



The Mass in Slow Motion



The Creed

This is a series on the Mass explaining the meaning and history of what we do each Sunday. This series of flyers is an attempt to add insight and understanding to our celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. You are also invited to learn more by attending Sunday School classes for adults which take place in the school cafeteria each Sunday from 9:45 am. to 10:45 am.

This series will follow the Mass in order.



At this point in the Mass, we confess our faith, a faith that many died for. The Creed stands at the center of the Liturgy and fundamentally declares “I believe” what we are celebrating here. I believe what we have just heard proclaimed in the readings and the homily. I believe in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe what God has done for me and that it is possible for me to be saved, sanctified, and share in God’s glory. I, standing here, declare that I believe in these things which we declare and celebrate. The word Creed comes from the Latin word, “Credo”, which means “I believe”. The Creed is also called the Profession of Faith.

The history of the Nicene Creed itself is a bit complex. The basic outline of the Creed, as we know it today, was given at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). This does not exactly coincide with our present Creed. The text we have today was actually approved by the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). There is one exception: the word, “Filioque” (indicating that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son), was added by the Council of Toledo in 589 AD. The Eastern Church never accepted the insertion of this word even though the teaching was not disputed. The dispute arose since there were no representatives from the Eastern Church present when the change was made. That is why, until this day the term does not appear in Eastern Orthodox Liturgies.

The use of the Creed was primarily associated with baptismal liturgies, at first and was often recited in the form of questions and answers. Later the whole Creed was memorized and recited just before baptism. It entered the Mass, first in the East in the early 6th Century, and did so due to difficulties with heresies. It was ordered recited at every liturgy by Timotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, between 511 and 517 AD. This example was copied everywhere in the East.

Its entrance into the Western part of the Church came through Spain, which was strongly influenced by the Eastern practice. It was recited just before the Our Father so that, before the Body and Blood of the Lord were received, the hearts of all might be purified by faith. Thus, with the Our Father, it was considered a prayer of preparation for communion. By the 8th Century the Creed appeared in the Gallican (French) liturgy. Once again, a struggle against heresy seems to have been behind its adoption. Charlemagne obtained permission from Pope Leo III and introduced the Creed into the Mass at his palace and, largely through this influence, its use slowly spread throughout the Carolingian Empire. From here it spread to England and Ireland, slowly.

Still, by this point it was not in the Liturgy at Rome. This greatly surprised the emperor Henry II who, in 1064 heard Mass in Rome without the Creed. The Roman priests explained that, since heresy had never been a problem in Rome, it was not necessary to profess the Creed so often. But for some reason, Henry pressured to have the Creed included, and Pope Benedict VIII directed it be included but only on Sundays and certain feasts.



The Creed was recited by the whole congregation at first. But slowly the text began to be sung in simple melodies. But these melodies grew in complexity and gradually slipped from the people; especially as more sophisticated harmonies came into use. Today, the preference is expressed in the norms that the people ordinarily be able to recite the Creed together. But this does not forbid it being sung, even elaborately. However, as we have seen with other texts, a balance between congregational participation and preserving the rich musical heritage of the Church is presumed.

Pastoral Reflections—In contrast with the Apostles' Creed, an older Creed in which the faith is asserted simply and forthrightly, the Nicene Creed is characterized by its theological clarity and richness. It is a theological and polemical declaration giving orthodoxy a clear exposition. But it must be recalled that the Creed's purpose is not so much to oppose heresy, as it is to unfold the contents of our faith. Hence the Creed, occurring as it does at the end of the Liturgy of the Word, is seen as the joyous "yes" of the congregation to the message they have received. Tampering with this text, text that martyrs died for, is surely uncalled for.



The Profession of Faith (Creed) is said by the priest and the people. At the words: "By the power of the Holy Spirit, etc." all are instructed to bow. On the feasts of the Annunciation and Christmas all genuflect. Despite this rather clear directive, this is not often done in the average parish. Once again, it is good to appreciate that the mystery of the Incarnation is so wonderful that we, in reverence, are to bow. Until the recent past, a genuflection was always called for, now a bow is the directive. Nevertheless, we are to indicate by our posture our awe of the mystery.

Notice the basic structure of the Creed: We believe in One God:

1. The Father Almighty
2. In Jesus Christ
3. In the Holy Spirit
4. The Church

This structure shows figuratively how the Church strengthens the teaching about the Trinity. The Church is an object of faith! It is through the Church that the faith is given, and hence, she is the foundation of and the safe-guarder of the Faith. Another thing to note about the Creed is that it is not a full catechism of the Faith. Rather, those truths about the faith that were most disputed in the early Church are listed and emphasized.

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Mass schedule: Sundays: 8 am, 9:30 am, 11 am & 7 pm; Saturdays: 8 am & 4:30 pm; Daily: 7 am in the chapel