

I BELIEVE ...

IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

Jerry Johnson

What do we mean when we repeat this phrase of the Apostles Creed? To begin with, if we say we believe in Jesus, we must have an understanding of who he is. We also need to know what it means to "believe in" him. So, who is this Jesus and what can we come to know about him? We could spend a lifetime answering that question, so our brief explanation here will hopefully be an encouragement to explore Sacred Scripture and the many good books available to help us in our understanding. Let's start with Christ's very own words. Who did he say he was? In the Gospel of John Jesus tells us He is "the way and the truth and the life". (14:6) This claim would indicate his preeminence in all things. In his very person is the essence of truth and life. He told Phillip "whoever has seen me has seen the Father". (14:9) He continued in verse 11; "...I am in the Father and the Father is in me". These words describe an intimate union with God the Father. The mysterious union we refer to as "persons" of the one, true God. Jesus also claimed his divinity when he referred to himself as "I AM" (John 18:5-8), the name used by God to express his identity to the Israelites. And yet, he was a man. A human being like us in every way except sin (Heb 4:15). Stop for a second and reflect on this. God, the creator of all that exists, joined with his own creation and took on human flesh. This amazing reality makes humanity unique among all life. Because of the incarnation, God becoming man, we alone have the opportunity to share in God's very



nature! In the words of St. Athanasius "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, tells us that the fullness of the deity (Godhead) dwells in Jesus (Col 2:9) but he is also fully human. Fully God and fully, perfectly man. Paul also tells us that we are to share in this fullness through our baptism and faith. In baptism we are buried with Christ and raised to new life in him. (Col 2:9-15) You see, Jesus is not only life itself, he is the way to this life of God for us. He confirmed Peter's declaration that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. (Matt 16:16) It was only through his sacrifice on the cross that we can come to share in his divine life. The name "Jesus" itself means "God saves" and "Christ" comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah", which means "anointed". In proclaiming Jesus "Christ" and "Lord" we are proclaiming him our God and Savior.

So, is this truly our belief and what difference does it make in our life? How do we live this amazing reality? Practically speaking, what do we mean when we say we "believe in" Jesus? Years ago I ran across a quote from Tony Campolo, a Baptist preacher, that has stuck with me. He said "to believe in someone means we are willing to put our lives into the hands of the one in whom we say we believe". This is faith and it fits perfectly with the definition that the Church gives us of the "obedience of faith" that we are all called to. (Rom 1:5) "By faith, man completely submits his

intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer." (CCC 143) To believe in Jesus is not simply an assent of our mind, we cannot just say we believe. We must *live* the belief. It is an obedient submission of our will and our whole being to God who has fully revealed himself to us in his Son, Jesus. In the words of Jesus himself "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matt 7:21)" "And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand." (Matt 7:26) Over and over in the Gospels, Jesus calls us to belief in him; a belief that entails much more than just saying "Lord, Lord". He calls us to a committed and deep Christian faith. In the *National Directory for Catechesis* the U.S. Bishops have given us an excellent description of what Christian faith should look like. As the very first line of paragraph 17B states; "The Christian faith is above all, conversion to Jesus Christ." A personal and explicit conversion of heart, mind and body to the God man, Jesus. On page 2 you will find the complete description given by the Bishops. Please read and reflect on their encouraging words and continue to ask yourself each day. Do I truly believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and what real difference will that make in my life today!

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and catechist for more than 20 years. He chairs the St. Lambert Faith Formation Committee and is currently in the Master Catechist Training program of the diocese.

CONVERSION

"The Christian Faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ. It is the fruit of God's grace and the free response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It arises from the depths of the human person and involves such a profound transformation of heart and mind that it causes the believer to change radically, both internally and externally. The Blessed Virgin Mary's perfect response to the grace of the Holy Spirit represents the primordial conversion to Christ and the 'purest realization of faith.' For the Christian, this metanoia reorients all aspects of the person's life to Christ. This conversion is the acceptance of a personal relationship with Christ,

a sincere adherence to him, and a willingness to conform one's life to his. Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple. Through this discipleship the believer is united to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church. The faith of the Church 'is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers.'

The process of conversion involves understanding who Christ is in order to change and follow him more closely. Conversion begins with an openness to the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a sincere desire to listen for its resonance within. This search arouses in those coming to Christ

a desire to know him more personally and to know more about him. This knowledge of the person, message, and mission of Christ enables the believer to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith. This profession of faith forms the foundation for the continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is nourished by the Sacraments, prayer and the practice of charity 'until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God... to the extent of the full stature of Christ'. This is crucial: we must be converted and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ."

-National Directory of Catechesis 17B

Thoughtful Questions

- Is this my experience of the Faith?
- Am I being transformed?
- What is my relationship with Christ?
- Have I made a personal decision for Christ in my life?
- Am I a committed disciple?
- Am I united in community with other disciples?
- Am I growing in an understanding of who Christ is?
- Is knowing Christ and being united with him the greatest desire of my life?
- Am I nourished in my faith journey by prayer, scripture and the sacraments?
- Am I experiencing a continuing conversion to Christ in my life?
- What is holding me back??

Sacred Scripture

" So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by hand, by stripping off the carnal body, with



the circumcision of Christ. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And even when you were dead (in) transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he brought you to life along with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross; despoiling the principalities and the powers, he made a public spectacle of them, leading them away in triumph by it."

-Colossians 2:6-15