

28th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (October 9, 2011)
(new translation of the Nicene Creed)
Fr. Jerry Kopacek

If I didn't know any better, I would be tempted to see our readings today as a great commercial, a promo for our Fall Festival here at St. Edward this weekend. Think about it: in the gospel, Jesus gives us a parable about a great wedding feast, while in our first reading the prophet Isaiah promises that the Lord on his mountain will provide for all peoples a feast of juicy rich food and pure, choice wines. This, of course, is what our Fall Festival dinner always is and certainly will be again [tomorrow]/today. OK, I have to be honest we won't be serving wines at the dinner. But the food will certainly be delicious of that you can be sure! I certainly hope you can all join us for that dinner and for all the other festival activities (by the way, there is still time to purchase raffle tickets as well).

The image of a great feast or banquet as a way to describe the heavenly kingdom of God is one that we find often in Sacred Scripture certainly in our readings today. Even that most familiar and beloved of all the psalms Psalm 23 (today's responsorial) speaks of the Lord spreading the table before him in the sight of all his foes. When it comes to how we see and live our faith, the banquet image takes on a special relevance. Certainly we think of the Eucharist in which we approach the altar, that sacred table, to partake in that feast that Jesus prepares for us: the feast of his Body and Blood. But the rest of the Mass also provides rich fare to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst. Think of the readings from the Bible that are a critical part of every Mass through which we hear the very word of God. Consider also the variety of prayers offered throughout the Mass by which we express to God our praise, thanksgiving, our needs and our sorrow for sin. Even the Nicene Creed in which we profess our faith on Sundays and holy days of obligation presents a kind of banquet for us a banquet of truth and faith reminding us of those central doctrines, those core beliefs of our Catholic Christian faith.

And it is in the Nicene Creed that we will find some of the more prominent changes in wording when we begin using the new translation of the Roman Missal late next month. I want to spend a few moments today reviewing some of those changes to help us begin the process of becoming familiar with them. I emphasize begin the process; as I said before, we need to have patience with ourselves and each other; we don't have to have all these changes memorized in any specific period of time. To that end, I invite you to take a look now at one of these pew cards found in the music book racks; it is titled "Mass Responses and Prayers" (there should be enough for everyone; if you need to, please share one with your neighbor). These are the pew cards I have been telling you about; the other Waterloo parishes have the same cards. Before we get to the Creed itself, take a brief look at the whole card you will see where in the Mass the wording changes relevant to you will take place. Note: 1. Changes are highlighted in red; 2. It goes through whole Mass in order; 3. Note the number of times you will respond and with your spirit instead of and also with you; 4. Please leave the cards in the music book racks on the pews; please do not take them home with you they are for everyone's use.

Remember: the reason for this new translation is to provide us with a more accurate and literal translation of the Mass prayers from the original and official Latin. You will come to see and appreciate how the new translation helps us be more aware of the glory and power of God and the infinite gift that Jesus his Son is to us. So now let us take a look at the Nicene Creed on the card open it up, and you will find it on the left-hand side (Profession of Faith Nicene Creed). As you can see, there are quite a number of words and phrases in red, indicating again the new wording we will use. I want to highlight three of those changes.

1) We start off the Creed right away with a change: I believe instead of the We believe that we have been saying the last 35+ years. The simple reason for this change: the Latin text says "credo" which is the first-person singular of the verb "credere" (to believe). But there is a more profound meaning to

this change as well. One of our U.S. bishops has said that professing what I myself believe emphasizes a key aspect of faith: it is a deeply personal decision in response to a wondrous gift from God. No one else can make this decision for us. Saying what I believe will challenge each of us to reflect: do I really, truly believe what I say I believe? The Creed declares some truly foundational and mysterious things to be true, things that we cannot prove in a laboratory or in any scientific manner. Do I really believe and accept for and within myself what the Church declares to be true in these areas of faith? This new translation of each of us declaring our own individual beliefs will help and challenge us to reflect more personally on these questions.

2) Going a little further in the Creed, we come to a word describing our belief in Jesus that may not be familiar to you: our belief that Jesus was of begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father instead of one in being with the Father. This new word reflects more closely the precise language used by the Church in the Council of Nicaea back in 325 A.D. to protect the Church's faith that Jesus was and is the eternal Son of the Father, truly and fully divine as is the Father. The Council of Nicaea was held in response to the false teaching of a bishop named Arius who declared that the Son of God did not exist from all eternity and was not fully divine. The Council used a Greek word to affirm the Church's belief that Jesus the Son shared the same divine nature and substance with the Father. That Greek word was later translated into Latin as consubstantialis which still later was given in English as consubstantial. Again, the purpose is to be more precise in our language and translation from the Latin. One in being with the Father (the phrase we are used to) is not wrong, but it does not express as clearly the critical point rejected by Arius and affirmed by Nicaea: that the Son is a divine Person, existing from all eternity, with the same divine nature or substance as God the Father. Consubstantial does a much better job of preserving and making more explicit that very important doctrine of our faith.

3) The last change I want to mention today is a little further down where it is said of Jesus that he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary. Compare that with what we have been saying: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary. Again, this is a more accurate translation of the Latin incarnatus from which come our English words incarnate and Incarnation. This makes more explicit another fundamental doctrine of our faith as explained in our Catechism: the Church calls Incarnation the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. We do not believe that Jesus, the Son of God, took on our human flesh and nature only at the moment of his birth, but rather when Mary said yes to God's plan for her as revealed by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation and when the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary's womb nine months before Jesus was born. This is not just theological hair-splitting or mumbo-jumbo. Especially in these days of so much confusion and so many misstatements of belief, it is vitally important that we express our faith as accurately as possible. To say that Jesus was incarnate of the Virgin Mary does a much better job of affirming our faith that the divine Word of God was conceived as that Word of God in Mary's womb.

As you can see, there are a number of other wording changes in this new translation of the Nicene Creed; we cannot cover them all at this time. But I want to conclude with a brief reminder of the importance for each of us to affirm what I personally believe and what each of you personally believes: not just what the universal Church believes in common. Faith and the knowledge of divine truths always and necessarily begin as a pure, undeserved gift from God. But God does not force that gift on us: we must freely and consciously choose to accept it. In the gospel parable, the king had prepared that great wedding feast and invited everyone, but not everyone accepted the invitation. How do we respond to God's invitation to accept, believe, and live by the saving truth he has revealed to us through his Son? When we begin using this new translation of the Creed late next month and we all begin saying what I believe, we will be challenged to ask ourselves: do I really, truly believe what I say I believe? May God grant us all the gift of a renewed and strengthened faith to truly affirm personally this Creed of ours and to live it in joy and gratitude.

