

If you can't get out of hell once you get there, how did Jesus descend into hell and be risen in 3 days after?

On Good Friday Jesus was laid in the tomb. He tasted human death, separation of His soul from His body; just as when we die our souls are separated from our bodies. Christ's body stayed in the tomb, but His soul descended to the realm of the dead; it was not hell as we know it. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, 'hell' - *Sheol* in Hebrew or *Hades* in Greek - because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God." (CCC#633) In some versions of the Apostle's Creed we say "He descended into hell", but in other versions, as in our missalette, we more accurately say "He descended to the dead."

But why did Jesus descend to the dead? At the last supper, Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) Without Jesus all the righteous souls who had died since Adam and Eve were deprived of the opportunity to come to the Father. The Catechism says: "In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him." (CCC#637)

Jesus did not go down to those who were condemned; those who are truly in hell. In the Gospel of Luke we hear the story of the selfish rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus. When they die, Lazarus is carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham, but the rich man is in the torment of hell. In the story, Abraham tells the rich man that "a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours." (Lk. 16:26) Jesus descended to the dead, to the bosom of Abraham, to lead souls like Lazarus' to heaven, but not the soul of the selfish rich man. He did not cross the chasm.

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