

**Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle C**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield, Illinois**

**January 19, 2025**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

In my homily last Sunday, I noted that this year marks the 1,700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which promulgated the Nicene Creed that we still use today and recite right after the homily at Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation. Today, I would like to look more in-depth at that gathering in Nicaea in the year 325.

The Council of Nicaea met from May until the end of July in the year 325 in ancient Nicaea, which was located in what is now known as the country of Türkiye [Turkey]. Around 220 bishops attended, mostly from the eastern churches. It was the first ecumenical council of the Christian church, called by the emperor Constantine I, at the time an unbaptized catechumen, to address the problem created by Arianism, a heresy first proposed early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by the priest Arius of Alexandria that asserted that Christ is not divine but a created being. Arianism, as the heresy was called, was popular throughout much of the Eastern and Western Roman empires.

The response that came from the Council of Nicaea was the Nicene Creed, a Christian statement of faith that is considered the only ecumenical creed because it is accepted as authoritative by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant churches.<sup>1</sup>

Although the main focus of the Nicene Creed is meant to address the Christological question of the nature of Jesus Christ as both divine and human, it actually has a Trinitarian structure, with separate paragraphs about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, with a concluding paragraph about our beliefs in the Catholic Church and some essential dogmas, such as the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life. In this sense, the Nicene Creed closely follows the structure of the Apostles' Creed, so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith, although the Nicene Creed is often more explicit and more detailed than the Apostles' Creed.

Part One of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a line-by-line and almost word-by-word analysis of the Apostles' Creed, which is helpful as we consider the meaning of the Nicene Creed. Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed start with the words, "I believe." Thus, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* starts its analysis of the Creed with these two words,

saying, “Before expounding the Church’s faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy and lived in observance of God’s commandments and in prayer, we must first ask what ‘to believe’ means” (CCC n. 26). Since faith is our response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to us as we search for the ultimate meaning of life, we must first consider that search, then the divine Revelation by which God comes to meet mankind, and finally our response of faith.

“The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for” (CCC n. 27). All people believe in something. Even atheism is a belief, namely the belief that there is no God. I would argue that atheism is actually harder to prove than belief in God. The Church “teaches that God . . . can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason” (CCC n. 36). In contrast, how does one prove the non-existence of God? It is sheer fantasy to imagine that the exquisite details of the ordered nature of the universe and of human existence came about by some random coincidence.

While we can know that God exists with certainty by natural reason on the basis of His works, there is another order of knowledge, which we cannot possibly arrive at by our own powers, namely, the order of divine Revelation. “Through an utterly free decision, God has revealed himself and ... His plan of loving goodness ... by sending us His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit” (CCC n. 50). This revelation comes to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. “Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit and [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit [who] transmits it to the successors of the apostles [today’s bishops] so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching” (CCC n. 81).

“By his Revelation, the invisible God, from the fullness of His love,” calls men and women His friends, “and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company. The adequate response to this invitation is faith” (CCC n. 142). But this faith does not come automatically. As we heard in today’s second reading (1 *Corinthians* 12:4-11), faith is a gift given by the Holy Spirit.

“Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him. Before this faith can be exercised, [we] must have the grace of God to move and assist [us]; [we] must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth” (CCC n. 153).

Today’s Gospel passage (*John* 2:1-11) describes the third of the three great theophanies, an ancient Greek word that refers to divine revelation or the manifestation of God. Two weeks ago we celebrated the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah to the Magi, symbolizing the manifestation of Jesus to all nations as the Messiah. Last week was the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, while the voice of God the Father proclaimed that “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22). Our Gospel passage today tells how Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding at Cana, the first of His great signs by which many “disciples began to believe in Him” (*John* 2:11). In response, we would do well to heed the instruction of the Blessed Mother, “Do whatever he tells you.”

All of this flows from those first two words of the Creed, “I believe,” which will lead us to consider in more detail in future homilies what it means to believe in God alone, to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and to believe in the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Council-of-Nicaea-325>; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nicene-Creed>; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arianism>; and <https://www.churchhistory101.com/council-nicea-325.php>.