

LESSON

8

HE IS NOT HERE; HE HAS RISEN!

BACKGROUND READING



Until Jesus, the Son of God, came as man and offered Himself to the Father as a sacrifice on the Cross, the way to Heaven was closed. That meant that the souls of every human being who died before Christ's redeeming sacrifice were waiting somewhere. The Apostles' Creed calls this place of waiting "hell" (*Sheol* in Hebrew, or *Hades* in Greek). When the Apostles' Creed was translated into English in the 1500s, the word *hell* meant *Hades* – the world of the departed. Hell did not mean the final state of eternal separation from God, which is what the word is used to mean today. Of course, not everyone who lived before Christ died as a friend of God. The souls of the just and the damned were in *Hades*.

Why Did Christ Descend into Hell?

To understand why Jesus descended into hell, it is important to remember that Jesus was both true God and true man. Because He was fully man, He experienced death and His soul joined others in the realm of the dead. In hell, He preached the Gospel to the holy souls who were waiting for God's covenants with humanity to be fulfilled. "The gospel was

preached even to the dead" (1 Peter 4:6). Jesus did not go there to deliver the damned, or to destroy hell itself, but rather "to free the just who had gone before Him" (CCC 633).

By preaching the Gospel message of salvation to the just who had died before Him, Christ brought to completion His saving mission. From the beginning of time until the end of time, the just are partakers in the redeeming work of Christ.

What Is the Resurrection?

While His soul preached the Gospel in hell, Jesus' lifeless body remained in the tomb on Holy Saturday. And then, on the third day, Christ rose again from the dead. Jesus' Resurrection is the fulfillment of our redemption. He came to free all mankind from the bonds of sin and death. Through His Resurrection we have the proof that He truly is the Son of God reigning as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16). The Resurrection is "the crowning truth" of our Faith (CCC 638) and the fulfillment of all the covenants of Salvation History. "We ourselves are proclaiming this good news to you that what God promised our ancestors He has

brought to fulfillment for us, (their) children, by raising up Jesus” (Acts 13:32-33).

We learned in lesson six that Jesus performed many miracles in order to prove to us the truth that He is the Son of God. The Resurrection was the greatest of all the miracles that Jesus performed. Perhaps not surprisingly, even some of His disciples at first struggled to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. Some thought He was a ghost, and St. Thomas doubted until they all could actually see and touch Him. After the Resurrection, Jesus’ body looked like a normal human body, but He had none of the physical weaknesses and limitations of human bodies. If we believe in Him and die in a state of grace, then we, too, shall be raised at the end of time. The truth of Jesus’ Resurrection is the promise of our resurrection.

What Is The Paschal Mystery?

The Paschal Mystery is the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paschal comes from the Greek *Pascha* for Passover; and Jesus

became the Paschal Lamb. (We will study this mystery in greater depth when we study the Eucharist.) We call the Paschal Mystery a mystery because in Jesus Christ, new life can come from death. As we learned in the last lesson, we die a spiritual death and are reborn in the new life of Christ’s Resurrection in Baptism. This is one reason we renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

Baptism begins the lifelong process of salvation, or being saved from the eternal death of sin. Christ opened the way to Heaven through the Paschal Mystery: His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. We become heirs to that promise of eternal life in Baptism. As we have learned in previous lessons, God’s grace heals our soul when we sin. Some Protestants (though not all) believe that faith in Jesus Christ is all that is needed for salvation and that salvation cannot be lost. Catholics do not believe these things. We believe, as Jesus told us many times, that salvation is not a single event that happens to us, but is a process in which we must cooperate with the grace God offers us.

LESSON 9

CHRIST IS RISEN, CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN

BACKGROUND READING



After His Resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with His disciples so that they might come to believe fully in all that He came to accomplish. During this time, Christ's glorified body was veiled "under the appearance of ordinary humanity" (CCC 659). After 40 days, Christ ascended into Heaven, and His humanity entered irreversibly into divine glory. The story of the Ascension is recorded in the Gospels, as well as the first book of Acts.

How fitting that He who "came from the Father" and entered the world now leaves the world and goes "back to the Father" (John 16:28). Jesus' Ascension into eternal glory is our hope and our promise that we, too, can someday go where He has gone. Christ is not just one of the many ways we can go there – He is the only Way. He told us, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Christ is the only intercessor between God and man.

What Is An Intercessor?

An intercessor is one who intercedes. The word *intercede* comes from the Latin *inter* (between) and *cedere* (to go or move).

Therefore an intercessor is someone who acts as a go-between, often to work out differences or bring reconciliation. This is exactly what Jesus accomplished for us in the Paschal Mystery: by redeeming humanity on the Cross, He made it possible for mankind to return to our Father in Heaven.

"Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us" (CCC 661). As He stood in for us or took our place on the Cross, He now stands in for us in Heaven. We read in the ninth chapter of Hebrews: "For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24).

This type of intercession, which is uniquely Jesus', should not be confused with intercessory prayer, which anyone can do. Intercessory prayer is prayer on behalf of someone else. We can ask our friends to pray for us, including those who have gone before us: the saints in Heaven, and especially Christ's Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary.

What Happened After Christ Ascended into Heaven?

The Apostles' Creed tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. The expression "at the right hand of the Father" indicates all the glory that belongs to Jesus and Him alone. We do not have to understand the word *seated* literally. Rather, we can understand it to mean *abiding* or *dwelling* for eternity. Thomas Aquinas wrote that Christ is said to sit at the right hand of the Father because "He reigns together with the Father, and has judiciary power from Him; just as he who sits at the king's right hand helps him in ruling and judging."

Christ's Kingdom is now and is yet to come. Christ reigns now in Heaven, and He also reigns here on earth through the Church, His Body. Since Christ's Ascension, the world has been in what the Church calls the last days, or the time between the Ascension and the Second Coming. Once again, humanity has entered a time of watching and waiting. We do not know the hour of His return, nor can we know it: "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). But we are called to "Be watchful!" (Mark 13:33).

We must be always watchful, as the Church teaches that "before Christ's Second Coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers" (CCC 675). A person who falsely claims to speak for God will offer people what seems like a solution to their problems, but that "solution"

will come at the cost of denying the truth. The Church must pass through this trial, and only then will she enter into the fullness of God's glory. God will bring the victory over evil, and the Last Judgment of the world will then come (see CCC 675-677).

What Is Judgment Day?

At the end of the world, called the Last Judgment or Judgment Day, "Christ will come in glory to achieve the definitive triumph of good over evil" (CCC 681). At the appointed time, at the end of the world, Jesus will return to this earth to judge the living and the dead and to bring His Kingdom to its fullness. All truth will come to light, the meaning of all creation will be revealed, and individuals will reap what they have sown. How we treated our neighbor will be evidence of whether we accepted or rejected God's gift of grace. Jesus will judge everyone according to His works and will reveal the secrets of every heart. "On the last day Jesus will say to us the words He spoke in Matthew 25:40: 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me'" (CCC 678). This is the standard by which we will be judged. Ultimately, the Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over injustice and that God's love is stronger than death.

But God will not wait until the end of the world to judge each person. At our death, God will immediately judge us. This is called the particular judgment, and we will learn more about it when we study the article of the Apostles' Creed on life everlasting.