

I Easter 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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*The Nicene Creed St. John 20.19-23*



“I believe”...“Credo” in Latin...the opening words to the Nicene Creed which we say together at every Mass...it is our individual and corporate Profession of Faith. Easter is a good time for us to think about the Nicene Creed and exactly what we claim to believe.

The Nicene Creed takes its name from the Council of Nicaea...called by the not yet baptized Emperor Constantine I in 325 AD. The bishops of the Church met to hash out exactly what we believe...particularly about the nature of the Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ.

Many heresies developed early in the Church’s history...some of which are still around today. A popular priest from Alexandria named Arius, taught Jesus had not always existed with God the Father, but was distinct from the Father and “begotten” later.

An outspoken deacon named Athanasius insisted Jesus was made of the same substance as the Father...“Godstuff”...and had existed with him and the Holy Spirit from the beginning. We state our belief in the Nicene Creed...the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...have always existed...three persons, one God.

The Nicene Creed defines what Orthodox Catholic Christians have always believed to be true. We believe in One God, the Father, all-powerful. We believe in the Incarnation; Jesus was born of a Virgin. We believe he suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. We believe he rose again. We believe he ascended into heaven. We believe he will come again. And we believe in the Resurrection of the dead...into Christ’s Kingdom...that will never end.

In the aftermath of that first Good Friday, the Blessed Mother, Mary Magdalene and the other women, and the disciples, were locked behind closed doors in a state of unbelief. They watched Jesus die and they only knew they had each other to try to figure things out. They weren’t certain what was going to happen next. They were in for a surprise!

Mary Magdalene is the first to arrive at the grave early Sunday morning and found it open and empty. She started crying and asked a man standing nearby she thought was the gardener where they had taken Jesus. “Mary”, he said to her. “Stop crying. I am here”. She knew it was Jesus because he called her by her name. She ran off to tell the others.

The Gospel records later that same day Jesus appeared to his disciples. In his resurrected body he was able to walk through a locked door. When we get to heaven in our resurrected bodies...we will not have to walk through doors...there will be none!

He has to tell his friends to calm down, and they were happy to see him again. Peter must have worried if Jesus was angry because he ran away when things got tough. “It’s OK, Peter”, Jesus said. “I forgive you. Don’t worry. I have important work for you and the others”. He empowered them with the Holy Spirit to forgive sins...the bishops and priests in Apostolic Succession follow Jesus’ instructions in pronouncing the Absolution at Mass.

Thomas is noticeably absent from the action in today’s Gospel. He didn’t believe the others when they told him they had seen Jesus. He wanted proof. Jesus made a second appearance a week later. Again the doors were locked. He tells his friends again to calm down. Jesus then gives Thomas the forensic evidence he demanded...and tells him to put his fingers in his hands and side. All Thomas can say is, “My Lord and my God.”

Jesus called Thomas by name and told him to quit being such a doubter. He told him those who believe without seeing him are truly happy. Jesus calls each of us by name and asks us to set aside any doubts we might have about him...and believe.

We believe Mary Magdalene, the Blessed Mother, Peter and all of his friends saw Jesus after the resurrection. We believe what the Nicene Creed teaches us...because Jesus arose again...we will rise again. We can say with confidence...

...“We believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come.”

