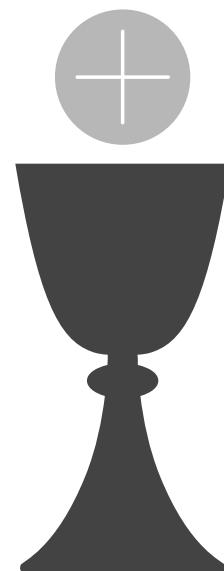


# Belief and Belonging



A few years ago, a popular department store launched an advertising campaign at the holiday season centered on a logo made up of the word “Believe!” This cheerful exclamation emblazoned on shopping bags and the like might suggest believing in Santa Claus, or yourself, or, really, anything.

It might be an act of faith to believe you’ll have enough money to pay your credit card bill at the end of the month! The success of the campaign (it was repeated the following year) suggests that belief itself has a kind of magic or charm, regardless of the object of that belief.

There may be something to this. It is human nature to believe, after all, and human dignity demands a respect for belief as part of the human person. But we also know that placing faith in an unworthy object can diminish people, and leave them empty and disappointed. Beliefs give shape to our commitments and guide our actions. Beliefs that matter must be grounded in truth.

## TO BELIEVE IS TO TRUST

To believe, *credere* in Latin, is to trust. It is to give one’s heart to something. In the Eucharist on Sundays we profess our faith, saying “I believe.” We say this together to affirm that we are believers together. At times my personal faith may be weak. The faith of others supports me. At other times it is my faith that provides the support for those around me. Believing is a community project.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that “faith needs the community of believers” (CCC 1253). Infants are baptized based on the faith of their parents. The Church community walks with catechumens on their journey of

faith. Even to the end of our days, sharing faith is important. It is no accident that the funeral rites make reference to the faith of the person who has died. The journey is long, but it leads us to God, in whom we have placed our trust. Blessed are those who have given their heart to *this* something—a faith that leads beyond death, to eternal life.

## THE CREED AT SUNDAY MASS

The Creed that we say at Sunday Mass is a wonderful witness to the multi-faceted nature of Christian believing. What is most personal to each individual—the trust I give to God’s revelation—is also something universal, shared with millions of other believers. In a day and age when people try to “make their mark” by being different, the Creed is counter-cultural. What the Creed gives us is something that individuality and personal flair can never provide: the strength that comes from a believing community. Christians in some parts of the world have been professing their faith at Sunday Mass since the fourth century. The Creed has deep roots.

The Apostles’ Creed is a summary of the profession of faith made in Baptism. Therefore, every time we say the Creed we should remember our dignity as the baptized. The Creed tells our story. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was composed as an expression of the faith of the bishops gathered at the Council of Constantinople in the fourth

century. Its precise expressions concerning each Person of the Trinity guard and protect us from false ideas (heresies) and keep us grounded in the truth that sets us free. Today, either may be used at Sunday Mass.

Within the flow of the liturgy, the profession of faith follows the homily. Coming as it does after the Word of God, it affirms God's revelation. The Creed also prepares us to enter into the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the second great section of the Mass. At the center of the Creed stands the Paschal Mystery—Christ's death and resurrection—which is the pivot on which the whole revelation turns. The Paschal Mystery is the heart of the Eucharist. Thus, the Creed points us forward, to the Eucharist.

### WHAT'S IN THE CREED?

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed consists of four parts. Each person of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—is named, and their interrelationships are named as well. The unique work of each Divine Person for our salvation is recalled. The fourth part of the Creed concerns the Church and her beliefs. It may surprise some that belief in the Church is an article of faith. Yet the Church is indeed part of the mystery of Christ. Gift from the heart of God, the Church is integral to the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world. It continues to the end of time.

At various moments in our faith journey, specific articles of the Creed can stand out and call us to more abundant life. Here are some examples: After the tragic attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on 9/11, some people heard our profession of faith in "one God" as a call to solidarity with all monotheistic religions: it became a key to reconciliation. A passion for the natural environment has made some acutely aware of affirming God as "maker of heaven and earth": it has become a call to stewardship of the gifts of the earth. After burying a loved one, some hear the affirmation of "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come" as a fresh promise: it has become

an occasion of healing and hope. How has the faith we affirm in the Creed called you to more abundant life? Each person has particular moments of insight. Although we say "Yes" to all of it at once, we realize the power of what we proclaim only a little at a time.

### REFLECT

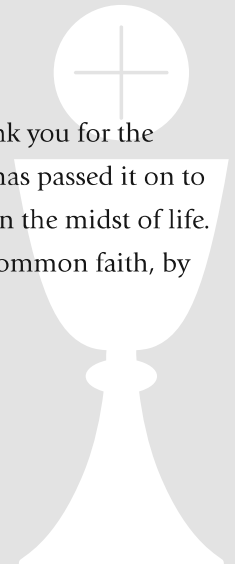
Try this exercise at home, as a way to hear the Creed afresh: At every point where it says "I believe" substitute the words "I put my trust." What insights occur to you, when you consider the Creed in light of trust?

### ACT

Memorize the Creed. In the early Church the Creed was never written down on paper or parchment, but "retained in the hearts of the faithful" (Rufinus, *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, 4th century). Get to know it "by heart."

### PRAY

Giver of the gift of faith, we thank you for the Creed, and for the Church that has passed it on to us. Let it be our strong support in the midst of life. Help us to bear witness to our common faith, by all we say and do.



**AUTHOR** ■ Rita Ferrone is an award-winning writer and speaker in the areas of liturgy, catechesis, and renewal in the Roman Catholic Church.

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