

19. April 2026
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
“Hell”

Any consideration of the all-important “last things” remains incomplete if we do not also take into account the possibility of a life gone astray, for both Sacred Scripture and Church teaching bear clear witness to this.

Certainly, it may be frightening to hear about this, but that is no reason to conceal this dimension of our faith, for there is also such a thing as “salutary fear.” Saint John Chrysostom underscores the importance of this teaching and emphasizes how essential it is to keep it in mind.

“Truly, if we always thought of the punishment of hell, we would not easily fall into it! That is why God has threatened us with the punishment of hell: if the thought of it did not have something salutary, He would not have done so. Because the memory of the punishments of hell produces such great effects, God has given us the threat as a salutary medicine. (...) A soul that fears hell will not easily fall into sin. (...) The fear dwelling in the heart banishes all that is sinful from it.” (J. Chrysostom, Homily on the Second Letter to the Thessalonians, 2:3)

So much for the words of the Saint, who particularly emphasizes the educational dimension of the thought of hell.

But how does a person end up in hell? This happens when he willfully and with full awareness turns against God and thus rejects God’s offer of grace. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

“The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, ‘eternal fire.’ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.” (CCC 1035)

For the sake of clarity, let us mention other passages described in an older catechism:

What sort of pains shall the souls of the damned suffer?

1. Internal torture and despair at the thought of all the evil they have done, and of the many graces they have abused (Wis. 5:1-15; Mt. 8:12);
2. Unspeakable sadness and misery, because they have, by their own fault, forfeited eternal happiness in Heaven (Lk 13:25–28);
3. Perpetual horror of the dismal company of the devils and of all the damned (Mt 25:41); and
4. The most intolerable torments and pangs, without any hope of relief or end; for their fire shall not be extinguished, and their worm shall not die (Mk 9:45; Apoc 20:9–10). (*Catechism by Joseph Deharbe, 1912*)

The same catechism further explains the *reasons why the punishments are eternal*:

1. Because the offence against the infinite Majesty of God demands of His justice a punishment without end;
2. Because all who die in sin remain eternally obdurate in sin;
3. Because God, in virtue of His holiness, hates evil no less than He loves what is good, and therefore punishes vice eternally, as He eternally rewards virtue; and
4. Because only the everlasting pains of hell are a sufficient means to deter man, even in secret, from evil.

It further states:

Will the pains of all the damned be equal?

No; for each one shall have to suffer in proportion to his sins, and to the ill use he has made of the graces bestowed upon him. — “*As much as she*” (the city of Babylon) “*hath glorified herself, and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give unto her*” (Apoc. 8:7). “*Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required*” (Luke 12:48).

These explanations may suffice to recall this teaching, which is unfortunately often neglected. For us believers, it is a constant reminder to lead our lives with great vigilance and free from recklessness and arrogance.

In this context, I recall the Church-recognized apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima (1917 in Portugal). She allowed the visionary children to see hell. The visionary Lucia described it as follows:

“Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire, which seemed to be under the earth. Immersed in this fire, demons and souls as if they were transparent and black or bronze colored embers, with a human shape, floating in the fire, carried by the flames, which came out of themselves, together with swarms of smoke and fell from all the parts, similar to the sparks that fall in the great fires, without weight or balance, between cries and moans of pain and despair that made the creep and tremble with fear. The demons were distinguished by the horrible and lousy forms of frightening and unknown, but transparent and black animals.” (Memoirs of Sister Lucia)

The vision lasted only a brief moment, and it became clear why Our Lady had shown this to the children. The point is that prayers are offered for those who are in danger of going to hell. This applies to all of us as well.

Given the great importance of the teaching on hell, I would like to invite you to follow the advice of the Blessed Mother and to recite the following prayer at the end of each decade of the Rosary:

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who are most in need of Your mercy.

Reflection on the daily reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/easter-monday-to-proclaim-the-gospel-without-fear/>

Reflection on the daily Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-risen-lord-reveals-himself/>