

Homily for The First Sunday of Lent (Year B)(21/02/21)

This Lent I want to share with you a series of reflections on The Creed. These are not going to be a history lesson, which I am not qualified to give, nor are they going to be a doctrinal exposition of every point in the Creed – which I am also not qualified to give, and which would also take much more time than we have. This is no time for an academic lecture, but instead to ask: why does the Creed matter? Why do we recite the same words Sunday after Sunday? What difference do they make to my life in the world of today? In particular, I hope that these reflections on the Creed will help us for the renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter when we will profess our faith once again in question and answer form as on the day of our baptism.

Lets just do the quick historical background. The Creed that we recite on a Sunday goes back to the Fourth Century, almost 1,700 years. It was created at two great councils of the Church, gatherings of bishops meeting under the Pope, and apart from one major change has stayed the same ever since. So how can such an ancient text, written in a world unimaginably different from our own, speak to us now?

Even older than the Nicene Creed that we use at Mass is the Apostles Creed, a slightly shorter text that we use when we say the Rosary, for example, and which exists in two forms: it exists as a text that we recite, from beginning to end; and it also exists in a question and answer form which is what we use at baptisms, and at Easter. And this is the key to help us understand why the Creed matters. The Creed that we recite is a statement of doctrine, but above all – above all, first and foremost, it is about conversion and about baptism.

When the first leaders of the Christian Church set about creating a simple statement of the Christian faith that they could question people coming for baptism about, they were not coming up with a list of rules for people to follow; they were not coming up with a statement of beliefs and values; they were not coming up with a mission statement to sign up to. They were asking: Who is it (not what, who) that you have come to believe in? The Creed is a statement of belief in persons: I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the Holy Spirit.

If we think about the Creed in terms of a set of propositions, of doctrines, of ideas, then it can seem complex and we get lost in the details and it loses its power. In fact it is about persons, not ideas; it is about conversion, about who or what will be the centre of my life, what light I will follow, what will be the touchstone that gives meaning to my everyday choices.

There is one other point to mention. At baptism the candidate is asked the questions of assent to the creed only after answering three other questions: first they renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his pomp and show. The Creed is inextricably linked with the most fundamental choice in life: the choice to reject evil and follow the path of life.

So lets re-imagine the Creed for a moment then, remembering that it is about conversion, about who I choose to follow and who I choose to reject. Lets leave aside the formal ritual

way in which we celebrate liturgy (which I love, of course) and look at what is going on beneath the surface.

So we are asked: 'Who do you put your trust in?'

'In God'.

'What is he like this God?'

'He is Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth...'

'Who else?'

'In Jesus Christ'.

'And what is he like?'

'The only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages...'

'And who else?'

'The Holy Spirit'.

'So what is he like?'

'The Lord, the giver of life...'

'And what about Satan, the Prince of Lies?'

'I renounce him'

'And all his works?'

'I renounce them'.

'And all his pomp?'

'I renounce it'.

Lying behind the Creed that we say each Sunday is this dialogue, this presentation of a choice. Who will be your guiding light this week? Whose side are you on? Every week we hear the scriptures proclaimed; we hear the homily preached; then we are asked the question. So, you have heard the message of Christ, its decision time again. Every time we recite the Creed, it is as if we stand again at our baptism and we make again the choice. Every Sunday we are asked again, will you be converted? Will you turn your back on the darkness and turn to face the light?

Who are you? I believe, I am a person of faith (which so much more accurately describes me than 'religious' or 'spiritual'). I am a person of faith, and I place my trust in a person, in the person of Jesus Christ. His life will do for me, it is enough. If I could just get out of the way and allow him to live in me so that you could see him more and more in me: his love, his compassion, his generosity, his gentleness, his hope, his courage, his trust, his humility, his laughter, his tears – if you could see all those in me more this week than last week then praise God.

After John the Baptist is arrested Jesus preaches: 'The time has come; repent and believe'. The time has come, the time for conversion, the time to be more and more people of faith, people who put their trust in God; people of the Creed.