

The Profession of Faith (Creed) and the living Tradition of the Church

Every Sunday we say together the Profession of Faith, also known as the Creed.¹ This is an ancient statement of our shared Christian Faith, and, indeed, it is shared with all other Christians belonging to the Orthodox, and Reformation (Protestant) traditions. In few, but precise, words, the Profession of Faith states what every Christian – and every person wanting to become Christian – must hold as their personal belief. That is why it begins with the words ‘I believe...’. It is known also as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed because it attained its final form in the Church Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381):

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

¹ From the first word of the Profession of Faith in Latin: ‘Credo’

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,²
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Profession of Faith is not something that was ‘made up’ by Christians. It is the result of three centuries of prayer, discernment, struggle and conflict. Both then and now there are people who call themselves Christian but who do not believe what we proclaim in the Creed. This is not, therefore, an easy thing to recite: it challenges us in what we believe.

None of us is forced to believe what is professed in the Creed. The question for each of us, to which we return again and again in our lives, is ‘*Do I believe these words which I profess?*’.

The words of the Creed are precise and were chosen very carefully by the Council Fathers of Nicea and Constantinople. As well as saying the entire Creed, we can focus in on a particular phrase in order to see exactly what it is that we believe as Christians.

In reciting the Creed together we acknowledge our shared Faith with all Christians who proclaim the same Creed. Those coming to the Catholic Church from other Christian traditions may well be familiar with this Creed, whereas those approaching Catholic Faith from a non-Christian background, or from previously having no particular faith, may be encountering this Profession of Faith for the first time.

In the process of our Journey in Faith (RCIA) together we are, effectively, exploring and examining in more detail what we profess together in the Creed. This text is, therefore, a good place to which to keep returning to see and show how what we explore in our meetings together is grounded in this one, shared Christian Profession of Faith.

The living Tradition of the Church

The Catholic Church teaches³ that the true Self-Revelation of God in Jesus, through the continuing action of the Spirit, is handed on to us from generation to generation in holy Scripture and Tradition. These two, which we receive as one Revelation,⁴ are alive and active in the Church today, just as they have been in the past and will be for those who follow us in Faith.

² We should note that disagreement remains concerning this phrase, ‘and the Son’ (*filioque*, in Latin). This is not recognised in the Orthodox tradition

³ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 7-10, 18 November 1965

⁴ *Ibid.* 10

Tradition, therefore, is best thought of not as *something* but as the lived handing-on of our Faith to one another and to our children. What we hand on to others is rooted in Scripture, God's Word spoken to us. As we read:

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*⁵

We are called, therefore, to share our Faith with others. This is why our Journey in Faith (RCIA) is essential to the life of our parish community. By sharing our Faith we nourish one another so that both we as catechists and those we teach grow in Faith, as well as in God's Love.

Pope Francis tells us:

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others".⁶ When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For "here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means".⁷

Irenaeus: Against Heresies

Chosen as bishop of what is now Lyon in France, Saint Irenaeus (AD c.130-202) wrote 'Against Heresies', a collection of five books against Gnosticism (the idea that personal spiritual knowledge is more important than shared faith). This heresy,⁸ which we still encounter today in the idea that 'what I believe is what matters whether it's "true" or not', was widespread in the first centuries, and the continued struggle to discern truly orthodox

⁵ Hebrews 4:12

⁶ Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 360)

⁷ *Evangelii Gaudium* 9-10, 24 November 2013

⁸ 'heresy' means a belief contrary to the shared Faith of the Church

faith⁹ is what gradually led, in the Councils of Nicea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381), to the formulation of the shared Profession of Faith which we still recite at Mass today.

You can learn more about how the Nicene Creed came to be written in ‘The Church that Follows Jesus Christ’ a short course available at

<https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk/education/our-faith/learning-about-our-faith/resources-2/the-church-that-follows-jesus-christ-2/>

Suggested Points for Discussion

- What do you think about the idea that ‘What I believe is what matters – it doesn’t matter what the Church says’?
- In what ways is it helpful to have a shared Profession of Faith?
- What do you feel as you read or recite the Creed?
- What do you feel as you read the words of Pope Francis (above)?
- What is the relationship between personal faith and our shared Faith?
- How have your thoughts about Tradition changed as you have reflected on the Church’s teaching?

Suggested Activities

- Taking a copy of the Profession of Faith, as a group highlight the words you feel are most important. Which do you find challenging? You can discuss these in the group.
- Explore together the different ways in which faith can be shared. Think about the things we can do ourselves as individuals, but also those we can do together with others.

Further Reading

When the Church was Young: Voices of the Early Fathers, by Marcellino d’Ambrosio, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2014

The Creed in Slow Motion, by Martin Kochanski, Hodder & Stoughton, 2022

I Believe in One God: The Creed Explained, by Pope Benedict XVI, St. Paul’s Publishing, 2012

Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel, by Pope Francis, Catholic Truth Society, 2013

⁹ ‘orthodox’ here means the true, shared Faith of the whole Church