

# The Creed Explained



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# To speak about faith is to talk about God

In these pages, you will come to know the Apostles' Creed more deeply. We call it a creed because it begins with the word **credo**, which is Latin for "I believe." The creed is a summary of the true faith that all Christians believe.

This ancient text is still recited by the Church today. When we **profess the Creed**, we retrace the Bible's message and Jesus' life. We say publicly that we are placing our trust in God, and we proclaim our faith in the Church. In the Creed, we speak about our biggest hopes and what our faith teaches about who God is for us.

## "Symbol"



For many centuries, the creed has also been known as the "symbol of faith." But what exactly does this phrase mean? Let's first take a look at the word **symbol**.

Symbol comes from the Greek word **symbolon** and means "a gathering or collection" or "a summary." It can also mean "half of a broken object." In ancient times, a "symbol" was used as a token of identity when agreements or alliances were made. Two individuals, families, or even cities would break a tessera, a clay seal usually made of terra cotta, into two pieces. Each side would save one of the two parts. The perfect fit of the broken pieces proved the existence of the agreement. The symbol was a **unique sign** that identified who had made an agreement or pact. In describing the Creed, Saint Augustine wrote, "It is called the Symbol because with it Christians recognize one another."

Even today, reciting the Creed is how we bring together the token of identity in Christ that each one of us carries. As we stand to profess our faith, the Creed enables us to present ourselves to God together, in communion with one another. The Creed unites and creates communion: whoever recites the Creed is identified as part of a believing community.

## "I" and "we!"

The Creed is a confession of faith made by each person (**I believe**). But at the same time it is a confession that happens from within a community. (We see this in the words **our Lord, Catholic Church, and communion of saints**). The faith is expressed by each one of us, because each individual makes a **choice**, a deeply personal choice, to believe the truths we profess.

Still, this profession is larger than any individual believer because the Creed proclaims the faith that **the whole Church has kept and passed on** to us.

Personal faith and the faith of the whole Church are bound together. They cannot be divided. Everyone who says "I believe" becomes part of the one community of faith in Jesus Christ. Although the Church is more than just a group of individuals, the faith of each member is what unites them.



## A Legend . . . and its truth

The Apostles most likely did not actually write the Creed. However, they did teach what is contained in the Creed. In the earliest years of the Church, a written Creed did not yet exist. Faith was handed on in much the same way family traditions are. Some of those traditions are legends.

According to one legend, the Apostles wrote this brief creed as a “model” for their preaching when they prepared to carry the Gospel to the world. The story even specifies that each of the twelve Apostles proposed one of the twelve articles, or parts, of the Creed!

Even if this legend is not historically accurate, we can say that it is based on an important truth: the Creed, the Symbol of The Apostles, echoes the faith of Jesus’ first Apostles in a way that reaches us.

### Let’s see why.

The origin of the **Creed** is ancient. This text contains the truths of faith by which the first Christians recognized one another. It was closely tied to Baptism. Those who wanted to be baptized and become Christians, called catechumens (ca-tuh-KEU-mens), had to prepare themselves well. During Lent, they had an extended period of formation in which the leaders of the Christian community explained what they believed.

As the day of Baptism approached, the catechumens recited the Creed before the community and the bishop as a sign of their faith. They became full members of the Christian community when they were baptized, usually on Easter.

Different historical periods and various churches have had their own versions (or “formulas”) of the Creed. These formulas differ in some ways, but they all reflect what is written in the New Testament and they all witness to the life of the first Christian communities.

In the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection, the Church's reflection on the Christian life and message matured. Our faith was able to be "synthesized" or summed up into the twelve articles that have been handed down to us.

## Are we ready to get to know the articles of the Creed one by one?

In the fourth century, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem wanted to explain to people the importance of the Creed. Before doing so, he turned to his listeners and said:

**"Be careful to guard and keep the teachings that you are now receiving, and write them in the depths of your heart."**



We begin our discovery of the Creed, one article at a time, so that the Creed can be imprinted in our hearts! Words from the Fathers of the Church and some Christian authors will help us to explore and better understand our faith.

As we go ahead you will also find **Notebook** pages: these are spaces for your thoughts and questions. There are reflections on these pages that can help you consider what you have read.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Article

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

*I believe in you, God,  
but my belief is just a  
small seed. Help my  
faith grow. Nourish  
me with your love, and  
let my faith deepen,  
mature, and always be  
in bloom.*



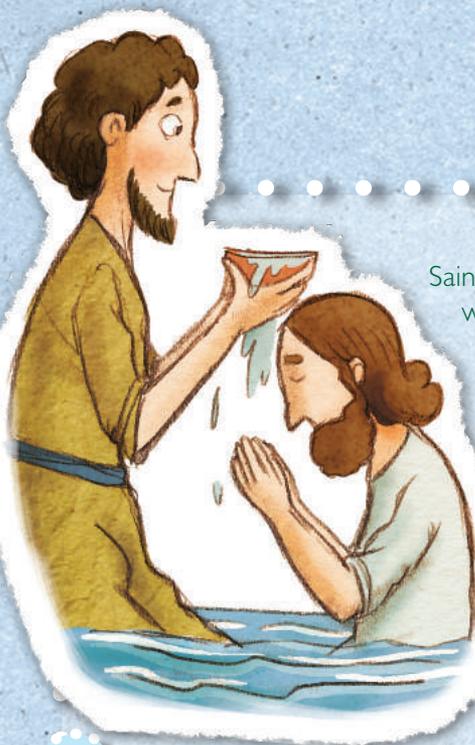
# I believe in God

Why does the Creed begin like this? Is it really that important to believe in God? Yes it is, because **having faith changes our lives!** Those who believe in God

- recognize God's greatness and goodness
- live with a heart full of gratitude
- know that all people are brothers and sisters
- use their gifts in an appropriate way
- have faith in God's love, even in moments of difficulty

## I believe in God . . .

God revealed his name to Moses when he encountered the burning bush, saying, "I am who am" (Ex 3:14). What does this name mean? That **God is present** in our life, attentive to our prayer, and ready to save us.



Saint Peter Chrysologus (kri- SAH-lah-gus) wrote, **"God is one, but not alone."**

For Christians, believing in God—one God—means **believing in God the Holy Trinity and not worshipping other gods or replacing God with anything or anyone else.** It is recognizing that the first place in our hearts belongs to God. Those who were about to be baptized in the early Church were asked three questions: "Do you believe in God,

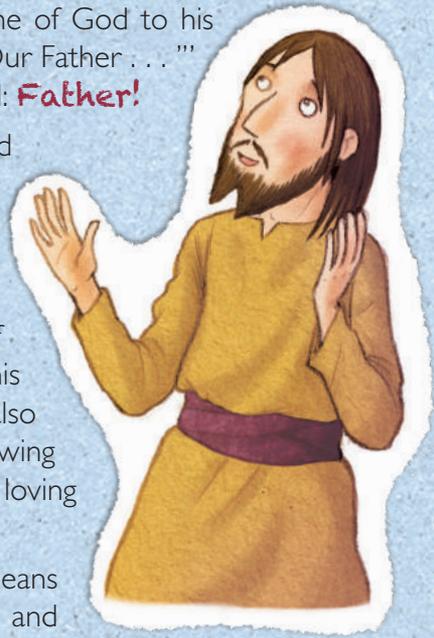
## ... Father

In his preaching, Jesus revealed the name of God to his disciples, saying, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father . . .'"

This is the name Christians have for God: **Father!**

This name expresses the nature of God and who God is for us. As Father, God has given us life and takes care of us. God's love can be compared to a good father's love for his children. But no one is a father in the way that God is. Belief in God the Father means having faith in his ability and desire to provide for us. It also means listening to his words and knowing that he guides our lives according to his loving plan.

Because God is our Father, this also means that we are called to act as brothers and sisters. We think of ourselves as living under the gaze of the same Father.



## One God in the Holy Trinity

the almighty Father? Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?"

The response to each one of these questions was, "I believe." In this dialogue we can see the structure of the Creed (**I believe in God . . . and in Jesus Christ. . . I believe in the Holy Spirit**). We see the same structure when we make the Sign of the Cross. As Saint Ambrose wrote, the Sign of the Cross "expresses in a most clear way the nature of God the eternal Trinity. . . . At the **same time**, we believe in the Father, **and** in the Son, **and** in the Holy Spirit."

### ...almighty

We believe that God created everything and rules everything. For him, “nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37).

The unlimited power of God is a strength of love. Still, the force of God’s love is also mysterious, because we can only recognize it through faith. When we think about Jesus on the cross, it does not seem that we are “seeing” the strength of God. Instead, we “see” the weakness of someone who was abandoned and crushed by violence. Yet Saint Paul reminds us that God’s weakness is stronger than human strength (see 1 Cor 1:25). Jesus, who dies on the cross, rises again through the power of love, a love that is stronger than death.

### ...creator of heaven and earth

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). These first words of the Bible tell us that God, the Eternal One, has given a beginning to everything that exists, all the marvels of creation. Among these, man and woman occupy a special place.

## Words to think about

The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but **a thing created is loved before it exists.**

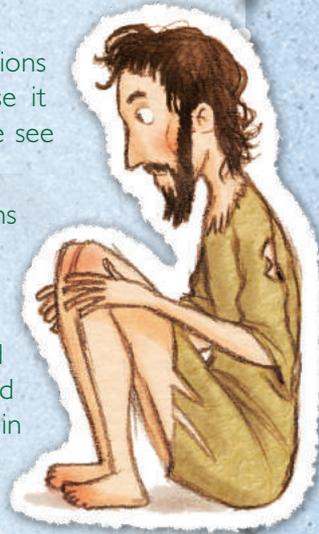


G.K. Chesterton,  
a well-known convert to  
Catholicism and English writer

# If God is almighty why does suffering exist?

This is a truly important question shared by millions of people. It is also a painful question, because it often arises when we are struggling or when we see someone else suffering.

It is good that we involve God in the questions we ask. Do you remember the story of Job in the Bible? Job lost everything he possessed; he lost his sons and daughters; he lost his health to the point of endangering his life. Job questioned the existence of evil and suffering—and he asked this question of God. Because Job truly believed in God, he understood that hidden in his suffering must be **a message and a purpose** that could help him through the suffering. He never tired of asking God his questions. In the end, God gave Job an answer and blessed him with even more than he had before.



The one who believes knows that “**God is Love**” (1 Jn 4:8) and trusts that God wants us to be happy. God may allow evil and suffering in the world but God does not send suffering and is never the cause of harm. Although he does not always use his power to stop evil from happening, God can and does bring good from it.

We have probably all experienced that God does not leave us alone in the trials we face—not even when we find it hard to understand his purpose! If we approach life with this certainty, we can discover a meaning to the painful things that occur, or at least find direction to follow and hope to cultivate. We also give witness to God’s faithfulness to us.

The more God’s power seems “hidden,” the more necessary it is for us to draw **closer to God** in faith and through prayer. The more we turn our hearts to God, the more mature our faith becomes. Then we can begin to recognize God’s presence with us in the midst of suffering and learn to see whatever happens as God sees it.

# Notebook

- ✓ Who is the first person who helped you to “find” God? Who has brought you closer to the faith through his or her witness? Try to write that person a note to say, “Thank you!” You may choose to actually mail this note, or simply use it for reflection.

Dear (insert name), .....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- ✓ Read this short story, which is found in the Hebrew tradition:

“God wants to be sought, and how can he not be found? Once, Rabbi Baruch’s grandson was playing hide-and-seek with another child. He hid himself and waited in his hiding place, believing that his companion was looking for but unable to find him. After having waited a long time, the child came out and did not see his friend anywhere around. He suddenly understood that no one had been searching for him. The boy ran to his grandfather’s room, crying and complaining about this bad friend. With tears in his eyes, Rabbi Baruch said, ‘God says the same thing about us.’”

- ✓ This little story teaches us that God also wants to be sought. Now ask yourself, “Am I looking for God?”