

THE NEW TRANSLATION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL

The Nicene Creed

Our look at the new translation of the Order of Mass continues with the Nicene Creed, which is a profession of the truths of the Christian faith. This Creed was originally adopted at the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, and then renewed and updated at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381. It is therefore also referred to as the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.”

The first major change is difficult to miss: the Creed will now say “**I believe**” instead of “We believe.” Other language groups have already been using “I believe” in the vernacular, because it is a straightforward translation of the ancient Latin text, which begins with “*Credo in unum Deum*” (“I believe in one God”). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a reflection on this phrase: “Whoever says ‘I believe’ says ‘I pledge myself to what we believe’” (no. 185). This offers a recurring opportunity to reaffirm one’s personal faith, just as when individuals respond, “I do,” if there is a renewal of baptismal promises during Mass.

The next change is from “seen and unseen” to “visible and invisible.” The Latin “*visibilium*” and “*invisibilium*” convey a more specific demarcation between the bodily and the spiritual realms. For instance, a child playing hide-and-seek may be unseen yet is still considered visible, whereas one’s guardian angel is indeed invisible by nature.

The new Creed translation also recovers Christ’s title, “**Only Begotten Son**” (“*Fili Unigenite*”), which we saw in the revised *Gloria*. To say the Son is “born of the Father before all ages” is a profound theological truth, for the Son is not “born” in the human sense of beginning one’s life, but eternally proceeds from the Father while being always fully God. Therefore, we continue to profess that Jesus Christ is “begotten, not made.”

(Continued...)

New Translation

(changes in bold)

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

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.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow, up to and including "and became man," all bow)

and by the Holy Spirit
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

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.

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.

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.

Following this comes a major wording change: from “one in being” to “consubstantial with the Father.” **“Consubstantial”**

(“*consubstantialem*” in the Latin text) is an unusual word that will require some catechesis, but it is a crucial early theological term, asserting that the Son is of the “same substance” with the Father – He equally shares the Father’s divinity as a Person of the Holy Trinity.

Although it carries the same basic meaning as “one in being,” the more precise use of “consubstantial” is an acknowledgement of how the Greek equivalent of the word was so important for safeguarding orthodoxy in the Early Church. In the Fourth Century, the description “*homoousios*” (“same substance”) was affirmed over “*homoiousios*” (“like substance”). The reality of who Christ is thus hinged upon a single letter!

In looking at the Creed as a whole, we recognize a definite structure: the first section speaks of God the Father, the second focuses on the Son, the third on the Holy Spirit, and the fourth on the Church. The portion on God the Son is by far the longest, for as we have seen, the need to affirm right doctrine about Jesus Christ was of utmost importance in the Early Church.

Let us turn to the phrase that stands alone in the middle of the Creed: **“and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”** Our current translation reads, “by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.” This simple change from “born” to “incarnate” is perhaps the most important amendment in the new text of the Creed, because it more accurately conveys the truth of the Incarnation – the event whereby the Son of God took flesh.

The current wording can easily be misinterpreted to mean that Christ did not actually

become man until the time He was born. Of course, the reality is that the Son of God took on human nature from the moment of His conception in the Blessed Virgin Mary’s womb, at the Annunciation. The Lord’s birth in Bethlehem is certainly a profound, public epiphany; but Mary’s “yes” to the Archangel Gabriel in Nazareth is understood as the moment when the Son first “came down from heaven” to dwell among us. By using the term, “incarnate,” the new translation leaves no ambiguity.

The significance of this line is also underscored by the fact that the faithful are supposed to make a “profound bow” (that is, a bow of the body from the waist) while reciting it, as an expression of reverence towards the great mystery of the Incarnation. This gesture is not something new with the coming translation – we all should be doing it even now whenever the Creed is recited.

There are a handful of remaining minor changes in the new translation of the Creed. Describing the Resurrection as being “in accordance with the Scriptures” speaks inclusively of the New Testament, in addition to “fulfillment” (as the current translation puts it) of Old Testament prophecy surrounding Christ’s rising. Towards the end, saying “I confess one baptism” carries more conviction than simply saying “I acknowledge.”

And by saying, “I *look forward* to the resurrection of the dead,” one expresses a sincere desire, rather than simply “looking for” the resurrection. The Latin “*expecto*” conveys a sense of anxious waiting and expectation for the fullness of eternal life!

This series was prepared by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. For more Roman Missal resources, please visit <http://www.diocesefwsb.org/diocesan-offices/worship-office/roman-missal/>