13

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Alleluia!

Gospel: John 20:19-23

Memorial Acclamation: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

Communion Antiphon: They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke of the marvels of God, alleluia.



Pentecost Sunday

Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection:

Whatever Happened to? (3) Limbo:

Limbo is a word which was prevalent when I was a child in the 1960s, but no longer appears to be so. My abiding impression from childhood is that we

were taught that our donations to overseas missions were needed to enable the maximum number of baptisms so as to minimise the number of children who would end up in limbo rather than in heaven. So what is the position on limbo?

There are in fact two concepts of limbo. One was explained in the old Penny Catechism in this way: *"64. What do you mean by Limbo? By Limbo I mean a place of rest, where the souls of the just who died before Christ were detained. 65. Why were the souls of the just detained in Limbo? The souls of the just were detained in Limbo because they could not go up to the kingdom of heaven till Christ had opened it for them."* Though not universally accepted by the Jewish people at about the time of Christ, there were writings explaining that the departed just were in a state of temporary happiness, which would be replaced by a state of final and permanent bliss after the coming of the Messiah. Translated into Christian belief, because of original sin Heaven was closed, even to those purified from sin, until redemption was achieved by Christ's ascendancy into Heaven. St Peter (1 Peter 3: 18-20) describes these souls as "in prison", but Christ's words in the parable of Lazarus, where the poor man is in the 'bosom of Abraham', make it clear that it was a state of happiness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), while not using the word 'limbo', says this of Christ's descent into Hell: *"It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Saviour in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ... delivered when he descended into hell."*

What, then of the idea of limbo for unbaptised children? Theologians grappled with the problem of the destiny of such children from the early days of the Church. In general terms the Greek Church was more optimistic, the Roman Church more pessimistic, as to their fate. The subject energised the early Church Fathers (St Augustine of Hippo's opinion was particularly strict)