

Responding to the Great Mysteries

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." ~ John 11:25-27

THE GREAT MYSTERIES are what we also call the deposit of faith. They are not mysteries in the sense that they cannot be known, but rather they are those things that we would not have known had not God revealed them. Whenever these mysteries are handed on, they require a response from the one who receives them. We call this response the response of faith. It is to say, "I believe!" The Latin word for "I believe" is *credo*. This is the word from which we get the word "creed." A creed, then, is a statement of faith. In fact, the words spoken at every Baptism, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (see Mt 28:19), are themselves one of the earliest creeds of the Church. The creed is what unites all believers and refusal to recant belief in it has cost many believers their lives.

As part of the baptismal ceremony, the celebrant asks the Elect a series of questions that are based on the Apostles' Creed, one of the earliest forms of the deposit of faith. Candidates for full communion are also asked to express their belief in these Great Mysteries, as explained by the

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Church. Each section of the Apostles' Creed focuses on a specific person of the Holy Trinity and reflects key moments in salvation history.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and earth?

God the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity, created men and women in his own image so that

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God and we could enjoy a close relationship. But instead of obeying God, our first parents chose to listen to the lies of the serpent and partake in what God had forbidden. This disobedience is what we call original sin. This is what separated us from God, severing the relationship for which we had been created. In his great love, God did not give up on his creation but announced his promise to send a redeemer (see Gn 3:15). The "seed of the woman" would one day crush the head of the serpent even as the serpent bruised his heel. From that time, God's plan unfolded throughout history. God chose Abraham and his descendants through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, the Israel-

*“The response of faith is only possible through God’s
grace operating in our lives.”*

ite people, as his means to bring forth the promised redeemer. After suffering in slavery in Egypt for many years, the Israelites, led by Moses, left the land of their bondage. The last of the punishments God brought against the Egyptians for refusal to free the Israelites was the death of all of their firstborn sons. Through Moses, God instructed the Israelites to sacrifice a perfect lamb, to eat the lamb, and to put its blood on their doorposts, so that their firstborn sons would be spared (“passed over”) the same fate. The meal celebrated the first Passover, which the Jewish people have celebrated ever since.

The Israelites inherited the land God had promised to Abraham, but their lack of firm commitment to God resulted eventually in the destruction of their kingdoms and their being carried off into exile. God eventually brought them back to their land, but they came to suffer under first Greek, then Roman, occupation as they anxiously awaited the coming redeemer.

*Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord,
who was born of the Virgin Mary,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
rose from the dead,
and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?*

St. Paul tells us that “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of [a] woman” (Gal 4:4). God’s promise of the “seed of the woman” is now fulfilled in the virginal conception and birth of Jesus, who is Immanuel (“God with us”) (see Is 7:14). This is the Incarnation (“enfleshment”) — the act of God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, becoming a man. He accomplished our redemp-



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tion through his Paschal Mystery — the total act of his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension to Heaven. Jesus became the definitive Paschal lamb by whose death we have been freed from the bondage of sin and death.

*Do you believe in the
Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic
Church, the communion of
saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the
body,
and the life everlasting?*

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity. After his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to lead and guide his

Church. Through Baptism, each Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit. This infilling is the restoration of the relationship for which God first created humankind. It is in the Church that each person can come to know and love God and experience the grace of the sacraments. The faithful living out of one’s baptismal promise brings the promise of eternal life.

The response of faith to these questions is a resounding, “Yes!” that is only possible through God’s grace operating in our lives. Our part is to respond to God’s grace and embrace his Revelation. Yet through our free will we can refuse God’s grace. Even with all that God has done, the final choice always remains ours. This is why God’s Revelation should always be accompanied by his admonition:

*I call Heaven and earth to witness against you this day,
that I have set before you life and death,
blessing and curse;
therefore choose life!*

(Dt 30:19; italics and exclamation added)
(CCC 150-175, 185-197)