

## DEAR DEACON BULLETIN INSERT

### ❖ Dear Deacon Jim,

*In the Apostles' Creed, it says Jesus "descended into hell" Why did Jesus descend into hell if he is divine?*

### ❖ Response

This is certainly a valid question and I can understand that the wording in the Apostles Creed may be a bit perplexing. To address this question, we must first examine the word hell as it is used. Typically, when we hear the word hell, we immediately associate it to the place of eternal damnation for those judged to have committed mortal sins without repentance and rejected God.

However, in the Old Testament, hell (Sheol in Hebrew or Hades in Greek) is referred to as *"the abode of the dead"*. This hell was for both the good and the bad. It was the nether world, which consisted of both the righteous and the unrighteous who were deprived of the vision of God. We find in the later writings of the Old Testament, a distinction is made between where the good resided in hell versus where the bad was; the two being separated by an impassable abyss. The section for the unjust was named Gehenna, where the souls would suffer eternal torment by fire.

Our Lord attested to this *"abode of the dead"* understanding of hell. Recall the parable of Lazarus, the poor beggar, who sat at the gate of the rich man, traditionally called Dives (cf. Lk 16:19ff). Lazarus dies and is taken to the "land of the dead" and is comforted at the bosom of Abraham. Dives dies and goes to the "land of the dead." However, he finds eternal torment, being tortured in flames. Dives see Lazarus and cries out to Abraham for relief. However, Abraham replies, "My child, remember that you were well off in your lifetime, while Lazarus was in misery. Now he has found consolation here, but you have found torment. And that is not all. Between you and us there is fixed a great abyss so that those who might wish to cross from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross from your side to us."

So, Jesus' descent into hell means that Jesus *"sojourned in the realm of the dead prior to his resurrection"* (CCC 632). Like all men, Jesus experienced death, and thus his soul joined others in this realm. But as the Catechism points out, "he descended there as Savior," and preached the good news to the spirits imprisoned there (1 Pet. 3:19).

The Jews referred to the righteous abode as "Abraham's bosom." It is these spirits to whom Jesus preached the good news when it is said Jesus descended into hell. "It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham's bosom, whom Christ the Lord delivered when he descended into hell" (CCC 633).

*Deacon Jim*