

Paragraph 2. Jesus Died Crucified

I. THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Divisions among the Jewish authorities concerning Jesus

595 Among the religious authorities of Jerusalem, not only were the Pharisee Nicodemus and the prominent Joseph of Arimathea both secret disciples of Jesus, but there was also long-standing dissension about him, so much so that St. John says of these authorities on the very eve of Christ's Passion, "many . . . believed in him," though very imperfectly.³⁷⁸ This is not surprising, if one recalls that on the day after Pentecost "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" and "some believers . . . belonged to the party of the Pharisees," to the point that St. James could tell St. Paul, "How many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; and they are all zealous for the Law."³⁷⁹

596 The religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take toward Jesus.³⁸⁰ The Pharisees threatened to excommunicate his followers.³⁸¹ To those who feared that "everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation," the high priest Caiaphas replied by prophesying: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."³⁸² The Sanhedrin, having declared Jesus deserving of death as a blasphemer but having lost the right to put anyone to death, hands him over to the Romans, accusing him of political revolt, a charge that puts him in the same category as Barabbas who had been accused of sedition.³⁸³ The high priests also threatened Pilate politically so that he would condemn Jesus to death.³⁸⁴ 1753

Jews are not collectively responsible for Jesus' death

597 The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. The personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost.³⁸⁵ Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross, and Peter in 1735

378 *Jn* 12:42; cf. 7:50; 9:16-17; 10:19-21; 19:38-39.

379 *Acts* 6:7; 15:5; 21:20.

380 Cf. *Jn* 9:16; *Jn* 10:19.

381 Cf. *Jn* 9:22.

382 *Jn* 11:48-50.

383 Cf. *Mt* 26:66; *Jn* 18:31; *Lk* 23:2, 19.

384 Cf. *Jn* 19:12, 15, 21.

385 Cf. *Mk* 15:11; *Acts* 2:23, 36; 3:13-14; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:27-28; 1 *Thess* 2:14-15.

following suit, both accept “the ignorance” of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders.³⁸⁶ Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places, based merely on the crowd’s cry: “His blood be on us and on our children!” a formula for ratifying a judicial sentence.³⁸⁷ As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council:

839 . . . [N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion. . . . [T]he Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture.³⁸⁸

All sinners were the authors of Christ’s Passion

598 In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that “sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured.”³⁸⁹ Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself,³⁹⁰ the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone:

1851 We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. And it can be seen that our crime in this case is greater in us than in the Jews. As for them, according to the witness of the Apostle, “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” We, however, profess to know him. And when we deny him by our deeds, we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him.³⁹¹

Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins.³⁹²

386 Cf. *Lk* 23:34; *Acts* 3:17.

387 *Mt* 27:25; cf. *Acts* 5:28; 18:6.

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389 *Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11; cf. *Heb* 12:3.

390 Cf. *Mt* 25:45; *Acts* 9:4-5.

391 *Roman Catechism* I, 5, 11; cf. *Heb* 6:6; *1 Cor* 2:8.

392 St. Francis of Assisi, *Admonitio* 5, 3.

II. CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE DEATH IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

"Jesus handed over according to the definite plan of God"

599 Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan, as St. Peter explains to the Jews of Jerusalem in his first sermon on Pentecost: "This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."³⁹³ This Biblical language does not mean that those who handed him over were merely passive players in a scenario written in advance by God.³⁹⁴ 517

600 To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of "predestination," he includes in it each person's free response to his grace: "In this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."³⁹⁵ For the sake of accomplishing his plan of salvation, God permitted the acts that flowed from their blindness.³⁹⁶ 312

"He died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures"

601 The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of "the righteous one, my Servant" as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin.³⁹⁷ Citing a confession of faith that he himself had "received," St. Paul professes that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures."³⁹⁸ In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant.³⁹⁹ Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God's suffering Servant.⁴⁰⁰ After his Resurrection he gave this interpretation of the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus, and then to the apostles.⁴⁰¹ 652 713

393 Acts 2:23.

394 Cf. Acts 3:13.

395 Acts 4:27-28; cf. Ps 2:1-2.

396 Cf. Mt 26:54; Jn 18:36; 19:11; Acts 3:17-18.

397 Isa 53:11; cf. 53:12; Jn 8:34-36; Acts 3:14.

398 1 Cor 15:3; cf. also Acts 3:18; 7:52; 13:29; 26:22-23.

399 Cf. Isa 53:7-8 and Acts 8:32-35.

400 Cf. Mt 20:28.

401 Cf. Lk 24:25-27, 44-45.

"For our sake God made him to be sin"

602 Consequently, St. Peter can formulate the apostolic faith in the divine plan of salvation in this way: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake."⁴⁰² Man's sins, following on
400 original sin, are punishable by death.⁴⁰³ By sending his own Son
519 in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."⁴⁰⁴

603 Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned.⁴⁰⁵ But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁴⁰⁶ Having thus established
2572 him in solidarity with us sinners, God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," so that we might be "reconciled to God by the death of his Son."⁴⁰⁷

God takes the initiative of universal redeeming love

604 By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part:
211, 2009 "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent
1825 his Son to be the expiation for our sins."⁴⁰⁸ God "shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."⁴⁰⁹

605 At the end of the parable of the lost sheep Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."⁴¹⁰ He affirms that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many"; this last term is not restrictive, but contrasts the whole of humanity with
402 the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over to save

402 1 Pet 1:18-20.

403 Cf. Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:56.

404 2 Cor 5:21; cf. Phil 2:7; Rom 8:3.

405 Cf. Jn 8:46.

406 Mk 15:34; Ps 22:2; cf. Jn 8:29.

407 Rom 8:32, 5:10.

408 1 Jn 4:10; 4:19.

409 Rom 5:8.

410 Mt 18:14.

us.⁴¹¹ The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men without exception: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer."⁴¹² 634, 2793

III. CHRIST OFFERED HIMSELF TO HIS FATHER FOR OUR SINS

Christ's whole life is an offering to the Father

606 The Son of God, who came down "from heaven, not to do [his] own will, but the will of him who sent [him],"⁴¹³ said on coming into the world, "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God." 517
 "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."⁴¹⁴ From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."⁴¹⁵ The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world"⁴¹⁶ expresses his loving commun- 536
 ion with the Father. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life," said the Lord, "[for] I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."⁴¹⁷

607 The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life,⁴¹⁸ for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. And so he asked, "And what shall 457
 I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour."⁴¹⁹ And again, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"⁴²⁰ From the cross, just before "It is finished," he said, "I thirst."⁴²¹

"The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world"

608 After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."⁴²² By doing so, he 523

411 Mt 20:28; cf. Rom 5:18-19.

412 Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624; cf. 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Jn 2:2.

413 Jn 6:38.

414 Heb 10:5-10.

415 Jn 4:34.

416 1 Jn 2:2.

417 Jn 10:17; 14:31.

418 Cf. Lk 12:50; 22:15; Mt 16:21-23.

419 Jn 12:27.

420 Jn 18:11.

421 Jn 19:30; 19:28.

422 Jn 1:29; cf. Lk 3:21; Mt 3:14-15; Jn 1:36.

reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the
 517 multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover.⁴²³ Christ's whole life expresses his mission: "to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁴²⁴

Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love

609 By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end," for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁴²⁵ In suffering
 478 and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men.⁴²⁶ Indeed, out
 515 of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."⁴²⁷ Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death.⁴²⁸

At the Last Supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life

610 Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night
 766 he was betrayed."⁴²⁹ On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial
 1337 of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: "This is my body which is given for you." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁴³⁰

611 The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice.⁴³¹ Jesus includes the apostles in his own
 1364 offering and bids them perpetuate it.⁴³² By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant: "For their sakes I
 1341, 1566 sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."⁴³³

423 *Isa* 53:7, 12; cf. *Jer* 11:19; *Ex* 12:3-14; *Jn* 19:36; *1 Cor* 5:7.

424 *Mk* 10:45.

425 *Jn* 13:1; 15:13.

426 Cf. *Heb* 2:10, 17-18; 4:15; 5:7-9.

427 *Jn* 10:18.

428 Cf. *Jn* 18:4-6; *Mt* 26:53.

429 *Roman Missal*, EP III, 110; cf. *Mt* 26:20; *1 Cor* 11:23.

430 *Lk* 22:19; *Mt* 26:28; cf. *1 Cor* 5:7.

431 *1 Cor* 11:25.

432 Cf. *Lk* 22:19.

433 *Jn* 17:19; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1752; 1764.

The agony at Gethsemani

612 The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani,⁴³⁴ making himself "obedient unto death." Jesus prays: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . . ."⁴³⁵ Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death.⁴³⁶ Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the "Author of life," the "Living One."⁴³⁷ By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."⁴³⁸

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Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice

613 Christ's death is both the *Paschal sacrifice* that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,"⁴³⁹ and the *sacrifice of the New Covenant*, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁴⁴⁰

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614 This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices.⁴⁴¹ First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.⁴⁴²

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434 Cf. Mt 26:42; Lk 22:20.

435 Phil 2:8; Mt 26:39; cf. Heb 5:7-8.

436 Cf. Rom 5:12; Heb 4:15.

437 Cf. Acts 3:15; Rev 1:17; Jn 1:4; 5:26.

438 1 Pet 2:24; cf. Mt 26:42.

439 Jn 1:29; cf. 8:34-36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19.

440 Mt 26:28; cf. Ex 24:8; Lev 16:15-16; 1 Cor 11:25.

441 Cf. Heb 10:10.

442 Cf. Jn 10:17-18; 15:13; Heb 9:14; 1 Jn 4:10.

Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience

615 “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,
 1850 so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”⁴⁴³ By his
 433 obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the
 411 suffering Servant, who “makes himself an *offering for sin*,” when “he
 bore the sin of many,” and who “shall make many to be accounted
 righteous,” for “he shall bear their iniquities.”⁴⁴⁴ Jesus atoned for our
 faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.⁴⁴⁵

Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the Cross

616 It is love “to the end”⁴⁴⁶ that confers on Christ’s sacrifice
 its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfac-
 tion. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life.⁴⁴⁷ Now
 478 “the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one
 has died for all; therefore all have died.”⁴⁴⁸ No man, not even the
 holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer
 himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine
 468 person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human
 519 persons and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind,
 makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*.

617 The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of
 Christ’s sacrifice as “the source of eternal salvation”⁴⁴⁹ and teaches
 1992 that “his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited
 1235 justification for us.”⁴⁵⁰ And the Church venerates his cross as it
 sings: “Hail, O Cross, our only hope.”⁴⁵¹

Our participation in Christ’s sacrifice

618 The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the “one media-
 tor between God and men.”⁴⁵² But because in his incarnate divine
 person he has in some way united himself to every man, “the
 possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the

443 Rom 5:19.

444 Isa 53:10-12.

445 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1529.

446 Jn 13:1.

447 Cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25.

448 2 Cor 5:14.

449 Heb 5:9.

450 Council of Trent: DS 1529.

451 LH, Lent, Holy Week, Evening Prayer, Hymn *Vexilla regis*.

452 1 Tim 2:5.

paschal mystery" is offered to all men.⁴⁵³ He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow [him],"⁴⁵⁴ for "Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps."⁴⁵⁵ In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries.⁴⁵⁶ This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.⁴⁵⁷

Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.⁴⁵⁸

IN BRIEF

- 619 "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3).
 - 620 Our salvation flows from God's initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19).
 - 621 Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolized this offering and made it really present: "This is my body which is given for you" (Lk 22:19).
 - 622 The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers" (1 Pet 1:18).
 - 623 By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfills the atoning mission (cf. Isa 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11; cf. Rom 5:19).
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453 GS 22 § 5; cf. § 2.

454 Mt 16:24.

455 1 Pet 2:21.

456 Cf. Mk 10:39; Jn 21:18-19; Col 1:24.

457 Cf. Lk 2:35.

458 St. Rose of Lima, cf. P. Hansen, *Vita mirabilis* (Louvain, 1668).

Paragraph 3. Jesus Christ Was Buried

624 "By the grace of God" Jesus tasted death "for every
 one."⁴⁵⁹ In his plan of salvation, God ordained that his Son should
 not only "die for our sins"⁴⁶⁰ but should also "taste death," expe-
 1005, 362 rience the condition of death, the separation of his soul from his
 body, between the time he expired on the cross and the time he was
 raised from the dead. The state of the dead Christ is the mystery of
 the tomb and the descent into hell. It is the mystery of Holy
 Saturday, when Christ, lying in the tomb,⁴⁶¹ reveals God's great
 349 sabbath rest⁴⁶² after the fulfillment⁴⁶³ of man's salvation, which
 brings peace to the whole universe.⁴⁶⁴

Christ in the tomb in his body

625 Christ's stay in the tomb constitutes the real link between
 his passible state before Easter and his glorious and risen state
 today. The same person of the "Living One" can say, "I died, and
 behold I am alive for evermore".⁴⁶⁵

God [the Son] did not impede death from separating his soul
 from his body according to the necessary order of nature, but
 has reunited them to one another in the Resurrection, *so that*
he himself might be, in his person, the meeting point for death and
life, by arresting in himself the decomposition of nature
 produced by death and so becoming the source of reunion
 for the separated parts.⁴⁶⁶

626 Since the "Author of life" who was killed⁴⁶⁷ is the same
 470, 650 "living one [who has] risen,"⁴⁶⁸ the divine person of the Son of God
 necessarily continued to possess his human soul and body, sepa-
 rated from each other by death:

By the fact that at Christ's death his soul was separated from
 his flesh, his one person is not itself divided into two persons;
 for the human body and soul of Christ have existed in the
 same way from the beginning of his earthly existence, in the
 divine person of the Word; and in death, although separated

459 Heb 2:9.

460 1 Cor 15:3.

461 Cf. Jn 19:42.

462 Cf. Heb 4:7-9.

463 Cf. Jn 19:30.

464 Cf. Col 1:18-20.

465 Rev 1:18.

466 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. catech.*, 16: PG 45, 52D.

467 Acts 3:15.

468 Lk 24:5-6.

from each other, both remained with one and the same person of the Word.⁴⁶⁹

“You will not let your Holy One see corruption”

627 Christ’s death was a real death in that it put an end to his earthly human existence. But because of the union which the person of the Son retained with his body, his was not a mortal corpse like others, for “it was not possible for death to hold him”⁴⁷⁰ and therefore “divine power preserved Christ’s body from corruption.”⁴⁷¹ Both of these statements can be said of Christ: “He was cut off out of the land of the living,”⁴⁷² and “My flesh will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption.”⁴⁷³ Jesus’ Resurrection “on the third day” was the sign of this also, because bodily decay was held to begin on the fourth day after death.⁴⁷⁴

“Buried with Christ . . .”

628 Baptism, the original and full sign of which is immersion, efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to live a new life. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”⁴⁷⁵

IN BRIEF

629 To the benefit of every man, Jesus Christ tasted death (cf. *Heb* 2:9). It is truly the Son of God made man who died and was buried.

630 During Christ’s period in the tomb, his divine person continued to assume both his soul and his body, although they were separated from each other by death. For this reason the dead Christ’s body “saw no corruption” (*Acts* 13:37).

469 St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.*, 3, 27: PG 94, 1098A.

470 *Acts* 2:24.

471 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 51, 3.

472 *Isa* 53:8.

473 *Acts* 2:26-27; cf. *Ps* 16:9-10.

474 Cf. *1 Cor* 15:4; *Lk* 24:46; *Mt* 12:40; *Jon* 2:1; *Hos* 6:2; cf. *Jn* 11:39.

475 *Rom* 6:4; cf. *Col* 2:12; *Eph* 5:26.

ARTICLE 5

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

631 Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens.”⁴⁷⁶ The Apostles’ Creed confesses in the same article Christ’s descent into hell and his Resurrection from the dead on the third day, because in his Passover it was precisely out of the depths of death that he made life spring forth:

[T]he one Morning Star who never sets,
Christ your Son, who, coming back from death’s domain,
has shed his peaceful light on humanity,
and lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.⁴⁷⁷

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

633 Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, “hell”—*Sheol* in Hebrew or *Hades* in Greek—because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God.⁴⁸⁰ Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil or righteous, while they await the redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into “Abraham’s bosom”.⁴⁸¹ “It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham’s bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell.”⁴⁸² Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him.⁴⁸³

476 Eph 4:9-10.

477 Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 19, *Exsultet*.

478 Acts 3:15; Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:20; cf. Heb 13:20.

479 Cf. 1 Pet 3:18-19.

480 Cf. Phil 2:10; Acts 2:24; Rev 1:18; Eph 4:9; Pss 6:6; 88:11-13.

481 Cf. Ps 89:49; 1 Sam 28:19; Ezek 32:17-32; Lk 16:22-26.

482 Roman Catechism I, 6, 3.

483 Cf. Council of Rome (745): DS 587; Benedict XII, *Cum dudum* (1341): DS. 1011; Clement VI, *Super quibusdam* (1351): DS 1077; Council of Toledo IV (625): DS 485; Mt 27:52-53.

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. 605

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

Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. . . . He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him—He who is both their God and the son of Eve. . . . “I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. . . . I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead.”⁴⁸⁸

IN BRIEF

- 636 By the expression “He descended into hell,” the Apostles’ Creed confesses that Jesus did really die and through his death for us conquered death and the devil “who has the power of death” (*Heb 2:14*).
- 637 In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him.
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484 1 *Pet* 4:6.

485 *Jn* 5:25; cf. *Mt* 12:40; *Rom* 10:7; *Eph* 4:9.

486 *Heb* 2:14-15; cf. *Acts* 3:15.

487 *Rev* 1:18; *Phil* 2:10.

488 Ancient Homily for Holy Saturday: PG 43, 440A, 452C: *LH*, Holy Saturday, OR.