**What do you believe?**Michael J. Sanem

 When I used to lead tour groups through Italy, I would always make a point to stop at the small, strange baptistry outside of the beautiful Duomo in Siena. What draws me there isn’t the beautiful architecture, or even the sculptures by Donatello, but instead, the wonderful ceiling frescoes that depict the Nicene Creed, in a beautiful, whimsical, almost pre-cartoon style. In each panel a small, ordinary looking person kneels while gazing at an article of faith, magnificently wrought: God the Father almighty, Jesus, begotten not made, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Last Judgement, Baptism, etc.

 The small person’s response to all of these is “Credo,” which is Italian for “I believe.”

 This year many of us will embark on an adventure in reading the Catholic Catechism with Fr. Mike Schmitz. It’s not an easy read, but with a good community to support us and Fr. Mike’s insights, I think it will be a worthwhile one that will help us grow closer to God in Christ through His Church.

 Because the Catechism is quite simply, a collection of “Credos,” what we, as Catholics, profess to believe. And the beginning of the Catechism, quite appropriately, is a slow read through the Nicene Creed, taking each article of faith and examining it further, bringing in the rich treasures and insights from two millennia of Catholic theology and spirituality.

 Here at the beginning of the new Liturgical Year, in the Season of Advent, when we prepare, wait, and joyfully hope for the coming of Christ, it is a good time to reflect on what we believe. To what could we respond to with “Credo”?

In the opening to the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it summarizes our faith in this way:

“1. What is the plan of God for man?

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man

to make him share in his own blessed life. In the fullness of time, God the Father sent his Son

as the Redeemer and Savior of mankind, fallen into sin, thus calling all into his Church and,

through the work of the Holy Spirit, making them adopted children and heirs of his eternal

happiness.”

Could you respond to this with: Credo?

Discussion Questions

1. If you were asked to witness to your faith, maybe in court, or before the Pearly Gates, or in a discussion with friends, how would you respond? If you couldn’t just say, “I’m Catholic,” what would you say? How would you summarize your faith?
2. How do you express your faith through your words and actions? Again, if you were in a court of law, would you be found “guilty” of being Catholic? Would there be enough evidence to convict you? Why or why not?

1. There is no one on earth who isn’t called to continue to grow in their faith. Me, you, the Pope, the pastor, all of us are “on the journey” and are continually called to repentance and renewal. This Advent, what is one hope and resolution you could make to grow in faith for the new year? What is one thing you can do to grow more deeply in love and commitment to God and God’s Church? (Hint: reading the Catechism with a loving community of faith would be a great start…)