

St. Edward the Confessor
RCIA Class on Faith and an Introduction to the Creeds
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Hebrews 11:1 Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen

Introduction to Faith

Today we are going to talk about faith. In a nutshell, faith is a human faculty or capacity to know (or discern) truth in a way that is different from reason. Since faith is a human faculty, it is a gift from God, and since it is concerned with truth, which comes from God who is Truth itself, it is a proper response to God (obedience of faith).

The USCC list 6 properties of faith.

1. *Faith is both personal and communal* – The action of faith starts with a person entering into a relationship of trust with God by using the faculty of faith to be open to God. The next step is being open to the truths that God reveals. Since these truths are real (objective) all people can agree on them. Thus personal faith becomes a shared faith.
2. *Faith complements reason* – Unlike reason, faith proceeds without the need to carefully sift through evidence and logically arrive at a conclusion. Faith approaches the mysteries of creation from a different point of view than reason, but their purposes are the same. Each of these looks for truth and, in doing so, each complement and strengthens the other. Faith guides reason holistically and reason analyzes what faith finds, providing new insights and new directions for faith to explore.
3. *Faith is necessary for salvation* – Faith is the cornerstone for a host of beliefs that can't be obtained from reason and which are revealed by God. These include the believing in the salvation obtained by Jesus Christ, in action of the Holy Spirit as the Lord of Life in this world, and in the promise of resurrection and the beatific vision in the next.
4. *Faith is a grace* – The concept of grace is complex and there is a whole section in RCIA devoted to it. For our purposes here, a grace is a component of the relationship between God and us. A grace is a gift from God but a gift that we must use or exercise. In the case of faith, the gift consists of the human capacity to see a truth that escapes the grasp of reason. But this capacity must be used (exercised) and trained. From the USCC, "Aided by the Holy Spirit we exercise faith...."
5. *Faith is free* – Since faith is a gift from God, it is up to each of us to nurture and cultivate our faith. We can chose to use our capacity of faith to strengthen our beliefs, or we can chose to ignore faith. God invites us and encourages us to use our faith, but he doesn't coerce us.

6. *Faith believes in truth* – By its very nature, faith allows us to enter into a relationship of trust with God. It is impossible to be in this relationship without trusting the message that God gives us.

The Transformative Nature of Faith

When I was starting my graduate studies of physics, I remember being overwhelmed by the variety of ways of looking at and describing physical systems. Not all viewpoints arrived at the same answer, and often reason provided no clue as to which one was correct (this is ultimately the justification for why science is empirical). I recall walking through a park with one of my professors on the way back from a seminar. I asked him how he knew when an answer was right. His response was that it just felt right. That after doing these kinds of things for a while, you just knew – you had an intuition. I had a hard time accepting this as an answer and my lack of ‘faith’ hampered my learning and research for a number of years.

The lesson here is that faith sits outside of reason. It transforms one’s life and allows one to accomplish amazing things. It can push us to attain our potential. The church holds up two particular models of the transformative nature of faith.

The first of these models is Abraham. It is hard to imagine what Abraham was called to do by God. At the time he lived, transportation was primitive by our standards and moving far from home represented a real danger to life and property. Furthermore, Abraham’s journey would take him to a land where he had no friends or family to aid or protect him. He literally launched himself into the unknown based solely on his faith in God’s promise. Later, when he was settled and had finally obtained the heir from Sarah he had always wanted, God asked him to take Isaac to an altar and sacrifice him. Even though he was distraught over the thought of losing his only son, Abraham obeyed and was one knife plunge away from taking Isaac’s life when the angel of God stopped him. From this faith has sprung the great body of people that comprise the western Judeo-Christian history.

The second model is the Virgin Mary. While being a single woman and very young, Mary was visited by Gabriel and told that she would become pregnant and would bear the messiah. Even in our ‘modern’ times, the prospect for a young single mother is rather bleak; for Mary it could have meant death. It would have been easy for a pregnant girl to be labeled a harlot by the Jewish people and to be subsequently stoned. And even if she escaped stoning, she faced expulsion from her community and a future as a pariah. Despite these risks, Mary agreed, and from her came the salvation of the world.

Like Abraham and Mary, each of us is called to follow our faith. I suspect that, if most of us followed it as closely as they, we would transform not just ourselves but the world as well.

The Nature of the Creeds

The specific articles of faith will be covered in detail in the next several classes. For the time being it is important to know a few things about the creeds.

There are, in fact, numerous creeds in the Catholic Church. Each one encapsulates the common truths of faith (trinity, salvation through Jesus, etc.) but they do so in different ways based on need and culture. The two most common creeds are the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Other creeds include the Credo of the People of God and the Athanasian Creed. The Catechism teaches that no creed is superseded or irrelevant.

Brief Comparison's of the Various Creeds	
Apostle's	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accurate reflection of the faith of the apostles• Used mostly in the rosary• Can be used in mass
Nicene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used mostly in mass• Derives its authority from the first two ecumenical Councils (in 325 in Nicaea and 381 in Constantinople)
Athanasian	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavily emphasizes the trinity• Reflects the teachings of the First Council of Ephesus (431) and the Council of Chalcedon (451)• Refutes various heresies<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sabellianism – Not a trinity but 3 facets○ Arianism – Jesus created by God○ Nestorianism – Jesus not Man & God○ Eutychianism – Jesus not Human & Divine
Credo of the People of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Published by Pope Paul VI in 1968• Repeats the Nicene creed in substance with 'some developments called for by the spiritual condition of our time'

Essentials (adapted from [USCC] and [CCC])

The catechesis comes from Chapter 4 of the USCC and from Part One, Section One, Chapter Three of the CCC, and covers Faith and the Introduction to the Creeds.

- Faith is an invitation from God to trust [CCC 142, 179] and a freely-given response of trust to God [CCC 143, 144]
- Abraham and the Virgin Mary are models of what faith can do to transform a life [CCC 144-9, 165]
- Faith is personal [CCC 150, 166, 176] but not an isolated one [CCC 166-8, 171-5, 181-2]
- Faith requires us to believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit [CCC 151-2, 176-7]

- Faith is a grace, a gift from God [CCC 153, 179] that nonetheless requires us to freely exercise it (believing is an act of intellect) [CCC 154-5, 160, 162, 165, 176, 180]
- Faith allows us to believe in revealed truths [CCC 156, 177, 182] with a certainty that escapes reason [CCC 157].
- Faith seeks to understand [CCC 158] and therefore complements reason and science [CCC 159]
- Faith is required for salvation because it guides us and allows us to believe in the revealed truths that lead to salvation [CCC 161, 164, 169, 174, 183] and it gives us a ‘taste’ of the beatific vision [CCC 163, 184]
- Our common (communal) beliefs are summarized by various creeds which guide us in conjunction with the Church [CCC 167-8, 171-5, 181-2, 186]
- These creeds are not ‘magic formulas’ that give us a pass into heaven, but rather they are powerful summaries and symbols, professions of faith that remind us of what we believe [CCC 170, 187, 188]
- The creeds allow for a common set of ideas of faith that transcends human language [CCC 185, 188]
- The first profession of faith is made during Baptism when the blessing is made in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [CCC 189, 194, 197]
- All professions of faith reflect this triune form [CCC 190-1] even though they differ in form (e.g., the Quicumque, also called the Athanasian Creed; The professions of faith of certain Councils, such as Toledo, Lateran, Lyons, Trent) [CCC 192]
- Since all of the creeds speak of truth, none of them can be considered irrelevant or superseded [CCC 193]
- The Apostles' Creed is so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles' faith [CCC 194]
- The Niceno-Constantinopolitan or Nicene Creed draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two ecumenical Councils (in 325 and 381). It remains common to all the great Churches of both East and West to this day [CCC 195]

Commentary

Some commentary on the points above:

- Kurt Gödel, the great logician, actually used logic and reason to prove the limitations of logic and reason. His proofs, published in 1931, basically show that there are always truths in any system of logic that can't be proven from first principles (axioms) and that logic can't even prove its own internal consistency.
- Science is, at its core, a faith-based enterprise. Each scientist, implicitly or explicitly, believes that the world can be understood and that results obtained through experiment ‘here and now’ work for experiments ‘there and then’.

- A bit more on faith as a grace. CCC 153 describes it as:
 - *Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.'*
- A bit more on faith and reason. CCC cites the words of St. Augustine, "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe."

Q&A

Questions from Chapter Three of the Compendium

25. How does man respond to God who reveals himself?
26. Who are the principal witnesses of the obedience of faith in the Sacred Scriptures?
27. What does it mean in practice for a person to believe in God?
28. What are the characteristics of faith?
29. Why is there no contradiction between faith and science?
30. Why is faith a personal act, and at the same time ecclesial?
31. Why are the formulas of faith important?
32. In what way is the faith of the Church one faith alone?

References

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| [CCC] | – Catechism of the Catholic Church |
| [Com] | – Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church |
| [USCC] | – United States Catholic Catechism for Adults |