

I Believe: The Creed and RCIA

In the 3rd Week of Lent, the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults suggest a small ceremony in which the Creed is “gifted” to the Catechumens (by then ‘Elect’) who are in the final stages of preparation for Baptism. It is a good opportunity to reflect on the words of the Creed, with which they may well be familiar, and to prepare for the Baptismal Promises which they will affirm at the Easter Vigil. Moreover, since the Creed is recited each Sunday during the Liturgy of the Word, Catechumens may benefit from catechesis on it at any stage in their journey.

These notes are offered with an eye to helping catechists and sponsors getting to grips with the change in wording brought about with the revised translation of the Missal in vigour from the First Sunday of Advent 2011.

“The purpose of the *Symbolum*, or Profession of Faith, or *Creed*, is that the whole gathered people may respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily, and that they might also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist.” (GIRM, 67)

The Creed is said (or sung) on Sundays and major feasts. In it, we declare a share in our ancient faith in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the Church to which we belong and other important aspects of our faith. The words we use have changed in some respects – bringing us closer to the structure and vocabulary of the Latin of the Roman Missal – although obviously the meaning is the same. Every Catholic, whatever their language, shares in this one act of faith.

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



1. The first, and most obvious difference, is the use of “I” rather than “We” to introduce the various parts. This brings us closer to the Latin word “*Credo*” which means “I believe”. Our current version used “We” since the faith we profess together is, first and foremost, the faith of the whole Church, and therefore something we can say together. Also, the Creed was first composed in Greek (in AD 325!) and said “We believe”. It became “I” only when it was translated into Latin (the language most people could understand at the time). Most modern languages have been using “I” except English. We are reminded now that the faith we share is also a faith each of us has to make personal. After all, in the Baptismal promises, we respond “I do”, not “We do” to the questions of faith.
2. The phrase “visible and invisible”, rather than “seen and unseen” is closer to the Latin (*visibilium et invisibilium*) but also clarifies that we are thinking about what God has created – the physical and the spiritual – rather than what I can or can’t see. I can’t see my aunt in Canada, or the dark side of the moon... they’re ‘unseen’ to me, but that’s not what we’re talking about in the Creed.

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.

1. As in the *Gloria* (“Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son”) we recover here the idea of Jesus as *Unigenitum* (“Only Begotten”) rather than “only” Son of the Father.
2. Currently we say “eternally begotten”. This is a paraphrase which is trying to grasp the idea that the Lord is Son of God even before Creation began – ie eternal, and timeless. This was important because the Creed was originally composed to counter a heresy which said that he only ‘became’ Son of God later. The new phrase not only brings us closer to the Latin, but actually makes it easier to understand: the Son was with the Father before time and creation began.
3. “Consubstantial”. This is a mouthful! It replaces “of one being” (in America “one in being”). It is a word which does not exist, except here. And that’s the key. It contains an idea hard-fought and grappled with by theologians for a long time before the Creed was written, since it tries to express something unique: how the Persons of the Holy Trinity relate to each other. No wonder it requires a unique word! The early Church forged a whole new vocabulary to try to express the inexpressible: the persons of the Trinity are the same, but each is also distinct; they share something that makes them fundamentally the same (sometimes referred to as ‘substance’, or ‘underlying nature’) but each has its own character and role in the relationship (‘person’)... Because this vocabulary is so unique, and the ideas it contains so theologically precise, Pope Benedict xvi has asked that every language translation retain the Latin word *consubstantialem* in their own language as closely as possible.

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.



1. This phrasing is closer to the Latin, and also brings us and other English language versions closer together (Americans have been saying “became man” all along).
2. The new version also lays out what is only suggested at the moment: that we should bow from “and by the Holy Spirit” “up to and including *and became man*”. As elsewhere, the new translation is asking us to think about posture and gestures as well as the words we use in our prayer and worship.

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.

1. The only difference here, for us, is in the third line about Jesus' resurrection. In the current version, we begin a new sentence there ("On the third day he rose again..."). The fact that it now begins with "and" suggests that we have to keep the suffering, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus very much together: all of this was "for our sake", not just his death. Besides, it means that the phrase "in accordance with the Scriptures" could now be understood to relate to the whole thing, not just to the resurrection, as it might be understood at the moment. In fact, the biblical text from which this ultimately derives (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) repeats "in accordance with the Scriptures" both when it speaks about his death for us and his resurrection. By reflecting the Latin structure here, we are more closely reflecting what St Paul said in his original writing too.



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

1. As before, the section on the Holy Spirit begins with "I believe" rather than "we believe", reminding us that our personal faith and our church faith go hand in hand.
2. Notice that, as well as reflecting more closely the Latin words, the new version also reflects its structure. At the moment, this part of the Creed has three sentences (We believe... With the Father... He has spoken...). In English this makes for clear meaning. Latin, however, has only one sentence, made up of a number of short clauses linked with "who" (referring to the Holy Spirit). This might make for slightly more awkward English, but it flows with the Latin. Also, it removes the word "he" when referring to the Holy Spirit, allowing a less gender-specific phrase. Many theologians think of the Holy Spirit in more feminine terms.
3. The phrasing "worshipped and glorified" is replaced (as in the *Gloria*) with the words "adored and glorified". The Latin uses the word "*adoretur*", which was paraphrased to say "worshipped". The word "adored" gives a sense, rather, that the Holy Spirit is worthy not only of our worship, but of our love too. In the *Gloria*, "we worship you" was used to translate "we bless you, we adore you". Here is one of those places where consistency of translation has been applied.

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

1. Again, as elsewhere, our faith in the church is expressed in personal terms. (Remember that in the Baptismal Promises we say “I do” not “We do” when we are asked if we believe in the Church, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body etc.). The four words used are sometimes called the ‘Four Notes’ or the ‘Four Marks’ of the Church.
2. Instead of saying we “acknowledge” one baptism, the new version uses the word “confess”, a stronger word which suggests a “confession of faith” in something (it’s not about “confessing sins”). That is, it expresses the *public* nature of our faith: we say it out loud because it means so much to us. To “acknowledge” something might suggest we have a notion in our heads about it, or a vague recognition of it which may or not mean anything to us. The new version gives a sense that it is something of the heart too, something we are proud of.
3. Note how the resurrection is something we “look forward to”, rather than “look for”, as if it had been misplaced. The Creed ends on a note of hopeful expectation of the future (the Latin word here is “*expecto*”). We wait for it, hope for it, indeed we “look forward” to it.



It is worth remembering that the 3rd Edition of the Roman Missal allows for the use of the Apostles’ Creed instead of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, particularly during the Lenten and Easter seasons. This is because it reflects more closely the language of the Baptismal Promises, language which the Elect may well profit from knowing. Moreover, it can make for a strong statement that the intense journey of Lent leading up to Easter continues through the Easter season – a liturgical expression of the significance of the period of Mystagogy.
A parish which is accompanying Elect towards Baptism may do well to take advantage of this option for everyone’s benefit.