



THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day he rose from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of
God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,
died and was buried."



Apostles' Creed

The Church always believes as she prays. From the time of the apostles until the current age, the way the Church prays effects what she believes. Her prayer is most completely revealed within the liturgical life – the celebration of the Sacraments and other ritualistic actions. In the second century, the Church of Rome was using a baptismal formula, which had the catechumens (those to be baptized) declare their belief in the Triune God as well as the Church and the resurrection of the body via a series of questions. These questions, which find similarity to the baptismal rites of today, developed into the Apostles' Creed by the end of the seventh century.

Commentary is by Saint Thomas Aquinas. By universal consent, Thomas Aquinas is the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of divine revelation. He is one of the great teachers of the medieval Catholic Church, honored with the titles Doctor of the Church and Angelic Doctor.

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.”

It is just as necessary for the Christian to believe in **the passion and death of the Son of God as it is to believe in His Incarnation**. For, as St. Gregory says, “there would have been no advantage in His having been born for us unless we had profited by His Redemption.” That Christ died for us is so tremendous a fact that our intellect can scarcely grasp it; for in no way does it fall in the natural way of our understanding. This is what the Apostle says: “I work in your days, a work which you will not believe, if any man shall tell it to you” [Acts 13:41, from Hab 1:5]. **The grace of God is so great and His love for us is such that we cannot understand what He has done for us.** Now, we must believe that, although Christ suffered death, yet His Godhead did not die; it was the human nature in Christ that died. For He did not die as God, but as man.

This will be clear from two examples, **one** of which is taken from himself. Now, when a man dies, in the separation of the soul from the body the soul does not die but the body or flesh does die. So also in the death of Christ, His Divinity did not die, but His man nature suffered death. But if the Jews did not slay the Divinity of Christ, it would seem that their sin was not any greater than if they killed any ordinary man. In answering this we say that it is as if a king were clothed only in one garment, and if someone befouled this garment, such a one has committed as grave a crime as if he had defiled the king himself. Likewise, although the Jews could not slay God, yet in putting to death the human nature which Christ assumed, they were as severely punished as if they had put the Godhead itself to death. **Another example** is had from what we said before, viz., that the Son of God is the Word of God, and the Word of God made flesh is like the word of a king written on paper. So if one should tear this royal paper in pieces, it would be considered that he had rent apart the word of the king. Thus, the sin of the Jews was as grievous as if they had slain the Word of God.

Why?

But what need was there that the Son of God should suffer for us? There was a great need; and indeed it can be assigned to two reasons. The **first** is that it was a remedy against sin, and the **second** is for an example of what we ought to do. It was a remedy to such an extent that in the passion of Christ we find a remedy against all the evils which we incur by our sins. And by our sins we incur five different evils.

The **first evil** that man incurs by sin is the defilement of his soul. Just as virtue gives the soul its beauty, so sin makes it ugly. “How happened it, O Israel, that you art in your enemies’ land?... You art defiled with the dead” [Baruch 3:10-11]. But all this is taken away by the passion of Christ, whereby Christ poured out His blood as a laver wherein sinners are cleansed: “Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” [Rev 1:5]. So, too, the soul is washed by the blood of Christ in baptism because then a new birth is had in virtue of His blood, and hence when one defiles one’s soul by sin, one offers insult to Christ and sins more gravely than before one’s baptism. “A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without any mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by one who treads underfoot the Son of God and esteems the blood of the testament unclean!” [Heb 10:28-29].

Secondly, we commit an offense against God. A **sensual** man loves the beauty of the flesh, but God loves **spiritual** beauty, which is the beauty of the soul. When, however, the soul is defiled by sin, God is offended and the sinner incurs His hatred: “To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike” [Wis 14:9]. This also is removed by the passion of Christ, which made satisfaction to God the Father for sin—a thing which man of himself could never do. The charity and obedience of Christ in His suffering were greater than the sin and disobedience of the first man: “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” [Rom 5:10].

Thirdly, we have been weakened by sin. When a person sins the first time, he believes that he will thereafter keep away from sin, but what happens is the very opposite. This is because by that first sin he is weakened and made more prone to commit sins, and sin more and more has power over him. Such a one, as far as he alone is concerned, has lowered himself to such a condition that he cannot rise up, and is like to a man who jumps into a well from which, without God’s help, he would never be rescued. After the fall of man, our nature was weakened and corrupted, and we were made more prone to sin. Christ, however, lessened this sickness and weakness, although He did not entirely take it away. So now man is strengthened by the passion of Christ, and sin is not given such power over him. Moreover, he can rise clean from his sins when aided by God’s grace conferred by the Sacraments, which receive their efficacy from the passion of Christ: “Our

old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed” [Rom 6:6]. Indeed, before the passion of Christ few there were who lived without falling into mortal sin; but afterwards many have lived and are living without mortal sin.

Fourthly, we incur the punishment due to sin. For the justice of God demands that whosoever sins must be punished. This punishment, however, is in proportion to the guilt. But **the guilt of mortal sin is infinite**, because it is an offense against the infinite good, namely, God, whose commandments the sinner holds in contempt. Therefore, the **punishment due to mortal sin is infinite**. Christ, however, through His passion has taken away this punishment from us and borne it Himself: “Who Himself bore our sins (that is, the punishment due to sin) in His body upon the tree” [1 Pet 2:24]. **The passion of Christ was of such value that it sufficed to expiate for all the sins of the whole world**, even of a hundred thousand worlds. And so it is that, when a man is baptized, he is released from all his sins; and so also is it that the priest forgives sins; and, again, **the more one conforms himself to the passion of Christ, the greater is the pardon and the grace which he gains**.

Fifthly, we incur banishment from the kingdom of heaven. Those who offend kings are compelled to go into exile. Thus, man is expelled from heaven on account of sin. Adam was driven out of paradise immediately after his sin, and the gate of paradise was shut. But Christ by His sufferings and death opened this gate and recalled all the exiles to the kingdom. **With the opening of the side of Christ, the gate of paradise is opened**; and **with the pouring out of His blood, guilt is washed away**, satisfaction is made to God, infirmity is removed, punishment is expiated, and the exiles are called back to the kingdom. Hence, the thief received the immediate response: “This day you shall be with Me in paradise” [Lk 23:43]. Never before was this spoken to anyone, not to Adam, not to Abraham, not to David; but this day (i.e., as soon as the gate is opened) the thief, having asked for pardon, received it: “Having a confidence in the entering into the holies by the blood of Christ” [Heb 10:19].

Consequences

From all this then is seen the effect of the passion of Christ as a remedy for sin. But no less does it profit us as an example. St. Augustine says **that the passion of Christ can bring about a complete reformation of our lives**. Whoever wishes to live perfectly need do nothing other than despise what Christ despised on the cross, and desire what Christ desired. **There is no virtue that did not have its example on the Cross**.

So if you seek an example of charity, then, “greater love than this no one has, than to lay down his life for his friends” [Jn 15:13]. And this Christ did upon the Cross. If, therefore, He gave His life for us, we ought to endure any and all evils for Him: “What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He has done for me?” [Ps 118:12].

If you seek an **example of patience**, you will find it in its highest degree upon the Cross. Great patience is exemplified in two ways: either when one suffers intensely in all patience, or when one suffers that which he could avoid if he so wished. Christ suffered greatly upon the Cross: “All you who pass by the way, look and see if there

is any sorrow like My sorrow” [Lam 1:12]. And with all patience, because, “when He suffered, He did not threaten” [1 Pet 2:23]. And again: “He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb before His shearer, and shall not open His mouth” [Is 53:7]. He could have avoided this suffering, but He did not: “Do you think that I cannot ask My Father, and He will give Me presently more than twelve legions of Angels?” [Mt 26:23]. The patience of Christ upon the cross, therefore, was of the highest degree: “Let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us; looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” [Heb 12:1-2].

If you seek an **example of humility**, look upon Him who is crucified; although He was God, He chose to be judged by Pontius Pilate and to be put to death: “Your cause has been judged as that of the wicked” [Job 36:17]. Truly “that of the wicked,” because: “Let us condemn Him to a most shameful death” [Wis 2:20]. The Lord chose to die for His servant; the Life of the Angels suffered death for man: “He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” [Phil 2:8].

If you seek an **example of obedience**, imitate Him who was obedient to the Father unto death: “For by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just” [Rom 5:19].

If you seek an **example of contempt for earthly things**, imitate Him who is the King of kings, the Lord of rulers, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom; but on the Cross He was stripped naked, ridiculed, spat upon, bruised, crowned with thorns, given to drink of vinegar and gall, and finally put to death. How falsely, therefore, is one attached to riches and raiment, for: “They divided My garments amongst them; and upon My robe they cast lots” [Ps 21:19]. How falsely to honors, since “I was covered with lashes and insults;” how falsely to positions of power, because “taking a crown of thorns, they placed it upon My brow;” how falsely to delicacies of the table, for “in My thirst they gave Me to drink of vinegar” [Ps 68:22]. Thus, St. Augustine, in commenting on these words, “Who, having joy set before Him, endured the Cross despising the shame” [Heb 12:2]. says: **“The man Christ despised all earthly things in order to teach us to despise them**.

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