

## The Creed

When someone asks you what Catholics believe, you could launch into a lengthy explanation of Transubstantiation, or try to repeat everything you remember from the Catechism. Or you could simply speak the words you say every weekend: “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...”



These words begin the Nicene Creed, the statement of our faith for almost 1700 years. Surprisingly, it was not originally part of the mass. In the early Church, the Profession of Faith was used during the celebration of Baptism. A candidate was immersed three times in the water, and each time they were asked a question dealing with their personal faith in the three persons of the Trinity.

The Nicene Creed we profess at mass each week is named for the Council of Nicea (325), which met to answer the Arian heresy that denied the divinity of Jesus. Faith statements from that Council were fashioned into a Creed by the Council of Constantinople in 381, but the Creed's inclusion in the mass took a lot longer.

Churches in different parts of the world started professing the Creed in mass during the sixth century, but not in the same place. Churches in the East said the Creed right before the Eucharistic Prayer. In Spain, it was chanted before the Lord's Prayer and in Ireland, it was used to conclude the Liturgy of the Word. Under Charlemagne, the use of the Creed in mass spread throughout Europe. Still, it wasn't part of what we call the "Roman Rite".

In 1014, German Emperor Henry II arrived in Rome for his coronation and was shocked to find that the Creed was missing from the Mass. Pope Benedict VIII then decreed that it be included in the Roman Mass on all Sundays and on those feasts mentioned in the Creed. Some commentators point out that Henry's army being camped right outside Rome may have influenced the Pope's decision.

The General Instruction tells us we proclaim the Creed so that we may "*call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith... before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist*" (GIRM # 67)

While it could be argued that the Creed is unnecessary because the Eucharist is the profession of our faith, the late liturgist Ralph Keifer said the Creed is not some kind of religious loyalty oath. Rather it is "an expressive way of celebrating not only what we believe, but also what it means to believe." (from *To Give Thanks & Praise*, by Ralph Keifer Pastoral Press, 1980)

## The Apostle's Creed

There is another creed many people could proclaim by heart: The Apostle's Creed. You might recognize the 12 articles from the Apostle's Creed in the questions asked when we renew our baptismal vows at Easter:

*Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?*

*Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?*

*Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?*

Both the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed express what we believe as Catholics, and both are used at mass. In addition to the renewal of baptismal promises, the Apostle's Creed is allowed at masses with children, since it is part of their formation.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes a case for every Catholic knowing the text of both:

*Faith is a personal act - the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith.*

*"I believe" (Apostles' Creed) is the faith of the Church professed personally by each believer, principally during Baptism. "We believe" (Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) is the faith of the Church confessed by the bishops assembled in council or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 166 & 167)*

Steve Raml  
Director of Liturgy & Music