

He descended into hell, on the third day He rose again from the dead.

These words, he descended into hell, signify that after the death of the Saviour His soul, united to His divinity, descended into that part of hell which is called Limbo, a sojourn wholly distinct from the hell of the damned and the prison of purgatory. It was in this place that the souls of the just of the old law were detained, waiting the day when the Redeemer would open for them the gates of heaven.

That day finally dawned, and Jesus Christ, having accomplished the work of the Redemption on the Cross, wished that He Himself should announce the glad tidings to that nation of saints who sighed for His coming. This is why, freed from its body, and presently resplendent with glory and beatitude, the soul of our Saviour descended into Limbo, and manifested itself to the saints in the brilliancy of its beauty and the ineffable splendour of its divine nature. At His appearance all these souls were transported with the joy of the blessed, since they beheld face to face their Saviour and their God.

On His part the Saviour regarded with an incomparable love the cherished souls of all His servants, from Adam to Joseph, His foster-father, ay, even to the good thief whom He pardoned on the Cross. He announced to them that the gates of heaven were now open, and that He came to lead them thither; but that first He must rise from the dead. These holy souls, who would have wished to entertain forever their divine Guest, seeing that He was to leave them to accomplish His resurrection, must undoubtedly have been glad to accompany Him, and to form for Him a guard of honour to the place of His burial.

Entering with the soul of Jesus the sombre tomb, the resting-place of His body, they must have beheld with untold grief that divine flesh, immolated for their salvation, stretched on the stone where it had been laid, when suddenly the glorious soul of the Saviour, renewing the mysterious link which death had broken, unites itself anew to that body and revivifies it with an entirely new life.

In what has just been said, there are three points which merit particular attention:

1. Before the coming of Jesus Christ heaven was closed even to the most holy souls; so, also, would it have continued for us had it not been for the death of the Redeemer.

2. The soul of Jesus Christ, separated from His body, was united to the Divinity; that is to say, it was, as it will eternally be, the soul of God the Son, the second divine Person, who, having taken to Himself a soul and a human body, will never part with them. On the death of the Saviour this body and soul were separated one from the other, but not from His divine person.

3. His soul, on its departure from His body, was at once the participant of the state of glory and beatitude, being emancipated from all its anguish, adorned with an incomparable beauty and all its virtues as with so many precious stones, which shone with an inconceivable brilliancy in the eyes of God and the angels.

And our soul, my brethren, at the moment of death what will be its state? It all depends on the care we now take to purify it of every defilement, and to share the Cross of Jesus Christ.