

## **Fifth Article of the Creed**

### **What does “He descended into hell” mean?**

*It means that the soul of Jesus Christ, after his death, went into Limbo, where the souls of the saints who died before Christ were detained.*

The Scripture points out to us three places in the bowels of the earth, which go by the general name of hell: 1. The place of the damned, which is called Gehenna, and the abyss or bottomless pit, and hell-fire. This is hell, properly so called, as being the deepest of all, and at the greatest distance from heaven. 2. The prison of purgatory, where those who have died in venial sin, or who have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to mortal sin, are detained until they are cleansed and purified from every stain and imperfection, and have fully satisfied for what they owe to the divine justice, by “paying the last farthing.” It is in this sense that the word hell is to be understood, when, in the Mass for the dead, the Church prays to God to deliver the souls of the faithful from the pains of hell. 3. The prison of limbo, where the souls of the patriarchs and prophets, and of all the just, who died before the coming of Christ, were detained, awaiting the coming of the Redeemer. Into this last place, “limbo,” it was that the soul of Christ descended at his death. Limbo is, too, called paradise; for it was of limbo that Jesus Christ spoke, when he said to the good thief: “This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

In limbo were the souls of our first parents, Adam and Eve; there were the souls of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of all the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, who had often preached to many of the Jews, and tried every means to convert them to God, but all to no purpose. In limbo were, too, all the good and holy souls who died before Christ. Among the Jews who died in favor with God, St. Joseph, the guardian of our Lord, and spouse of the Blessed Virgin, was there. He had, a few years before, died peacefully in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Jesus Christ, then, descended into limbo, to preach the gospel to those holy souls who were there detained. He announced to them the happy tidings of their redemption. “He (Christ) was put to death indeed in the flesh,” says St. Peter, “but enlivened in the spirit; in which also coming, he preached to those spirits that were in prison” (1 Pet. iii, 18, 19); that is, he explained to them all that he had done for mankind in order to redeem them. Those holy souls were overjoyed when they learned that they were soon to ascend with our Lord to the glorious dwelling of heaven.

### **Why could not those saints go to heaven immediately after death?**

*Because heaven was shut against them on account of the sin of our first parents, and could not be opened to anyone except by the death, of Christ.*

The souls of all the just who died before the coming of Christ, could not go immediately to heaven after their death; for, on account of the sin of Adam and Eve, heaven was closed against them and all their posterity, and could only be opened by the death of Christ. That the patriarchs and prophets, and all the just souls of the Old Law, should enter heaven, it was first necessary that the blood of Jesus Christ should blot out the handwriting of sin and death recorded against them, on account of our first parents’ transgression it was necessary that he, as our precursor, should first enter, and with his cross burst open the brazen gates which sin had closed, and reestablish that happy intercourse between God and man

which had been interrupted for so many years. (Do you see any symbolism here from the Palm procession on Palm Sunday?)

### **When did those souls go to heaven?**

*When Christ ascended into heaven.*

The souls of the saints who died before Christ did not leave limbo immediately after the visit of our Lord to them. Their sojourn in that place was prolonged until the day of Christ's ascension into heaven; and that event did not take place until the fortieth day after his resurrection, and consequently the forty-third day after his descent into the prison of limbo. On Ascension-day, when he mounted up to heaven, all the holy souls in limbo were set free; all the ancient holy patriarchs, prophets, and other saints, against whom until then the gates of heaven had been shut, were then carried up in triumph by their Redeemer: "He hath led captivity captive." They were formerly captives of the devil and sin: Christ, having powerfully rescued them from their tyranny, leads them to heaven as the trophies of his victory, as the rich spoils taken by him, as the proofs of the overthrow of the enemy, as the price of his adorable blood, and as the ornament and glory of his triumph. In company with him they pierced the highest heavens, and were placed on bright, glorious seats in his Father's kingdom, where they shall reign with him for ever and ever.

### **When the body and the soul of Christ were separated, were they also separated from his divinity?**

*No; the divine person always remained inseparably united with his body and with his soul.*

Death separated the soul from Christ's body; but it did not separate the divinity of Christ either from his soul or from his body. From the very first moment of Christ's life on earth, his divinity has never been separated from his body or soul, but always continued united to both. During the whole time that the body of Christ was hanging on the cross, and whilst it remained in the grave, his divinity was united to it; so that his body then, equally as when united to his soul, was the body of the Son of God, and, as such, entitled to our respect and adoration.

It is not, then, our belief that the body of Christ alone was buried. His Godhead, too, was buried. According to the rule of Catholic faith, we say, with the strictest truth, that God was born of a virgin, that God died. Now, as his divinity was never separated from his body, which was laid in the sepulcher, we truly confess that God was buried.

### **What does "The third day he rose again from the dead" mean?**

*It means that, on the third day after His death, Christ reunited, by his own power, his soul to his body, and rose from the grave.*

When Jesus was laid in the grave, the Scribes and Pharisees, pretending that there was a design on the part of Christ's disciples to steal away his body, and then to spread a report of his being risen from the dead, came to Pilate, and desired him to order a guard of soldiers over the sepulcher. Meanwhile, the soul of our divine Savior remained in limbo until Sunday morning. A great number of the angels kept guard over the holy sepulcher. Some gathered the drops of divine blood, and the pieces of sacred flesh torn by the blows, as also everything that related to the integrity of the most holy humanity. The angels most reverently replaced the sacred relics which they had gathered. The body of Christ was, in no degree, corrupted in the sepulcher, according to the prediction of the prophet: "Thou shalt not give thy

Holy One to see corruption.” (Ps. xv, 10; Acts ii, 31.) Now, while Jesus was yet alive, he had, on different occasions, openly declared that he would raise his body to life again the third day: “I lay down my life,” he said to his disciples, “that I may take it again.” (John x, 17.) And again: “The Son of man shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon. And after they have scourged him, they will put him to death, and the third day he shall rise again” (Luke xviii, 32, 33.) And on another occasion, when the Jews asked him for a sign of his divine mission, he had said: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” In these mysterious words he alluded to his future resurrection, though the Jews, and even his own disciples, thought at the time that he spoke of the Jewish temple or church, in which the solemn sacrifices were offered: “But he spoke,” as the Holy Scripture adds, “of the temple of his body.” (John ii, 19, 21.)

The time was now come when our blessed Lord was to accomplish these prophecies. Our dear Savior reunited his soul to the divine body, communicated to it life immortal and glorious, and arose from the tomb, leaving the seal which closed up the mouth of the tomb untouched. At the same time an angel descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone and sat upon it: “His countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow; and for fear of him the guard were struck with terror, and became as dead men.”

### **Did Christ still retain in His glorified body the marks of his sufferings?**

*He still retained, in His hands, feet, and side, the marks of His wounds: 1, in testimony of his victory over hell; 2, as a proof that he rose in the very same body in which he suffered; 3, to show them on the day of judgment for the consolation of the just; and for the confusion of the wicked.*

In the time of His passion, our divine Savior had lost the four principal privileges that man may possess. His executioners deprived Him of His clothes, leaving Him in extreme poverty; they deprived Him of all honor, by loading Him with the most outrageous contempt; they deprived Him of His health, by inflicting upon Him the most frightful torments; they deprived him of his most precious life, by inflicting on him a most cruel death. But, in arising from the tomb, he regained all these privileges, added to and multiplied beyond measure. He who before was poor and indigent became the Lord of the universe. He who, but three days before, was a “worm of the earth, the opprobrium of men, the outcast of the people,” is now crowned with glory and honor, and seated at the right hand of the Most High. He who was before “a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity, in whom there was no sound part, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot,” (Isaias) recovered his vigor, becoming victorious over hell and sin. He changes His weakness into power and strength, and the ignominy of His passion into honor and glory. His body thenceforth shines resplendent for all eternity, endowed with the four qualities of glorified bodies: that is to say, His body is exempt from pain, sickness and death forever: “Death shall have no more dominion over him” (1 Cor. xv ; 42) j it is; like a spirit, enabled to penetrate all material objects, and to be un-arrested by material obstacles; it is endowed with agility. By virtue of this power, the risen Savior traversed space with the rapidity of thought, and was in a moment where he willed to be. His body was also endowed with the gift of brightness. As a result of this property, the body of the risen Savior shone forth with greater brightness and splendor than the sun, each separate part of it resembling a sun in its dazzling brilliancy. He has overthrown in the Red Sea of His blood “the horse and the rider:” that is, the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Christ, moreover, willed to preserve in his body the marks of his wounds. This we know from the Gospel, which tells us that, after His resurrection, Christ appeared to His apostles and showed them the marks of

His wounds, and asked, especially, the Apostle St. Thomas to look at His hands, and put His hand into His side, and then told Him not to be incredulous but faithful, after having seen Him and the marks of His sufferings. Now, Christ willed to preserve the marks of His wounds, in order that the cause of the glorification of his body should not be obscured by the brightness of its glory; thus affirming forever that he rose in the same body in which he suffered, and won His glory and the victory over death and hell by the sufferings and death of that same body.

Another reason why our blessed Savior preserved the prints of His wounds in His glorified body is, that they might serve as a token and memorial of the love He bears us, which constrained Him to suffer and die for us. These wounds ever recall to Him the price of our redemption, and move Him to love us continually for whom He has paid so high a price. Finally, our risen Savior wished to preserve the marks of His wounds, in order that He might one day show them to the damned, and upbraid them for their cruelty and ingratitude in rejecting His love, and crucifying Him afresh by their sins. It is also for the sake of His elect that Jesus preserves His wounds, in order that they may forever rejoice over the unspeakable love which beams forth from them. If we do not follow the great multitude of the enemies of Jesus, but are found amongst the small number of his disciples, then we may confidently hope that His sacred wounds will be to us an inexhaustible fountain of joy.

#### **How do we know that Christ rose from the dead?**

*From the testimony of the apostles and His disciples, who, during forty days, often saw Him, touched Him, ate and conversed with Him; and St. Paul tells us that our risen Savior "was seen by more than five hundred at once" (1 Cor. xv, 6.)*

Christ did not remain in the grave during three whole days, but, as He lay in the sepulcher during one whole natural day, during part of the preceding day and part of the following, He is said, with the strictest truth, to have lain in the grave for three days, and on the third day to have risen again from the dead. To declare His divinity, He deferred not His resurrection to the end of the world; whilst at the same time, to prove His humanity, and the reality of His death, He rose not immediately, but on the third day after His death, a space of time sufficient to prove that He had really died.

The fathers of the first Council of Constantinople added here the words, "according to the Scriptures," which they received from apostolical tradition, and embodied with the Creed, because the same apostle teaches the absolute necessity of the mystery of the resurrection, when he says: "If Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain, for you are yet in your sins." (1 Cor. xv, 14, 17.) Hence St. Augustine, admiring our belief of this article, says: "It is of little moment to believe that Christ died: this, the pagans, Jews, and all the wicked believe; in a word, all believe that Christ died: but that He rose from the dead, is the belief of Christians; to believe that He rose again, this we deem of great moment." (In Ps. cxx, 4.) Hence it is that our Lord very often spoke to His disciples of His resurrection; and seldom or never of His passion without adverting to His resurrection. Thus, when He said, "The Son of man shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged and spit upon; and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death," he added: "And the third day He shall rise again." (Luke xviii, 32, 33.)

Now, that Christ arose from the dead by his own divine power, is a fact of which not the slightest doubt can be entertained. The evidence of those who often saw Him and spoke with Him after His resurrection

who ate with Him and touched His wounds, performed miracles in the name of the risen Savior, and then sealed the truth of their testimony with their blood, clearly proves that Jesus arose from the dead.

The evidence of the apostles as to the resurrection of Christ, their Master, is undoubted; for the nature of their depositions rejects the notion of their being deceived respecting the fact. If Jesus Christ had appeared but once or twice to two or three of his disciples, and then had only spoken to them a few passing words, there might be some reason to infer that they were deceived as to the presence of their Master; but He appeared often and often to them, He appeared to all the apostles, and to more than five hundred disciples at the same time, and during these repeated apparitions had lengthened conversations with them. The Gospel tells us that he appeared first to Magdalen, to recompense her faith and love for him; then to the pious women who came to embalm his body; after this to St. Peter, chief of the apostles; to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus; and to the eleven apostles who were assembled in a room, the doors being shut. He showed them the wounds in His hands, feet, and side; He ate and drank with them; He explained the Scriptures to them; He unfolded to them the great truths which they were to preach to the nations; He conferred on them great powers, among which was that of loosing and retaining sin. He instructed them; He consoled and encouraged them; He foretold the persecutions that they were to meet with, and traced out for them the line of conduct which they were to pursue. All these different interviews, and all these many and varied discourses, are so many palpable proofs for the truth of Christ's resurrection. So many details, and so connected and circumstantial an account, place beyond all doubt the evidence of those who depose to all these facts.

What adds the greatest weight to their evidence is their slowness of belief: and for this they were often reproached by Jesus Christ, both during His life and after His resurrection. When, a short time before His death, He foretold to them, for the third time, that He would rise again from the dead, so faint was the idea they had of it, that they scarcely understood what He said. It was to them, according to St. Luke, a riddle which they could not unravel. When, on the very morning of Christ's resurrection, the holy women related to them what they had seen, so far from believing their narration, they considered it as the result of a disordered imagination; and when, at last, they themselves beheld Him for the first time, they thought they saw a ghost. "foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken!" said our Lord to the disciples going to Emmaus. "Except I shall see in his hands," said St. Thomas, "the print of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John xx, 25.) Now, men, with minds so disposed, could be convinced of the truth of Christ's resurrection only by the clearest proofs. And Christ did not fail so to convince them. Witness St. Thomas. His incredulity was inexcusable. He neither believed the prediction of his divine Master, nor the testimony of St. Peter, who had seen our Lord after His resurrection. His presumption was extreme: for He preferred His own judgment to that of all the apostles, whom He accused of simplicity. He is ungrateful to His Lord and Master for the graces he had received, and the dignity to which he had been elevated. He has the temerity to prescribe laws to his Sovereign and his God; and were he not wanting in reverence and respect, the very thought of putting his hands in the sacred wounds of our Savior would cause him to tremble with awe. Nevertheless, Jesus, with inconceivable meekness, bears with the infidelity of His disciple, and prepares a sovereign remedy for his incredulity and the fortifying of our faith. In His unparalleled charity, our divine Savior seeks out the faithless one. "He enters, the doors being shut:" His custom is to knock at the door of the heart and await its opening. "I stand at the door and knock: if any man open to me, I will enter. But here he performs a miracle. "He enters, the doors being shut." To heal the incredulity of his disciple, he displays an act of that

omnipotence which all creatures unresistingly obey. He shows him his wounds. "Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into My side." St. Thomas knew not that his Lord and his God was present when he said: "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now he discovers that nothing can be concealed from the infinite wisdom of his Master, who, with a charity commensurate with that wisdom, sweetly invites the disciple to touch those sacred wounds, whence issues the light of faith to illuminate, as had previously rushed the blood to redeem, the human race. The charity of the apostle is rekindled on touching the sacred wounds of his divine Master, who saved him from the dangers of the abyss into which he had fallen, by showing His hands and His side, the view of which raised him up, even to that admirable confession of the Divinity, "My Lord and my God!"

O what joy to this apostle! With what ardent gratitude is his soul replenished in return for so singular a grace! Happy saint! how great the favor to put your hand into that heart of mercy, that side, the source of salvation, in which we are saved from the wrath of God, find healing for all our spiritual maladies, are engendered to grace, and elevated to eternal glory.

How touching is this conduct of our risen Savior towards Thomas! He concedes to him all that He had required in order to believe. He speaks kindly to him, as if He would say: "I know all that thou hast said during My absence, all that thou hast required: come, see and feel My hands and My side, and believe." Thus lovingly does Jesus convince Him and the other apostles of His resurrection.

#### **What should we learn from the resurrection of Christ?**

*1, That Christ is true God ; 2, that we, too, shall one day rise from the dead.*

1. From the resurrection of Christ we should learn that He is God. By the word resurrection we are not merely to understand that Christ was raised from the dead a privilege common to many others with Him; but that He rose by His own power and virtue, a prerogative peculiar to Him alone: for it is incompatible with our nature, nor was it ever given to man to raise himself, by His own power, from death to life. This was an exercise of power reserved for the all-powerful hand of God, as these words of the apostle declare: "For, although he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God." (2 Cor. xiii, 4.) This divine power was never separated either from His body whilst in the grave, or from his soul whilst disunited from his body; it existed in both, and gave to both a capability of reuniting: and thus did the Son of God, by His own power, return to life, and rise again from the dead. This we have from the divine lips of our Savior Himself. "I lay down my life," says He, "that I may take it again; and I have power to lay it down, and power to take it again." (John x, 17, 18.) Christ, then, having raised himself from the dead, has proved himself God. He is indeed what He has declared Himself, the only Son of God, equal to His Father. He is arisen: His religion, then, is founded on a firm base, against which the storms of ages rage in vain against which the efforts of hell are directed to no purpose, except to prove its perpetual duration. Christ has arisen: his witnesses, then, must be believed, and the truths they taught must be received. The prophecies which foretold the resurrection, with all the other truths contained in the inspired writings, must be admitted as true; and all these being acknowledged, Christianity is undoubtedly the religion of God.
2. From the resurrection of Christ, we shall also learn that we, too, shall one day rise from the dead. As it was the peculiar privilege of Christ to raise Himself from the dead, so, in like manner, it is the peculiar privilege of Christ to be the first who enjoyed this divine prerogative of rising

from the dead: for He is called in Scripture, "The first-begotten of the dead" (Apoc. 1, 5) ; and also: "The first-born from the dead" (Col. 1, 18). The apostle also says: "Christ is risen from the dead, the first-fruits of them that sleep: for, by a man, came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also, in Christ all shall be made alive. But everyone in his own order: the first-fruits, Christ then they that are of Christ, who have believed in his coming." (1 Cor. xv, 20-23.) These words of the apostle are to be understood of a perfect resurrection, by which we are resuscitated to eternal life, being no longer subject to death. In this resurrection Christ holds the first place: for, if we speak of resurrection, that is, of a return to life, subject to the necessity of dying again, many were thus raised from the dead before Christ (3 Kings xvii, 22 ; 4 Kings iv, 34) ; all of whom, however, were restored to life, to die again. But Christ the Lord, having conquered death, rose again to die no more, according to this clear testimony of the apostle: "Christ, rising again from the dead, dieth now no more: death shall no longer have dominion over Him. (Rom. vi, 9.)

From what has been said, we can perceive the important advantages which the resurrection of our Lord has conferred on the faithful. In his resurrection we acknowledge him to be the immortal God, full of glory, the conqueror of death and hell: and this we are firmly to believe and openly to profess of Jesus Christ.

Again, the resurrection of Christ brings about our resurrection, not only as its efficient cause, but also as its model. Thus, with regard to the resurrection of the body, we have this testimony of the apostle: "By a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead." (1 Cor. xv, 21.) To accomplish the mystery of our redemption in all its parts, God made use of the humanity of Christ as its efficient instrument; and hence, His resurrection is the efficient cause of ours. It is also the model. His resurrection was the most perfect of all; and as His body, rising to immortal glory, was changed, so shall our bodies also, before frail and mortal, be restored and clothed with glory and immortality; or, to use the language of the apostle: "We look for the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of His glory." (Phil, iii, 20, 21.)

## THE SIXTH ARTICLE

### What is the sixth article of the Creed?

*"He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."*

Jesus Christ is the first-born of the Father; the first born amongst the dead; the first-born of those risen from the tomb. He has accomplished the will of His Father in all things, announced the Gospel, fulfilled the prophecies, paid the ransom for mankind, delivered the captive souls from limbo, instituted the sacraments as fountains of grace to flow forth to the utmost ends of the earth, atoned for the sins of the world, triumphed over death, broke the gates of hell, vanquished Satan and stripped him of his power over mankind, confounded the Jews, was victorious over his enemies, and arose to a life of infinite glory. He shall, therefore, be the first who shall enter into heaven. "I ascend," he says, "to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God." (John xx, 17.) He humbled himself; He was obedient to death; He offered Himself upon the cross; but when He ascended into heaven, His humility and obedience were crowned with a diadem of immortal glory and exalted to the throne of the Godhead.

### What means, "He ascended into heaven"?

*It means that Christ, by His own power, with soul and body, ascended into heaven.*

Christ ascended into heaven by his own power, and not by the power of another, as did Elias, who was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot (4 Kings ii, 11) or as the Prophet Habacuc (Dan. xiv, 35), or Philip the Deacon, who were borne through the air by the divine power, and traversed the distant regions of the earth (Acts viii, 39). Neither did Christ ascend into heaven solely by the exercise of His supreme power as God, but he also ascended by virtue of the power which He possessed as man. Although human power alone was insufficient to raise him from the dead, yet the virtue with which the blessed soul of Christ was endowed, was capable of moving the body as it pleased; and His body, now glorified, readily obeyed the soul. Hence we believe that Christ ascended into heaven, as God and man, by His own power.

### **Did Christ ascend into heaven immediately after rising from the dead?**

*No, He still remained on earth for forty days, to teach his apostles, and to show that he was truly risen from the dead.*

After Christ was risen from the dead, he remained on earth forty days. During that time He often appeared to His apostles, and instructed them in the duties which they were to perform when he should leave them, telling them, at one time, that whatever they should bind or loose on earth, he would bind or loose in heaven ; at another time, he commissioned them to “go and teach all nations,” saying that he should be with them” all days, even to the consummation of the world.” He opened their eyes that they might understand the Scriptures, and promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, who should teach them all truth. Our blessed Savior having thus laid the foundations of His Church on a strong basis, and having commanded His apostles and their successors to govern it, was then pleased to remove Himself from this world, and to take possession of that glory and happiness which was due to His victory over sin and death.

During the forty days He remained on earth, He did not live with his apostles in the world as He had done before his death; and the reasons were, that he might conceal himself from the Jews and the impious who were unworthy of His presence; that He might show the difference between His mortal and glorious life, and also that He might make His resurrection a model for our spiritual resurrection from sin, by pointing out that, when we arise from the grave of sin, we must truly, as He did, shun this world, and live for a better.

### **When did Christ ascend into heaven?**

*Forty days after his resurrection Christ ascended into heaven, from Mount Olivet, in presence of his disciples.*

It is related, by the holy fathers, that our blessed Lord left imprinted on Mount Olivet, on the spot from which he ascended into heaven, the traces of His sacred footsteps. St. Augustine, who lived about four hundred years after Christ, declares that they were there in His day; and St. Paulinus adds that the spot could never be covered with any pavement, though this had often been attempted, and that no violence had ever been able to efface them. These precious relics of our blessed Redeemer have in all ages been visited by the faithful with the greatest veneration. St. Bernardine of Sienna tells of a gentleman, well known for his fervor and piety, who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He longed to visit every spot that had received the impress of our Lord’s sufferings; and, after going to confession and making his



communion with great devotion, he set out on his travels. He first stopped at Nazareth, where the great mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished. He then proceeded to Bethlehem, to kneel at the spot in which our Lord first deigned to visit this earth as a suffering Infant. He walked by the banks of the Jordan, the scene of our Lord's baptism, and went to the desert which had witnessed that wonderful forty days fast; to the mountain where Jesus was transfigured; to the house at Jerusalem consecrated by the institution of the Holy Eucharist; to the Garden of Olives; to the Praetorium, and to Calvary, where the awful sacrifice was consummated. He visited the scene of our Lord's burial and resurrection, and finally ascended Mount Olivet, fondly recalling the blessing which Christ gave to the apostles before His ascension. After visiting every place which was in any way connected with our Lord's life and death, with a heart glowing with love, he exclaimed: "Jesus, Jesus, my much-loved Savior! since I can no longer follow thy footsteps on earth, call me to thyself in heaven. And his prayer was immediately heard; for it was no sooner uttered than he expired. The intensity of His love for Jesus had broken his heart; and after death these words were found engraven on his breast: "Jesus, my love."

### **What means, "Sitteth at the right hand of God"?**

*It means that Christ, even as man, is exalted above all created beings, and shares in the power and glory of the divine majesty.*

"And the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God." (Mark xvi, 19.) These words, "Sitteth at the right hand of God; are not to be taken in their literal meaning, because God the Father has no hands; they are a figure to express the glory which Jesus Christ possesses in heaven. As, amongst men, he who sits at the right hand occupies the most honorable place, so, in like manner, to express the glory which Christ, as man, enjoys above all others, we confess that he sits at the right hand of his eternal Father. This, however, does not signify a position of the body, but declares the fixed and permanent possession of royal and supreme power and glory, which Christ received from the Father. In the Incarnation, His soul was united to a mortal and passible body; in the Resurrection, both soul and body were glorified; in the Ascension, the glory was perfected, being raised to the throne of the Divinity; as the apostle says: "Raising him up from the dead, and setting him on his right hand in the heavenly places, above all principality and power, and virtue and domination, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and he has subjected all things to his feet." (Eph. i, 20 22.) These words manifestly imply that this glory belongs to our Lord in so eminent a manner, that it is inconsistent with the nature of any other created being; and for this reason, in another place, the apostle asks: "To which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Heb. i, 13.) His being seated, moreover, marks the end of his labors and combats, the consummation of His work, and the stability of His everlasting kingdom.

### **Is Christ, then, not present in all places?**

*As God, He is everywhere; but, as God-man, He is only in heaven and in the holy Eucharist.*

Although Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, yet he has not altogether withdrawn his bodily presence from us. Jesus left his Father and came into the world, without quitting the bosom of his Father; and He went out of the world to return to his Father, without leaving the world. His love for the Father raised Him to heaven; His love for mankind keeps Him on earth. The one draws Him on high, the other makes Him stay here below. He has satisfied the one, by ascending into heaven; and the other, by remaining with us on earth in the blessed sacrament.

## **Why did Christ ascend into heaven? Why did Christ ascend into heaven ?**

*To take possession of His glory, as conqueror of death and hell; 2, to be our mediator and advocate; 3, to send the Holy Ghost to His disciples; 4, to open heaven, and prepare a place for His followers.*

1. Christ ascended into heaven to take possession of His glory as conqueror of death and hell. The Son of God came down from heaven to destroy the empire of the devil, and to be the conqueror of death. He vanquished Satan by his sufferings and death upon the cross; He became victorious over death by His glorious resurrection. Having gained these victories, nothing more remained to be done by Him except to return in triumph to heaven, to take possession, not only of the throne of His glory, and the kingdom which He had purchased at the price of his blood, but also to attend to whatever regards the salvation of His people. By ascending into heaven, He has shown us that His kingdom is not of this world, is not earthly, as the Jews expected, but is a spiritual and eternal kingdom.

2. Christ ascended into heaven to be our advocate. According to the Apostle St. Paul, Christ also ascended into heaven, "that he may appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb ix, 24), and discharge for us the office of advocate with the Father. "My little children," says St. John, "these things I write to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just, and He is the propitiation for our sins." (1 John ii, 1, 2.) Christ presents to His Father those wounds which He received for our redemption; through those wounds He supplicates the divine mercy in our behalf. Christ is also our advocate in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, in which He offers to Him all that He has done for Us. As our advocate, Jesus Christ offers to His Father our penances, good works, and prayers, which become acceptable through union with His merits. What a consolation for us to know that Jesus continues the great work of our redemption, by exercising the office of advocate in our favor; to know that, on the right hand of His Father, He is still our mediator, our redeemer, our high priest, our victim, our king, our judge, our physician, our loving friend, having our interests at heart, and desirous of nothing so much as that we should fill those seats which the rebellious angels have lost forever.

3. Christ ascended into heaven to send down the Holy Ghost to His disciples. Jesus Christ, before quitting this world to return to His Father, told His apostles and disciples of His intention of leaving them; and finding that this announcement filled them with bitter sorrow and grief, he consoles them by saying that, after His departure, He would not leave them orphans, but would send down the Holy Ghost to strengthen and comfort them. The wonderful effects that the Holy Spirit would produce on them, He also described. He promised them that this other Comforter would instruct them in all things, would teach them all truth, and would clothe them with strength from on high: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind whatsoever I shall have said to you. . . . But when the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall give testimony of Me: and you shall give testimony, because you are with Me from the beginning." (John xiv, 26 ; xv, 26, 27.) In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke thus relates Christ's promise of sending the Holy Ghost: "But you shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth." (Acts i, 8.) That promise Jesus Christ fulfilled after His ascension into heaven. He was not long in possession of His Father's throne, when the expected Comforter descended upon the apostles.

4. Christ ascended, that he might open heaven, and prepare a place for His followers. When Jesus ascended triumphantly to heaven, the holy angels, with great rejoicing, came forth to meet Him. They

welcomed Him as the conqueror of death and hell; as the good shepherd who had sought and found the wandering sheep; as the beneficent Father who has received back the lost son; as the Redeemer of mankind. The souls of the just whom He had delivered from limbo, accompany Him in rapturous ecstasy, singing the song of praise so dear to Jesus: "Thou art worthy, O Lord! to take the book, and open the seals thereof; because Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue, and people and nation." (Apoc. v, 9.) And the angels sing: "The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and benediction." And having come near to the gates of heaven, a voice is heard, saying: "Lift up your gates, O ye princes! and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates!" (Ps. xxiii, 7.) It was then that the gates of heaven were opened again for the first time since the fall of our first parents.

"And I," said Christ to His disciples, "dispose to you, as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom . . . that you may sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke xxii, 29, 30.) Jesus disposes absolutely of all things in heaven and on earth; He disposes of our life and death, of our fortune and honor, of all that concerns us: and these dispensations of His providence are intended to prepare us for our union with God in heaven. This He has predestined for us from eternity, and prepared from the beginning of the world, assigning to us the place forfeited by the rebel angels. For this He was born, for this He lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Wherefore, on entering into the world, or ascending Mount Calvary, or returning to the bosom of his heavenly Father, our divine Savior could say: "I go to prepare a place for you." (John xiv, 2.) But He admonishes us all, saying: "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come." (Luke xii, 40.) Only those of the virgins who were prepared were admitted to the nuptial feast. We cannot possess beatitude in this life; but we can merit it and prepare for it, as Christ has prepared it for us, that is to say, by sufferings. Can we too dearly purchase that for which the Son of God poured out the last drop of his most precious blood on the gibbet of the cross? By His death and resurrection He has bequeathed to us an example of dying and rising again in spirit; and by His ascension He teaches us to raise ourselves in thought and desire to heaven, "confessing that we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth . . . seeking a country" (Heb. xi, 13, 14); "fellow-citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God" (Eph. ii, 19): "for," says the same apostle, "our conversation is in heaven." (Phil, iii, 20.)