

THE APOSTLES' CREED.

Art 5: He descended into hell ...

1. These words mean that when Jesus died, His blessed soul went down into hell, where it remained until the Resurrection, and that *His Person*, the Second Person of the Trinity, was, throughout that interval not only in hell, but also in the sepulchre, where His body lay. In this there is nothing to excite surprise, for, although His soul was separated from His body, nevertheless His divinity was inseparable from either.

2. Under the general designation of « hell » are included the several dark and hidden places where all those spirits to whom heaven is closed (temporarily, or for all eternity), are detained. There are three such places entirely distinct from one another.

3. The first of these, to which alone the word « hell » strictly applies and which is referred to in the Bible also under other names such as « *Gehenna, Hades* and the *Abyss*, is like a dark and frightful prison wherein the damned, be they demons or men, suffer the ceaseless torment of unquenchable fire.

4. A second one of such places is *the limbo of infants*, where the unbaptized who die without personal mortal sin are confined and undergo some kind of punishment.

5. The third place is *Purgatory*, where the just, who die in venial sin or who still owe a debt of temporal punishment for personal sin, are cleansed by fire before admission into heaven, « which nothing defiled may enter. » (*Apoc. XXI, 27.*)

6. Up to the time of Christ's Ascension there was a fourth such place, the *Limbo of the Fathers*, in which the souls of the just who died before Christ awaited peacefully and painlessly the hour of their redemption, for in the meantime heaven was closed against them as a punishment for Adam's sin. It was among these souls, resting on Abraham's bosom and expectant of the coming of the Saviour, that Christ descended. This part of Hell was distinct from that of the damned is clear from *I Pet. III, 18-20*,

which says that after death Christ « *preached to those spirits which were in prison* », *waiting « some time for the patience of God.* »

7. We are not however to imagine that Jesus descended into this place only because He was the expected Saviour; we must firmly believe that He went there just as did all those who had preceded Him, to remain there until heaven was again open, for the Psalmist makes Him say, praying to the Father; - « *Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell.* » (Ps. xv, 10.)

8. But this descent of Christ into hell did not in any sense, derogate from His power and majesty, nor did the darkness of those regions in any way dim the lustre of His glory. On the contrary, by it He confirmed all that had been proclaimed regarding His infinite holiness, and, over and above this, showed that He was truly the Son of God, a fact He had already proved on earth by the numerous prodigies and miracles He wrought.

9. This becomes at once apparent the moment we consider the respective reasons why Christ, on the one hand, and the rest, on the other, were in Limbo. These latter were there as captives with no power in themselves to gain their freedom, whereas He was there as the only One « free among the dead » (Ps. lxxxvii, 6.) and as a conqueror utterly, to rout the powers of darkness, whose close prisoners they all were owing to Adam's sin.

10. He descended into hell not only to snatch from Satan the demon's hard-won spoils by delivering from captivity the Fathers and other Jews, but, as it were, to carry them off at once in triumph into heaven. For His mere presence illumined every recess of their dark prison, filled their hearts with an inconceivable joy and made them partakers of that sovereign beatitude which consists in the vision of God. For the time being hell became a heaven. Thus, the promise made by Our Lord to the penitent thief: « *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.* ' (Luke xxiii, 43.) was fulfilled to the letter.

Explanation of the Plate.

11. The picture represents the blessed soul of Jesus Christ appearing among the captive souls in Limbo. In the foreground we see Adam and

Eve on their knees. On their left are Abraham holding a knife with Isaac kneeling at his side, Jacob leaning on his staff, David with his harp, and so on. On the right are Moses with the two horns of light issuing from his forehead, Aaron staff of office in hand, St. Joseph holding a lily, and so on.

12. As said before, Our Lord remained with them until His Resurrection.

13. Underneath them is represented the real hell. where the damned, demons and men, are burning in « unquenchable fire ». (*Matt.* III, 12). It was neither here nor into Purgatory that Christ descended. Nevertheless, He made His presence felt - in hell, by compelling its inmates to acknowledge His divinity; in purgatory, by inspiring the souls there with the hope and expectation of ultimate glory.
