

## CATECHISM FOR ADULTS

### VI—'He Rose Again'

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**T**HE arms of Christ on the Cross are represented on the crucifix as stretched out to their full extent. They not only bear the weight of man's sin, but they are extended to include all men. There is no limitation to the act of sacrifice—it is offered for all men, and it obtains for all the possibility of eternal life in the presence of God. Christ is for all men the cause, the only possible cause, of salvation in the sense that he alone frees man from the consequences of sin and that no type of man is excluded from the newness of life his sacrifice gains—save only the one who, by the exercise of his freedom, shuts his mind and heart to faith when it is presented, or refuses, in pride, to repent.

The statement in the Creed, 'He descended into hell', means that Christ's redemptive work is not confined to those who lived during or after his life on earth. The Cross of Christ is the central point in history in that it is an eternally decisive point, whose consequences are effective throughout the whole temporal process. Those who lived before Christ, and who tried to do the Will of God in so far as light was given to them, were not untouched by grace. Since they were born in a state of condemnation and death, they were as a people incapable of entering into the presence of God. As individuals who had looked for God, and by grace in hope, they were not condemned, but just. Because the mode of their existence was historical or time-conditioned, they had to wait, even after death, for the appointed time, for the Cross of Christ. Their salvation was assured, for the time was to be fulfilled; but they could not enter into their reward till its fulfilment opened the gates of the kingdom.

The statement 'He descended into hell' sounds a note of triumph. Christ dead, and to the world buried, is in fact a conqueror who is breaking the power of sin and death. The just were waiting. Waiting in hell because they were without God, they could not praise him as a redeemed community. By the death of Christ, their death becomes merely death to the world, not the victory

of sin. They are released for he blots out 'the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. . . . And despoiling principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in himself.' (Col. 2, 14-15.) The prince of this world is overthrown, hell, in the old English phrase, is harrowed, and in triumph the victory comes of the spoils, the souls of the just who rise with Christ to reign with God. Not only the dead are released, but to the living hope is given, for in us there is begotten 'a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ'. (1 Peter 1, 3.) Therefore, the Creed continues, 'the third day he rose again from the dead'.

It was very early in the morning of the first day of the Jewish week, when Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, came to the tomb (Mark 16, 1). At the rising of the sun they find that the tomb is empty because the light of the world has risen.

'He appeared first to Mary Magdalene' (Mark 16, 9). What does this mean? It was quite clear that the appearance was what we call factual. It was something that could be verified in a quite ordinary way. It is both factual and incomprehensible in that it can only be explained by the intervention of God.

'Then he saith to Thomas: Put in thy finger hither and see my hands. And bring hither thy hand and put it into my side. And be not faithless, but believing. Thomas answered and said to him: My Lord and my God.' (John 20, 27-28.)

The empty tomb is the sign of victory, the body of the risen Christ the sign of power and triumph. In rising from the dead all things are made subject to him and because 'he was raised for our justification' (Rom. 4, 25) all are made alive in him (1 Cor. 15, 23). This is the fact that lies at the centre of the preaching of Peter: 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2, 36). This is the 'gospel' of St Paul. 'For I have delivered unto you first of all, which I also received: how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures: And that he was buried: and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. And that he was seen by Cephas, and after that by the eleven. Then he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once: of whom many remain until this present, and some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen

by James: then by all the apostles, and last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time' (1 Cor. 15, 3-8). 'Thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 15, 57).

This is the fact that creates the Christian community, that dominates its worship. It is no longer the Sabbath of the Law that is celebrated, but the first day of the week—Christ's day, for that is what the term the Lord's Day means (cf. Apoc. 1, 10). Christ alone is the true Sabbath, for in Christ alone is rest given, hence every Sunday is a day on which the Christian rejoices in the triumph that brings deliverance and rest. Easter is the centre of the Christian year and each Sunday is an Easter.

The Last Supper, the Passion, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost, form a unity in that they are episodes in the divine saving action. Each leads into and implies the other, whilst each expresses a particular stage in the divine plan. The Resurrection is the triumph which gives freedom and life, for it gives to man the power to be, and to live as God would have us.

The fruits of the Resurrection are given to us nominally by the baptism of water. Christ 'the first born from the dead' 'reconciles us to the Father' (Col. 1, 18 and 20) so that he is the supreme head of the body to whom all things are subjected (Eph. 1, 20 *seq.*). St Paul tells us that we 'are the body of Christ' (1 Cor. 6, 15 *seq.*). By divine ordinance incorporation into Christ is effected by baptism. 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' (Mt 28, 18-19). Because of the power of the risen Christ, this baptism or washing is distinguished from all others. It is a consecration into the person of Christ, for that is what 'in the name of' means, so that the person baptized becomes a 'new creature' (Gal. 6, 15). No doubt the value contained in the pagan rites of purification and rebirth, which gain for the youth a new personality in the tribe, is caught up here. Explicit reference is made also to the Jewish rite of circumcision, which set the seal to the promises of God (Romans 4, 11), a rite which for St Paul was prophetic of baptism. The baptism of John is also related, for it was the sign that the day of the Messiah had come. But all are distinguished from the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire (Mark 3, 11). This is a being baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6, 7) as the Christian

through forgiveness of sin dies to the world. It is being baptized into the resurrection, as the Christian rises with Christ to a 'newness of life' (Gal. 5, 16).

Primarily the function of baptism is to 'add' the individual to Christ (Acts 2, 41), to build him into the temple of God, which is the body of Christ. For 'by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free' (1 Cor. 12, 13). This implies that baptism does not essentially consist in the awareness in faith of the baptized person, though such an awareness is involved in the case of an adult convert. In the case of an infant, salvation is mediated through the action and faith of the Church. Baptism is a spiritual washing in that through its instrumentality the soul is freed from the whole guilt of punishment belonging to the past. It is the gate to the Church, in that by baptism the person becomes a living member of the Church. Baptism by water is the normal and official manner of entry into the kingdom, but it does not confine, cannot confine, the salvific activity of God. The effect of baptism is obtained by those who, through suffering, are made like to Christ, and by those who are moved by the Holy Ghost to believe and to love.

Baptism is new life in that the Christian lives by and for Christ. A new life that shows itself in living for the kingdom of God, in reaching out in love towards the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner (Matt 25, 35). Doing so, not because of the pressure of the Law, but in the freedom of the children of God. 'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. . . . If we love one another, God dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us.' (1 John 4, 11 and 12.)