

Three Minute Liturgical Catechesis

Article 13: Avoiding An Identity Crisis

Sometimes in the course of life, some people experience what is called an identity crisis. Experiencing significant changes in one's life, such a person loses a clearly defined sense of who they are and what is important to them. It may take a while to find one's bearings again, to realize what is really central to one's sense of self and the meaning of one's life.

Perhaps it is to forestall a similar crisis that the liturgy invites us each week to reaffirm our identity in the Creed or Profession of Faith at Mass. Because we say it every week, it can easily become a routine ritual carried out with little thought. It may be helpful to take a few moments to talk about why we say the Creed each week.

Think about how we do the Creed on Easter Sunday. Abandoning our usual pattern, on that central day of the year we profess our faith by renewing our baptismal promises. This reminds us that the Creed finds its first home in the celebration of baptism. Before entering the waters of the font, those to be baptized (or their parents if they are infants) publicly profess their faith. In doing so, they claim their identity as believers in Jesus Christ, called by the Father and guided by the Holy Spirit. They commit their future to sharing the life of the Trinity.

So every week, we renew that commitment. The catechumens are dismissed before the Creed, because they have not yet made this profession of faith at baptism. We who are already baptized publicly profess again who we are and what is ultimately important in our lives. And we do this together, as one voice, because our faith is a shared faith, not just a set of beliefs but a way of life shared with all other members of Christ's body.

In the Creed, we use ancient language to profess eternal truths. The words we use most often are the Nicene Creed, stemming from the Councils of Nicaea in 325 and Chalcedon in 451. Sometimes, as on Easter, we use the words of the Apostles' Creed instead.

Both formulas reaffirm our faith in the Father who created us and all things, in the Son who redeemed us by his death and resurrection, and in the Holy Spirit who guides us and unites us in the Church. Thus we identify ourselves as children of the Father, as those redeemed by the Son and as people who strive to live in the Holy Spirit. We base our lives on belief in the Trinity. Consider the contrast with Muslims, for example, who affirm their identity by professing their faith in Allah: "There is no god but Allah." We also believe in one God, but we believe that there are three persons in that one God.

The Creed comes just after the readings and the homily. It stands as a communal response to God's word. We hear what God has done for us and then we express our faith in response. Of course, the words only matter if we live by them. By proclaiming the Creed, we commit ourselves to live every day in the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.