APOSTLES CREED

The Apostles' Creed – Explanatory Notes for Lay Catholics
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Introduction

The **Apostles' Creed** is one of the oldest summaries of the Christian faith. It is called "Apostles'" because it expresses the faith handed down by the Apostles who were chosen by Jesus Himself.

According to tradition, the Creed developed in the early centuries of the Church, mainly from the baptismal profession of faith used in Rome. By the 4th century, it had taken the form we know today.

The Creed is prayed by Catholics during the Rosary, in personal prayer, and at Mass (especially in Lent and Easter). It unites us with the faith of the first Christians and expresses what every Catholic must believe.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 185–197) explains that the Creed is a summary of the entire Gospel.

Historical Development of the Apostles' Creed

The **Apostles' Creed** did not originate at any single Church Council but developed gradually from the early baptismal profession of faith used by the Church in Rome, known as the *Old Roman Symbol (Symbolum Romanum).* By the 2nd century, early Church Fathers such as **St. Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.)** and **Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.)** were already using versions of this profession that closely resembled the Creed we know today. According to early Christian tradition, mentioned by **Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 400 A.D.)**, each Apostle was believed to have contributed one article of the Creed before setting out to preach, symbolizing the unity of their faith, though this account is regarded as devotional rather than historical. The Creed was not formally defined by an Ecumenical Council but was **recognized and approved** by the Church, especially in the **Latin West**, and became the standard profession of faith for catechumens, the liturgy, the Rosary, and daily prayers. Its use was confirmed by many popes and local councils, such as the **Council of Milan (390 A.D.)**, the **Fourth Lateran Council (1215 A.D.)**, and by **Pope Innocent III (1198–1216)**, who affirmed it as a valid summary of Christian faith. While the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed** (325 and 381 A.D.) was formulated at the Councils of **Nicaea** and **Constantinople** to address heresies regarding the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the **Apostles' Creed** remained widely used in the **Western Church** because of its simplicity and baptismal roots. The **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 194–197)** calls it "a faithful summary of the apostles' faith" and "the ancient baptismal symbol of the Church of Rome." Today, it is officially approved and used in the **Roman Rite,** appearing in the *Roman Missal*, *Liturgy of the Hours*, and as the doctrinal framework for *Part I of the Catechism*. Thus, even though it was not defined by a universal council, the Apostles' Creed holds full authority as an authentic profession of the apostolic faith, rooted in ancient tradition and upheld by the Magisterium throughout the centuries.

The Twelve Articles of the Apostles' Creed

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in one God who is the loving Father of all. He is almighty, all-powerful and all-wise, and He created everything that exists: both visible and invisible.

- **Bible references:** Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:12; Matthew 6:9.
- **CCC references:** 198–231.
- **Explanation:** God is not distant but close to His creation. He provides, protects, and governs all things with love and wisdom. As Father, He calls each of us into a personal relationship.

2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God who became man for our salvation. “Christ” means “Anointed One” or “Messiah.” As Lord, He is divine and worthy of worship.

- **Bible references:** John 3:16; Matthew 16:16; Philippians 2:11.
- **CCC references:** 422–455.
- **Explanation:** To believe in Jesus as Lord means to accept Him as our Saviour and to follow His teachings in daily life.

3. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by human means. Mary remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Jesus.

- **Bible references:** Luke 1:26–35; Matthew 1:18–25.
- **CCC references:** 456–511.
- **Explanation:** The Incarnation shows God’s great love. By becoming man, God entered human history to save us. Mary’s “yes” (her *fiat*) made this possible.

4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Jesus truly suffered and died for our sins. His death on the Cross was a sacrifice of love to redeem humanity.

- **Bible references:** Mark 15:15–39; 1 Peter 2:24.
- **CCC references:** 571–630.
- **Explanation:** The mention of Pontius Pilate reminds us that the Passion of Jesus is a historical event. Christ’s suffering teaches us obedience, humility, and the cost of love.

5. He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead.

“Descended into hell” means that Jesus entered the place of the dead to free the righteous who awaited the Messiah. His Resurrection is the victory over sin and death.

- **Bible references:** 1 Peter 3:18–19; Luke 24:6–7.
- **CCC references:** 631–658.
- **Explanation:** The Resurrection is the foundation of our faith. It proves that Jesus is truly God and that new life awaits all who believe in Him.

6. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

After appearing to His disciples, Jesus was taken up into heaven, where He reigns with the Father.

- **Bible references:** Acts 1:9–11; Ephesians 1:20.
- **CCC references:** 659–667.
- **Explanation:** The Ascension means Jesus is Lord over heaven and earth. From heaven, He intercedes for us and sends us His Spirit.

7. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
Jesus will return in glory at the end of time to judge everyone according to their deeds and faith.

- **Bible references:** Matthew 25:31–46; 2 Timothy 4:1.
- **CCC references:** 668–682.
- **Explanation:** This reminds us to live with faith, hope, and charity. Our lives on earth prepare us for eternal life with God.

8. I believe in the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, the Spirit of God who gives us life and holiness.

- **Bible references:** John 14:26; Acts 2:1–4.
- **CCC references:** 683–747.
- **Explanation:** The Spirit guides the Church, strengthens believers, and fills our hearts with God's love. Through the Spirit we are made children of God.

9. I believe in the holy catholic Church.
The Church is the Body of Christ, made holy by the Spirit. "Catholic" means universal, open to all people.

- **Bible references:** Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4–6.
- **CCC references:** 748–945.
- **Explanation:** The Church is both human and divine — a community of believers united in faith and the sacraments. To love Christ is to love His Church.

10. I believe in the communion of saints.
All who belong to Christ, the faithful on earth, souls in purgatory, and saints in heaven, are united in one family of faith.

- **Bible references:** Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.
- **CCC references:** 946–962.
- **Explanation:** The communion of saints means that we pray for one another and share in each other's spiritual blessings. Death does not break our unity in Christ.

11. I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven, especially through Baptism and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- **Bible references:** John 20:22–23; Acts 2:38.
- **CCC references:** 976–987.
- **Explanation:** God's mercy is endless. When we repent and confess our sins, He restores us to grace and friendship with Him.

12. I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.
At the end of time, our bodies will rise and be reunited with our souls. We will share eternal life with God.

- **Bible references:** John 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:51–54.
- **CCC references:** 988–1065.
- **Explanation:** This article expresses our Christian hope, that death is not the end, but the doorway to eternal life in the presence of God.

Conclusion

The Apostles' Creed is not just a prayer, it is a **summary of our Catholic faith**. Each "I believe" is a personal and communal profession of trust in God. When we pray the Creed, we renew our baptismal promises and affirm our faith in the Holy Trinity and the saving work of Christ.

Let us live what we believe, with love, faith, and hope, as true witnesses of Christ in the world.