



## March 2016 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Magnet of Truth

By Noel Culbertson

The Catholic Church was never on my radar. I had no hatred or malice for the Church, more of an American ignorance and apathy toward it. But like many a road that leads to Rome, I was on it long before I knew it. We were happy in our Baptist congregation, involved in ministry, studying the Bible, and surrounded by wonderful Christian friends, but along the way we were wooed by the great Bride of Christ. As G.K. Chesterton puts it, "He has come too near to the truth, and has forgotten that truth is a magnet, with the powers of attraction and repulsion."

I grew up the second of four kids in a wonderful Christian home. Both of my parents had powerful evangelical conversion experiences in high school, my Dad coming from a Christian Science background and my Mom from a nominally Catholic background. I cannot remember a time when Scripture study was not a part of our family life. We sang the Greek alphabet as kids, had family Bible studies, and attended church regularly. My Dad had a voracious love of the Scriptures. He studied Jewish history, mapped out the Gospel accounts in chronological order, and even translated the New Testament from Greek ... for fun. Our family was always involved in ministries at our Baptist church in Southern California. I had a gift for memorization that won an awkward kid a fair amount of attention in AWANA (a Bible verse memorization program for kids). By the time I was in sixth grade I had memorized hundreds of Bible verses.

During my high school years I went on a mission trip through nine countries in Europe. I was

devoted yet naive and had no real concept that the whole point of the trip was to "save" Catholics. Our mission leaders talked about all of the people in Europe who go to church every week, but have no personal relationship with Jesus. I knew plenty of people in my own Baptist congregation who fit that description so I thought nothing of it. We toured Europe sharing our Four Spiritual Laws, often in front of cathedrals we would later tour.

The following year our family moved to Washington State and I began work at a Christian Camp nearby. (I had a love for the ministry because my Dad had come to Christ at a Christian camp.) We worked with a number of Christian denominations and saw many lives ignited by the gospel message. We had daily prayer with the staff and in my time off I worked with the high school staff and taught Sunday school for kindergarteners. I was constantly involved in ministry activities.

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Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

### An Engagement & Unexpected News

In the beginning of 1999 I began dating Stan, who had attended Christian college with my sister. Half a year later we were planning our wedding. We were to be married just after he returned from his upcoming six-month deployment with the US Navy. However, six weeks before he deployed, at a doctor's appointment for an unrelated issue, I found out I was pregnant. I was shocked, embarrassed, and humiliated. How could I let this happen? What would people think? I had let down my parents and so many others who looked to me as a witness to the faith. In that moment the temptation flashed into my mind, "You could have an abortion and no one would ever know." It was a startling thought for someone who was adamantly pro-life, but it was a dizzying temptation in my moment of humiliation. I knew I had to tell someone to "make it real" and to dissolve the temptation in the light of the truth. Stan was at work for another six hours, with no way of contacting him. I went to my sister's house (her husband was also on staff at our Baptist church) and asked if we could talk. Immediately after confessing to my sister, the power of the temptation was gone. A few hours later Stan and I talked and in the following days he told my parents and our pastor, and I wrote a letter to the staff at the camp repenting of our sin and asking for their forgiveness. It was an extraordinary experience of the power of confessing your sins to someone with some authority to retain forgiveness — of exposing and repenting of our shortcomings out loud and thus receiving God's grace and freedom through that confession. Two weeks later we were married. Two weeks after that Stan deployed. He returned after a six-month deployment and two weeks later our first beautiful daughter was born.

### Questions & Unsettling Notions

As the years passed we remained very involved in our Baptist congregation. I headed up women's ministry, Stan was a deacon, and we had a weekly Bible study in our home. One week in our adult Sunday school class, in which we were discussing the Par-

able of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-23), Stan asked about the seed that fell on rocky ground. He mentioned that it sounded like it refers to someone who had been saved, "received the word with joy," but then "falls away" or loses their salvation. Now, if you'd like to see a room full of "once saved — always saved" Baptists turn on you, this is a good way to do it. On our way home that afternoon, we mused about the hostile reaction to what seemed to be a fairly clear biblical account. But then we were not really willing to bet our eternal salvation on a hunch, so the incident fell like a seed on our rocky path.

In our home Bible study we were going through the Book of Acts. Each week, Stan and I would read a chapter, research all of the best commentators we could find, and then discuss it with our Bible study group. It became more unnerving the more commentators we read. They each had a different take on the passages, and not just personal reflections, but often opposing theological views. How could we be sure that we were reading the right interpretations? We had, of course, been choosing which to agree with based on our understanding of the Scriptures, but these commentators had years of study under their belts yet still had dozens of different views on how the passages should be interpreted. How could faithful believers, who were not disposed to spend several hours each day studying, know which interpretation was correct? Then came Acts 15 and the Council of Jerusalem.

Acts is a picture of the early Church in action and as Protestants we were always trying to get back to an authentic early Church experience. But in studying the early Church in the Book of Acts, it didn't look much like my Baptist experience. They met in council and spoke with authority to all the other churches about issues of faith. Where was that in my denomination? We had no councils, nor did we have the ability to define with authority matters of faith and morals. Again, these unsettling notions remained as seeds on our path as we navigated a busy life with faith, kids, and a bunch of deployments.

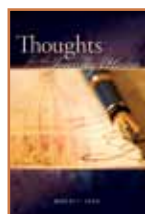
## FEATURED RESOURCES

### The Verse I Never Saw CD

— By Marcus Grodi



In this insightful talk, Marcus Grodi discusses the "Verse He Never Saw" that started him on the journey towards the Catholic Church.



### Thoughts for the Journey Home — By Marcus Grodi

This collection of essays by Marcus Grodi provide wisdom and strength for those who are exploring the claims of the Catholic Church, those who are on the path to the Church, and those who have already entered the Church yet need encouragement. Lifelong Catholics will also find the book useful in helping friends and family members they hope will someday come home. A great gift for those being received into the Catholic Church this Easter!

\$35

Receive *The Verse I Never Saw CD* for a \$35 donation.

\$50

Receive *Thoughts for the Journey Home* for a \$50 donation.

\$75

Receive *The Verse I Never Saw CD* and *Thoughts for the Journey Home* for a \$75 donation.

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## A Surprise Announcement

In 2003 my Dad announced, much to the horror of my Mom and surprise of our Baptist friends, that after several years of studying he was going to enter the Catholic Church. This tore my Mom up, devastated our pastor who had been very close to my Dad, and shocked the congregations whom my Dad had taught often through the years. For me, it didn't seem like the huge tragedy others thought it to be. My Dad studied more than anyone I had ever known. He asked questions that stumped pastors and seminary professors in his quest to know Christ. Since he had been meeting with a couple of priests for a few years, they had directed him to more resources and answers than he could dig through in a lifetime. He'd grown deeply in prayer with the help of these Carmelite priests. The Catholic Church seemed like a great fit for someone like my Dad, who studied so much. I viewed it as more of a personal preference, that we were all Christian — the people who loved the Bible were Baptist, the ones who were drawn to ritual and study were Catholic, the ones who were charismatic were Pentecostal, etc. Out of respect for my Mom's struggle with his conversion, my Dad shared very little about his conversion with us unless we asked directly. It must have been a terribly isolating time for him.

Several years later, after hearing a news story regarding Pope Benedict XVI and contraception, and knowing better than to take the news media's word about any denomination's teaching at face value, I asked my Dad about the Catholic Church's deal with contraception. I knew very little about it, only that they taught something against using contraception. It seemed like such an odd place to draw a line in the [Continued on page 5](#) ▶

## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**March 5, 2016**

Catholic Men's Conference  
Diocese of Springfield, MA  
[www.spfldmensconference.org](http://www.spfldmensconference.org)

**March 12, 2016**

Catholic Women's Conference  
Diocese of Rochester, NY  
[www.rochesterercwc.org](http://www.rochesterercwc.org)



## "Free to Deepen My Personal Friendship With Jesus"

INTERVIEW WITH DR. IAN MURPHY

This month we are sharing an interview with CHNetwork member and *Journey Home* guest Dr. Ian Murphy who shares a few words about his relationship with Christ as a convert and offers some advice to similar journeyers. — *JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach & Development*

*My name is Dr. Ian Murphy and I entered the Catholic Church at the 2004 Easter Vigil. I first came to know Christ, however, years before when He encountered me in an episode of spiritual warfare and delivered me from a demonic presence.*

*My personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ has improved and deepened indescribably as a result of being a Catholic because I was free to deepen in that personal friendship with Him. I had previously felt so stuck trying to answer which denomination got a doctrinal question right, and I felt like it was stunting my development. Knowing that we have magisterial authority — we have apostolic authority — set me free to deepen that friendship.*

*Some of the barriers I had to overcome included the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and prayers to those who have passed on, but the Holy Spirit had beautiful ways of*

*answering those questions and even allowing experiences of those graces.*

*My advice to someone else who is either agnostic or Baptist and is actively seeking the truth, is to keep seeking, keep praying. It's ok to have questions, it's ok to have doubts, it's ok to wrestle. Israel, the people of God — that very word ("Israel") means "wrestles with God." And anyone who loves knows there is struggle, but it is worth it because you are in love. So keep wrestling, and keep praying, and keep seeking the truth, because if you're after the Christ, you will find Him because He will find you.*

Please share this short interview with friends and family. It is available online at [chnetwork.org/signposts](http://chnetwork.org/signposts). Also, if you haven't seen Dr. Ian Murphy's full *Journey Home* program, go to the new [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org) and click the magnifying glass icon to quickly find it in our archive. ■

# Community Groups on CHNetwork.org

By JonMarc Grodi, Manager of Outreach & Development | [jmgrodi@chnetwork.org](mailto:jmgrodi@chnetwork.org)

From our CHNewsletter, to our retreats and conferences, to our staff and Helper's Network providing individualized support, we have worked over the years through the "network" to create opportunities for people on the journey to the Catholic Church to find fellowship and assistance, especially from other converts of a similar background. With this new version of our website, we have taken a big step forward in making CHNetwork.org a ready and welcome place for inquirers to find companions and helpers for the journey.



As I announced last month, the website now features an online community area, complete with member profiles, discussion forums, and a variety of private community groups. Our discussion forums have been an important part of our work for many years, but they are now made more accessible and powerful through the integration with our main website and through the pairing with new features such as our private community groups. While the forums are perfect for general topical discussion, the groups will now provide opportunities for greater fellowship and more sensitive dialogue amongst especially converts and inquirers in the network.

Let me give some examples and make some invitations!

**DENOMINATIONAL GROUPS:** We currently have eight groups formed for converts and inquirers from Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal, Assemblies of God, and non-denominational backgrounds. We especially encourage ALL converts to join a relevant denominational group so that we can better reach out to new inquirers through the website. (Don't see your denominational group? Email me at [jmgrodi@chnetwork.org](mailto:jmgrodi@chnetwork.org) and help us get a new one started!)

**NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN CLERGY & MINISTERS:** A group in which clergy & ministers who are thinking of becoming Catholic can receive fellowship and support from others who have already made the journey.

**GRUPO DE HABLA HISPANA:** ¿Pensando en volver a casa? ¿Prefiere comunicarse en español? Este grupo está abierto. (A group for Spanish-speaking converts and inquirers who participate on our website.)

**CONFRATERNITY OF CLERGY CONVERTS:** As you know, our work with non-Catholic ministers and pastors who make the journey home has always been a special focus of our mission. Years ago we started the Confraternity of Clergy Converts (CCC) to provide opportunities for convert clergy to connect with others — for fellowship, support, and to share ideas. The new CHNetwork website now contains official pages about the Confraternity as well as a private community group and forum for CCC members. We invite all Clergy Converts to join the group so that we may share common experiences and interests, discuss issues in the Church and our culture, and especially share ideas about how the Church can better utilize the gifts of converts. The group is a place where we can dialog about what

converts can contribute to the renewal of the Church, about how clergy converts can support their families while serving Christ in His Church, and about how to more effectively reach-out to our separated brethren.

**MORE:** A community Bible study group has popped up as well as a "Quo Vadis?" group for young adult members, with many more ideas in the pipeline. We have only recently launched the new website, but already, as of this writing, we're nearing 3000 registered users. So, if you haven't yet done so, go visit the new website, spread the word, and through the forums and community groups, help us to continue to build a place of welcome for inquirers, a "digital emmaus" where Christians discover the Body of Christ in His fullness.

## Joining CHNetwork Community Groups

**REGISTER:** Are you not yet a member of the CHNetwork? Go to [CHNetwork.org/join](http://CHNetwork.org/join). For existing members who want to participate on the site, we've created an easy-activation form at [CHNetwork.org/activate](http://CHNetwork.org/activate).

**LOG-IN & EXPLORE:** Once you are registered on the new site, log in and then click "Community." From there you can browse the forum boards and the groups directory. ■

## THE CHNETWORK STAFF & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### The Verses I Never Saw

By Marcus Grodi

*In this month's conversion story, Noel Culbertson discusses some of the verses that she never really understood or "saw" before her journey led her towards the Catholic Faith. Like Noel, I also had a number of Scripture verses that I never saw as a Protestant Christian. For me and many other converts, even after years of studying, preaching, and teaching the Bible — sometimes from cover to cover — all of a sudden a verse "we never saw" appears as if by magic and becomes an "Aha!" mind-opening, life-altering messenger of spiritual "doom!" Sometimes it's just recognizing an alternate, clearer meaning of a familiar verse, but often, as with some of the verses mentioned below, it literally seems as if some Catholic had snuck in during the night and somehow put that verse there in the text!*



The list of these surprise verses is endless, depending especially on a convert's former religious tradition, but the following are a few key verses that turned my heart toward home. I've shared this list in the newsletter some years back, but wanted to include it again in hopes that it will be an encouragement to your own journey as you seek a closer walk with our Lord Jesus. This list is also included as a chapter in the book *Thoughts for the Journey Home*, a collection of articles I've written on various topics related to the journey to the Catholic Church and continual conversion to Jesus Christ. This book is featured in this month's newsletter (see page 2) in case you would wish to order a copy for yourself or for a friend who is curious about the Catholic Faith or even one who is being received into the Church this Easter.

#### 1 Proverbs 3:5-6

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

Ever since my adult reawakening ("born again" experience) at age 21, this proverb has been my "life verse." It rang true as a guide for all aspects of my life and ministry. But then during my nine years as a Presbyterian minister, I became desperately frustrated by the confusion of Protestantism. I loved Jesus and believed that the Word of God was the one trustworthy, infallible rule of faith. But so did lots of the non-Presbyterian ministers and laymen I knew: Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Congregationalists, and others. The problem was that we came up with sometimes radically different conclusions from the same verses. With this particular, favorite verse, for example, the questions grew over time: How do you "trust in the Lord with all your heart"? How can you make sure you're not "leaning on your own understanding"? We all

had different opinions and lists of requirements. How can you be certain that "in all your ways [you] acknowledge him" rather than using this as an excuse to advance your own agenda? And how can you be certain that the choices you have made were truly God's efforts to make "straight your paths" — when it may actually be the case that you are just using this verse to blame Him for your mistakes? A verse I had always trusted suddenly became nebulous, immeasurable, and unreachable.

#### 2 1 Timothy 3:14-15

**I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.**

This was the key "verse I never saw" that started my journey home to the Church. Dr. Scott Hahn pulled this one on me. "So, Marc, what is the pillar and foundation of truth?" he asked. I answered, "The Bible, of course." "Oh, yeah? But what does the Bible say?" "What do you mean?" When Scott told me to look up this verse, I suspected nothing. I had taught and preached through First Timothy many times. But when I read this verse, it was as if it had suddenly appeared from nowhere, and my jaw dropped. The Church? Not the Bible? This realization alone sent my mind and essentially my whole life reeling. It didn't immediately direct my attention toward the Catholic Church; rather, it made my situation worse, for I had never considered any church to have this corner on truth. The question of which church was one I was not ready to broach.

#### 3 2 Timothy 3:14-17

**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings**

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**which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

I and others had always turned to the second paragraph above (verses 16–17) to buttress our belief in sola scriptura. So to this verse I quickly turned my attention. Among many truths, three especially important ones became very clear, for the first time. First, when Paul used the term “Scripture” in this verse, he could only have meant what we call the Old Testament. Only a portion of the New Testament documents had been written at that point, and the New Testament canon would not be established for another three hundred years! Second, “all” Scripture does not mean “only” Scripture, nor specifically what we have in our modern Bibles. Third, the emphasis in the context of this passage (verses 14–15) is the trustworthiness of the oral tradition Timothy had received from his mother and others — not sola scriptura!

#### **4 2 Thessalonians 2:15**

**So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.**

“Traditions”? This was a word we Protestants avoided like the swine flu. Yet our lives and theologies were steeped in traditions, whether or not we recognized or labeled them this way. The traditions that these early Christians were to hold fast to were not just the written letters and Gospels that would eventually make up the New Testament. They also included elements of the oral tradition. Even more significantly, the context of Paul’s letters indicates that his normal, preferred way of passing along “what he had received” was oral. His written letters were, from his perspective, an accidental, sometimes unplanned add-on, dealing with immediate problems — leaving unsaid so much of what his readers had learned through oral teaching.

#### **5 Matthew 16:13-19**

**Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”**

There is so much to discuss in these verses, so much I never saw. I always knew that Catholics used this paragraph to ar-

gue Petrine authority, but I wasn’t convinced. To the naïvely ignorant, the English words “Peter” and “rock” are so different that it seemed obvious to me that Jesus was referring to the faith Simon Peter received as a gift from the Father. For the more informed seminary-educated Bible students, like me, the key was in the original Greek. The English name “Peter” is the translation of *petros*, which I was taught meant “little pebble,” and “rock” is the translation of *petra*, which I was taught meant “large boulder.” It seemed an obvious disconnect, so for years I taught specifically against Petrine authority. Then, with some embarrassment I came to recognize, through the witness of various Catholic apologists, the implications of an historical fact I knew all along: Behind the Greek was the Aramaic that Jesus originally spoke, in which the word for “Peter” and “rock” are identical — *kepha*. Once I saw that Jesus had said essentially, “You are *kepha*, and on this *kepha* I will build my Church,” I knew I was in trouble.

#### **6 Revelation 14:13**

**And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”**

For years, as a Calvinist preacher I recited this verse at every funeral graveside service. I believed and taught sola fide (“faith alone”), discounting any place for works in the process of our salvation. But then, after my last funeral service as a minister, a family member of the deceased cornered me. He asked, with a tremble in his voice, “What did you mean that Bill’s deeds follow him?” I don’t remember my response, but this was the first time I became aware of what I had been saying. This incident began a long study of what the New Testament and then the early Church Fathers taught about the mysterious but necessary synergistic connection between our faith and our obedience of faith (works).

#### **7 Romans 10:14-15**

**But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!”**

I had always used these verses to champion the central importance of preaching and to defend my decision to give up my engineering career for the great privilege of becoming a preacher of the gospel. I was never bothered by the phrase about the need of being “sent,” because I could point to my ordination, where a gaggle of local ministers, elders, deacons, and laymen had laid their hands on my sweaty head to send me forth in the name of Jesus. Nevertheless, my reading of the history and writings of the early Church Fathers and my rereading of the scriptural context of Paul’s letters shed new light on this passage. I came to realize that Paul emphasized the necessity of being “sent” because the occasion of his letters was to combat the negative, heretical influences of self-

appointed false teachers. I had never thought of myself as a false teacher. But by what authority did those people send me forth? Who sent them? In this insight, I came to understand the importance of apostolic (literally, “those who have been sent”) succession.

### 8 John 15:4 and 6:56

**Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. (15:4) He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (6:56)**

The book of the Bible I used most often in preaching was the Gospel of John. The chapter from John that I used most often in preaching was chapter 15, the analogy of the vine and the branches. I bombarded my congregations with the need to “abide” or “remain” in Christ. But what does this mean? I always had an answer, but then I looked closely for the first time at the only verse where Jesus Himself defines clearly what we must do to abide in Him. I was floored. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him.” This verse led me to study a boatload of other verses in John 6 that I had never “seen” before. In the end, with regard to accepting Jesus at His word on the Eucharist, I found only one answer: “Where else can we go? Only you have the words of eternal life.”

### 9 Colossians 1:24

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.**

I don't know whether I purposely avoided this verse or just blindly missed it, but for the first forty years of my life I never really “saw” it. And to be honest, when I finally saw it, I still

didn't know what to do with it. Nothing in my Lutheran, Congregationalist, or Presbyterian backgrounds helped me understand how I or anyone could rejoice in suffering, and especially why anything was needed to complete the suffering of Christ — for I believed that nothing there was lacking! Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection were sufficient and complete! To say anything else, I believed, was to attack the omnipotent completeness of God's sovereign grace. But then again, this was the Apostle Paul speaking in inerrant, infallible Scripture. And we were to imitate him as he imitated Jesus. Finally, I read an apostolic letter by Pope John Paul II called *Salvifici Doloris*, “On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering.” It opened my eyes to a beautiful mystery that is recognized by the ancient Catholic understanding of redemptive suffering.

### 10 Luke 1:46-49

**And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”**

The most difficult hurdle for so many Protestant converts to get over is our Blessed Mother Mary. For most of my life, the only time Mary came into the picture was at Christmas — and dare I say, as a statue! I never referred to her as “blessed.” Yet Scripture says all generations will call her blessed. Why didn't I? This question led me to see other verses for the first time, including John 19:26–27. There I read that, from the cross, Jesus gave His mother into the keeping of John, rather than any supposed siblings. By grace I began, in imitation of my Lord and Savior and eternal brother Jesus, to recognize Mary, too, as my blessed loving Mother. ■

## Easter Beauty

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | [LittlePortionHermitage.org](http://LittlePortionHermitage.org)



Beautiful and breathtaking: that's how I think of the Resurrection of the Lord. Catholics around the world will be commemorating the Resurrection during the Easter season that begins with the Easter Vigil on March 26th and continues for fifty days until Pentecost Sunday (May 15).

As Easter Vigil liturgies are celebrated in churches around the world, tens of thousands of adults and children of every nation, race, culture, and complexion will be brought into full sacramental union with Christ and His Church. These new Catholics will have come from all manner of backgrounds. Some of them will have come from no particular religious tradition whatever. Many will be entering the Catholic Church from one or another community of non-Catholic Christians. Others will have come from philosophic and religious traditions as varied as secular atheism on the one hand and Zoroastrianism on the other. All of these new Catholics will have been drawn by a gift of purely unmerited grace to encounter and embrace the breathtaking goodness, truth, and beauty

of Christ and the Church He founded for His glory and our sanctification.

Brothers and sisters, in the remaining time in this Lenten season, I want to encourage you to fast and pray in a particular way for the adults and children who will be received into the Church, the Body of Christ during the Easter Vigil. Through the Sacraments of Baptism and/or Confirmation and First Eucharist they will be grafted fully into Christ. Through the grace imparted by the Sacraments Christ will break the chains of Original Sin, confirm in them the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit, and feed and strengthen them with His Body and Blood in the Eucharist for the journey ever deeper into God.

I would also encourage you to attend and fully participate in an Easter Vigil Mass this year. The kindling of the Paschal fire, the chanting of the Exultet, the readings from salvation history, the hymns, the candlelight, the incense, oil, water, wine and bread, and the women, men, and children entering the Church are all part of the beautiful and breathtaking gift that is our Catholic Faith. ■

# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For an Episcopalian priest in Kentucky that the Lord guide him and his family into full communion with the Holy Catholic Church.
- For a Presbyterian who is in RCIA and is completing a master's degree at a non-denominational evangelical seminary, that she may discern well whether to complete this degree given the seminary's demands that she commit to a creedal statement that is contrary to her growing convictions.
- For a Presbyterian lay minister, that our Lord would guide her to the authentic teachings of the historic Church.
- For a Reformed minister in South Africa, that his curiosity about the Catholic Faith would lead him on a journey to full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.
- For a non-denominational minister in Illinois, that the Holy Spirit would grant his wife the grace to love the Catholic Faith and free him to come home to the Catholic Church.
- For a Presbyterian lay minister in Ontario, that our Lord Jesus would guide her as she discerns when to come into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For a non-denominational teacher in an Evangelical school, that her journey to the Catholic Church would not endanger her teaching position.

- For a Baptist minister in North Carolina who feels stuck, that God would guide him and grant him the wisdom to know when to make the move home to the Catholic Church.
- For a Lutheran minister in Sweden, that as he prays and studies the Lord would guide him to the original Christian faith of Sweden, the Catholic Church.
- For the headmaster of a Baptist school, that the Holy Spirit may guide him as he discovers more of the Church which is ever ancient and ever new.
- For a Presbyterian minister in Virginia, that our Lord Jesus would give him the faithfulness and courage to resist the temptation to postpone what God wants for him out of fear of the unknown.
- For Jack, a lay minister in the United Kingdom, that as he discovers the teachings of the ancient Church he may come to embrace the apostolic authority that has preserved them in the Catholic Church.

- For Jeff to continue to see the Holy Spirit's guidance in his faith journey.
- For a couple who are confused since they received inaccurate theological information from a priest, that they not give up on their desire to be received into the Catholic Church.
- For a woman who comes from a non-denominational faith background and is in RCIA, that she be able to find good Catholic friends in her area.
- For an agnostic who is interested in history and Christian teaching and is learning more about the Catholic Church.
- For Jill who has taken big steps with her faith journey recently and is planning to begin RCIA.
- For a Baptist in the south who struggles greatly with the idea of pursuing an annulment but yet isn't satisfied with where she is spiritually.
- For Michael who has recently returned to the Church but due to circumstances can't get to Mass regularly, that he continue to grow in his faith.

## Lay

- For Jennifer's marriage, that the Holy Spirit will work powerfully in her and her husband's life to bring healing and reconciliation.
- For a Lutheran in the Midwest who has been attending daily Mass and watching the Journey Home program, that she come to full communion with the Catholic Church soon.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org).

We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

### March 7

Fr. Pierre Ingram\*  
 Former Baptist

### March 14

Jennifer Fulwiler\*  
 Former Atheist

### March 21

Kirk Ross\*  
 Former Church of God General  
 Conference

### March 28

Devin Rose\*  
 Former Atheist & Southern Baptist  
 (Re-air from 4/21/2014)

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 4

sand. My Dad’s brief explanation of the Church’s reasoning was shockingly reasonable. But what struck me most was that every single Protestant denomination had held the same teaching as the Catholic Church on contraception until 1930 after which each denomination in turn changed its teaching with the times. I had never even heard anything about this in our denominational history. It was a non-issue; it was simply a given that people had always used whatever form of contraception they wished without being in opposition to any teaching of the faith. It was another seed on our path.

### Catholic Influences

In early 2010, part way through our seventh Navy deployment, I was chaperoning a field trip for my daughter’s class. I was paired up with Janet, another mom I hadn’t met before. Throughout the field trip Janet and I talked about religion, the spiritual state of the nation, and all of the subjects generally frowned upon in polite conversation. We got along famously and talked for several hours after the field trip was over. I ran into Janet and her family again a few weeks later at the hardware store and she mentioned that she thought my Dad went to their church. I asked, “Oh, you go to St. Cecilia’s?” It was their parish also, and they asked me what I thought of my Dad being Catholic. I said I thought it was a good fit for him and that I was happy for him. She then asked what my Mom thought about it. I said, “Well ... not so much. It’s been really hard for her.” (My Dad had now been Catholic for about seven years.) She recommended a book by a former Protestant minister who had converted to Catholicism. Because the book addressed how the former minister’s wife struggled with his conversion, Janet thought it might be a help to my Mom. I thanked her and finished my errands.

A month or so later Stan returned from overseas, and we were prepared to spend some much needed family time on a road trip to several national parks. While driving through our town a few days before our trip, I decided to stop by the Catholic parish to ask them where I might find this book Janet had recommended. I had never seen a Catholic bookstore (or a priest or nun for that matter). When I arrived the doors were locked, but I noticed someone moving boxes around the side of the building. I walked around to ask her if she knew where I could find

the book. She said that she didn’t have a copy of the book, but had a conversion CD by the same author if I was interested. (I had planned to read the book before deciding if I should give it to my Mom. I knew what kind of firestorm might follow if I gave her a Catholic book, especially if she thought it actually had come from my Dad.) The lady at the parish was cleaning out her office and asked if I would be interested in any other CDs. I told her I would, and she loaded me up with more than 30 CDs and a *Seeker’s Catechism*. I thanked her and headed home.

A few days later we left for our road trip. On our first drive through the night, after the kids were asleep, we popped in the conversion CD. We were dumbfounded. How could we have missed all of this? At every rest stop we were scouring our Bibles to confirm that all of these verses were really there. We read passages such as Matthew 16:13-20, John 6, Isaiah 22:22-23, John

20:23, 1 Timothy 3:15. Of course they were there, some I had memorized back in my AWANA days, but now they all came together and had a place. They were like tumblers in a lock, nothing was being pressed to fit; it fitted the lock and opened the door. It was like being handed the answers to every question about the faith I’d never thought to ask and yet felt I should have thought to ask them years ago.

The most profound revelation for me was that, according to the Scriptures, Christ clearly founded a Church and it had His authority and protection (Matthew 16:13-20).

Jesus granted Peter the power to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. Since we know that nothing impure can enter heaven, we know that whatever this Church, founded on Peter, binds on earth would not and could not be counter to Christ. Then when Jesus says the gates of hell will not prevail against this Church He gives His word that this Church would be specially protected. If this was true, then it meant that Christ had founded a Church and it was still present today, not in a simply mystical way, but in a real and visible way. It was very clear through my own experience that denominations struggle with unity because they lack authority. Someone who disagrees with the biblical interpretations of the pastor can simply break off and start another church, and they often do. But here the Catholic Church stands with authority given by Christ, as it has for two thousand years, led and protected by the Holy Spirit. If this claim is true, I had to come in line with the Church and not the other way round. The scriptural evidence especially on the issues of the authority of the Church, Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist

“ ...we popped in the conversion CD. We were dumbfounded. How could we have missed all of this? At every rest stop we were scouring our Bibles to confirm that all of these verses were really there.... Of course they were there ... but now they all came together and had a place.”

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

(John 6), and the necessity of faith and works rather than faith alone (James 2:14-24) was staggering. By the end of our road trip we had listened to more than 30 hours of Catholic teaching and spent countless hours pouring over the scriptures.

When we arrived home, we got ahold of as many Catholic books as we could, including several on the early Church Fathers of whom we had never heard, and began reading. We studied the Bible with new eyes, having removed the Baptist lenses we didn't know we had. We continued to study for months with a growing conviction that the Catholic Church was really what she claimed to be — one, holy, catholic, and apostolic — but we had yet to attend Mass. After some discussion we settled on a date to attend our first Mass, with the intention that we would keep going to our Baptist church. Then we could slowly attend Mass more over the coming months to lessen the blow to the Baptist community I had been a part of for nearly 18 years.

I then told my Mom that we were considering becoming Catholic. We had always been close and generally talked every day. She went to all of my prenatal appointments when Stan was on deployment and we even went grocery shopping together. But when I told her what we were considering, she was speechless, which shortly turned to hysteria. Following this, she could no longer talk to me without tears often accompanied by shouting. She even went to counseling to try to get a handle on what to her felt like utter betrayal.

### **Ships on Fire**

On August 1, 2010 we attended our first Mass. Stan, knowing what a hardship conversion would mean for our family, prayed for divine direction. At Mass we listened to the prayers, responses, and readings which all poured out from the Scriptures. The Responsorial Psalm rang out as if speaking right to me: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart." In his homily the priest spoke about Cortez and his men landing in the Americas. They encountered so many hardships that the men wanted to return home to safety and comfort. However, Cortez burned the ships and the men had to move forward to complete the mission they had been chosen to do. I leaned over to Stan and said, "I think our ships are on fire." Then came the consecration and we watched as people from every age, race, and social status received Christ. The room literally filled up with Christ.

I turned to Stan again and this time there were tears streaming down his face. This Navy Chief could not speak about it for several weeks without being moved to tears. It was the reality of all we had been studying. We never went back to the Baptist church. Within days, the life and friendships we had before fell suddenly silent. In the loneliness of those days we dove deep into the Scriptures and Catholic teaching. I was introduced to Catholic writers like Fulton Sheen, Karl Keating, Frank Sheed, Pope John Paul II, and especially G.K. Chesterton who would become one of my jovial and genius guides on the path of conversion.

A couple days after our first Mass a member of the parish told us about a Catholic conference in a nearby town the following weekend. That Friday afternoon we arrived early to the conference and ended up having dinner with Tim Staples from Catholic Answers, who was one of the speakers. We tripled the number of Masses we had attended to date, prayed our first Rosary (very awkwardly), and were connected to a number of resources for our journey. We also ran into an old friend, who after recovering from his shock at seeing us at a Catholic conference, offered to bring us more CDs

and books. The following week he dropped off dozens of CD sets as well as the three-volume set of the writings of the early Fathers and much more.

### **Struggles with Authority**

The main theological issues I struggled with were did Christ really found a visible Church with His authority and, if so, was it still in existence today. Being a Baptist, the Bible verses I had never seemed to notice especially struck me, particularly Matthew 16:13-20 and 1 Timothy 3:15. In my study of the Scriptures over the years I had focused much of my study on Paul's epistles rather than the Gospels. I think this was because they occurred after the Resurrection; therefore they were more relevant to the living of the Christian life. In studying the Catholic Faith, I was starting to see how little I had regarded the words of Jesus in relation to the structure of my faith as a Baptist. I had always believed that the Church was an invisible, Mystical Body of all believers who had a personal relationship with Christ, not an actual visible Church with a hierarchy. Reading Matthew 16, it seemed clear that Christ gave particular authority to Peter and the Church he would lead. If Jesus said, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heav-

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

en” then whatever Peter bound in this Church would have to be infallible or it would make Christ a liar.

Then I began reading some of the early Fathers of whom I had never heard before beginning my study of the Church, and began to study how the Church believed, thought, and taught in the first centuries. I had no idea that writings from the disciples of the Apostles existed. It was equally shocking to read what they had to say about the authority and structure of the Church. St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle John, said in A.D. 107, “You all should follow the bishop as Jesus Christ does the Father. Follow too the presbytery as the apostles, and honor the deacons as the command of God. Let no one do anything that is proper for the church without the bishop. Let that Eucharist be considered valid that is under the bishop or performed by one to whom he entrusts it. Wherever the bishop appears, let there be the fullness [of the church] as wherever Christ Jesus appears, there is the catholic church.”<sup>1</sup> I became convinced that the Bible and the earliest accounts of Christianity in the world were profoundly Catholic, not Baptist, in their structure.

Janet, whom I had met on the field trip, and her husband became our sponsors through the RCIA process. It was wonderful to be united in faith with my Dad in the Catholic Church. It is difficult to put to words the thrilling and terrifying adventure of conversion. Chesterton describes it thus: “It is impossible to be just to the Catholic Church. The moment men cease to pull against it they feel a tug towards it. The moment they cease to shout it down they begin to listen to it with pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it they begin to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair.” Our family entered the Catholic Church together at the Easter Vigil Mass in April 2011. Both our girls received the Sacrament of Baptism, and the entire family was confirmed and received our first Eucharist together that night.

### Joys and Sorrows

The years that have followed have been a great and growing love affair with Christ and His Church. They have included the most heart breaking and joyful moments of my life. Just eight months after we were received into the Church, my Dad fell seriously ill and would need a transplant to survive. Ten days after that, my Mom was driving and her hand fell off the steering wheel. A few weeks later she underwent brain surgery for a terminal brain tumor. Both my parents moved into our home where we cared for them. The Lord provided a power-

ful time of healing and reconciliation with my Mom during those months. Once after one of our long talks my Mom said, “I know you are experiencing Christ in the Catholic Church... I just don’t know why God would do that!” It was a long way for my Mom to come, and we both got a hearty laugh from her closing line. In September 2012, I lost both of my parents just three weeks apart. As I watched my parents receive last rites as they died, I saw the Church’s sacraments pour out God’s grace on them. My Mom had been baptized and confirmed Catholic, but she had been attending Baptist churches since she was 18. The day before she died, a parish priest came and anointed her. There were no words to express the weight in my heart as the Church militant and the Church triumphant prayed together with us. It was a moment when the veil between earth and heaven is so thin you can nearly see through it. The following year, my 84-year-old Grandpa was baptized and entered the Catholic Church.

The Christmas following my parents’ deaths we attended Midnight Mass, followed by the Feast of St. Stephen the Martyr on December 26th. It struck me again, that even the calendar of the Church encompasses the human experience of faith. We experience the peak of joy at the birth of Christ immediately followed by the depths of the sorrow at the death of the first martyr. Our lives are a compilation of feasts and fasts, yet

neither are in vain. They both hold vigil in our lives. God works in both according to the good for those who are in Christ Jesus. He directs our paths through both joy and sorrow with His word and His very self in the sacraments to sustain us. In His great mercy, Christ directed our path to Rome.

To doctor one last line from Chesterton to summarize my experience to date, “I know that Catholicism is too large for me, and I have not yet explored its beautiful and terrible truths. But I know that [Protestantism] is too small for me; and I could not creep back into that dull safety, who have looked on the dizzy vision of liberty.” ■



NOEL CULBERTSON is a member of St. Cecilia Catholic parish where she volunteers in the RCIA program and various parish ministries. She and her husband, Stan, live on Camano Island in Washington State where they are raising their two teenage daughters.

### BLOG

Please visit [www.chnetwork.org/story](http://www.chnetwork.org/story) to comment on and discuss this story!

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth J. Howell, *Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna: A New Translation and Theological Commentary* (Zanesville: CHResources, 2009), 134.

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