



Episode 24: The Creed

SUMMARY

A frequent question concerns the first pronoun of the Creed. Why do we say “I believe” rather than “we” believe?

Notice that one of the first tasks of the liturgical assembly is for the different members to be formed into a single body. The “I” (ie., the first person singular pronoun) of the Creed is, in a sense, the “I” of the singular Body of Christ, who worships God the Father. It is also the personal “I” of the individual believer. This “I believe” of the Creed is able to account for the personal belief and the corporate belief of Christ’s mystical body. It is both a baptismal confession and a communal statement of shared faith.

The Letter of to the Corinthians tells us that the body has many members, but it is one body. The plural “we” signifies grammatically a collection of individuals; “we” is only a united body when it is understood as “I”.

Credo, I believe, signifies at one and the same time, my personal faith and the faith of the one body, the Church.

The Roman Missal

Moreover, they are to form one body, whether in hearing the Word of God, or in taking part in the prayers and in the singing, or above all by the common offering of the Sacrifice and by participating together at the Lord’s table. This unity is beautifully apparent from the gestures and bodily postures observed together by the faithful.

General Instruction, n°. 96

The purpose of the Creed or Profession of Faith is that the whole gathered people may respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also honor and confess the great mysteries of the faith by pronouncing the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use and before the celebration of these mysteries in the Eucharist begins.

General Instruction, n°. 67

The Symbol or Creed is sung or recited by the Priest together with the people with everyone standing. At the words *et incarnatus est*, etc. (*and by the Holy Spirit...and became man*) all make a

profound bow; but on the Solemnities of the Annunciation and of the Nativity of the Lord, all genuflect.

General Instruction, n°. 137

IN THE TRADITION

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. ... Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.”

I Corinthians 12:12, 27

“Hear, O God, my petition, listen to my prayer.

Who is speaking? An individual, it seems. See if it is an individual: *I cried to you from the ends of the earth while my heart was in anguish.* Now it is no longer one person; rather, it is one in the sense that Christ is one, and we are all his members. (...) This possession of Christ, this inheritance of Christ, this body of Christ, this one Church of Christ, this unity that we are, cries from the ends of the earth.”

Saint Augustine
Exposition of Psalm 60

“Where do you pasture your sheep, O Good Shepherd, you who carry on your shoulders the whole flock? For it is but one sheep, this entire human race whom you lift onto your shoulders.”

Gregory of Nyssa
Commentary on the Song of Songs

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

✠ “Rightly, then, the liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole

public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.”

Sacrosanctum Concilium, n°. 7

✠ “Whoever says ‘I believe’ says ‘I pledge myself to what we believe.’ Communion in faith needs a common language of faith, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n°. 185

✠ “The first ‘profession of faith’ is made during Baptism. The symbol of faith is first and foremost the baptismal creed.”

CCC, n°. 189

IN THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

Eucharistic Prayer III

We pray, almighty God, that we may always be counted among the members of Christ, in whose Body and Blood we have communion.

Prayer after Communion, Fifth Sunday of Lent

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What attitude is required for a group to be formed into a unified body?
2. How does the common faith expressed in the Creed unite us to Christ?

FOR FURTHER READING

Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).