

ILLUMINATIONS SESSION 1 – 20140923

NICENE CREED – OUR SYMBOL OF FAITH

NOTES:

CREED - comes from the Latin *credo* which means “I believe.” In the Orthodox Church the creed is usually called **The Symbol of Faith** which means literally the “bringing together” and the “expression” or “confession” of the faith.

The **Nicene Creed** should be called the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan** Creed since it was formally drawn up at the first ecumenical council in Nicea (325) and at the second ecumenical council in Constantinople (381).

In the early Church there were many different forms of the Christian confession of faith; many different “creeds.” These creeds were always used originally in relation to baptism. Before being baptized a person had to state what he believed. The earliest Christian creed was probably the simple confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, i.e., the Messiah; and that the Christ is Lord. By publicly confessing this belief, the person could be baptized into Christ, dying and rising with Him into the New Life of the Kingdom of God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

CONTROVERSY CAUSED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CREED - In the fourth century a great controversy developed in Christendom about the nature of the **Son of God** (also called in the Scripture the Word or *Logos*). Some said that the Son of God is a creature like everything else made by God. Others contended that the Son of God is eternal, divine, and uncreated. Many councils met and made many statements of faith about the nature of the Son of God. The controversy raged throughout the entire Christian world.

325 IN NICAEA - It was the definition of the council which the Emperor Constantine called in the city of Nicaea in the year 325 which was ultimately accepted by the Orthodox Church as the proper Symbol of Faith. This council is now called the first ecumenical council, and this is what it said:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.

381 IN CONSTANTINOPLE - Following the controversy about the Son of God, the Divine Word, and essentially connected with it, was the dispute about the Holy Spirit. The following definition of the Council in Constantinople in 381, which has come to be known as the second ecumenical council was added to the Nicene statement:

And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED:

"I BELIEVE"

Faith is the foundation of Christian life. It is the fundamental virtue of Abraham, the forefather of Israel and the Christian Church. "Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (*Gen 15:6*).

Jesus begins his ministry with the same command for faith.

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and **believe** in the gospel" (Mk 1:15).

All through his life Jesus was calling for faith; faith in himself, faith in God his Father, faith in the Gospel, faith in the Kingdom of God. The fundamental condition of the Christian life is faith, for with faith come hope and love and every good work and every good gift and power of the Holy Spirit. This is the doctrine of Christ, the apostles, and the Church.

In the Scriptures faith is classically defined as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (*Heb 11:1*).

TWO BASIC ASPECTS TO FAITH:

- 1. The Faith "in" someone or something:** faith as the recognition of these persons or things as real, true, genuine, and valuable; for example, faith in God, in Christ, in the Holy Trinity, in the Church.
- 2. Faith as trust or reliance:** For example, one would not merely believe in God, in his existence, goodness, and truth; but one would believe God, **trust** his word, **rely** upon his presence, depend securely and with conviction upon his promises. For Christians both types of faith are necessary. One must believe in certain things with mind, heart, and soul; and then live by them in the course of everyday life.

Faith vs Reason: According to Orthodoxy, faith and reason, belief and knowledge, are indeed two different things. They are two different things, however, which *always belong together* and which may never be opposed to each other or separated from each other.

How?

- 1. One cannot believe anything which he does not already somehow know.** A person cannot possibly believe in something he knows nothing about.
- 2. What one believes in and trusts must be reasonable.** If asked to believe in the divinity of a cow, or to place one's trust in a wooden idol, one would refuse on the basis that it is not

reasonable to do so. Thus, faith must have its reasons, it must be built upon knowledge, and it must never be blind.

3. Knowledge itself is often built upon faith. One cannot come to knowledge through absolute skepticism. If anything is known at all, it is because there exists a certain faith in man's knowing possibilities and a real trust that the objects of knowledge are really "showing themselves" and that the mind and the senses are not acting deceitfully. Also, in relation to almost all written words, particularly those which relate to history, the reader is called to an act of faith. He must believe that the author is telling the truth; and, therefore, he must have certain knowledge and certain reasons for giving his trust.

Very often it is only when one does give his trust and does believe something that one is able to "go further," so to speak, and to come finally to knowledge of his own and to the understanding of things he would never have understood before. It is true to say that certain things always remain obscure and meaningless unless they are viewed in the light of faith which then provides a way of explaining and understanding their existence and meaning. *Thus, for example, the phenomena of suffering and death would be understood differently by one who believes in Christ than by one who believes in some other religion or philosophy or in none at all.*

Faith is always personal. Each person must believe for himself. No one can believe for another. Many people may believe and trust the same things because of a unity of their knowledge, reason, experience and convictions. There can be a community of faith and a unity of faith. But this community and unity necessarily begins and rests upon the confession of personal faith.

For this reason the Symbol of Faith in the Orthodox Church—not only at baptisms and official rituals of joining the Church, but also in common prayers and in the Divine Liturgy—always remains in the first person. If we can pray, offer, sing, praise, ask, bless, rejoice, and commend ourselves and each other to God in the Church and as the Church, it is only because each one of us can say honestly, sincerely, and with prayerful conviction: "Lord, I believe..."—adding, as one must, the words of the man in the gospel—"... help thou my unbelief" (Mk 9:24).

In order for our faith to be genuine, we must express it in everyday life. We must act according to our faith and prove it by the goodness and power of God acting in our lives. This does not mean that we "tempt God" or "put God to the test" by doing foolish and unnecessary things just for the sake of seeing if God will participate in our foolishness. But it does mean that if we live by faith in our pursuit of righteousness, we can demonstrate the fact that God will be with us, helping and guiding us in every way.

For faith to grow and become stronger, it must be used. Each person should live according to the measure of faith which he has, however small, weak and imperfect it might be. By acting according to one's faith, trust in God and the certitude of God's presence is given, and with the help of God many things which were never before imagined become possible.

“IN ONE GOD, FATHER ALMIGHTY”

The fundamental faith of the Christian Church is in the **one true and living God**. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and 5:6-7.

God’s name is **Yahweh** which means I AM WHO I AM; or I AM WHAT I AM; or I AM WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE; or simply I AM. He is the true and living God, the only God. He is faithful and true to his people. He reveals to them His divine and holy Word. He gives to them his divine and holy Spirit.

GOD DOES NOT “EXIST” – To exist means to be alive or created out of nothing. Since God is eternal, he does not exist – HE IS. God is “above existence” or “above being.” Thus, there would be great reluctance according to Orthodox doctrine to say that God “is” as everything else “is” or that God is simply the “supreme being” in the same chain of “being” as everything else that is.

It is this God—the Yahweh of Israel—whom Jesus Christ has claimed to be His Father. God Almighty is known as “Father” through His son Jesus Christ. Jesus taught man to call the Almighty Lord God of Hosts by the title of Father. Before Jesus no one dared to pray to God with the intimate name of Father. It was Jesus who said, “Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven ...”

Jesus could call God **Father** because He is God’s only-begotten Son. Christians can call God **Father** because through Christ they receive the Holy Spirit and become themselves sons of God.

God may certainly be said to exist perfectly and absolutely as the one who is perfect and absolute life, goodness, truth, love, wisdom, knowledge, unity, purity, joy, simplicity; the perfection and super perfection of everything that man knows as holy, true, and good. It is this very God who is confessed formally in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom as “...God, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same.”