

I Believe vs. We Believe

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Every Catholic shares a belief with every other Catholic. We believe in one God. We believe in three divine persons. We believe in forgiveness. We believe in eternal life. We each hold this belief. When we were baptized, we spoke it for the first time, or our parents and godparents spoke it for us. Now, every Sunday at Mass, we recite the Creed. We may disagree with other Catholics on less important matters, but the Creed holds us together on what counts the most.

The first word of the Creed in Latin is *Credo*, and it means “I believe.” When the Mass first went into English after the Second Vatican Council, the translation used the words “We believe.” This helped our sense of participation at Mass. We come not just by ourselves but as a community expressing together our common faith. Other vernacular languages did not make the same choice, so it has been common to hear the equivalent of “I believe” in Catholic churches in other nations around the world.

Now the Vatican has asked that all vernacular languages express the Creed in the first person singular, “I believe.” This is consistent with the tradition going back to the sixth century, when the Creed began to appear as a regular feature of Sunday Mass, first in Spain and then throughout the rest of the Catholic world. The community recited the Creed together, but in the first person singular, “I believe.”

St. Thomas Aquinas said, “The confession of faith is handed down in the Creed, as it were, as coming from the person of the whole Church, united by means of the Faith.” When we say, “I believe.” we speak not only for ourselves—we speak for the church.

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