

“I Confess One Baptism”

Kristopher W. Seaman

The phrase “I confess one Baptism” is in the last paragraph of the Nicene Creed. This Creed, with a few minor changes added to it at later councils, was primarily written at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Nicaea is a city outside of what today we call Istanbul (during the fourth century, it was known as Constantinople). In the years leading up to this council, the Church struggled to articulate the natures of Christ. The bishops of the Church, particularly those of the East, gathered in order to articulate true belief in who Christ is, especially in his relationship to God the Father. It was a time of controversy on core beliefs. The Creed was the final document of that council, written so that all the faithful may know the central teachings of Christianity.

The revised translation of *The Roman Missal* adds the word “confess.” This word was not present in the previous translation. To confess is to adhere to; to have faith in something or someone. Thus, to *confess* something is “to show and to articulate our belief(s).” What does it mean then to “confess one Baptism”?

Through the sacrament of Baptism we enter the Church. This sacrament makes us disciples of the Lord Jesus. Water washes us clean of original sin, and we step out of the font glistening with the radiance of Christ shining through us. That is why we are given a baptismal candle. Candles represent Christ who, like the candle, gave up his life so as to shine forth in the lives of believers who were purified by fire and water.

In the ritual of Baptism, the Creed is a significant part of the sacrament. Rather than professing the Creed, the priest (or the deacon) requests the Creed in the form of questions: “Do you believe in God, the Father almighty . . . ?” Adults will



answer, “I do!” while godparents will answer on behalf of the infant. We are used to this form of question, especially at Easter when we renew our baptismal promises, or when a Baptism of an infant takes place during Mass. Those baptismal promises comprise the Creed.

By confessing in “one Baptism,” we confess, or state our faith or adherence to, that there is one way to enter the Church. It is this sacrament that makes us disciples of the Lord Jesus. The Creed is a Trinitarian confession: We confess our belief in “God, / the Father,” “one Lord Jesus Christ, / the Only Begotten Son of God,” and “the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.” In the waters of Baptism, we are baptized in the name of the Triune God: “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We were marked or “branded” in God’s very name.

This means that we are put into relationship, into communion, with God. God himself is a communion: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s great love issues forth from this divine Communion in order to bring us into communion, into relationship, with God’s very self. God’s love overflows and washes us in life giving waters.

That Baptism is a sacrament of the Church means that participation in the sacrament also puts us into relationship with the Church. This is why Saint Augustine of Hippo could remind those who were baptized that they wear the name of Christ as Christians. Like water, candle, and flame, we are to shine the love of the Triune God to renew the face of the earth, to give of ourselves in sacrificial love, and to burn brightly so that God’s love, peace and presence will be felt in what we do and say as Christian disciples.