

The Profession of Faith

When we think of “the Creed” we probably call to mind the Apostles’ Creed, which is well known as the one most often recited at Sunday Mass, on other Solemnities and Feasts, and when we pray the Rosary. Since 1969, in French and English liturgies, Canadian Catholics have prayed the Apostles’ Creed. It was the Nicene Creed, however, that was inserted into the Mass in the late 400s, for the Faithful to profess and pray.

The Jubilee Year of 2025 marks the 1700th anniversary of the original Creed of Nicaea. It was drawn up by the bishops and theologians who gathered at the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (modern-day Turkey) in 325 to settle a dispute about Jesus, since some were saying that he was only a special human being but not God. The Scriptures, of course, were clear about how Jesus revealed himself as human and divine, son of Mary and Son of God, but the Church needed to find the right words to explain this mystery. At the Council it was declared that Jesus is *consubstantial with the Father*. The next Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople in 381, would add to the Creed and make it clear that the Holy Spirit is also God, of the same substance. This expanded Creed came to be known as the “Nicene Creed”.

This Creed was first prayed at Mass in the East (Asia Minor, the Middle East and Asia) from the late fifth century. Within 100 years it was being used during the Mass in Spain. The Creed was prayed at various times during the Mass, and when it spread to Ireland, it was recited at the end of the Liturgy of the Word. In the early ninth century it was introduced throughout the empire of Charlemagne at his insistence. In the early 11th century, it was introduced into the Mass at Rome and later included in the *Missal of Pius V*, following the Council of Trent (1554-63).

By comparison, the Apostles’ Creed, as we know it, was compiled over time from the words used in the celebration of Baptism since the first century. The questions asked of those being baptized, or of parents and godparents, were put in a single formula around the year 390 by St. Ambrose of Milan. That formula was later expanded in the eighth century into the formula we know today, and also used as part of the Rosary as it developed over time.

In the reform of the Liturgy following Vatican Council II (1962-65), the Creed retained its place in the Liturgy of the Word. Canadian bishops sought permission from Rome to also use the Apostles’ Creed at Mass. It was well known because of its use with the Rosary, but also had ecumenical appeal, since most Protestant ecclesial communities used it in their worship. In addition, it is a central part of the rites of Christian Initiation. The Apostles’ Creed has become so common that most parishes in Canada pray and profess the Nicene Creed only on 25 March and 25 December.

To mark this 1700-year milestone since the first Ecumenical Council, it has been suggested that we make provision to pray the Nicene Creed at more celebrations of Mass during the Jubilee Year. Whichever profession of faith we use, it is a prayerful way to express what we believe as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith. Praying the Nicene Creed this year reminds us of the important moment in history when the Holy Spirit gave the Church a new way of thinking and of proceeding with the mission of making new disciples according to the mind and heart of Jesus.