

## “AWAKE, O SLEEPER, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST SHALL GIVE YOU LIGHT.”

In the *Apostles Creed* we have the following: “He descended into Hell. On the third day He rose again.” This proclaims a twofold truth: “This was the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ’s descent into hell: that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in His soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But He descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there.” Who were these souls?

They were all the just and righteous from our first parents, Adam and Eve, up to all the righteous of our Lord’s earthly ministry (e.g. John the Baptist). You will notice on the icon depicting the Resurrection that our Lord stand atop broken gates and takes the hands of both Adam and Eve. You will notice that He holds in His hands the Cross, the instrument of His death and the instrument of our salvation. An ancient homily that dates from the beginnings of Christianity and is read every Holy Saturday in the Roman Rite Liturgy of the Hours explains this event:

*He [Jesus] has gone to search for our first parents, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: “My Lord be with you all.” Christ answered him: “And with your spirit.” He took him by the hand and raised him up saying: “Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”*

All of the righteous of the Old Testament were there: Our first parents, Adam and Eve; Abraham, our “Father in Faith,” and all the Patriarchs were there. Moses, the Lawgiver was there. King David, be-



loved of the Lord was there. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets and all the prophets were there. Why? Because the gates of heaven were closed due to the sin of Adam and Eve. With His Passion, Death and Resurrection, Christ has opened the gates of paradise to all these righteous. Notice that the smashed gates of Hell (“Hades” in Greek - “Sheol” in Hebrew) lie beneath his feet. Grasping our first parents by the hand, our Lord now commands Hell to release all the righteous held since the beginning of creation, and Adam and Eve now lead a triumphant procession while being held in the hands of Christ.

*I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and your descendants I*

*now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.*

As when Christ rose from the dead, His earthly body was not simply resuscitated, but He arose in a glorified body, so it will be the same with us. Christ made it clear to these righteous, now released from hell, that He was not restoring them to the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden, but to their true homeland: the Kingdom of Heaven and a glorified existence in glorified bodies.

*Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.*

This is what Easter is all about. What you just read will be reenacted a second time, only instead of being the righteous of the Old Testament it will be *us*, if we avail ourselves of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. This helps to put suffering in a new perspective. Think of how long some of those Old Testament, righteous souls had to wait for this. But eternal happiness is certainly worth the wait and the sufferings that we must endure while on this earth.

All of us, but most particularly, those of us in the post-Christian West need to hear this call of, “Awake, O sleeper.” Sin puts us into a deep sleep, a virtual coma. Christ continually calls us to awaken from the sleep of sin. Are we heeding this call, this invitation?

Yet we have those in the Church today (including some highly placed prelates) who deny the Resurrection of Christ and deny that it happened as a real event. Yet the disciples saw the risen Jesus, so the Resurrection is a fact, an event, supported by eyewitness testimony. But these “Modernists” — the name of the current heresy (yes, that word still exists) in the Church will claim that the disciples saw no phenomena of whatever origin; the revelation was of a different order of reality. As the disciples pondered upon Christ’s life among them, its true significance gradually unfolded as the revelation of a new mode of living, of relating to each other. They realized that He had led them to a breakthrough in their appreciation of what it meant to be fully human, and this revelatory experience released in them a new spirit of love and forgiveness. In this spirit, Jesus may be truly described as having transcended His death, to have remained “alive” among His followers. He was present in the prophetic spirit released in the early Christian community. All intellectual content has been removed from the Resurrection proposition from the Creed. The “resurrection experience” is entirely subjective. Many highly degreed Catholics assent to the above. But as the saying goes, “You have to be very smart in order to be very stupid.”

The true Jesus Christ, proclaimed by the Catholic Church for over two millennia, calls us to not only awaken from the sleep of sin, but to awaken the whole world. The Servant of God, Fr John Hardon, SJ would often say why it was so hard to convert Muslim people to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He taught Muslims in class and they would tell him, “Where is the Christians’ zeal? If you believe that Jesus was the living God who became man, why are you so passive? So indifferent?” By contrast he would say, Muslims give public testimony to their faith. The Risen Christ calls us to do the same. This is what Easter is about. There is only one solution to all the turmoil in the world today—to bring the world to Christ. All other “solutions” will fail. Let us “awaken from sleep” and awake the world to Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. ✠