NICENE CREED

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,
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.

The Nicene Creed

• The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #193, tells us that there are two Creeds that hold a special place in the Church’s life. One is called the Apostles’ Creed, and the other is called the Nicene Creed. The Apostles’ Creed is described as a summary of the apostle’s faith. Early Christians had to confess this faith if they were to be baptized a Christian.

• The second creed, the Nicene Creed, receives its authority from its origin in the first two ecumenical councils in 325 A.D. and 381 A.D.

• The Nicene Creed was first formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and was accepted as the absolute expression of faith at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.
• Churches in both the east and the west use this creed to this very day. Both creeds are equally important—one is not considered more important than the other. Both creeds help us deepen our faith as they are intended to be summaries of our faith.

• Consider the first sentence. “I believe in one God.” The catechism tells us how we are to understand this first sentence.

  o We affirm faith in one and only one God.
  o We call on God in faith, and we abandon our lives to his providential care.
  o We surrender our lives to God.
  o We promise to love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul.
  o We affirm that we are disciples and that we are in relationship with God.

• God loved us so much that he revealed his name to us. When one person discloses his or her name to another person, that person makes himself or herself known to the other person. God made himself known to human beings by disclosing his name.

• Believing in one God has huge consequences for the way we live our lives.

• The Catechism of the Catholic Church, #223, tells us:

  o We come to know God’s awesome majesty.
  o We must adore him and serve him.
  o We must have a thankful heart for all God has given to the human race.
  o Believing in one God means that we appreciate and acknowledge the unity and dignity of all people—we are made in God’s image, and we must honor that image in every person.
  o Believing in God means that we make good use of all that God has given us, all created things.
  o We are to retain everything that brings us closer to God. We are to discard everything that distracts us from God.
  o Believing in God means we are to trust God in every circumstance. The catechism cites St. Theresa: Let nothing trouble you. Let nothing frighten you. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God wants for nothing. God alone is enough.

• When we call God “Father,” we do not mean that literally. God is not father as we understand the human father. The Catechism reminds us that God does not have gender as we do. “Father” is a metaphor for expressing God’s love, his compassion, his tenderness, and his desire to care for us. There are other biblical images of God besides “father.”

• The Wisdom tradition refers to God as the divine Sophia, another name for Wisdom.

• The New Testament uses the image of a woman looking for a lost coin as a metaphor for God as well.

• When we say “maker of heaven and earth,” we powerfully acknowledge that God is not just the God of Israel, but God is the only God there is! God is the creator. God is Lord of the universe, of the cosmos. God is ruler of all created things.

• The Creed professes that we are Trinitarian. We believe in three equal persons in one God.
• We pray in the Nicene Creed that we believe in one God.

• We pray that we believe in “one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,” and we believe in “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.”

• This is very difficult language—not to mention theology—to wrap our heads around. The language we use to describe it is limited and inadequate at best, but still we must try.

• The scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity is taken from the story of the baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:16-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-22), the ritual prayers of the baptism rite in very early Christian sources, and early Church prayers in general (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

• Scripture did not specifically reveal the doctrine of the Trinity, even though it is powerfully alluded to in the Gospel of John. It is a doctrine that was developed by the early Church in their discussions about the nature of God and in various councils.

• The establishment of the doctrine of the Trinity came in response to heresies that denied and doubted the humanity and the divinity of Jesus.

• For example, the words, “born of the Father before all ages” were inserted into the creed as a response to the Arian heresy that insisted that Jesus was created by the Father as a lesser being than the Father, not as the Father’s equal. In other words, Jesus was not equal to the Father; he was somehow less than the Father.
  
  o The Nicene Council refuted that heresy and inserted the fact that Jesus was always a part of the Godhead. Jesus was always divine, and was present with the Father from the very beginning.

• One metaphor that helps us understand the mystery of the Trinity is as follows:
  
  o Word. Jesus was always part of God. There never was a time that Jesus was not God, or not part of God. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus and the Father have always been one. Jesus is often referred to as the Divine Word.
  
  o One way to try to understand “begotten, not made” is to say that Jesus was always part of the Father. The Father did not make Jesus. To be begotten, the Father simply had to speak the Word (that was already part of God) and Jesus who was already part of God’s essence flowed out from God, out to the universe.
  
  o In truth there really is no language that adequately describes this or helps us get our heads around it. But still we must try to understand it as it is a central part of Catholic Christian faith.
  
  o The unity of the Trinity has always been perfect.
  
  o There never was a time when Jesus did not exist. Jesus, the divine Son of God, who is God, was present at the creation of the world.
  
  o However, each person of the Trinity, though one and in perfect unity, is nevertheless distinct from the other. They each have their own essences.
  
  o Each member of the Trinity has his own mission.
The Father is the origin of all life. He and only he is the creator. The Son alone took on human form. The Son became incarnate. The Spirit flows from, comes out of, the Father and the Son as the greatest gift ever given to human beings. The Spirit carries on the work Jesus began in his incarnation.

The Father, Son, and Spirit form a perfect community of love. They are an example for us for how to live in perfect love with one another as they show us their perfect love in their relationship with one another in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit in a perfect community of love.

In the Scriptures we learn that Jesus constantly honored and loved his Father. The Father calls out from heaven that Jesus is his beloved Son.

The Spirit glorifies both the Father and the Son. Perfect unified love!

The Creed also professes other major points of Christian teaching and doctrine. The Catholic understanding of the word “mystery” is that it is something we can grasp on some level, but also something we will never fully understand. We will continue to plumb the depths of the mystery throughout our lives.

**Incarnation**

- The Creed professes and affirms that Jesus took on human form. He became a human being. He was both human and divine.

- One of the most beautiful theologies of the Incarnation is that Jesus made all creation holy just by taking on human form.

- Since Jesus was divine, his incarnation made the entire created universe, men, women, and all created things, holy.

- Our liturgy prays that a divine exchange took place. Jesus/God took human form and in so doing imbued us with his divinity, a spark of his divine life. Scriptures tells us we are made a little less than the gods.

- The Creed also professes that he was born of the Virgin Mary. The Creed upholds her very important place in God's plan of salvation. This is why we honor Mary. She is the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God.

**Paschal Mystery**

- Christians believe in the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

- The Church calls this the paschal mystery. We are all invited to share in that mystery.

- We are invited to take up our cross and follow Jesus, the absolute invitation of every liturgy we celebrate.

**Eschatology**

- Our teaching about the afterlife is also included in the Nicene Creed. “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

- We are reminded about the last things, about heaven, hell, final judgment, and eternal life.
We are reminded that Jesus will come again at the end of the world to judge the world and bring his work on earth to completion.

The Four Marks of the Church

- The Creed also teaches us about the four marks of the Church, that is, the four identifying characteristic of the Church.
- The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.
- **ONE**: there is only one Church of Christ, and it subsists in the Catholic Church. All other Christian Churches are understood to be in some way part of the Catholic Church, united in baptism, but not all are in full communion.
  - Many Catholics used to believe that Christians from other traditions were not saved. That is not true. The Second Vatican Council and all of our ecumenical efforts remind us that other Christian people are saved.
  - They are in some mysterious way already a part of the Catholic Church through baptism.
  - Some of them are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church but they are a part of it nevertheless.
- **HOLY**: The Church is holy by the power of Jesus. The Church is set apart for a particular purpose (CCC, #824). Even though we are sinners, we work toward holiness. The Church itself is holy and graced by Jesus Christ.
- **CATHOLIC**: The Church is universal in message. The same full gospel is preached everywhere. The Church is Catholic because, as St. Ignatius of Antioch told us: Wherever Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church. The fullness of the body of Christ exists within the Catholic Church (CCC, #830).
  - Secondly the Church is Catholic because it is sent on a mission by Jesus Christ to the whole world.
- **APOSTOLIC**: Our faith is handed down to us from an unbroken line of succession, from Peter to the current pope. We have been formed in the faith of the Apostles that means we are to do what the apostles did: go out and baptize all nations, go out and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

One baptism

- Finally, the Creed reminds us that there is only one baptism. That is why we do not re-baptize. We accept and honor the valid baptism of other Christian Churches. A valid baptism consists of baptism with water and in the name of the Trinity.
- The Creed ends on a note of hope as we await eternal life in the life after death.
- The Nicene Creed is the foundation of our Christian/Catholic belief.
- Belief in the articles of faith contained in the Creed is not optional. When new members make a profession of faith in the Catholic Church, they are professing, committing, and affirming that they believe everything that is contained in these words.