

The Creed: Part 2

One in Being versus Consubstantial

In last week's column, I addressed the most significant change to the Creed as a result of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal. We will no longer say, "We believe" but instead will say, "I believe." This is in keeping with the Latin word *Credo*, which is the first person singular present tense. The only other significant change you will notice in the Creed beginning on the First Sunday of Advent will be the use of "Consubstantial" in place of the phrase "One in Being." So, let's look at why this change was made.

Living in the 21st Century, it is easy to take for granted the words we say at Mass each week, such as those contained in the Creed. In fact, the creedal formula we use now was the result of two early Church councils. The first was at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the second was the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) both situated in modern day Turkey. It was during these councils, that bishops from both the East and the West assisted by theologians like St. Athanasius and St. Cyril of Jerusalem, both Doctors of the Church, helped to articulate the mystery of the Trinity. At issue, was how to best define Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who always existed as the second person of the Trinity, but who also was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These councils produced what we now call the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed using the Greek language. The word they used to describe the essence of who Jesus is in relation to God the Father was "homoousion" which means "of the same substance." When the Creed was translated into Latin, the word became "consubstantialem" which in English is rendered "consubstantial."

During the Roman Missal workshops that I offered at all three parishes, with the assistance of Tess Stumme, a member of the pastoral council at Holy Trinity Church, I pointed out that the Church provided a guiding principle regarding the translation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal. Specifically, it was the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which published an instruction, entitled *Liturgiam Authenticam*. It stated: "*Certain expressions that belong to the heritage of the whole or of a great part of the ancient Church, as well as others that have become part of the general human patrimony, are to be respected by a translation that is as literal as possible*" (no. 56). Consubstantial was one of those words that the Church did not want to lose.

Finally, let me address one objection I have heard regarding this change. I have heard it said, "Why is the Church keeping a word like consubstantial, it doesn't mean anything to me?" To that objection I would say, there are words doctors and tax accountants use that don't mean anything to me either, but I'm glad they mean something to them. In fact, when a doctor or tax accountant uses a word I don't know, I will ask them to define the word they are using. So, just because a word is difficult, or requires study, doesn't mean it should be eliminated from our ecclesial lexicon. On the contrary, the return to the use of consubstantial in our Creed provides the opportunity to study the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople to discover why this particular word was chosen to describe who Jesus is.

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