

Homily for The Second Sunday of Lent 2021

Last week I began a series of homilies on the Creed. I explained that it is less about theology and doctrines (although it does contain both) and more about conversion: Who do you believe in? Whose life do you want to become part of your life? Will you, once again, turn away from the darkness and face the light? The Creed we proclaim week after week is a call to conversion, and us saying it loud and proud is our response.

Some of you will have read books by the American writer Scott Hahn, and writing about the Creed he talks about an evangelical singer who decided to become a Catholic. This singer wrote a song called 'Creed' with these words in the chorus:

*'And I believe what I believe
is what makes me what I am.
I did not make it. No, it is
making me.'*

Now sadly he never became a Catholic, he was killed in a car crash the day before his reception into the Church, but these few words show us how deeply he had taken to heart and understood the nature of faith, and the meaning of the Creed. The Creed that we profess is there for us to speak out loudly and joyfully, but also thoughtfully and reflectively. It makes us who we are. The Creed is a guide for the person I am becoming. I think we should be asking ourselves, again and again (maybe each week as part of our preparation for Mass) Who am I becoming? What am I turning into? What virtues are growing stronger in me (and maybe, realistically, what vices too)? The Creed asks us to be converted, but it also dangles before our eyes a vision of what we are being converted to.

The first paragraph of the Creed is about God the Father. It is pretty brief. He is God, he is one, he is father, he is almighty, he is maker of all - heaven, earth, visible and invisible. Saying this week by week we are proclaiming that this is true: but do we act as if it is true? If the Creed is making us who we are, what does this first paragraph offer us?

'I believe in God'. This is probably the biggest statement that a person can make. It turns life on its head because if we believe in him and place our trust in him then all the other things that call out to us 'make me the thing that governs all your choices in life' must sink below the horizon; they simply can't compete. Pope Benedict, who had an extraordinarily clear understanding of the world of today, talked about a 'practical atheism' where people said that God exists, but acted as if he didn't. The Creed makes us who we are because it asks us again: will you trust him, and follow him, and listen to him, and love what he loves, reject what he rejects? Will you make life's choices in the shadow of his presence?

God exists. He is not an idea, he is a person. And he is one. There are not lots of Gods competing for our attention in the same way there are lots of makes of car, or holiday destination, or restaurants, competing for us. There is just one. Believing in God is a different form of believing to every other: I might believe that Volkswagens are the best cars, or that Dickens is a great author – all sorts of things and that is fine, but it is not at all the same sort of belief as belief in God, which colours every moment of every day, every choice I make. We only have one fundamental choice: will we let him love us, or will we say no. That's it. In the Gospel today the Father speaks about Jesus as his Son, the Beloved. This tells us something about the nature of God the Father: his very nature, the deepest part of his being, is to be one who loves. The Creed is making me who I am when it asks me, 'Will you let yourself become the Beloved of the Father?'

God is our Father. That is how we address him every day as we pray ‘Our Father’. He is not some remote and distant being with little interest in us, he is as concerned for us as the best of fathers is concerned for his child. This idea revolutionised faith. This was simply unheard of in the ancient world, when Jesus told his followers they could relate to God as a Father. St Paul tells us that we can call on God with intimate familiarity: ‘Abba, Father!’ (Gal. 4.6; Rom. 8.15). Do you want to know what sort of a father he is? Read the parable of the prodigal son.

He is one, he is God, he is Father, and he is also maker of all: Heaven, earth, all things visible and invisible. If the Creed makes us who we are it is moulding us, then, to live as people who believe in Heaven. This life is not all there is, it is a preparation for something more glorious still. We are created to live in the presence of the God who is love. We can use this life to help us become more and more ready for that, or not. The point of earthly life is to grow into the sort of people who are as near as possible ready for heaven (and only the saints get there all in one go, but still we choose to try). God created an invisible realm, which is as real as the visible one. So many things, we know, that truly matter cannot be seen: love, hope, joy, faith. As we say the creed, we are saying: I will live as one who knows the unseen truths are still true: water poured brings new life; bread and wine become body and blood, nourishing food, and so many more.

But God made the visible world, too. He ‘ordered’ creation, set it up in a way that is beautiful and that works. He placed us in creation with a responsibility to love it and to cherish it and to protect it. So as we say the Creed we are saying that we will honour the creation because of who created it. The earth matters not just because it is the only home we have, but also because it is the cherished creation of God who is love. We cannot avoid this: the Creed is making us who we are. We have to live on the earth in such a way that, if it lasts another million years, it will be as fruitful and productive for future generations as it is for ours. If we do not do that, we are stealing from our grandchildren, and God is their Father as much as he is ours so we will have to account for our actions.

What we believe is what makes us who we are. Who are we going to be this week?