

Day 120 (Thursday, July 16)

This article can be found at

<https://www.liguori.org/the-creed-gateway-to-grace.html>

The need for creed

The word creed comes from the Latin word *credo*—literally translated: “I believe!”—which is the phrase with which Christians have always begun their profession. There is strong evidence that such summary acts of faith have been integral to Christianity from the very start. *Credo* (or its Aramaic equivalent) is the word cried out by the desperate father who begs Jesus for the healing of his child ([Mark 9:24](#)). St. Paul seems to allude to credal statements when he says: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved” ([Romans 10:9-10](#)).

In the ordinary course of love, we believe with our heart and express our love with our words and deeds. If we live with integrity, there is a unity of our thoughts, words and deeds—our hearts and hands and voices. We say what we mean, and we do as we say. We “walk the talk.” This doesn’t mean, however, that our recitation of the creed presumes a “mastery” of “material.” As Rich Mullins put it, the creed “is making” us. That “making” is an ongoing process. Think again about the man in the Gospel. He shouted out to Jesus, “I believe,” but then he quickly added, “Help my unbelief!” Our lives must be shaped by the Creed we profess, just as we ourselves must be mastered and enriched by the truth.

A creed marks the way of conversion, for a pilgrim Church on earth and for each of its members. Creeds and conversion

Thus, creeds have always been an important part of the Rite of Baptism. This was one way the early Church made sure to fulfill Jesus’ command: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit” ([Matthew 28:19](#)). Some of the most ancient creeds we know are simple statements professing belief in each of the persons of the Blessed Trinity. If they elaborate at all, they add statements affirming that Jesus is both God and man.

In the Church’s beginning, there were no New Testaments, no missals, no hymnals. The apostles would summarize the saving events of Jesus’ life, often in short, skeletal sermons—summaries of the gospel—that came to be known as the “rule of faith.” In Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles, we see this process at work. Peter preached a summary of Christ’s life and mission (see especially 2:29-36). The people experienced a change of heart (v. 37) and “received his word” and “were baptized” (v. 41). They heard the apostles’ teaching and went on to receive the Eucharist (v. 42). The rule of faith, the creed in the making, was their gateway to the graced transformation made possible by the sacraments of initiation. We find this pattern repeated frequently in the New Testament and, afterward, in the works of the early Church Fathers.

The rule of faith took many forms, but it always proclaimed certain mysteries: God is one; God became man in Jesus Christ; Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ is glorified and will come again. Over time, these proclamations became more detailed and more standardized. They were universally recognized marks of faith. In the East, they were known as “canons of truth,” from the Greek term *kanon*, a “measuring stick.”

From early on, there were two general types of creeds: the question-and-answer kind and the declaration kind. We still know both forms [today](#). The Church uses the Q&A form in Baptisms and at the Easter Vigil. It expresses the movement of conversion in dramatic terms as it moves from a rejection of sin and evil (“Do you reject Satan?” “I do.”) to an affirmation of the true God (“Do you believe in God the Father Almighty...?” “I do”). Each “I do” resounds with power, glory and strength of commitment, reminding us of marriage vows and

solemn oaths sworn in courtrooms. Like marriage, the Creed indeed changes us. It marks a key moment in the story of our ongoing conversion. It is making us.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein