



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

THE NICENE CREED



Icon of Resurrection of Christ, Vatican Pinakoteka



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that are best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

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Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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Catechist begins this session by making introductory remarks, using these or similar words:

What Jesus accomplished as a result of his death and resurrection is found in the prayers we pray at Mass. It is found particularly in the Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and various other prayers. Today we are going to break open the Nicene Creed. This profession of faith is a prayer you will say for the rest of your life. It summarizes the most important things we believe about Jesus the Christ, as well as other important doctrines we believe.



Sharing Human Experience

Catechist invites participants to take a panoramic view of their own lives—to remember significant events and call them forward. Allow five to seven minutes for the exercise and discuss for about five minutes.

- ▶ Have you ever belonged to a group that had a charter, vision statement, and so forth?
- ▶ Why do groups formulate such statements?
- ▶ What do they accomplish? What is their purpose?

Catechist reads the whole Creed to the group:

NICENE CREED

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

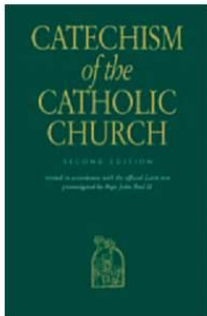
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
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.



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 198-231; 430-455; 456-483; 571-594; 631-637; 659-667; 668-682; 687-747; and 748-780.

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.
 - We affirm faith in one and only one God.
 - We call on God in faith, and we abandon our lives to his providential care.
 - We surrender our lives to God.
 - We promise to love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul.
 - 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:
 - We come to know God’s awesome majesty.
 - We must adore him and serve him.
 - We must have a thankful heart for all God has given to the human race.
 - 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.
 - Believing in God means that we make good use of all that God has given us, all created things.
 - We are to retain everything that brings us closer to God. We are to discard everything that distracts us from God.
 - 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.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question in dyads. Catechist begins the discussion by sharing from his or her own life experience. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Name one thing in your life that brings you closer to God and one thing that distract you from God and perhaps should be discarded.

Surface insights in wider group.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ 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.
 - 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:
 - 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- The unity of the Trinity has always been perfect.
- 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.
- However, each person of the Trinity, though one and in perfect unity, is nevertheless distinct from the other. They each have their own essences.
- 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.

Catechist invites participants to engage in the following exercise in small groups of four. Allow ten or fifteen minutes for the following exercises. Catechist begins the discussion by sharing an experience from his or her own life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Part One: Read the Creed again. Choose one thing in the Creed that gives you great comfort in your life of faith.
- ▶ Part Two: What exactly are we affirming when we pray the Creed? What are we saying “yes” to in this prayer?
- ▶ Consider each paragraph, and in your own words give a summary of what you think it is saying.
- ▶ If you are a catechumen or a candidate, you will be telling God and witnessing to the world that you believe all that is contained in the Nicene Creed. It is important that you understand what you are affirming.
- ▶ Is there any part of this Creed that would be difficult for you to say, “Yes,” to? If so, what makes it difficult?



Community Connections

- ▶ Part Three: What is the challenge of the Nicene Creed in our everyday lives?
- ▶ How could the Nicene Creed possibly challenge us to be a better disciple?
- ▶ What are the implications of this teaching?



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to either respond with one other person to the following question or to write their response in their journal.

- ▶ What one thing are you invited to change in your life as a result of what we shared today?

Catechist invites participants to take part in parish activities that support spiritual growth. For example, “We strongly encourage you to make the parish retreat that is taking place in the next few weeks. It will be one of the greatest gifts you could give yourself. Please come and see one of us after this session for information on participating.”



Closing Prayer

God of power,
we know that we do not know how to pray as we should,
so we ask that you teach us how to pray.
You have given us the gift of prayer.
You have given us the Creed as our profession of faith.
We ask you to help us be grateful for such a wonderful gift.
You enter into a covenant relationship with us.
So we ask you to make us thirsty for your love.

We'll end by celebrating the minor rite of blessing.

Appendix

#1. I am a strong believer that every person has a right to health care. Every person should have access to the care I am privileged to have. Thus I have followed the health care debate very closely. I have been extremely upset over the self-serving behaviors exhibited by our national leaders on both sides of the political divide. It would seem that more care and concern is given to their re-election than to the serious problems so many people face when it comes to health care. I have been so embroiled in following the course of the debate that I was spending an inordinate amount of time following news reports. I was becoming addicted to the news. My inner peace became seriously disturbed.

I have a thirty-minute drive to work each day. I used to spend that time listening to commentaries on the subject of health care. I would channel surf until I found commentaries dealing with the subject. One day I had a profound awakening. My inordinate attention given to the issue was not doing one thing to insure its passage. It was, however, distracting me from prayer and other more worthy pursuits. I made a conscious decision to turn off the radio and to listen instead to spiritual and teaching CDs that would better occupy my mind. I follow the debate by taking a brief look at the news each day and then move on to other, more wholesome pursuits.

My attention to the subject, while good in principle—health care for all is a value promoted by our own bishops—was nevertheless a serious distraction and one that totally disturbed my peace. When I put the issue in right order and occupied my mind with other pursuits, the benefits to my spiritual life were palpable. I have learned a powerful lesson. Even worthy pursuits can become distractions if not held in balance.

#2. I find great comfort in the words, “begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.” I love our Church teaching on the Incarnation that tells us that we are imbued with Christ’s divine life; that just because he took human form all creation is graced and holy. Most of us have been beaten down by life and in one way or another are afflicted by low self-esteem. We are in constant pursuit of affirmation that tells us that we are OK.

I have come to believe that such pursuits are an affront to God. Yes, we are sinners. However, when we deny our own intrinsic goodness, we deny the power of the Incarnation. When I am able to touch the divine life that exists within me, I have no need to pursue affirmation and accolades. They are meaningless. I am affirmed because I am a child of God. If I truly believed that, I would no longer take offense when my self-esteem is challenged. My fervent prayer is to more fully participate in the divine life that is within me. I would be a far more effective minister. My daily prayer is always, “Lord, may I decrease so you can increase.” Sometimes I live that more effectively than at other times.

Handout on the Nicene Creed

NICENE CREED

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the Father almighty,
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of all things visible and invisible.

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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.
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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
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He will come again in glory
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 - 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.

- 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.
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- ▶ **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.