

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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## THE COLOR OF LENT

The English word "Lent" comes from the German *Lenz*, which means "spring." As the Church looks forward to laying aside the dark, violet vestments of Lent, winter loosens its grasp, and the earth begins to show the unmistakable signs of renewal and birth.

For those who live in the Northern Hemisphere, this is a joyous time of year, as we see the days lengthening and plants making their first, tentative appearance from the apparently dead soil of winter.

Were we to assign a color to spring and Easter, we would undoubtedly choose green, with its manifold variations. But this overlooks another color – red – which precedes the green that marks the renewed vigor of many of our favorite trees and plants. Birches, maples, peonies – even roses – are a distinct dark red long before they turn green.

In the spectrum of the Church's liturgical colors, red is the color of blood, and the red we observe in nature at this time of year is a reminder that the joy of Easter, with its riot of lilies and pastel hues, comes only at the cost of Our Savior's blood, shed for our salvation.

St. Augustine says that we who are alive naturally shrink from death, because death is so foreign to us. As Christians, we must face this natural fear of death if we wish to enjoy fully Christ's triumph over it. If we ignore the pain of Calvary on Good Friday, we diminish the value of Easter in the garden.

## FR. DUFFNER REFLECTS ON THE ANNUNCIATION

Although Lent is a time of fasting, the Church allows the faithful to interrupt their Lenten austerities on Sundays and feast days. The most significant of the latter falls on March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, commemorating the angel's telling Mary that she will be the Mother of our Savior.



**THE RESURRECTION**  
Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

Fr. Duffner, who directed the rosary Center ministry for two decades, provides the following thoughts on the solemnity that marks the beginning of Jesus' life in our flesh:

The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at the moment of conception, that God creates the human soul and infuses it into the fertilized ovum. The human person comes into existence at this point, although its human body is but a minute cell.

This is not merely the opinion of theologians, but the testimony of Sacred Scripture, which tells us that when the angel departed, after telling Mary she would be the mother of Jesus, Mary went in haste to share this good news with her kinswoman Elizabeth. Elizabeth greeted Mary with the famous words, "...blessed is the fruit of your womb...how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Elizabeth calls Mary "mother," which means a child must be part of the equation. Mary became the mother of the Lord at the moment of her consent, when she told the angel, "be it done unto me according to thy word." The human life of our Savior commenced at that moment, and so it is with all human life. It begins at the moment of conception.

## THE ROSARY LIGHT & LIFE

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2 Novenas of Masses to honor

## THE RESURRECTION

March 30 - April 8 — April 9 - 17

TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

**Note:** Because Mass is not celebrated on Good Friday, the Novena of nine Masses will commence on March 30, ten days before Easter.

# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The Creed, Part V

### He Descended Into Hell and On The Third Day He Rose Again

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

Anyone who compares the Apostles' Creed to the Nicene Creed will notice a significant difference. The Apostles' Creed takes note of Our Savior's descent into hell. Faithful Christians are often puzzled by this and ask why Christ descended into hell, and whether this is the same hell to which mortal sin condemns the sinner who dies without repentance.

St. Thomas does not provide answers to these questions in the Lenten homilies we have been studying. However, he considers the questions at some length in his *Summa Theologica*. He says that Christ did not descend into the "hell of the lost." Rather, "...upon the holy Fathers detained in hell solely on account of original sin, He shed the light of glory everlasting" (ST III. 52.2).

#### TWO HELLS?

St. Thomas distinguishes between the "hell of the lost" and the "hell of the patriarchs." The former is the state of those who have died unrepentant for mortal sin; the latter is the state of the righteous individuals under the Old Law who died, necessarily, without seeing their Savior.

#### TWO VISITS?

To say that Christ descended into hell does not mean that He paid an equal visit to all the individuals languishing there. Those condemned to eternal punishment would have received no benefit from Christ's presence among them. However, the souls of the damned were well aware of Christ's descent. St. Thomas tells us, "...by descending thither, He put them to shame for their unbelief and wickedness" (ST III. 52.2).

If this seems confusing, St. Thomas teaches us by way of an example.

*...while remaining in one part of hell, he visited interiorly by grace, according to His Godhead. Accordingly, while remaining in one part of hell, He wrought this effect in a measure in every part of hell, just as while suffering in one part of the earth He delivered the whole world by His Passion* (ST III. 52.2).

#### THE LESSON OF CHRIST'S DESCENT

The Angelic Doctor preached that the first lesson we should carry away from Christ's descent among the souls of the dead is one of hope. Although St. Thomas bases his argument for hope on Scripture, it also appeals to our common sense. The book of Ecclesiasticus says, "he that feareth the Lord shall tremble at nothing; he shall not be afraid, for He is his hope" (Eccclus 34:16). St. Thomas remarks

we can suffer nothing worse than to be in hell. "So if Christ freed those who were in hell, anyone – provided he is a friend of God – should be confident that God will deliver him from his straits whatever they are."

#### A REMEDY FOR FEAR AND PRESUMPTION

St. Thomas reminds us that Jesus did not deliver every soul from hell, only the souls of the righteous. Thus, he urges us to reflect on our lives, and to conclude that if we strive to remain in the state of grace we have no reason to doubt God's mercy. On the other hand, we should also consider the souls Christ left to their punishment, and not assume that God will overlook our sins if we fail to repent.

#### A DAILY CONSIDERATION

The author of the Books of the Maccabees commands us, "remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (2 Mac 12.46). Jesus descended into hell for our salvation and instruction, so St. Thomas urges us to follow Him there, considering the punishments our sins deserve. He continues this admonition by saying that those who make a spiritual descent into hell in life are not apt to make the descent in death.

#### AN EXAMPLE FROM LIFE

We express perfect contrition when we grieve because our sins have offended God's goodness. However, the Church teaches that imperfect contrition – i.e., sorrow because we fear the punishment due to sin – is sufficient for our salvation. St. Thomas reminds us that we avoid breaking civil laws because we reasonably fear the punishment that will follow if we are found guilty. If the punishment of hell exceeds the penalty for breaking any law on earth, how much more, St. Thomas asks, should we fear to break God's law?

#### AN EXAMPLE OF LOVE

Christ continually calls us to follow Him, and His descent into hell is a particularly effective example. Christ's visit to the netherworld to deliver the just "from their privation of glory" (ST III 52.8, reply 3), invites us to remember the souls in Purgatory. The Scripture teaches "it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they be loosed from sins" (2 Macc 12:46), and the Church fathers identify Masses, prayers, almsgiving and fasting as effective sacrifices to offer for the salvation of those who have died in a state of venial sin.

Once again St. Thomas draws an example from our daily life, reminding us that only a very cruel person

would fail to offer help to a friend in prison. If we are willing to pay a debt for a friend in this world, how much more eagerly – considering the far greater punishment a soul suffers in Purgatory – should we come to the aid of those who have died?

## **CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND OURS**

When discussing the knowledge necessary for our salvation, St. Thomas is very succinct. *"Man must know two things: the glory of God and the punishments of hell."* These realities were hard to grasp in the ages before Christ's example-filled life, death and resurrection, but they are considerably easier for us to understand now.

God's Word took on our flesh so that we, who had forfeited, through sin, our glory as God's children could learn a lesson from God's only Son. Likewise, although the pains of sin might have been hard to discern at one time, they are considerably easier to comprehend now that Christ has visited hell and returned to tell us what awaits the souls of the unrepentant.

## **WHAT THE RESURRECTION TEACHES**

The title by which Jesus is most often addressed in the gospel is "teacher," and the early Church writers said Christ came to save us by His example, going through every moment of our lives – from the first to the last – and teaching us how to face the many challenges of our human existence. The Resurrection completes this education, enabling Our Savior to show us in His risen body what we have to look forward to if we remain faithful to His commands, and what we will face if we ignore them.

## **CALL TO FAITH**

The Resurrection confirms our faith and encourages us to hope. In the Old Testament Job cried out, *"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and therefore in the last day I shall rise out of the earth... this [is] my hope...."* In the Resurrection, God allows us to see what Job and the other righteous patriarchs could only imagine.

## **A CALL TO VIRTUE**

St. Paul teaches, *"As Christ is risen from the dead... so we also may walk in newness of life"* (Rom 6.4). The Resurrection reminds us that death is not the final reality for a Christian, and one of the prefaces for the funeral Mass proclaims, *"Lord, for your faithful people life is changed [in death], not ended."* The promise of resurrection invites us to live in the present, but with an eye on the future. Christ's Resurrection reveals the glory we are called to share, and encourages us to live in a manner worthy of that great hope.

## **CHRIST'S UNIQUE RESURRECTION**

The Old Testament relates the resurrection of one or two individuals, and the gospel tells us Jesus raised a young woman and two men (including Lazarus) after they had died. God undoubtedly intends to inspire us by these examples, but we must not forget that the Resurrection of Our Savior differs from all the rest. Each

of the individuals called back to life in the Scripture died from illness or weakness, and all were restored to life by the power of God; none of these rose by his own power.

Jesus, on the other hand, died by His own choice, and rose by His own power. His divinity was never separated from His humanity, so He could truly claim, *"I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it up again"* (John 10.18). When we profess our faith we say, *"He rose again,"* and these words remind us that the Resurrection was the result of Jesus' own activity, not the effect of someone else acting on the Savior's behalf.

## **RESURRECTION TO A PERFECT LIFE**

Christ's Resurrection differs from the resurrection of those He restored to life because Lazarus and the others resumed the same life they had enjoyed before, a life that included the necessity of dying once again. Christ's Resurrection is not only deliverance from death, but deliverance from the possibility of dying. Thus, Christ's perfect Resurrection establishes the pattern which the other resurrections looked forward to, although imperfectly.

## **RESURRECTION IN TIME**

Finally, Jesus' Resurrection differs from the resurrection we anticipate because His Resurrection took place *"on the third day,"* while the rest of humanity (except the Blessed Virgin) awaits resurrection at the end of time. In his homily on the Resurrection St. Thomas says the Resurrection occurred as it did because Christ took on our flesh, died and rose *"for our salvation."*

When he quotes these words from the Creed, St. Thomas explains that the Resurrection, no less than every other event in Our Savior's life, was aptly calculated, to give us the greatest possible advantage. Had Jesus risen before the third day the world might not have believed He truly died; had he delayed His Resurrection, the disciples might have lost heart and failed to carry out the preaching task the Savior entrusted to them.

## **WE LEARN FROM THE RESURRECTION**

St. Thomas preached that the first example the Resurrection teaches is the necessity to rise spiritually from the death of sin. Each Act of Contrition, each visit to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, each time we receive the Eucharist we experience a personal Resurrection that brings us closer to Christ, and allows us to participate more fully in the life He won for us.

## **THE LESSON OF THE THIRD DAY**

Our Savior did not delay His Resurrection unnecessarily; neither should we. The Church sings a Lenten response that reminds us, *"in the midst of life we are in death."* Medical advances and a greater awareness of the importance of healthful living have unquestionably increased the lifespan of those who live in the developed countries of the world. Nevertheless, St. Thomas reminds us,

*...when you are burdened with sickness, you will be unable to think of those things which concern your salvation, and... by persisting in sin you forfeit a share in all the good works that are done in the Church....*

The Venerable Bede adds that the longer we put off repentance, and the longer the devil possesses us, the more loathe he is to lose his hold on us. We may delay death, and prolong life, but common sense suggests we should use the time we have gained in following – not shirking – the example of the Lord.

### **INCORRUPTIBLE LIFE**

Once we have surrendered to Christ's reconciling love, we should strive to live fully the new life we have received, by avoiding the death of sin. St. Paul reminds us, "*Christ rising from the death dieth now no more... so do you also reckon that you are dead to sin but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 6:9).

The virtue of hope enables us to live in this world "as if" we already enjoyed the blessings we look forward to in heaven. In God's kingdom of heaven we will enjoy fully what we can only anticipate on earth: a life that will neither end nor be diminished by weakness, illness or sin. We cannot avoid these evils on earth, but the Christian's life of prayer, and the Sacraments that unite us to Christ's saving death and resurrection, cultivate a contemplative spirit, and this enables us to grasp as fully as possible in this life the joys we look forward to possessing in the next.

### **MARY AND THE RESURRECTION**

The Resurrection is a mystery, and therefore we may be slow to grasp its effect on our everyday lives. After all, Jesus was divine; why should He not have risen from the dead? None of us can claim the unique perfection of Jesus, so why should we expect deliverance from death and decay.

Christ invites us to share His supreme goodness, but the sheer immensity of that goodness may be so overwhelming that we are reluctant to approach Our Savior, simply because we feel so unworthy of His love. In this dilemma, the example of the Mother of God offers us counsel and hope.

Sin claims no part in the nature of the Son of God, so our faith (reasonably) teaches that the human Jesus was like us in all things but sin. This is not the case with the Virgin Mary. She was like us in all things, including our need to be delivered from sin, and our faith teaches that God's gift of Baptism after our birth echoes the special gift God gave Mary before she was born.

### **CHRIST SETS THE PATTERN; MARY SHOWS THE WAY**

Christ's Resurrection shows us what we can look forward to. Mary's Assumption demonstrates that the everlasting life of heaven is, indeed, a promise we can trust. Mary embodies all the virtuous hope of God's

people in the Old Testament, and her Magnificat is a triumphant sermon on God's mercy: "*He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree*" (Lk 1.52). Mary's Assumption fulfills these words, and extends a powerful invitation to follow her example of humility.

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### **MEMORIAL FUND GROWS**

When he arrived at the Rosary Center three years ago, Fr. Reginald Martin dreamed of establishing a scholarship fund to help underwrite the training and formation of the young men preparing for ministry as Dominican priests and brothers. When the Rosary Center received a gift from the will of a generous benefactor, Fr. Reginald inaugurated The Rosary Confraternity Memorial Education Fund.

"One gift led to another," Fr. Reginald says, with a smile, "and now the Fund is valued at more than \$100,000.00." He adds, "This does not yet yield a return to cover the cost of training even one of our Dominican brothers, but we look forward in hope, and our hope is as great as the generosity of our friends."

Fr. Reginald continues, "this is an exciting time in the life of the Western Dominican Province. At long last God has answered our prayers, and allowed us to buy our own seminary building. After years of renting space from others, we own two magnificent buildings, with state-of-the-art classrooms that allow students and faculty to take part in lectures around the world.

"The challenge, of course, is to pay for our new campus. Even used buildings, such as ours, are costly. But we are confident that after allowing us to take this important first step, God will enable us to take the steps that necessarily follow."

Gifts to the Rosary Center's Memorial Education Fund become a part of the Dominicans' vision for the future. The Rosary Center's legacy not only helps educate the Dominicans who use the new seminary complex, but guarantees that Dominicans who study there will continue to preach the Good News of Our Lady's Rosary.

Only the income of the Memorial Fund is spent, so a gift to the fund becomes a lasting tribute that will allow a benefactor's generosity to touch generations of Dominican preachers and the countless souls to whom they will minister. Fr. Reginald says, "we hope the prospect of new Dominicans to preach the Gospel will encourage our friends to support the Rosary Confraternity Memorial Education Fund. If you are preparing your will, we beg you to include us among those whom you will remember."

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### **OUR PROMISE**

The Rosary Center carefully guards the names of its donors. Fr. Reginald says, "God has blessed us with many generous friends. We will not betray their trust by selling – or even sharing – their names."