

Reaffirming the Faith

At our Synod's National Convention this July, the assembled delegates passed a number of resolutions that said things we've said before. They voted to "Encourage God's People to Engage in Active Witness" and plant churches. They confessed "the Biblical Six-Day Creation," and encouraged "Faithfulness Regarding Marriage." Once again, they affirmed "the Sanctity of Life and the Dangers of Physician-Assisted Suicide," remembered "the Persecuted Church," and encouraged "Lifelong Catechesis in the Home and Church."

Granted, the Convention did a lot of other work, but why repeat positions we've already made clear? Isn't that just a waste of time?

Perhaps you have the same sort of thoughts about Sunday services. "We've heard all this before. Why do we have to hear it again?"

Well then, let me ask you: Why do we confess the Creed each week?

Historically, the Creed used to be confessed just before the Communion portion of the Service, when only the faithful who were staying for communion were in the building. But in the ninth and eleventh centuries, under pressure from Emperors Charlemagne and Henry II, the Creed was moved to its current place after the Gospel. The Emperors were concerned about the threat of heresy invading the Church, and so they insisted that the Creed be included in the liturgy where everyone would be confessing it, to fortify the Church against this threat.

You see, even though the Church may not change its doctrine, the world around us doesn't stop trying to change it for us. We repeat our confession of faith so that we don't forget it. We repeat it so that others may learn it. We repeat it to encourage and remind one another that we share this belief. And we repeat our confession so that all of us may be better prepared to repel the sneaky (and not so sneaky) attacks of the world, which would twist our words in order to confuse us and draw us away from Christ.

God doesn't call us to come up with a "new" or "up-to-date" faith. He calls us to delight in His Word and remain faithful to it, to reaffirm our faith in that Word and what it says to the questions and threats raised by the world around us.

I was reminded of all this in an old prayer I prayed on my recent ordination anniversary. The prayer reads, in part:

"Come, Holy Spirit, thou Spirit of the Father and the Son, make God's Word great for me; make me desire it and delight in it, that nothing may be more joyful to me than to listen to it speaking still to me today. Sanctify me that I may be nothing but the mouth of God's speech. Open my eyes that I may see the flock entrusted to me with the eyes of the Good Shepherd, that I may recognize and lift up the bruised reed. Awaken within me the image of the one High Priest, Jesus Christ.

"Come, Holy Spirit, pour down thyself upon thy church. Raise up in her men and women to serve with me in common priestly ministry. Cleanse in us what is unclean. Water and sprinkle what is parched. Restore what is wrong. Warm what is cold. Direct what is rebellious. Grant us great power to do that which is good and avoid that which is evil.

"Creator Spirit, come thou also upon my brethren whom thou hast set over me for the leadership of thy church. So rule these thy servants that thou shalt thyself be the Leader of thy church. Help me to see in their guidance thine own divine governance, that we may all be one body and grow up into him who is our Head, even Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

God so grant it, as we reaffirm the faith, and continue to walk in His words and ways!