

WHERE Do I Fit In?

As we grow up, we often have experiences that cause us to question who we are and what we believe. As Jesus' followers, we can turn to the Church to help us navigate this ongoing process of growth and development. By reflecting on the Creed and its meaning, we can remain true to a faith that has been passed down since the time of Jesus.



by Joe Paprocki

Who Am I and What Do I Believe?

Back in the day, when I was a teenager, I tried really hard to be bad, and I failed miserably. Like many teenagers, I was struggling to find my identity. I didn't want to be the "goody two-shoes" I had been when I was younger. I wanted to be cool. So I grew my hair long. I dressed like a rebel. I hung out with the cool crowd and did cool things. Or so I thought. In reality, I ended up doing a lot of things that were just plain stupid. I did things that were not "me." Why? Because I didn't know who "me" was. Like many teenagers, I went through a difficult period of awkward grasping after some identity or meaning. It wasn't until a few years later, when I began to know what I really believed in and who God was calling me to be, that I began to act accordingly. It's so hard to know how to act when you don't know who you are or what you believe in.

You may be struggling to define yourself too. You may even find yourself doing some things that you're not very proud of. Without a clear sense of identity, it's difficult to act in a consistent manner. All of us need a clear sense of identity, and in order to have that, we need to know what we believe. The Creed is a prayer that expresses our identity. You were baptized into this Creed. At your Baptism, your parents and godparents accepted this identity on your behalf as they responded "I do" to baptismal promises drawn from the Creed.

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To symbolize your new identity, you were given a baptismal garment; we are what we wear! The message is clear: If you wish to be Jesus' disciple, place your trust in him. Know who it is you believe in and why. Supported by firm belief, you can find yourself—in Jesus.

Reflect

Who Am I?

Take a moment to reflect on your personal identity. How has your understanding of who you are changed as you've gotten older? In the box below, draw a symbol that represents your personal identity at this stage in your life. Before you begin, think about what you want your symbol to express to others about who you are.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw a symbol representing their personal identity.

Session 6 > We Believe

WHERE Do I Fit In?

As Catholics we belong to a community with whom we gather to celebrate our joys and sorrows. The teachings, practices, and rituals that are part of our celebrations shape us in ways we don't always realize—at first.



by Catherine
O'Connell-Cahill

What Shapes Us?

When my daughter was five, she began singing church songs with great gusto around the house. One of her favorites was a song we sang at our parish all during Lent: "Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life." It's a version of the well-known 23rd Psalm, which begins, "The Lord is my shepherd." My daughter wanted to know what the words mean, so I tried to explain it to her.

One day, we were driving around town with her cousin, Liam, age four. The two kids had been taking turns, one sitting in the child car seat, and the other riding in the back seat with the seat belt. After each stop they would switch. But then, after the last stop, each of them refused to get into the car seat. After a few mild threats, I said, "Well, let me know who is going to ride where. I can wait." Silence. Then, after a minute or so, my daughter heaved herself into the car seat.

"Liam, I'm doing this for you," she said, "because I know you don't want to sit here, even though it's your turn." Then, realization dawning, she cried, "Mom! It's just like the song, isn't it? 'Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants!'"

She had found it within herself to be generous and loving even though she didn't have to be. The psalm had done its work in her heart.

This story causes me to think about the things that shape us. Think, for a moment, about all the advertising messages that you hear throughout the day: Buy this phone and you'll be happy. Wear these jeans and you'll be more attractive. If we're not careful, we can let those messages shape us.

We hear a different message at Mass. We are beloved children of a gracious God, and everything we have received in our lives is a gift from God. Jesus, whom we see on the cross at the altar, loved us enough to die for us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be the hands and feet of Christ in the world today.

Reflect

A Message of Faith

Take a moment to reflect on a time you received the message that you're a child of God. Then on a separate sheet of paper write how you can share with others the message that they are also children of God.

CATHERINE O'CONNELL-CAHILL is the author of *At Home with Our Faith*, a monthly family newsletter published by Claretian Publications.

Session 7 > Gregory the Great Influences the Liturgy

WHERE Do I Fit In?

We are members of the Church, a community of believers. This is important, because it reminds us that we don't go to God alone. As Sr. Sheryl Chen points out, sometimes living in community can be challenging. It is among the members of our community, however, where we learn what it means to really love others. Love is generated among people.



by Sr. Sheryl Chen, O.C.S.O.

Why Do We Need Community?

Before I entered the monastery, I volunteered at a soup kitchen in Chicago. I was a bit apprehensive about serving the down-and-out, rough characters, mostly men, who came for a free bowl of soup and day-old bread. It turns out that the people who were homeless were fine, but another volunteer almost drove me stark-raving mad with her continuous pious comments. Then it dawned on me that maybe God had inspired me to work here not to learn to serve the unemployed, but to get along with the other staff in the kitchen.

Before I entered the monastery, I had lived alone in an apartment the previous two years. I was pretty faithful to getting up early so that I could pray morning prayer and go to Mass before work, and spending two hours in the evening in prayer. But I suspected that over time I would not be able to keep it up alone, and I would need the support of a community. So I entered a monastery that followed Saint Benedict's Rule for living out Gospel values together in community. Those who live together in monasteries know that they need the support of others to live in the presence of God.

Yet the biggest challenge in monastic life has been my community. Though we each want to live the Gospel according to the Rule, we have very different ideas about what that means in practice. Every day we have to accept one another as different incarnations of Christ, and even, as Saint Benedict says, to prefer what is better for the other to what I myself want. Living in love together

calls for a constant yielding of my own will, my preferences, my ideas. It is not easy. It is constant growth in self-knowledge and conversion.

A journalist once asked Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, "What needs to change in the church?" She answered, "You and me."

Reflect

Called to Community

Identify one or two areas in your life where the support of the community can help you remain faithful to the call of discipleship. On the lines below, write how you can turn to the community for support and how you can support others in their journey of faith.

SR. SHERYL CHEN, O.C.S.O. is a Trappistine sister who lives at Mariakloster Monastery in Tautra, Norway.

Session 8 > Monasteries and Community

WHERE Do I Fit In?

We are called to share the Good News with others through our thoughts, words, and actions. By doing so, we can have a profound effect on others, maybe without even knowing it!



by Fr. Paul Brian Campbell, S.J.

Who Has Carried the Message of Jesus to Me?

Many people have brought Christ to me in my life. The first time it happened was unforgettable. The person who brought Christ to me was Mrs. Brennan, my first grade teacher at a Catholic elementary school in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

We had a religion period every morning. I remember only one of them now, and it has stuck with me through the years. Mrs. Brennan told us the story from Mark's Gospel about the paralyzed man whose four friends brought him to see Jesus. The house was too crowded to enter, so the man's friends opened a hole in the roof and lowered him into the room where Jesus was. Jesus healed the man, who got off his stretcher and walked.

I don't know why it happened, but this story came alive for me. Right then and there, as Mrs. Brennan told it in that Irish classroom, I was transported back to first-century Capernaum. I could see, hear, and experience the whole thing unfolding before me. I was in the crowd. I felt the sun beating down on us, the dust that tickled my throat, the group of people trying to get closer to Jesus. I felt the astonishment as the men climbed on top of the building and started taking off the roof tiles. I listened, spellbound, as Jesus told the paralyzed man to "get up, take your mat and go home." The man, who had been lowered in front of Jesus just a few minutes before, sprang up and marched out of the house with great joy.

Doubtless, it was just another day's work for Mrs. Brennan, but she brought me to meet Jesus for the first time. She almost certainly had no idea that she had opened up the Scriptures for me in a whole new way. My only regret is that I never thought to tell her about it. If people ever do something like that for you, make sure to tell them.

Reflect

A Model of Faith

Take a moment to think of one or two people who have modeled a life of discipleship for you. Then on the lines below, write what you can do to thank these people for bringing you closer to Jesus.

FR. PAUL BRIAN CAMPBELL, S.J., is the Publisher at Loyola Press.

Session 9 > Sent on a Mission

WHERE Do I Fit In?

The Feast of the Nativity reminds us that our faith is incarnational—God became man in the Person of Jesus. As members of the Body of Christ, we can also find God's ongoing presence in one another and in the many signs and symbols of our faith.



by Becky Eldredge

Where's God?

One Sunday at Mass during the Christmas season, my two-year old son suddenly asked, "Where's God?" My husband and I, along with several other people around us, were rather surprised by the question. I saw a few smiles and heard a few laughs. One man, however, turned around and looked at my son and answered, "He's not here."

Maybe the man was trying to be funny, but he looked serious. The man's words weighed heavily on me during Mass. They seemed in stark contrast to the signs of our faith that surrounded us and reminded us of God's presence in our past and present—the Nativity scene in front of the altar, the Gospel Reading we heard that day about the Magi coming to visit Jesus, the Eucharist, and the church adorned and radiant with white. Every year we Catholics retell our Christmas story, our story of hope. We celebrate the extent to which God loved us—enough to become man. Our faith refuses to let us forget God's intense interest in each of us that began so long ago.

As I took in the sights of Christmas in the church, I thought about my own personal reminders of God active in my world. I felt God's presence in the way my entire body reacted to the man's answer because I wholeheartedly disagreed with him. I saw God present, not only in the church, but also in each one of us, the gathered Body of Christ. One look at my son reminded me that God dwells in him. God was present in the joy and the curiosity that prompted him to ask his question, "Where is God?"

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Toward the end of Mass, I smiled with relief, thankful for the reminders of God's presence, both in the past and in the present. I knew the answer I would give my son, and I knew the answer I wanted to give the man, "God is everywhere! Let me help you see him."

Reflect

God Is Present

Take a moment to reflect on a person, place, or object that has served as a reminder of God's presence in the world. In the box write a poem or reflection, sketch a picture, or attach a photograph of whatever you thought of.

Session 10 > Celebrating Advent and Christmas