

**Christ's Descent into Hell, Sunday, April 28, 2019**

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**To the Stronger Man Go the Spoils**

Luke 11:14–28

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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Jesus said, "WHEN A STRONG MAN, FULLY ARMED, GUARDS HIS OWN PALACE, HIS GOODS ARE SAFE; BUT WHEN ONE STRONGER THAN HE ATTACKS HIM AND OVERCOMES HIM, HE TAKES AWAY HIS ARMOR IN WHICH HE TRUSTED AND DIVIDES HIS SPOIL" (vv 21–22).

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Today the Gospel reading in many of our sister churches is the appearance of Jesus to doubting Thomas. When he sees the scars on Jesus' body from the nails and the spear, Thomas believes the resurrection. This living Man standing before him, he confesses, is "MY LORD AND MY GOD!" (Jn 20:28). And our Lord responds, "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET HAVE BELIEVED" (Jn 21:29).

Now even though we haven't seen Him, we do believe that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead. He proclaims us blessed. And we also believe that, after His crucifixion but before rising, Jesus descended into hell alive and as a man. So today, a week after Easter, we rewind and celebrate His descent into hell.

*By descending into hell victorious and triumphant,  
Jesus shows us that He is stronger than the strong man, Satan,  
and claims us as His own.*

## I.

Who is Satan? St. Peter calls THE DEVIL our ADVERSARY, our enemy. THE DEVIL, he says, PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ravenous, ROARING LION, just waiting TO DEVOUR anyone, whoever he can sink his claws and his teeth into (1 Pet 5:8). He's the leader of the fallen angels WHO DIDN'T STAY WITHIN THEIR OWN POSITION OF AUTHORITY, but rebelled against the almighty God and so LEFT the place where they properly belonged (Jude 6). In the beginning, God created them to be MINISTERING SPIRITS SENT OUT TO SERVE humanity (Heb 1:14), but their rebellion set them at odds against all creation, including the crown of God's creation—man and woman. The devil had no sympathy, love, or friendship for Adam and Eve, not even after their sin,

and he was no sympathy, love, or friendship with you, not even when you sin. It fills him with glee, with wicked pleasure, to see our fall.

From the moment the LORD God comes back on the scene, there's ENMITY, hatred, and hostility between the devil and Adam and Eve. When the devil claims to be on your side, remember that he's MORE CRAFTY than any other creature (Gen 3:1). As it says in Proverbs, PROFUSE ARE THE KISSES OF AN ENEMY (27:6). He flatters. He sweet talks. He lies and deceives. He tempts. "HE WAS A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING," Jesus says, "AND HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE TRUTH, BECAUSE THERE'S NO TRUTH IN HIM. WHEN HE LIES, HE SPEAKS OUT OF HIS OWN CHARACTER, FOR HE'S A LIAR AND THE FATHER OF LIES" (Jn 8:44).

Satan means "accuser," and so he is. Not just *an* accuser, but *the* accuser, the greatest enemy of humankind. He is our accuser and THE ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS, WHO ACCUSES THEM DAY AND NIGHT BEFORE OUR GOD (Rev 12:10). Let that remind us of exactly whose side we're on when we make accusations, even when they may be true. And of what does he accuse? He accuses us of being disloyal to God, fickle, rebellious, self-serving, faithless, and full of sin. And what can we say in response? What weapons do I have to fight against him? He's right, isn't he? God's law says the same. So these accusations stick to us like poisonous arrows precisely because they're true. He puts his foot on our throats and wraps his deadly chain around our necks, and he's got us. With these accusations, he holds us all in thrall.

That's why he's called THE POWER OF DARKNESS (Lk 22:53), and THE RULER OF THIS WORLD (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, THE SPIRIT THAT IS NOW AT WORK IN THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE (Eph 2:2). We are all conceived and born sinful, and so under the power of the devil.

This is what Jesus means when He calls the devil A STRONG MAN (v 21), a dictator and tyrant. He is *not* the rightful, lawful ruler. This world doesn't actually belong to him. But he rules it. By force, with coercion, using every weapon at his disposal—anything to keep us enslaved, beaten down, and subject to him. He is brutal. He demands total submission. Lives mean nothing to him. He counts his treasure in souls. Satan is the STRONG MAN of the spiritual world, FULLY ARMED. He GUARDS HIS OWN PALACE, HIS GOODS ARE SAFE (v 21). And we were his goods. We were his possessions. He would make us believe that we still are.

## II.

And we would be, except that ONE STRONGER THAN HE ATTACKS HIM AND OVERCOMES HIM (v 22). The devil is our enemy, but Jesus IS A FRIEND OF SINNERS

(Lk 7:34). He takes no pleasure in our sin, and He has no delight in our suffering or death. Though greater than the devil, the demons, and all the angels as the Son of God, He entered His creation, put on our flesh, and came, as a man, to save us. As a man WITH the AUTHORITY AND POWER of God over the spiritual realm! As the light that casts out the darkness! HE COMMANDS THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS, AND THEY COME OUT (Lk 4:36)! He cast OUT A DEMON THAT WAS MUTE, and THE MUTE MAN SPOKE, and THE PEOPLE MARVELED (Lk 11:14)!

Some said that he did it BY BEELZEBUL, THE PRINCE OF DEMONS, meaning Satan. Others wanted Him to prove it by a sign (v 15–16). Oh, He would give them THE SIGN OF JONAH (Lk 11:29), the preaching of repentance, death and resurrection on the third day. What He's doing is clear. "EVERY KINGDOM DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF IS RUINED, AND A DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD FALLS. AND IF SATAN IS DIVIDED AGAINST HIMSELF, HOW WILL HIS KINGDOM STAND? IF IT IS BY THE FINGER OF GOD THAT I CAST OUT DEMONS, THEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME UPON YOU" (vv 18a, 20). He came, the woman's Seed, to BRUISE the accuser's head, just as God had promised long ago to Adam and Eve. To do it even though HIS HEEL would be struck and bruised too (Gen 3:15).

But how? He took on Himself the sin of the world. He got Satan's attention. He said, "Hey, devil, come get me. Pick on someone your own size." And the devil turned all his firepower against Him. Every accusation the devil could find, every sin ever committed, he threw against Jesus. He spent all the ammo he had piercing our Lord, and our Lord has the wounds to prove it. His body was riddled with the accusations the belong to us. He was cut down in our place. GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT SOMEONE LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS (Jn 15:13), BUT GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE WERE *STILL* SINNERS, while we were still under the power of the devil and in Satan's kingdom, CHRIST DIED FOR US (Rom 5:8). FAITHFUL ARE THE WOUNDS OF A FRIEND (Prov 27:6).

And that's how CHRIST HAS UTTERLY WIPED OUT THE DAMNING EVIDENCE OF BROKEN LAWS AND COMMANDMENTS WHICH ALWAYS HUNG OVER OUR HEADS, and gave the devil power over us, AND HE HAS COMPLETELY ANNULLED IT BY NAILING IT OVER HIS OWN HEAD ON THE CROSS. THEN, HAVING DRAWN THE STING OF ALL THE POWERS RANGED AGAINST US, HE EXPOSED THEM SHATTERED, EMPTY, AND DEFEATED (Col 2:14–15). The truth is that it's all been paid! Your sins are forgiven! The devils' weapons have been taken away!

Not through force, but by showing mercy and love for sinners, with a spike driven in His heel, Jesus attacks and overcomes the devil, TAKES AWAY THE ARMOR IN

WHICH HE TRUSTED AND DIVIDES HIS SPOIL (v 22). Behold, THE STRONGER MAN (v 22)! And you are the spoils of His victory!

### III.

PUT TO DEATH BY FLESH, JESUS WAS MADE ALIVE BY THE SPIRIT and drove the final nail into the devil's coffin. For HE WENT AND MADE PROCLAMATION TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON (1 Pet 3:18b–19). He descended into hell victorious and triumphant and said, "Hell is the place of punishment for you and yours, Satan, but it's no place for My people. Roar and rage, tempt and threaten, you're just a NOISY GONG, A CLANGING CYMBAL (1 Cor 13:1). You can't scare those whose sins are forgiven! They've already been BURIED with Me BY BAPTISM INTO DEATH, and SET FREE FROM SIN, and already their lives are HIDDEN WITH Me in GOD until they APPEAR with Me IN GLORY (Rom 6:4, 7; Col 3:3–4). And, look, Satan, THIS IS MY BODY, GIVEN FOR them, and THIS IS MY BLOOD, SHED FOR them. What do you say to that?" Jesus triumphed over the devil and He ripped the hinges right off hell's gates for us and Satan stands there speechless, crushed, and disarmed.

So God DELIVERED US FROM THE DOMAIN OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED TO THE KINGDOM OF HIS BELOVED SON (Col 1:13–14). The man who was born in humility, who lived in lowliness, suffering, and contempt, who died accursed and in shame, is now exalted. With the descent into hell, the triumph begins in full. Now THE GATES OF HELL SHALL never PREVAIL AGAINST Him or against His CHURCH (Mt 16:18)! The accuser HAS BEEN THROWN DOWN (Rev 12:10)! Just as Jesus descended into hell and is risen from the dead, so now He is risen in us. We cannot be conquered by Satan, for the Satan's Conqueror lives in us.

Having sent the UNCLEAN SPIRIT packing, Jesus didn't leave us as empty dwellings. He LIVES IN us (Gal 2:20) and THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLS WITHIN US (2 Tim 1:14). Our bodies are His temples (1 Cor 6:19). "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEP IT (v 28)," Jesus says, "for MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, AND WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM" (Jn 14:23).

And, so when the devil comes, we have nothing to fear. The Stronger Man, Jesus, meets the strong man at the door. He says, "Depart, you unclean spirit. Go to hell and never come back. I'm the Master of this house. I'm the Lord of this soul. This One is Mine."

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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