

“I Believe”

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When Catholics profess the Creed, or Profession of Faith, during Mass, the first change in the translation will be immediately apparent. We have been beginning the Creed with the words, “We believe” With the new text, we will profess, “I believe” Many may wonder why this change has been made.

In its original form, as approved by the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in the year 381, the Nicene Creed (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, to be precise) begins “We believe.” The Council Fathers were establishing a rule of faith, a criterion that helps us interpret Sacred Scripture correctly and to preach and theologize correctly; it was a bulwark against many of the heresies of the day (Arianism, for example). It was not written to be recited during the Mass. An abbreviated version of the Creed was, however, used for Baptisms. Before being plunged into the water, the catechumen would be presented the Creed in question and answer form. The response to each question was “I believe.”

And, of course, more baptismal water would follow. Thus the initial use of the Creed in the liturgy was in the context of Baptism, employing the words, “I believe.” It wasn’t until the year 1014 that Rome began to use the Creed within the Mass on a regular basis. This broader liturgical use of the Creed followed the form used in Baptism, and thus the opening word, *Credo* (meaning “I believe”), was employed. In the centuries since then, additional reasons for using “I,” instead of “we,” have been put forth. Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* IIa IIae 1, 9) says that the Church proclaims the Creed as a single person, made one by faith. Whereas the original baptismal context calls us to take personal responsibility for our faith by the use of the singular “I,” Saint Thomas complements this idea by observing that the singular “I” also



demonstrates the united, corporate nature of the Church. Each of us singly also speaks as the one body of Christ in crying out, “I believe.” In professing the faith, we acquire, in the words of Saint Paul, “the mind of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 2:16, NRSV) and speak as his one body.

There are two additional reasons for this change to the form of the Creed. First, every other major liturgical language either already uses the singular “I” or soon will. This change will unite English-speaking Catholics more closely to the rest of the Catholic world. Secondly, the Latin text of the Creed in *The Roman Missal* uses *Credo* (“I believe”) rather than *Credimus* (“We believe”).

Some of the prayers of the Mass employ the first person plural, for example, the Gloria (“we praise you . . . we give you thanks. . . .” [emphasis added]); the prayer at the Preparation of the Gifts: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands . . . for our good” (emphasis added); the Preface Dialogue: “Lift up your hearts. / We lift them up to the Lord” (emphasis added); the Our Father; and the Lamb of God: “have mercy on us” (emphasis added). Also, a number of prayers use the first person singular, for example, the *Confiteor*: “I confess to almighty God,” and the response to the Invitation to Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you” (emphasis added)—and now the Creed.

The emergent pattern seems to be that when we confess our sins and when we confess our faith, the Church wants us to use the “I.” When we otherwise say or sing prayers of praise or mercy, it is rather “we.” In a beautiful way, when a Catholic prays the Mass, we are both one and many: many parts, one body; many grains, one loaf; many minds, united in one faith, in the one mind of Christ.