

Mass Parts 18/52: *Creed, part 2*



Continuing with the Nicene Creed from last week, we see a description of the Church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” These are the Four Marks of the Church. The Church is *one*, with one head, Jesus Christ, one vicar, the Pope, one gathered people. The divisions within Christianity are harmful to this unity and we continue to pray that all may be one. It is *holy* because it has Jesus Christ as its head, with the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is *catholic* in the fullest sense of the term: universal. This faith is intended to cover the whole world and that continues to be our missionary call. The Church is *apostolic* in that the bishops, as successors to the apostles, continue to lead the church in its holiness and connectedness.

One final statement for our reflection on the Nicene Creed: “I confess one Baptism...” We do not believe in re-baptizing, nor in the invalidity of infant baptism. The sacraments work because of the grace they imbue. Three of the seven sacraments imprint a special character on the recipient, a character that can never be washed away; these are Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. You can only receive these once. Sin does not wipe away the mark of Baptism, but it can cloud and soil it; so we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation. St. Augustine compared this mark as similar to the tattoo that soldiers in the Roman army received: SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus* = The Senate and People of Rome). If a soldier deserts from the army, he cannot remove the tattoo, the mark remains. If he comes back and rejoins the army, they do not redo the tattoo, it is still there.

At special times of the year, we also have the option to pray the Apostle’s Creed. The title comes from the story that each Apostle came up with one line each and joined them together to form this creed. This is just a story, as the Creed has its development from the Roman Baptismal ritual.

The one line that gives people the most concern is where Jesus “descended into Hell.” Hell here refers mostly to the Jewish and Greek understanding of Hades or Sheol. It was a dark and dim place in the afterlife. Not exactly a place of eternal damnation or the abode of Satan, it is more a sad place, close to our understanding of Purgatory. The 20th century theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, wrote a whole book about this line from the creed, pondering on its meaning as to how Jesus went to the very depths of existence and distance from God to preach the Good News of salvation. He felt everything a human being can feel, even to the point of despair of God.

As was explained, we can use either creed during the year. The Nicene Creed is the norm, with the Apostle’s Creed suggested during Lent and Easter. So to add to our confusion, we will be bringing the Apostle’s Creed back. It is good to know both.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Intercessions