

## **THE PARTS OF THE MASS**

### **Part Three: The Profession of Faith**

The Profession of Faith, or Creed, is our response to the readings and homily. It is our way of saying, “Yes, we believe in the God who has spoken to us in scripture and we accept the challenges in the readings to live the way of life Christ calls us to live.”

But it took a long time for the Church to clarify who is the God we believe in. The Creed that we most often recite is the Nicene Creed. It comes from the Council of Nicea in 325, and was amended by several Church councils in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to understand the meaning of the Creed, however, we need to know about the heresies that were damaging the Church in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries which these councils refuted.

The first heresy claimed this: Since Christ was born as a human being, then he could not be God. God cannot have a beginning because God has always existed. Therefore, Jesus Christ must have been some lesser god but is not the one, true God.

The second heresy similarly struggled with Jesus being a human being. It claimed that Mary was only the mother of the human Jesus. We can call Mary the Mother of Christ but not the Mother of God, as the Church claims. The divine Son of God can have no beginning and, therefore, no birth. The divine Son took over the person of the human Jesus, which means there was a period of time when there were 2 sons of God.

The third heresy claimed that if the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, then that means either there are 3 Gods, which no one accepted, or that God is sometimes the Father, sometimes the Son, and sometimes the Holy Spirit.

The Church responded to these heresies through a series of councils beginning with Nicea in 325 until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which gave us the final form of the Creed that we use today.

You will notice that we will no longer say “We believe” but rather “I believe,” which is the more correct translation of the Latin. This also corresponds to the “I statements” that we make when we renew our baptism and respond “I do” to the questions posed to us that are based on the Creed.

Notice that we immediately declare that we believe in only one God. This makes us monotheists; however, as Christians we recognize the one God is three Persons. The first paragraph is the first article of the Creed about the first person of the Trinity whom we call God the Father.

The second and third paragraphs are the second article of the Creed about the second person of the Trinity whom we call God the Son. This is what really got the Creed started. You’ll notice that we profess faith in only one begotten Son of God; there are not two sons of God. This one Son is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,” not some lesser

god. The Son is begotten by the Father not made. In other words, the Son of God was never created by the Father, never had a beginning, but has eternally come forth from the love of the Father. That's what "begotten" means."

Then, we will profess our faith that the Son is "consubstantial with the Father." This means that the Son has the same divine essence as the Father, and, therefore, is as much God as the Father is. We even say that through Christ "all things were made," which means that the Son of God was as much a part of the creation of the world as God the Father.

Next we profess our faith in the Paschal Mystery. That term is not in the Creed, but it refers to all that we believe about the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is the core of our faith as Christians. The Paschal Candle that stands by the baptismal font is named after the Paschal Mystery.

Notice that the instructions call us to bow at the line "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary..." This shows our deep reverence for the fact that Christ, who is very much God, also became a very real human being in the womb of Mary and, therefore, in Christ God underwent a human birth. God became one of us.

The fourth and fifth paragraphs form the third article of the Creed about the third Person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. Again, notice that we say the Holy Spirit is the giver of life, which also places the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son at the dawn of creation. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives life to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. The Holy Spirit gives life to each believer through "baptism for the forgiveness of sins." And the Holy Spirit gives new and eternal life in "the resurrection of the dead."

We also now have the option of using the more ancient creed known as the Apostles' Creed, which fits the baptismal questions. My only caution here is where it says Christ "descended into hell." A better translation would have been "the abode of the dead" from the Latin "ad inferos." Unfortunately, the term "hell" to contemporary ears means the place of the condemned, which is not the meaning of the Creed. It means that Christ truly entered into the realm of death and united with all who have died. By doing this, Christ has brought the dead into his resurrection.