



If You Believe and I Believe

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There is a traditional refrain from Zimbabwe that has found its way into some of our hymnals: “If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God’s people free.” I’m not sure that we have that kind of control over the Holy Spirit, but the text reminds us that our faith is a shared thing, a common treasure, and that God has promised to be in our midst when we pray together.

In the early church, when a catechumen was baptized, he or she made an individual profession of faith. Often a triple immersion in the baptismal waters was preceded by a triple profession of faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That baptismal ritual was the first place that the Creed found a home in the liturgy. This early profession of faith is the origin of what we call the Apostles’ Creed.

The Creed we most commonly use at Mass, however, is called the Nicene Creed, because it stems from the Council of Nicaea in 325, with modifications from the Council of Constantinople in 381. It became part of the Mass in the East in the sixth century but did not enter the Roman rite until the eleventh century.

The first obvious change in our new translation of the Creed is the first word. Currently we begin with “We believe,” while the revised text has “I believe.” When our current translation of the Creed was prepared, the scholars decided to use the plural because the original text of the Creed (in both Latin and Greek) used the plural and because we are professing our faith together. But the Latin text in the missal is in the singular, perhaps because it came into the Roman Mass at a time when only the priest was saying the prayers of the Mass. The use of the singular can remind us of our baptismal vows, but it is important to remember that our faith is a shared reality and we profess it at Mass as an assembly rather than as individuals.

Another noticeable change comes in the line about the Son's divinity. We currently say that Christ is "one in being with the Father." The new text says he is "consubstantial with the Father." *Consubstantial* is not really a translation. It is a transliteration—the same Latin word, spelled in English—of the Latin *consubstantialis*, which means "one in being." The point is simply that Jesus is God, one with the Father. A separate bulletin insert discusses this change in more depth.

Another change appears when we speak of Christ's human nature. We currently say, "by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man." The new text says, "and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man." Incarnate means enfleshed, so using the term here can remind us that he was human from the first moment of his conception, not just when he was born.

There are several other minor changes in the text of the Creed, and it will take us a while to commit the new version to memory so that we can profess it together easily. The new missal also allows the option of using the Apostles' Creed instead of the Nicene Creed. This can be done on any Sunday but is especially recommended during Lent and Easter because of the baptismal focus of those seasons. Those who pray the rosary will recognize it, but many of us may need to relearn that text as well to proclaim it comfortably.

The Creed is placed in the Mass after the readings and the homily. After hearing God's word to us and recalling some of the events of salvation history, we are invited to respond to God's word by renewing our commitment to live out our baptismal faith in union with the other members of the body of Christ who worship with us. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we renew our baptism, and the Profession of Faith can help us remember that.