
³ St. Matthew 27:35-50; St. Mark 15:24-37; St. Luke 23:33-46; St. John 19:18-30. For the actual mechanism by which crucifixion caused death, *see* note 6 *infra*.

⁴ THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928).

⁵ St. John 3:16; *see also* 1 John 2:1-2.

⁶ *See* PIERRE BARBET, A DOCTOR AT CALVARY: THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AS DESCRIBED BY A SURGEON. Dr. Barbet points out that in crucifixion the victim always suffers either the neurological pain of having his body's weight hanging the nails through his wrists combined with suffocation caused by having his own chest muscles drawn tight by his own weight as he hangs from his arms as they are fastened above his head, or the exhaustion of his leg muscles caused by their supporting his entire weight while balancing on a narrow footrest.

When his legs become too weak to support him, he sags onto his arms and becomes unable to breath. When he cannot stand further suffocation, he must hoist himself onto his failing legs. Thus his suffocation is intermittent but the periods of relief from standing become ever shorter and the periods of struggling to breath become ever longer.

This, incidentally, is the explanation for the "mercy" that was at last extended to the two horrific murderers who were executed with Jesus. Once their legs were broken, they could not hoist themselves up again to relieve the compression of their chests, so they could only hang until they suffocated to death. That made the process a matter of minutes rather than of hours. Christ was spared this "mercy" only because by that time He had already expired.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE APOSTLES' CREED -- 4.

The Reverend Canon John A. Hollister

**I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:**

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: *Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried:* He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost: The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of the body: And the Life everlasting. Amen.

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate,"

The fourth segment or phrase of the Apostles' Creed deals with what we call the *Passion* of Our Lord Jesus Christ. "Passion" in this context is an old word that means "suffering", which is the actual word used in the customary English translation of the Creed.

When we affirm that Christ "Suffered under Pontius Pilate", we are testifying directly to two important points and, by implication, to a third. The first (although it is the second to be

mentioned) is that this “Passion of Our Lord” really happened: it was *an historical event*, which occurred during the term of office of another historical figure, the Roman Procurator, or governor, of Judea who was named Pontius Pilate. As is true in the cases of other ancient Roman provincial officials, there exist inscriptions carved on stone monuments which confirm both that there was a governor in Judea by that name and the approximate dates of his tenure there.

Once again, Christianity is an historical religion and is founded upon individual events that happened at specific times, although the most recent of those foundational events, the ministries of the Apostles recorded in their Epistles, are now approximately 1,900 years in the past and others, such as the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt, are some 3,400 years or more in the past.

The second important point to which we testify in this first part of the fourth segment is that Christ actually *suffered*. He suffered agonies of mind and spirit, as in the Garden of Gethsemane,¹ but also physical tortures, as when he was flogged by the Roman soldiers² and, even more, in his agonizing death by six hours’ intermittent asphyxiation upon the Cross.³

The third point here, the one that is merely implicit, is that Christ was crucified, *i.e.*, died barbarously, *for us* and *for our sins*. The Apostles’ Creed merely recites the facts, as here that Christ “Suffered ... [and] Was crucified...” but the somewhat longer Nicene Creed suggests the reasons behind those facts: “And was crucified *for us* under Pontius Pilate...”⁴ This reason is set out explicitly in the Gospels, as where St. John tells us that Christ’s Passion and death were *gifts* from God to us and, moreover, gifts that make it possible for us to rise above physical death and aspire to eternal life.⁵

This is the concept known as the Atonement. In general use, “atonement” means “making up for” something wrong, but the root meaning is “making whole”, or “at – one – ment”. By His willing sacrifice of Himself, Christ made it possible for us

to heal our separation from God, a separation that is caused by our sins. A number of words are used for various aspects of this process, such as “Sacrifice”, “Justification”, “Atonement”, “Substitution”, and the like, each of which has a technical theological meaning. What is most important for the individual worshipper, however, is that Christ died to make it possible for us to be reconciled with God, if only we ourselves are willing to have it so.

“...Was crucified, dead, and buried....”

The rest of the fourth segment confirms and carries forward the second point already made in connection with the earlier portion of this segment: Christ’s actual physical *suffering* climaxed in the barbarous physical torture⁶ of being *crucified* (which simply comes from the Latin word for being “fixed to a cross”). This torture actually killed His human body. Then, after that body was murdered, it was, like many dead bodies, buried by being sealed in a real tomb.

Why these facts are so important will be explained in connection with the next segment of the Creed. Here we should simply note that Christ, who possessed (and possesses) a real human nature in a real human body, united with His truly divine nature, experienced a real human death of and in that body. Thus He shared the full experience of death which all past humans have undergone and which each of us, in our turns, will someday undergo, too.

This lays the foundation for several of the later segments of the Creed, in which we are taught the significance of Christ’s physical death, that is, what that death means for us. As we will see below, because we know He actually experienced this death, we also know that the meaning the Church has traditionally seen in that death is both valid and something on which we can rely.

¹ St. Matthew 26:36-46; St. Mark 14:32-42; St. Luke 22:39-46.

² St. Matthew 27:26b; St. Mark 15:15b; St. John 19:1.