



THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of
God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

"He Descended to the Underworld.
The third day He arose again from the dead."



Apostles' Creed

The Church always believes as she prays. From the time of the apostles until the current age, the way the Church prays effects what she believes. Her prayer is most completely revealed within the liturgical life – the celebration of the Sacraments and other ritualistic actions. In the second century, the Church of Rome was using a baptismal formula, which had the catechumens (those to be baptized) declare their belief in the Triune God as well as the Church and the resurrection of the body via a series of questions. These questions, which find similarity to the baptismal rites of today, developed into the Apostles' Creed by the end of the seventh century.

Commentary is by Saint Thomas Aquinas. By universal consent, Thomas Aquinas is the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of divine revelation. He is one of the great teachers of the medieval Catholic Church, honored with the titles Doctor of the Church and Angelic Doctor.

“He Descended to the Underworld. The third day He arose again from the dead.”

The death of Christ was the separation of His soul from His body as it is with other men. But the Divinity was so indissolubly conjoined to the Man-Christ that although His soul and body were disunited, His Divinity was always most perfectly united to both the soul and body. This we have seen above. Therefore in the Sepulcher His body was together with the Son of God who together with His soul descended to the underworld.

Why descend?

There are four reasons why Christ together with His soul descended to the underworld. **First**, He wished to take upon Himself the entire punishment for our sin, and thus atone for its entire guilt. The punishment for the sin of man was not alone death of the body, but there was also a punishment of the soul, since the soul had its share in sin; and it was punished by being deprived of the beatific vision; and as yet no atonement had been offered whereby this punishment would be taken away. Therefore, before the coming of Christ all men, even the holy fathers after their death, descended into the underworld. Accordingly in order to take upon Himself most perfectly the punishment due to sinners, Christ not only suffered death, but also His soul descended to the underworld. He, however, descended for a different cause than did the fathers; for they did so out of necessity and were of necessity taken there and detained, but Christ descended there of His own power and free will: “I am counted among them that go down to the pit; I am become as a man without help, free among the dead” [Ps 87:5–Vulgate]. The others were there as captives, but Christ was freely there.

Fourthly, let us **rise again to a new and glorious life** by avoiding all that which formerly were the occasions and the causes of our death and sin: “As Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life” [Rom 6:4]. **This new life is the life of justice which renews the soul and leads it to the life of glory.**

End

(2) Christ's resurrection was different as regards **the life to which He arose**. Christ arose again to a glorious and incorruptible life: "Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father" [Rom 6:4]. The others, however, were raised to that life which they had before, as seen of Lazarus and the others.

(3) Christ's resurrection was **different also in effect and efficacy**. In virtue of the resurrection of Christ all shall rise again: "And many bodies of the saints that had slept arose" [Mt 28:52]. The Apostle declares that "Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep" [1 Cor 15:20]. But also note that Christ by His Passion arrived at glory: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and so to enter into His glory?" [Lk 24:26]. And this is to teach us how we also may arrive at glory: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" [Acts 14:21].

(4) Christ's resurrection was **different in point of time**. Christ arose on **the third day**; but the resurrection of the others is put off until the end of the world. The reason for this is that the resurrection and death and nativity of Christ were "for our salvation" [Nicene Creed], and thus He wished to rise again at a time when it would be of profit to us. Now, if He had risen immediately, it would not have been believed that He died; and similarly, if He had put it off until much later, the disciples would not have remained in their belief, and there would have been no benefit from His Passion. He arose again, therefore, on the third day, so that it would be believed that He died, and His disciples would not lose faith in him.

Instructions

From all this we can take four things for our instruction. **Firstly**, let us endeavor to **arise spiritually**, from the death of the soul which we incur by our sins, to that life of justice which is had through penance: "Rise, you who sleep, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall enlighten you" [Eph 5:14]. **This is the first resurrection**: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection" [Rev 20:6].

Secondly, let us **not delay to rise until our death**, but do it at once, since Christ arose on the third day: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord; and defer it not from day to day" [Sir 5:8]. You will not be able to consider what pertains to salvation when weighed down by illness, and, moreover, by persevering in sin, you will lose part of all the good which is done in the Church, and you will incur many evils. Indeed, the longer you possess the devil, the harder it is to put him away, as St. Bede tells us.

Thirdly, let us rise up again **to an incorruptible life** in that we may not die again, but resolve to sin no more: "Knowing that Christ, rising again from the dead, dies now no more. Death shall no more have dominion over Him.... So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin; but present yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead" [Rom 6:9,11-14].

The **second** reason is that He might perfectly deliver all His friends. Christ had His friends both in the world and in the underworld. The former were His friends in that they possessed charity; and the latter were they who departed this life with charity and faith in the future Redeemer, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and other just and good men. Therefore, since Christ had dwelt among His friends in this world and had delivered them by His death, so He wished to visit His friends who were detained in the underworld and deliver them also: "I will penetrate all the lower parts of the earth, and will behold all that hope in the Lord" [Sir 24:45].

The **third** reason is that He would completely triumph over the devil. Now, a person is perfectly vanquished when he is not only overcome in conflict, but also when the assault is carried into his very home, and the seat of his kingdom is taken away from him. Thus Christ triumphed over the devil, and on the Cross He completely vanquished him: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world (that is, the devil) be cast out" [Jn 12:31]. To make this triumph complete, Christ wished to deprive the devil of the seat of his kingdom and to imprison him in his own house—which is the underworld. Christ, therefore, descended there, and despoiled the devil of everything and bound him, taking away his prey: "And despoiling the principalities and powers, He hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in Himself" [Col 2:15]. Likewise, Christ who had received the power and possession of heaven and earth, desired too the possession of the underworld, as says the Apostle: "That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth" [Phil 2:10]. "In My name they shall cast out devils" [Mk 16:17].

The **fourth and final reason** is that Christ might free the just who were in the underworld. For as Christ wished to suffer death to deliver the living from death, so also He would descend into the underworld to deliver those who were there: "You also by the blood of your testament, sent forth your prisoners out of the pit where there is no water" [Zech 9:11]. And again: "O death, I will be your death; O hell, I will be your bite" [Hosea 13:14]. Although Christ wholly overcame death, yet not so completely did He destroy the underworld, but, as it were, He bit it. He did not free all from the underworld, but those only who were without mortal sin. He likewise liberated those without original sin, from which they, as individuals, were freed by circumcision; or before [the institution of]. circumcision, they who had been saved through their parents' faith (which refers to those who died before having the use of reason); or by the sacrifices, and by their faith in the future coming of Christ (which refers to adults)". The reason they were there in the underworld is original sin which they had contracted from Adam, and from which as members of the human race they could not be delivered except by Christ. Therefore, Christ left there those who had descended there with mortal sin, and the non-circumcised children. Thus, it

is seen that Christ descended into the underworld, and for what reasons. Now we may gather four considerations from this for our own instruction.

Considerations

(1) A firm hope in God. No matter how much one is afflicted, one ought always hope in the assistance of God and have trust in Him. There is nothing so serious as to be in the underworld. If, therefore, Christ delivered those who were in the underworld, what great confidence ought every friend of God have that he will be delivered from all his troubles! “She [that is, wisdom] did not forsake the just when he was sold, but delivered him from sinners. She went down with him into the pit. And in bonds she did not leave him” [Wis 10:13]. God helps in a special manner those who serve Him, and hence the servant of God should feel secure in Him: “He who fears the Lord shall tremble at nothing and shall not be afraid; for He is his hope” [Sir 34:16].

(2) We ought to **conceive a fear of God and avoid all presumption.** We have already seen that Christ suffered for sinners and descended into the underworld for them. However, **He did not deliver all sinners**, but only those who were free from mortal sin. He left there those who departed this life in mortal sin. Hence, anyone who descends into hell in mortal sin has no hope of deliverance; and he will remain in hell as long as the holy fathers remain in paradise, that is, for all eternity: “And these shall go into everlasting punishment; but the just, into life everlasting” [Mt 25:46].

(3) We ought to **arouse in ourselves a mental anxiety.** Since Christ descended into the underworld for our salvation, we ought in all care go down there in spirit by considering, for instance, its punishments as did that holy man, Hezekiah: “I said: In the midst of my days I shall go to the gates of the underworld” [Is 38:10]. **Indeed, he who during this life frequently descends into hell by thinking of it, will not easily fall into hell at death; for such meditation keeps one from sin, and draws one out of it.** We see how men of this world guard themselves against wrongdoing because of the temporal punishment; but with how much more care ought they avoid the punishment of hell which far exceeds all else in its duration, its severity, and its varied nature! “In all your works remember your last end, and you shall never sin” [Sir 7:40].

(4) There comes to us in this **an example of love.** Christ descended into the underworld in order to deliver His own; and so we should go down there to rescue our own. **They cannot help themselves.** Therefore, let us deliver those who are in purgatory. He would be very hard-hearted who does not come to the aid of a relative who is detained in an earthly prison; but much more cruel is he who will not assist a friend who is in purgatory, for there is no comparison between the pains of this world and of that: “Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me” [Job 19:21]. “It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins” [2 Mac 12:46]. We may assist these souls in three ways as St. Augustine tells us, viz., through **Masses, prayers, and almsgiving.** St. Gregory adds a fourth, that is, **fasting.** All this is not so amazing, for even in this world a friend can pay a debt for his friend; but this applies only to those who are in purgatory.

We must necessarily know two things: **the glory of God and the punishment of hell.** For being attracted by His glory and made fearful by punishments, we take warning and withdraw ourselves from sin. But for us to appreciate these facts is very difficult. Thus, it is said of God’s glory: “But the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?” [Wis 9:16]. For those who are worldly minded this is indeed difficult, because “he that is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaks” [Jn 3:31]; but it is easier for the spiritually minded, because, “he who comes from above is above all,” as is said in the same place. Accordingly, God descended from heaven and became incarnate to teach us heavenly things. Once it was difficult to know about the punishments of the underworld: “no one has been known to have returned from the underworld” [Wis 2:1], as it is said in the person of the wicked. But this cannot be said now, for just as Christ descended from heaven to teach us heavenly things, so also He came back from the region of the underworld to teach us about it. **It is, therefore, necessary that we believe not only that Christ was made man, and died, but also that He arose again from the dead. Therefore, it is said in the Creed: “The third day He arose again from the dead.”**

Uniqueness of Christ’s resurrection

We find that many arose from the dead, such as Lazarus [Jn 11:1-44], the son of the widow [Lk 7:11-16], and the daughter of the Ruler of the synagogue [Mk 5:35-43]. But the resurrection of Christ differed from the resurrection of these and of all others in four points.

(1) Christ’s resurrection differed from that of all others **in its cause.** Those others who arose did so not of their own power, but either by the power of Christ or through the prayers of some Saint. Christ, on the contrary, arose **by His own power**, because He was not only Man but also God, and the Divinity of the Word was at no time separated either from His soul or from His body. Therefore, His body could, whenever He desired, take again the soul, and His soul the body: “I lay down My life, that I may take it again.... And I have power to lay it down; and I have power to take it up again” [Jn 10:18]. Christ truly died, but not because of weakness or of necessity but rather of His own will entirely and by His own power. This is seen in that moment when He yielded up the Spirit; He cried out with a loud voice [Mt 27:50], which could not be true of others at the moment of dying, because they die out of weakness... For this the centurion said: “Indeed, this was the Son of God” [Mt 27:54]. By that same power whereby He gave up His soul, He received it again; and hence the Creed says, **“He arose again,”** because He was not raised up as if by anyone else. “I have slept and have taken My rest; and I have risen up” [Ps 3:6]. Nor can this be contrary to these words, “This Jesus God raised again” [Acts 2:32], **because both the Father and the Son raised Him up, since one and the same power is of the Father and the Son.**