

Understanding the Mass – The Creed

The Creed, also known as the Profession of Faith, summarizes what we have just heard in the scriptures and have come to believe. The word “creed” comes from the Latin word “Credo” which means “I believe”. Its origins are from the baptismal rites where the one entering the Church had to profess faith in the Triune God and in what the Church teaches. In the early Church, just going to Mass was enough of a profession of faith to get oneself martyred. As the faith spread and time went on, the Creed developed, becoming more precise as the divine truths became more clear, its words being carefully chosen to clarify doctrinal issues and refute heresies. The Creed we now use is called the Nicene Creed. It is the result of truths professed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381.

With the new translation of the Roman Missal, there will be several changes in how we say the Creed. For one, we will switch from the plural “*We believe*” to the singular “*I believe*”. Using “*I*” is not only a better translation from the Latin but using “*I*” makes the Creed more personal and challenges us to make this faith our own.

Another will be where we now say “*one in being with the Father*”. This will change to “*consubstantial with the Father*”. The Church fathers fought long and hard against the heresies of their time to explain the true nature of Jesus as co-eternal with the Father and of the same substance, not a lesser, created being. The English word that best describes the intent of these Church fathers is “*consubstantial*”. While it is not as easy to say, it is more precise and provides an opportunity to reflect more on the divine nature of Christ and the Trinity.

Another important change will be to use “*incarnate of the Virgin Mary*” instead of “*born of the Virgin Mary*”. This change emphasizes that Jesus, as the Son of God, actually took on our flesh when he came into this world.

One thing that is not a change in the Creed but which is more clearly directed is that we bow at as directed with the words “*and by the Holy Spirit...and became man*”. Culturally, bowing is a sign of respect and in the liturgy it is a sign of reverence and honor shown to persons or to the signs that represent them. For example, in the liturgy we make a bow of our head when the Trinity is named together, also at the names of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Saint in whose honor Mass is being celebrated. We are also to make this simple bow of the head before receiving the Eucharist.

We make a profound bow (from the waist) to reverence the altar which represents Christ or to other ministers who by their service represent Christ the servant.

In the Creed we make this profound bow in reverence for what has happened: that Jesus, the Son of God, has humbled himself and became man. On the solemnities of the Annunciation and Christmas we go even further and kneel at these words, imitating the

second person of the Trinity who touched the ground of our humanity in order to redeem and save us.

What we are to say and do in the Creed will take some time and effort to get used to. As for the change in words, we need to remember that these changes are a better translation of the original Latin and together with the action of bowing will help us enter more deeply into the mysteries of the Mass through the faith we profess.