THE DAILY BREAD

The Creed of the Apostles



Professing the Creed

Living Your Baptismal Vows

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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INTRODUCTION

The Vows You Forgot You Made

At some point, probably before you could speak, a set of vows was made in your name. Standing at a font with your parents and godparents, the Church asked a series of questions, and someone answered them for you. Do you reject sin? Do you reject the glamour of evil? Do you reject Satan? And then: do you believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ his Son, in the Holy Spirit, in the holy Catholic Church? To each renunciation and each profession the answer was given, I do, and I do believe, and on the strength of those vows you were baptized, claimed for Christ, and made a Christian.

Most men have never once thought about those vows as adults. They were made for him long ago, in a ceremony he does not remember, and they sank out of sight beneath a whole life. And yet they are the most serious promises ever made on his behalf, a pledge of his entire self to God, and they did not expire when he grew up. They are still binding. They still define him. The whole of the Christian life, when you strip it down, is simply the living out of those baptismal vows: the daily rejecting of what was renounced, and the daily professing of what was professed. A man has not really taken up his faith as a man until he has consciously claimed those vows as his own and set about living them.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9

This book is not about what the Creed means, the doctrines it contains and defends; that is a study of its own. This is about something more personal and more practical: how a man actually lives the vows he made at the font, day by day, in the ordinary stuff of his life. For the Creed was never meant only to be understood or recited. It was meant to be professed, with the mouth and with the whole life, and a profession is a thing a man lives, not merely a thing he says. We will look at the two great movements of the baptismal vow, the renouncing and the professing, at the identity it gives a man, at how to keep it alive and renew it, at what it costs to profess it openly, and at how a professed life becomes, all by itself, a witness. The aim is simple: that a man would stop merely having been baptized, and start living baptized.

CHAPTER ONE

Claiming the Vow as a Man

Promises Made in Your Name

A promise made on a man's behalf before he could understand it is a strange kind of promise. It is real and binding, as a title to land inherited in infancy is real, but it is not yet fully his until he takes hold of it, understands what it gives and demands, and makes it his own by a deliberate act. This is the first work of a man with respect to his baptismal vows: to stop treating them as something that happened to him as a baby and to claim them, consciously, as a man.

Choose this day whom you will serve… but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. — Joshua 24:15

The Two Movements of the Vow

Look closely at what was actually promised at the font, because it has a precise and powerful shape. The baptismal vow moves in two directions, like a man turning his whole body around. First there is a turning away: the renunciation of sin, of the seductive glamour of evil, and of Satan, the enemy of the soul. A man cannot face God while still facing the other direction, so the vow begins by turning its back on everything that leads away from him. And then there is a turning toward: the profession of faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the Church. Having renounced the darkness, the baptized faces the light and commits himself to it. Every Christian life is lived inside these two movements, the no and the yes, the renouncing and the professing, and a man who understands his vows understands that he is pledged to both.

Most men are stronger at one of these movements than the other, and the imbalance is worth noticing in oneself. Some men are good at the no, disciplined, self-denying, proud of what they have given up, and yet strangely cold, because they have renounced much and professed little; their faith is all restraint and no love. Other men are warm with profession, full of affection for God, and yet have never seriously turned from the sins they coddle; their faith is all sentiment and no spine. The baptismal vow pledges a man to both movements together, and the Christian life stays whole only when they are kept in balance. A man should ask himself honestly which half comes harder to him, the renouncing or the professing, and lean deliberately into the one he tends to neglect.

Not a Ceremony, but a Covenant

It is essential to grasp that these vows were not a mere ritual formality, a religious welcoming ceremony with no binding force. They were a covenant, a solemn and permanent pledge of allegiance, as real as an oath of office or a marriage vow. In Baptism a man was not simply blessed or named; he was enlisted, sworn to a King, bound to a side

in a war that is real. The casual modern notion that one's baptism was a nice family tradition with no ongoing claim is a serious misreading of what took place. A man was given to God and vowed to God, and the vow stands over his whole life whether he attends to it or not, as an oath of loyalty binds a soldier whether or not he thinks about it daily.

Ratify It as an Adult

So the first and most important thing a man can do is to ratify these vows deliberately, as a grown man who now understands them. This is, in part, what Confirmation was for, the sealing and personal taking-up of what was pledged at Baptism. But it should also be a conscious, ongoing act of the will: a man standing before God and saying, in effect, what was promised for me as a child, I now claim and mean for myself as a man. I reject sin. I reject evil. I reject the enemy. I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in the Church, and I stake my life on it. Until a man has made the vow his own in this deliberate way, his faith remains in some sense secondhand, a thing he inherited rather than chose. The moment he claims it, it becomes his, and his whole life can begin to be organized around keeping it.

CHAPTER TWO

Do You Reject Sin?

Living the Renunciations

The vow begins with a renunciation, and so must the lived Christian life. Before a man can meaningfully profess his faith, he has to turn from what contradicts it, and the baptismal promises name three things he is pledged to reject: sin, the glamour of evil, and Satan himself. These are not rejected once and for all at the font; the renunciation is a daily act, renewed every time a man turns from a temptation, and the living of it is half of what it means to be a baptized man.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. — James 4:7

Notice the order in that ancient instruction, because it is the whole secret of the renunciation. Submit to God first; then resist the devil. A man who tries to resist temptation by sheer willpower, without first submitting himself to God, is fighting the enemy on his own strength and will eventually lose, for the enemy is stronger than he is. But a man who has first given himself to God resists from within God's own strength, and

against that the enemy cannot stand; he flees. This is why the renunciation is never merely a gritting of the teeth against sin but always a turning toward God in the same motion. A man does not white-knuckle his way out of temptation; he turns, in the moment, to the God he belongs to, and finds that the thing which was overpowering him loosens its grip the instant he does.

The Renunciation Is a Daily Turning

A man who thinks he renounced sin once, at his baptism, and need not do so again has misunderstood the vow entirely. The renunciation made at the font was the first of a lifetime of renunciations, the opening of a war, not its conclusion. To live baptized is to keep turning from sin, concretely, in the actual moments of temptation that make up a life: the turning of the eyes from what they should not see, the refusal of the sharp word, the setting down of the grudge, the walking away from the thing a man knows he must not do. Every one of these small turnings is a living-out of the baptismal no, a renewal of the vow in the only place it can actually be kept, which is the present moment. A man renounces sin not mainly in a ceremony but in a thousand ordinary choices, and the sum of those choices is whether he is living his vow or breaking it.

Naming the Glamour of Evil

The vow is strikingly precise about one thing a man must reject: the glamour of evil, its seductive packaging, the way sin is made to look attractive, sophisticated, liberating, or harmless. This is worth dwelling on, because evil rarely presents itself as evil; it comes dressed as freedom, as pleasure, as the thing everyone does, as the reasonable exception, as the life a man is missing out on. To renounce the glamour of evil is to see through the costume, to name the attractive thing for what it actually is, and to reject it precisely where it is most appealing. A man living his vows learns to distrust the glittering promise, to ask of the alluring thing not merely is this fun but where does this lead, and to refuse what he knows, beneath the shine, will cost him his soul. The renunciation is not only of obvious vice but of vice made beautiful, which is far harder and far more necessary.

Renewing the Renunciation

Because the renunciation is a daily thing, a man needs regular points at which to renew it deliberately, and the Church gives him several. Every year at Easter the whole Church renews the baptismal promises aloud, and a man should mean the words with his whole heart rather than mumbling them by rote. Every time he goes to Confession, he renounces again the sins he confesses. Every time he blesses himself with holy water on entering a church, he recalls his Baptism and the vow it carried. And in the daily battle, a

man can renew the renunciation in a breath, in the moment of temptation, with a short and ancient prayer that resists the enemy and clings to Christ. The vow is kept not by a single heroic act but by this constant, humble renewing, the daily re-turning of a man's face away from the darkness he was pledged to reject.

CHAPTER THREE

Do You Believe?

Living the Profession

Having turned from the darkness, the baptismal vow turns toward the light, and the man professes his faith: I believe. These two words are among the most consequential a human being can speak, and most men speak them every Sunday without feeling their weight. To profess the Creed is not to recite a summary of religious opinions a man happens to hold. It is to pledge his allegiance, to stake his life, to declare whose side he is on. And such a profession is lived, not merely said.

Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. — Matthew 10:32

I Believe Means I Commit

In the mouth of a Christian, I believe is not the weak thing the modern world means by belief, a tentative opinion about matters that cannot be proven. It is far closer to the I do of a wedding vow or the oath of a soldier. When a man says I believe in God the Father almighty, he is not merely reporting that he thinks God probably exists; he is giving himself, committing his trust, his obedience, and his whole future to the One he names. The Creed is a pledge of allegiance before it is a checklist of doctrines. This is why a man can know every article of the faith and still not truly profess it, and why a simple soul who knows little but has given himself wholly to God professes it more truly than the learned man who merely assents. To profess is to commit, and a profession that commits nothing is not yet the profession the vow intends.

Believing With the Whole Life

And a real profession cannot stay in the mouth; it works its way out into the whole of a man's life, or it is not real. Faith that changes nothing a man does is not the living faith the vow professes but a dead opinion, and Scripture is blunt that such faith is worthless. A man professes his belief in God not only by saying the Creed on Sunday but by living

Monday as though every word of it were true: by treating his neighbor as a soul of infinite worth because he believes in a God who made and redeemed him, by facing suffering with hope because he believes in the resurrection, by keeping his integrity in the dark because he believes in a God who sees. The profession is embodied or it is empty. A man's real creed, the one he actually believes, is written not in what he says on Sunday but in how he lives all week, and the goal is to make the two the same.

There is a searching test in this that a man can apply to himself. Watch how you actually live for a week, the choices you make when no one religious is watching, and you will read off your true creed, the one you really believe as opposed to the one you recite. A man who claims to believe that this life is a brief prelude to eternity, and then lives wholly for comfort and reputation here, does not really believe what he professes; his life has contradicted his lips. A man who says he believes God is his Father and provider, and then is eaten alive by anxiety over money, has a creed his worry exposes as thin. This is not cause for despair but for honesty and for growth: the aim of living the vows is precisely to close the gap between the creed a man says and the creed he lives, until the whole of his life finally agrees with the words of his mouth.

Say the Creed Like You Mean It

All of this should transform the way a man prays the Creed at Mass, which for most has become a passage mumbled on autopilot while the mind wanders. Recover it as what it is: the weekly renewal of your baptismal vow, your chance to stand up in the assembly of God's people and pledge your allegiance again, out loud, with your brothers and sisters. Pray it deliberately. Let the words land. When you say I believe in one God, mean it as a man means his marriage vow. When you say and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, feel the weight of calling him Lord, which is to call yourself his servant. The Creed prayed this way, even once, is a different thing from the Creed mumbled a thousand times, and a man who learns to profess it with his whole attention has begun to profess it with his whole life.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Man You Already Are

Living From Your Baptism

There is a secret in the baptismal vows that changes everything about how a man lives them, and it is this: the vow did not merely commit a man to a set of behaviors; it made him into a new kind of person. Baptism did not just enroll him in a religion. It changed

what he is. And the Christian life is lived not by straining to become something a man is not, but by living out of what, at the font, he already became.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. — Galatians 3:27

Identity Before Activity

Most men try to live the faith backward. They treat Christianity as a set of things to do, a performance by which they hope to earn an identity, to become, through enough effort, the kind of man God might accept. But the order of the Gospel is the reverse. First God gives the identity, freely, at Baptism: a man is made a son of God, a member of Christ's body, a new creation, marked permanently as belonging to Christ. The behavior then flows from the identity, not the other way around. A man does not do good works in order to become a son of God; he does them because he already is one and is learning to live like it. This is the difference between the exhausting religion of earning and the freeing life of grace, and it changes the whole feel of the Christian life. A man is not auditioning for a part. He is growing into a name already given him.

This also quietly heals a wound many men carry without naming it, the sense that they must somehow prove their worth, earn their place, justify their existence by performance, a burden that drives them in their work and poisons their rest. The baptized man has been handed, as pure gift, the one verdict he most needed and could never have earned: that he is a beloved son of God, accepted not because of what he has achieved but because of what Christ has done. A man who truly receives this can finally stop striving to be somebody, because he already is somebody, named and claimed by God himself. The relentless inner pressure to prove his worth gives way to the settled security of a son, and out of that security, rather than out of anxiety, his good works begin to flow freely, as gratitude rather than as audition.

Live Like Whose You Are

Once a man grasps this, the moral life takes on a different and more natural shape: not a straining to meet a standard, but a living up to an identity, the way a king's son behaves in a certain way not to become royal but because he already is. When temptation comes, the deepest question is not merely is this against the rules, but is this worthy of a son of God, is this who I am. A baptized man facing a shabby or shameful choice can say to himself, with real force, that is not who I am; I was washed clean of that, I belong to Christ, I will not drag his name through that. This is the ancient dignity the early Christians felt so keenly, who went to the lions rather than betray the identity sealed in their Baptism. A man who knows whose he is has a reason to refuse the unworthy thing that no mere rule could ever give him.

Small Renewals of the Mark

Because this identity is so easily forgotten in the press of ordinary life, a man does well to build in small, physical reminders of it, and the Church has always provided them. The Sign of the Cross, made deliberately and not flicked off absentmindedly, is a renewal of the baptismal mark, a claiming again of the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit into which a man was baptized. Holy water at the door of a church, and kept at the door of a home, recalls the water of the font every time it is touched. The morning offering, made on waking, consciously takes up the identity again for the day: I am yours; this day is yours; let me live it as your son. These are not empty gestures but the small daily renewals by which a man keeps alive the memory of what he is, so that he goes into his day not as an orphan trying to earn a home but as a son living from one.

CHAPTER FIVE

Keeping the Vow Alive

The Renewal of a Lifetime

A vow that is never renewed slowly dies, not usually through a dramatic breaking but through simple neglect, the way a fire goes out when no one tends it. The baptismal vow is no exception. A man does not keep it alive by the single fact of having once made it, but by renewing it deliberately across a lifetime, and a wise man builds these renewals into the rhythm of his years, his weeks, and his days.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. — 2 Timothy 4:7

The Great Yearly Renewal

The Church, wise about human forgetfulness, has built into her calendar a great annual renewal of exactly these vows. At the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday, the whole Church stands and renews the baptismal promises aloud, rejecting sin and professing faith in the very words that were spoken at every member's font. For most Catholics this passes as one more part of a long liturgy. For a man living his vows, it is the high point of the year, the moment he deliberately re-makes, with full adult understanding, the pledge once made in his name. A man should prepare for it, come to it awake, and mean every word as the renewal of the most serious oath of his life. Kept this way, each Easter becomes a genuine re-founding of a man's whole Christian life, a yearly return to the font.

It is worth preparing for this renewal the way a man would prepare for any oath that mattered, rather than stumbling into it cold. The Church gives him the season of Lent precisely for this, forty days to examine where he has broken his baptismal promises over the past year, to turn from the sins that have crept back in, and to come to Easter ready to renew the vow with a cleansed and deliberate heart. A man who lets Lent do its work arrives at the Easter renewal having genuinely turned, so that the words he speaks are not a hollow repetition but the true re-making of a man who has looked honestly at his failures and chosen God again. Approached this way, the yearly cycle of Lent and Easter becomes exactly what the Church designed it to be: an annual dying to the old self and rising renewed, the baptismal vow lived out in the very shape of the year.

The Daily and Weekly Rhythm

Beneath the yearly renewal runs a weekly and a daily one. Each Sunday, in the Creed at Mass, a man renews his profession; he should treat it as such and not as filler. Each morning, in the morning offering and the Sign of the Cross, he can take up the vow again for the day ahead. Each night, in a brief examination, he can look back and ask honestly how he kept it: where did I live my Baptism today, and where did I betray it? This is not a heavy burden of extra religious activity; it is a few deliberate moments that keep the great vow from fading into the background of a busy life. A man who renews his baptismal commitment every morning, professes it every Sunday, and re-makes it every Easter has built a structure in which the vow stays alive, tended like a fire that is never allowed to go cold.

Pass the Vow to Your Children

And a man keeps his own vows most powerfully, in the end, by handing them on. If he is a father, the children he has brought to the font are watching to learn what those vows actually mean, and they will learn it less from what he says than from whether he visibly lives his own. A father who renews his baptismal promises with evident seriousness, who is seen to reject sin and to profess his faith with his life, teaches his children what their own Baptism is for in a way no catechism class can. He should also mark and celebrate their baptismal days, teach them to renew their promises, and speak to them of the vow that was made for them, so that they too, one day, claim it as their own. A vow lived and handed on does not die; it propagates, passing from a man to his children and beyond him into a future he will not see.

CHAPTER SIX

The Cost of Saying It Out Loud

Professing in a World That Will Not

To profess the faith privately, in one's own heart and at Sunday Mass among fellow believers, costs a man little. To profess it openly, in a world that increasingly regards such faith as embarrassing, backward, or offensive, costs a man something real, and the baptismal vow, rightly understood, pledges him to the costly kind. A profession that a man is careful never to let anyone outside the church walls see is only half a profession.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. — Romans 1:16

The Temptation to Keep It Quiet

The great temptation of the Catholic man in a secular age is not usually to renounce his faith outright but to keep it quiet, to wall it off into a private compartment that never shows at work, among skeptical friends, or in public life. He tells himself this is prudence, or respect for others, or simply good manners, and sometimes there is a measure of truth in that. But often it is something less noble: a quiet shame, a fear of the raised eyebrow, the awkward silence, the reputation for being that kind of person. A man can attend Mass faithfully every Sunday and yet live the other six days as a functional unbeliever, giving no outward sign that he belongs to Christ, and such a man has quietly broken the open profession his vow intends. The faith was never meant to be a secret a man keeps.

There is a real distinction, though, between hiding one's faith and merely not parading it, and a man should not confuse boldness with obnoxiousness. The call is not to turn every conversation into an argument, to wear his religion as a badge of superiority, or to make a tiresome display of his piety, which usually does more harm than silence. It is simply to be honestly and unmistakably what he is, to let his faith be known and visible in the natural course of his life, and never to deny or disguise it out of fear. The quiet, unembarrassed consistency of a man who plainly lives by his faith, and does not hide it but also does not brandish it, is far more powerful than either cowardice or bluster. A man acknowledges Christ before men best not by preaching at them but by living among them as one who evidently and unashamedly belongs to him.

Acknowledge Him Before Men

Christ spoke with unusual bluntness on exactly this point. Whoever acknowledges me before men, he said, I will acknowledge before my Father; but whoever denies me before men, I will deny before my Father. He was not demanding that a man preach on street

corners or force his faith into every conversation, which is often mere vanity. He was demanding that a man not hide, not pretend to be what he is not, not laugh along with the mockery of what he holds sacred, not let others assume he shares their unbelief because he lacked the nerve to let them know otherwise. To acknowledge Christ before men is often quiet: it is to make the Sign of the Cross before a meal in a restaurant, to say plainly that one will be at Mass on Sunday, to decline to join the cruel joke, to let one's faith be known and visible even when it is not loud. The baptized man does not hide whose he is.

The Freedom of the Open Profession

What a man discovers, when he finally stops hiding, is that the open profession is not a burden but a liberation. The energy a man spends concealing his faith, managing impressions, keeping two selves, one for church and one for the world, is exhausting, and it corrodes his integrity from within. The moment he lets the two selves become one, the moment his colleagues and neighbors simply know that he is a serious Catholic and he no longer has to hide it, a great weight falls away. He is finally whole, the same man everywhere, with nothing to conceal. And he usually finds that the disaster he feared does not come; most people respect a man who is quietly and unashamedly what he is far more than one who trims and hides. The open profession, dreaded in advance, turns out to be the doorway to the freedom of a man who has stopped being ashamed of his King.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Life That Says the Creed

Your Profession Becomes Your Witness

In the end, the living of the baptismal vows does something a man may not have intended: it makes him a witness. A life actually shaped by the Creed, a man who visibly rejects what he renounced and visibly lives what he professed, becomes an argument for the faith more persuasive than any words, and this is precisely where the vow opens out into the mission that is coming.

For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. — Acts 4:20

The Professed Life Preaches

A man who truly lives his baptismal vows preaches the Creed with his life whether he means to or not. The colleague who watches him refuse the dishonest shortcut, the

neighbor who sees his marriage hold and his children thrive, the friend who notices that he is strangely unafraid and strangely free, all of them are reading a profession of faith written not in words but in a life. In an age that has heard every religious claim and grown deaf to them, a life visibly transformed by the faith is one of the few things that can still break through, because it cannot be argued with. A man can dispute a doctrine, but he cannot easily dispute the evidence of a life he can see with his own eyes. The baptized man living his vows is a standing testimony, a walking Creed, and his witness often reaches people no sermon ever could.

This takes the pressure off a man who feels he is no evangelist, who would not know what to say and dreads the thought of arguing religion. He does not have to become an orator or a theologian. He has only to live his vows where people can see him, and the living itself does the first and greatest work. Long before a man ever opens his mouth about the faith, his life has been speaking, and if that life does not match his words, no words will persuade anyone, while if it does, the words become almost unnecessary. The most effective thing most men will ever do for the salvation of the people around them is simply to be, visibly and consistently, a man who lives what he professes. The witness is not an extra task added onto the living of the vows. It is the living of the vows, seen by others.

From Professing to Proclaiming

And the step from professing the faith with one's life to proclaiming it with one's words turns out to be a short one. A man who has learned to live his vows openly, who is known for his faith and unashamed of it, finds that the conversations come to him. People who have watched his life begin to ask about its source, the colleague going through a crisis, the friend whose own life is unraveling, the young man looking for something solid to stand on. A man who has professed his faith with his whole life is ready for those moments, because he has only to speak of what he has already been living. The profession that began at a font, claimed as a man, lived day by day, and acknowledged openly before the world, becomes the foundation of everything the mission will ask. A man cannot proclaim what he has not first professed and lived.

Here I Stand

This is the settled solidity that the whole of the Creed is meant to produce in a man, and that living his vows actually produces: a man who knows what he believes, has staked his life on it, and will not be moved. In a world of men blown about by every wind of opinion, trimming their convictions to fit the company, never quite sure what they hold, the man who can plant his feet and say, this is what I believe, this is whose I am, here I stand, is a

rare and powerful thing. He has become what his baptismal vows always intended: not a man who was once baptized, but a man who is living baptized, whole and settled and unashamed. And such a man is exactly the one the next stage of the journey requires, for the mission can only be carried by a man who is himself unshakably standing on the faith he is sent to share.

CONCLUSION

Say It With Your Life

Return to the font where it all began, to the vows made in your name before you could speak. You can see now that they were never meant to stay there, sealed in a ceremony you do not remember. They were meant to be claimed, as a man claims his inheritance, and then lived, day after day, across a whole life: the daily rejecting of the sin and the glamour of evil and the enemy you were pledged to renounce, and the daily professing, in word and in deed, of the faith you were pledged to confess.

To live baptized is to make those two movements the shape of your life: turning from the darkness and toward the light, not once but continually, in the small choices of every ordinary day. It is to live from the identity Baptism gave you rather than straining to earn one, to renew the great vow every morning and every Sunday and every Easter, to profess it openly in a world that will not, and to let the whole of it become, almost without your trying, a witness that preaches the Creed more powerfully than words. It is to stop merely having been baptized, and to start living baptized.

Say the Creed, then, not only with your mouth on Sunday but with your life on Monday, until the two are one and your life itself is a profession of faith. This is the first and most personal thing the whole of your formation asks of you, and it is the ground on which everything else is built. A man who is living his baptismal vows has become solid, settled, and unashamed, and he is ready to be sent. The vow was made. Now go and live it, out loud, before the world.

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