

CCC HE DESCENDED INTO HELL; ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

Paragraph 1. Christ Descended into Hell

632 The frequent New Testament affirmations that Jesus was “raised from the dead” presuppose that the crucified one sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection.⁴⁷⁸ This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ’s descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But **he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there.**⁴⁷⁹

634 **“The gospel was preached even to the dead.”**⁴⁸⁴ The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus’ messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ’s redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption.

635 **Christ went down into the depths of death so that “the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”**⁴⁸⁵ Jesus, “the Author of life,” by dying destroyed “him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.”⁴⁸⁶ Henceforth the risen Christ holds “the keys of Death and Hades,” so that “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”⁴⁸⁷

The Particular Judgment

1021 Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ.⁵⁹² The New Testament speaks of judgment primarily in its aspect of the final encounter with Christ in his second coming, but also repeatedly affirms that **each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith.** The parable of the poor man Lazarus and the words of Christ on the cross to the good thief, as well as other New Testament texts speak of a final destiny of the soul—a destiny which can be different for some and for others.⁵⁹³

1022 Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in **a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification**⁵⁹⁴ **or immediately,**⁵⁹⁵ **—or immediate and everlasting damnation.**

Hell

1033 We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: “He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”⁶¹² Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren.⁶¹³ To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called “hell.”

1035 The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. **Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell,** where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.”⁶¹⁷ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

1037 God predestines no one to go to hell;⁶²⁰ for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, **the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want “any to perish, but all to come to repentance”**

1058 The Church prays that no one should be lost: “**Lord, let me never be parted from you.**” If it is true that **no one can save himself, it is also true that God “desires all men to be saved”** (1 Tim 2:4), and that **for him “all things are possible”** (Mt 19:26).