

- One of the favorite subjects of medieval English literature was a theological concept known as the harrowing of hell. It refers to the line in the Creed in which we profess that Christ descended into hell after His death on the cross and before His resurrection.
- Yet the hell that we profess in the Creed is not the inferno of the souls of the damned, but rather the abode of the just souls who died before Christ's passion and death on the cross. In harrowing Hell, Christ went to free the just from the powers of death that held them captive.
- Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, David, John the Baptist and all the prophets, and our beloved St. Joseph were all there patiently awaiting the arrival of Christ. And their souls became the first to experience the joys of Heaven with the Resurrection.
- The fascination with this topic was not confined to literature but also spread to the visual arts. And any good art museum with a decent collection of religious art generally has at least one depiction of this amazing event, for there are many versions of it.
- Usually Christ is seen clothed in white, with a staff of victory in His hands, bursting through the stone that was rolled in front of His tomb. He is radiantly glorious in His resurrection.
- Behind Christ are the souls of all the just, shining in Easter glory, and lying under the stone is the devil, defeated and vanquished by the power of our Lord's resurrection.
- What I love about the harrowing of hell is that it shows the depths of Christ's love for sinful man. It shows us the lengths to which Jesus will go to save us. Indeed, our Lord was willing to go even to the world of the dead to save man from sin.
- And today on this most glorious feast day of the year, we celebrate that, not only was Christ willing to die for us. He was willing to come back to our fallen world in His resurrected body to show us how much He loves us and wants us for Himself.
- You see, at Easter we celebrate not only the historical fact that Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and rose again from the dead. At Easter we celebrate God's unfathomable love for us: a love willing to go anywhere and do anything for His beloved.
- His terrible suffering, His crucifying death, His harrowing of hell, and His resurrection from the dead are all proof of His infinite love for us.
- In the 8<sup>th</sup> c., the bishop St. Andrew of Crete wrote that:
- "...in His humility Christ entered the dark regions of our fallen world, and He is glad that He became so humble for our sake, glad that He came and lived among us and shared in our nature in order to raise us up again to Himself. And even though we are told that He is now ascended above the highest heavens... His love for man will never rest until He has raised our earthbound nature from glory to glory, and made it one with His own in Heaven."
- Think about those words for a moment: *His love for man will never rest until He has raised our earthbound nature from glory to glory, and made it one with His own in Heaven.*
- The point here is that God pursues us. God has created us for Himself, and He will not rest until He makes us His own: until He has captured our minds and hearts and led us down a path to virtue and holiness.
- Our sins – regardless of how many and grievous they may be – do not scare, repel, or repulse our Lord. Our sins actually serve to make His heart more tender toward us.
- Subject as He was to the full tilt of man's malice in His Passion, our weaknesses and faults do not cause our Lord to turn His heart from us. Truly, if Christ can forgive those wicked men who so unjustly condemned, tortured, and crucified Him, He can forgive all of us.

- And that He willingly does when we give ourselves to Him in love and in repentance.
- What's more, if we die in Christ's friendship but have yet to make sufficient reparation for our sins, then in His great love for us our Lord allows us to be purified in the fires of purgatory so that we can be fit to be with Him forever in Heaven.
- Truly, God's love for man knows no limits.
- Understanding all this, we see in this magnificent and glorious feast of Easter an invitation: an invitation to repent of our sins, to pursue a life of virtue, to become one of Christ's intimate friends.
- My brothers and sisters, let us not waste the grace that we have received these past 40 days, and let us not waste the grace of Easter that we are now receiving! Instead let us allow the graces of Lent and Easter to transform us, and to continue making us new creations!
- God is pursuing us. May we commit ourselves to pursuing Him return.