

AMEN

*For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be glory for ever. Amen. ~ Romans 11:36*

THE WORD “AMEN” is such a universal feature of Christian prayer that we often don’t think any more about it than we do about the period at the end of a sentence. However, knowing its meaning can enrich our prayer.

“Amen” is derived from a Hebrew root that also provided the Hebrew word for “believe.” In both Hebrew and English, belief in someone indicates that the person is solid, trustworthy, and faithful. “Amen” has this same sense, and can “express both God’s faithfulness towards us and our trust in him” (CCC 1062).

Because of its breadth of meaning, “amen” is used in several ways in the Old and New Testament. The prophet Isaiah’s phrase translated as “*God of truth*” (Is 65:16) is “God of Amen.” On several occasions, the Israelites used “amen” to indicate their acceptance of something. For example, in the book of Deuteronomy the people were instructed to say “amen” following a series of curses connected with the breaking of the moral law (see Dt 27:15-26). “Amen” is also used following prayers of praise to God. For example, when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, the people concluded the hymn of thanksgiving sung by the Levites with “Amen” (see 1 Chr 16:36). Following the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity and the restoration of the Temple, the people gathered to hear the first five books of the Scripture read to them, and before the scribe Ezra began to read, he blessed the Lord, and everyone answered “Amen” (see Neh 8:6). Several of the Psalms end with “Amen” (see Ps 41:13; Ps 72:19; Ps 89:52; Ps 106:48), following an expression of praise of God.

In the New Testament, the majority of the letters contain “amen,” some more than once, usually following an expression of praise to God or a blessing by the author. In the book of Revelation, Jesus himself is, as God is in Isaiah, “*the Amen, the faithful and true*

witness, the beginning of God’s creation” (Rv 3:14). “Amen” is also a response to praise of God in the book of Revelation (see Rv 5:14; Rv 7:12; Rv 19:4), and “Amen” ends both the Gospel of Mark (see Mk 16:20) and the book of Revelation (see Rv 22:21).

The most original use of “amen” was by Jesus himself. He repeatedly opened a teaching with the phrase “Amen, I say to you” (see, for example, Mt 5:18; Mt 18:3; Mk 3:28; Mk 9:1; Lk 18:29; Lk 21:32).

In the Gospel of John, the word is often doubled (see, for example, Jn 5:19; Jn 6:53; Jn 8:58). (In some translations of the Gospels, “amen” is rendered by “truly.”) Jesus tells us that his statements are worthy of our complete trust, for “all the promises of God find their Yes in him”¹ (CCC 1065).

In ending the Creed at Mass with “Amen,” we return to the initial “I believe,” ratifying everything we have just prayed. The Great Amen concludes the most solemn part of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer:

Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, God, for ever and ever” (CCC 1065).

Because Jesus is the seal and guarantee of the love of his Heavenly Father, we in turn offer our Amen through him. The Great Amen at Mass was in use by at least 155 AD, since it is found in St. Justin Martyr’s description of the Mass (see CCC 1345). This “Amen” is, like those of the assembly in the Old Testament, a Yes to all that has come before. When we receive the Eucharist, we also say “Amen,” saying, as St. Augustine explains, “yes, it is true!”² (CCC 1396). The Church concludes all its prayers with “Amen,” an affirmation, a Yes, a “so be it!” to what we have just prayed, and a sign of participation by all those assembled. In praying “Amen,” we entrust ourselves “completely to him who is the ‘Amen’ of infinite love and perfect faithfulness” (CCC 1064).

(CCC 1061-1065, 1345, 1348, 1396, 2856)

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statements are worthy of our
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¹ 2 Corinthians 1:20

² St. Augustine, Sermo 272 from J.P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Latina 38, 1247 (Paris: 1841-1855)