

# “I Believe”

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When Catholics profess the Creed, or Profession of Faith, during Mass, the first change in the translation will be immediately apparent. Today, we begin the Creed with the words, “We believe . . . .” With the new text, we will profess, “I believe . . . .” Many may wonder why this change has been made.

In its original form, as approved by the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in the year 381, the Nicene Creed (or Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, to be precise) begins “We believe.” The Council Fathers were establishing a rule of faith, a criterion that helps us interpret sacred scripture correctly and to preach and theologize correctly; it was a bulwark against many of the heresies of the day (Arianism, for example). It was not written to be recited during the Mass. An abbreviated version of the Creed was, however, used for Baptisms. Before being plunged into the water, the catechumen would be asked,

Do you believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth?

The response would be given,

I believe.

After that statement, the rest of the Creed would be presented in question form. The response to each question was “I believe.”

And, of course, more baptismal water would follow. Thus the initial use of the Creed in the liturgy was in the context of Baptism, employing the words, “I believe.” It wasn’t until the year 1014 that Rome began to use the Creed within the Mass on a regular basis. This broader liturgical use of the Creed followed the form used in Baptism, and thus the opening word, “Credo” (meaning “I believe”), was employed. In the centuries since then, additional reasons for using “I,” instead of “we,” have been put forth. Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae 1, 9) says that the Church proclaims the Creed as a single person, made one by faith. Whereas the original baptismal context calls us to take personal responsibility



for our faith by the use of the singular “I,” Saint Thomas complements this idea by observing that the singular “I” also demonstrates the united, corporate nature of the Church. Each of us singly also speaks as the one body of Christ in crying out, “I believe.” In professing the faith, we acquire, in the words of Saint Paul, “the mind of Christ” and speak as his one body.

There are two additional reasons for this change to the form of the Creed. First, every other major liturgical language either already uses the singular “I” or soon will. This change will unite English-speaking Catholics more closely to the rest of the Catholic world. Secondly, the Latin text of the Creed in *The Roman Missal* uses *Credo* (“I believe”) rather than *Credimus* (“We believe”).

Some of the prayers of the Mass employ the first person plural, for example, the Gloria (“we worship you, we give you thanks. . .”), the prayer at the Preparation of the Gifts: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands . . . for our good . . .” the Preface dialogue: “Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord,” the *Our* Father, and the Lamb of God: “have mercy on us.” Also, a number of prayers use the first person singular, for example, the *Confiteor*: “I confess to almighty God,” and the prayer before Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you . . .”—and now the Creed.

The emergent pattern seems to be that when we confess our sins and when we confess our faith, the Church wants us to use the “I.” When we otherwise say or sing prayers of praise or mercy, it is rather “we.” In a beautiful way, when a Catholic prays the Mass, we are both one and many: many parts, one body; many grains, one loaf; many minds, united in one faith, in the one mind of Christ.

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# Creed

## Present Version

**We believe** in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
**of all that is seen and unseen.**

**We believe** in one Lord, Jesus Christ  
**the only** Son of God,  
**eternally begotten of the Father,**  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
**one in Being with the Father.**

Through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:

*All bow:*

**by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he was born of the Virgin Mary,**  
and became man.

For our sake  
he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
**he suffered, died, and was buried.**  
**On the third day he rose again  
in fulfillment of 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.

**We believe** in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds  
from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son  
he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.

**We believe** in one holy catholic  
and apostolic Church.

**We acknowledge** one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.

**We look for** the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## New Version

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

**And** 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.

**And** 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.

**And** 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.

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