



I Believe

The Creed: Essentials of our Faith!

We live in a world where there are different faiths and faith formulae. Organizations or groups, whether political, social or spiritual, come up with their own 'mission statements' – what they believe, stand for and propagate. There are both good and bad ideologies and theories. Different groups live according to these theories and ideologies. All these groups change their belief systems and ideologies from time to time in order to 'fit into' the society and the times in which they find themselves. A classical example is communism – there is a Soviet communism, Chinese communism, Indian communism, African communism, etc. If we were to ask whether there is a 'pure' communism, the answer would be very difficult to find – because it is only a materialistic ideology that talks about a utopian society, an unrealistic expectation!

But it is not same with 'The Creed' of the Church. The Creed is the pure handing down of the essential beliefs of the early Church to our own times without much change or addition. It has been believed and proclaimed regardless of the geographical or political boundaries of the world for more than two thousand years!

I am sure, as Catholics, we have come across the question, 'What do you believe'? And at times we might have struggled to explain it, and even if we manage to reiterate 'the Creed', we did so without much conviction. If the questioner is cunning and has the intention of trapping us, he or she may point out certain non-essential *practices* of the Catholic faithful and engage us into a heated discussion, the end of which we lose the *argument* – because we were hijacked from the essentials and led into the non-essentials. The result is confusion and failure. The essential beliefs of Catholics are contained in what is called 'the Creed'.

We are journeying through the 'Year of Faith', which calls us to be rooted in our faith. At the same time, we are summoned to invite others to embrace the same faith. It is not only the mandate of the Church, but also a call, a commission by the Lord!

Our faith has two dimensions – *belief and proclamation/confession*. Both belief and proclamation are needed to experience salvation! The Scripture says, "If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. By believing from the heart you are made righteous; by confessing with

your lips you are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10). The Creed, which consists of the essentials of our faith, helps us to know what to believe and by so doing, makes us righteous or holy; it also gives us contents to *confess* and by doing so, helps us to experience salvation and invite others to experience the same.

So, first of all we should bear in mind that the Creed holds the *essentials* of our faith. This means that there are other non-essentials, secondary beliefs. We should not muddle them up and give equal significance to all our daily beliefs and practices. For example, devotion to the Divine Mercy chaplet or novena to a particular saint is *not* essential for you to be a Catholic. But to believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead is an essential belief to be held by all Catholics.

There are two popular and official formulae of the Creed, which are regularly used in the Church. They are *not two* separate creeds but One Creed in two forms. One does not contradict the other. The shorter version of the Creed is called the *Apostles' Creed* and the longer version is called the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*. Up until the Middle Ages, it was popularly believed that the Twelve Apostles contributed one clause each of the Creed and thus there are twelve clauses in the *Apostles' Creed*. Whether it is true or not, learning and proclaiming the Creed was necessary for one to become a Christian. So, before baptism, all were instructed and required to recite the Creed by heart. This was also known as the '*Rule of Faith*' and '*Symbol*' of faith.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was formulated originally at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in AD 325 and proclaimed as the true content or rule of faith by the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in AD 381. Thus the name *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*. This was not a completely new Creed as we said before, but an elaboration of the *Apostles' Creed*. This was needed because of the heresies of the time, especially *Arianism*, which rejected the full divinity of Jesus Christ. One important thing to remember is that the Creed is *older* than the canon of the Scriptures! It was formulated before the Church determined which books were to be included in the Bible canon. (St. Athanasius listed the 27 New Testament books in 367 AD which was confirmed by the Councils of Hippo and Carthage; in the year 405, Pope Innocent I confirmed the same list and finally, at the Council of Trent (1545-63) promulgated the same list!!). That is to say, the Creed is much older; if anyone rejects the Creed he or she rejects the whole New Testament, and Christianity as a whole!!

Let us go quickly through the different clauses of our Creed and fix them in our minds so that we may be able to ruminate and reflect upon them and make them part of our faith life and live them in our ordinary lives.

You might have noticed that with the new translation of the Roman Missal, we no longer use the formula “We believe” anymore for the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, but the traditional, close to the original meaning “I believe” (*Credo* = I believe).

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

It is ‘I’ who believes. Here the ‘I’ does not mean that my belief is a private one. Rather, it is a personal conviction and at the same time ‘I’ am ready to respond to my belief. This belief changes and moulds one’s entire way of life. In this ‘I’ is included the corporate personality of the entire body of the Church. It is my personal act and is rooted in my experience; at the same time, it has a communal dimension when I share it with a wider community of believers.

This God in whom I believe is *One, Almighty, Father* and the *Creator* of all that I can comprehend and beyond! By saying God is One, we affirm that there are no other gods but only One God who is also the Father-Creator – father of the universe, father of humanity, father of all created things, father who provides, sustains, recreates and regenerates. It must be noted that “Father” is a familiar term for us now but at the time of Jesus, God was only Creator. It is the Sonship of Jesus that enables us to acknowledge and accept God as Father! We also affirm that there is much more in creation than we can ever comprehend; there is not only natural creation but supernatural creation as well. It also tells me that I am a contingent being dependent on the Creator for my existence and He is the Transcendent Being! (cf. CCC 239). He is also *Almighty*; this is the only divine attribute of God that we see in the Creed! (cf. CCC 268).

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.

I believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ; Jesus means ‘the Lord saves’ and I acknowledge His absolute Lordship on my life and on the course of the whole universe. He is also the ‘Christ’, the ‘anointed’ one – anointed with the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:18-19). There are two special titles of Jesus – ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Son of God’. This Jesus has a unique relationship with the Father by nature, not by adoption whereas I become a child of God through my baptism; I am adopted into God’s family. Jesus is also of the *same* substance (in Greek *homoousios*) as the Father – consubstantial (To know more about it we need to learn the whole Arian controversy!). It is through him that all things were made (John 1:3). He is the agent through whom God created and He is not a created thing! (St Irenaeus describes the Son and Spirit as the two hands of the Father that made all creation!).

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.

John writes that, "Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life" (3:16). The sole purpose of the Incarnation is to bring us back to the eternal glory, which was lost through original sin. Here 'men' does not only mean the male gender but it is the more accurate translation of the Greek and Latin origin of both genders.

Jesus was not conceived in the way we have been conceived, but by the Holy Spirit. In Incarnation, the divine and human came together. Supreme grace was granted which then became the source of all other graces. In the Incarnation, it is the power of the divine manifested, not the power of the human. And both historically and theologically, Mary remained a Virgin.

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.

It is for our sake that he has crucified, "Yet ours were the sorrows he bore, ours were the sufferings he endured... destroyed because of our sins, he was crushed for our wickedness..." (Is 53: 4-5). It is not a myth. It happened during the reign of Pontius Pilot, a historical event, an event that tore history into two! He was crucified – the worst kind of death anyone can have, "Anyone who hung on a tree is under God's curse" Dt. 21:23. He took upon himself the curse of sin under which humanity had been crushed.

But He has overcome death – he has Risen! St. Paul speaks about it well in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, where he affirms that it had happened "according to the Scriptures" (v.4).

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.

Through ascension and being seated at the right hand of the Father, Jesus inaugurated the Messianic Kingdom, into which we are called to be citizens. We live and realize this Kingdom in our daily realities and will enjoy its fullness in the beatific vision, which we shall experience once we depart from this life.

He will come again. "Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus come!" is the prayer of the Church. It is the duty of the Church to prepare everyone for that final moment where He will become all in all! Everything that the Church does and prays is directed towards this

Second Coming of the Messiah! Let us pray that it may happen in our own time! Thus we may enter into that everlasting Kingdom!

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

As the Son, the Spirit is also 'Lord'. This Old Testament title of God is attributed to the Spirit as well. We profess three persons as One God- the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Spirit is 'life giver' in two senses – at the beginning of creation and the New Life he gives to all who are recreated in Christ! This Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. (...and the Son is a later addition, to know more about it refer to any Catholic encyclopaedia on the subject *Filioque*). In the Scripture we see the Spirit is referred to as Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6), Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9; Phi 1:19), Spirit of the Father (Mt 1:20) and Spirit of God (1Cor 2:11). We are called to live 'in the Spirit', as the prophets before Christ lived, and Jesus who was led by the Spirit. The Church - the body of Christ, is now being led by the Holy Spirit!

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The Church has four distinctive marks – One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. These are the four qualities of the Church as well. It is 'One' because Jesus established only one Church; Church is also the bride of Christ and he has only one Bride, not a group of brides! It has only one set of doctrines – one faith. This oneness is manifested in the Hierarchy of the Church – one head, one heart, one voice, etc. The Church is Holy, because it is the body of Christ! Its founder is holy, its animator is holy – Jesus and the Holy Spirit! The Church is also the source of all holiness – the sacraments! The Church makes us holy – through our Baptism! The church is not only the home of saints but also the hospital of sinners, where one is nursed, nurtured and prepared to share that holiness! It is Catholic, i.e. Universal, it spreads throughout this world and beyond and has existed for the last two thousand years and will continue to exist here on earth as long as it is necessary! And the Church is Apostolic, founded on the acts and teachings of the Apostles.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins

There is only one faith, one Lord and one Baptism. It is through our baptism that we are incorporated into the body of Christ and assured of our salvation. Baptism is the first and foremost sacrament for the remission of sins. And it is the mandate of the Lord to "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved;*" (Mark 16:15-16). It is through our baptism that we are freed from Original Sin and given the indelible character of being one in the family of God.

and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

St Paul reminds us that, *"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty and our belief comes to nothing"* (1Cor 15: 13-14). It is fundamental to believe in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life. The Creed reminds us of it and asks us to proclaim it!

Amen!

CCC has the following:

1061 The Creed, like the last book of the Bible, ends with the Hebrew word "amen". This word frequently concludes prayers in the New Testament. The Church likewise ends her prayers with "Amen."

1062 In Hebrew, "amen" comes from the same root as the word "believe." This root expresses solidity, trustworthiness, and faithfulness. Thus we can understand why "Amen" may express both God's faithfulness towards us and our trust in him. (Also read 1063-65)

Therefore, the Creed presents us with the essentials of our faith and encourages us to be rooted in what we believe and helps us to order our lives in response to our beliefs. The creed is called *"Orthodoxy"* which means, "right belief" and this orthodoxy invites us to *"Orthopraxis"* which is 'right living'. It is not only important to proclaim what we believe but today it is equally or even more important to live what we believe, as Jesus lived and the countless saints lived and continue to live today. We, as Jesus Youth are called to believe, proclaim and live the faith, The Creed!
Amen!

Fr. Binu Palakapally

Pastor, Jesus Youth UK