



December 2016 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



A Chance Remark Rocks My World

By Mark Gamble

I was raised in a small Baptist church, where my father served as Sunday School Superintendent and Chairman of the Board of Deacons. As a family we were always active in church functions. If there was something going on at church, we were there as a family. I especially enjoyed Sunday evenings after church service, when there would be a social time for families. Our life as a family revolved around church activities, except for hockey and other sports that my brothers and I were involved in. My parents were faithful, committed Christian parents and their lives reflected what we learned on Sundays.

Early Life

After supper my father would read a passage from the Bible and explain how we could apply the teaching to our own lives. Dad loved to read the stories from the Old Testament. We got to know them well. He would then lead us in prayer, giving thanks for God’s goodness, asking for His forgiveness, and always remembering to pray for our friends, neighbors, family, and special activities. Sometimes I would have a friend over for dinner and hoped that Dad would skip the Bible story and prayer so we could get out to play, but it never happened. Dad was not into skipping Bible reading and prayer. Moreover, visitors presented an opportunity to share the Gospel, which was the responsibility of every Christian and something my father took seriously.

While my parents strongly encouraged our active participation in church activities, they stressed that following Christ was a personal commitment that we each had to make for ourselves.

It was while attending a Christian summer camp that I responded to an invitation to receive Christ as my Savior. Soon afterwards, at age 14, I chose to be baptized in our local Baptist church. Throughout my high school years, I tried to live a Christian life, attending youth group and Bible studies held through organizations such as The Navigators and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. My summers were spent working at a Christian conference ground. It was at this conference ground that I heard some of the best Christian (Protestant) speakers from all over the United States and Canada. I always enjoyed hearing good Bible teaching.

Not long after my baptism, my parents became concerned with a less biblically faithful trend in our particular Baptist denomination and viewed this as the Lord’s call to leave and form a new Bible church in a neighboring community. I went with my parents. I continued in that worship tradition through my high school years and later went away to LeTourneau University, *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

an evangelical Christian school in Texas, where I majored in engineering.

My faith in Christ was always an important part of my life. While I did not always express my faith boldly to others, I never experienced a time when I did not want to be in worship or in a Bible study with other believers.

After I began my work career, I continued to worship in independent Bible churches and even met my wife-to-be, Kris, in one such church. Kris had been raised and confirmed in the Catholic Church but had left to attend Green Bay Community Church, where we met and were later married. After we began our life together, we joined the Presbyterian Church. Sunday worship and participation in our local church were always important to us. Despite the concerns we had with our denomination on a national level, our local church was firmly Bible based, and I felt that we could even be a part of an eventual renewal of the larger church.

Work assignments took us to Brazil and Korea, but eventually we arrived near Seattle with our three children and settled into a more traditional family life.

Questioning and Awakening

It was while working, raising a family, and serving as a teacher and elder in our Presbyterian church that I developed a friendship with a work colleague named Pat. It surprised me to discover that Pat was Catholic, since he was a serious and knowledgeable Christian. Up to that point in my life, I had a stereotypical view of Catholics. Attending Bible studies and sharing one's faith as he did was not part of that view. Pat and

I shared similar Christian values. He was strongly pro-life and known for his Christian faith within the company.

It made me think. I always considered that any Catholic who had a real biblical faith would ultimately leave the Catholic Church for a "sound Bible church." My friend Pat didn't fit into that scheme. I knew that some Catholics had a real Christian faith but believed that many just went through repetitive and sterile religious motions. Pat's life and witness made me question my shallow and prejudicial view of Catholics.

One of the Bible classes I taught at our Presbyterian church dealt with the authority of the Scriptures and their origin. I tried to explain to the class why we should accept the whole Bible as the Word of God. However, I found it difficult to explain how we know that the New Testament we now have is truly Scripture. I knew that the Lord had put His stamp of approval on the Old Testament, but the New Testament canon formation was somewhat of a mystery to me. Jesus had never even mentioned that there would be new writing added to Scripture. My sources told me that there was a consensus reached as to what books were authoritative and what books were not. This did not ring true to me. Who was involved in the establishment of this "consensus," and how was the final decision made? How do we know that we have all the books and that they are the right books? Surely it would have been challenging, even impossible, to obtain consensus among believers if the Church looked anything like it does today.

In my class there was one challenging skeptic. This individual had an unusual viewpoint and was quite strident in his belief.

Continued on page 5 ➤

FEATURED RESOURCES



This month, we would like to invite our members to make a Christmas gift of excellent Catholic books to your family and friends or even your local parish. We will send you a special selection of books from our mailroom to help you effectively build up the Faith. We want to get into your hands powerful resources where they can do good for the Kingdom! As a premium, you will receive selections from among these and other titles:

Navigating the Interior Life by Daniel Burke, *What Jesus Really Said About the End of the World* by David Currie, *The Beginning of the English Reformation* by Hugh Ross Williamson, *Building Catholic Family Traditions* by Paul & Leisa Thippen, *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist* by John Salza, *Priestly Celibacy* by Peter Stravinskis, *Did Adam and Eve Have Belly Buttons?* by Matthew Pinto, *Made for More* by Curtis Martin, *By What Authority* by Robert Hugh Benson, and *Saint Peter Lives in Rome* by Robert Stackpole.

\$50

For a donation of \$50 you may receive **one book**.

\$100

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\$150

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A Catholic and a Protestant in Israel

By Kenneth Hensley

Some months back Ron, a good friend from my youth, asked me if I would travel with him to the Holy Land.

I was immediately interested. I'd been to Israel with a Catholic pilgrimage group and loved it, but this would be quite different. We would be renting a car and free to explore wherever we wanted. I liked that. But what interested me most was the opportunity this trip would present. Ron is an evangelical Protestant who loves Jesus, leads worship at his church, and has been taught that Catholicism is completely unbiblical. I am a former ordained Protestant minister who left the ministry twenty years ago to enter the Catholic Church. I also teach Old and New Testament at a Catholic seminary. I had been wanting to "catch up" with Ron for a long time.

So off we flew, the ultimate odd couple.

We began our stay in the ancient port city of Joppa on the Mediterranean coast. This is where Jonah caught his ship to flee from the Lord. We all know how that worked out. This is also where Peter, centuries later, raised a young girl named Tabitha from the dead. At the very heart of the Old City stands a beautiful basilica dedicated to St Peter.

Our first morning in Israel, I invited Ron to join me for Mass. Ron looked a little unsure but said, "OK." We wound up in a little stone chapel celebrating a beautiful, simple liturgy with ten Franciscan monks. Perfect! After Mass, one of the priests showed us around the monastery and basilica explaining how the Franciscans had been there ever since St Francis visited in 1217.

Ron was clearly moved by the whole experience. I was happy.



From here we traveled up the coast to explore the ancient ruins of Caesarea. This is where Peter came (from Joppa) to preach to the family of the Roman centurion Cornelius. This is where St. Paul was imprisoned for two years. This is also the place he preached before King Herod Agrippa and where the Roman procurator Festus interrupted him: "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" (Acts 26:24). It's from this very harbor that the great Apostle finally set sail for Rome and eventually his death.

It's hard to put into words what it's like simply *being* where so many important events of early Christian history have taken place. Ron and I had a great afternoon walking and talking about these things.

The next day we pushed westward into the hill country of northern Israel and to the beautiful town of Nazareth.



The Church of the Annunciation is built over the traditional site of Mary's home. This is where the angel Gabriel came to announce the good news that she would be the mother of the Savior and where Mary responded, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word." This is where the Incarnation took place.

Ron and I spent a good deal of time in silence, just looking and praying and marveling.

From Nazareth we drove through Cana, where Jesus turned the water to wine, and to the other holy sites around the Sea of Galilee. We walked among the ruins of first century Capernaum. We stood in the remains of the synagogue that would have been in use in Jesus' day. We stared in disbelief at what are almost certainly the foundations of the house Peter lived in at the time our Lord called him.

After this came the long drive down the Jordan Valley to the hill country of Judea and eventually to Jerusalem.

From here we visited Bethlehem and one of the highlights of the entire trip — the ancient Church of the Nativity. It was first built by order of Constantine between AD 327 and 339 over the site of the cave in which Jesus was born.

Of course it makes perfect sense that the early Christians would be eager to identify the important sites associated with the life of Christ. And from the beginning, this is what they did. However, after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 and then again in AD 135, in order to wipe out the memory of Jesus, they began to erect pagan monuments or temples over these sacred sites. This is what the Roman emperor Hadrian did in Bethlehem. He built a shrine to the Greek god Adonis over the place where Jesus was born.

It appears, however, that what the Roman emperors meant for evil, God meant for good. Because by constructing these pagan monuments, they inadvertently marked out the correct sites so that later on, when Constantine's mother Helena traveled to the Holy Land to discover where the important events of Christ's life had taken place, many of them could be pinpointed with a fair degree of accuracy. This is the case with the site of the Nativity.

The current structure was built by the Byzantines in AD 565. It's an amazing and beautiful church. But the real treasure lies below. To the side of the altar a stone staircase leads down to a small room. On its floor there is a silver star marking the place where Jesus was born.

One of the most moving moments of our pilgrimage was sitting in that room and just watching the people react to being where our Lord was born. It was amazing to think that day after day, all day long, men, women and children "from all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9) stream through this little room, all of them praying, most bowing to kiss the floor, some weeping.

There's so much more to tell, but not enough space to tell it.

By this time, Ron and I had spent many hours talking — about our families, our work, what we were doing. In what seem now like days of conversation I had related something of my story. I explained how I came to be Catholic and my reasons for doing so.

I think I made a dent. But even more powerful, I believe, than anything I may have said was the simple power of visiting all those holy sites and being in all those beautiful churches and realizing that they are virtually all *Catholic!*



Wherever you go, the churches are Catholic churches. And most often they are cared for by Franciscans! Never once did we run into a group of Methodists serving as custodians of a holy site. Never did we see a Baptist church, or a Presbyterian church, or a Lutheran church built over some important holy place. And it served as an almost blunt reminder that Protestantism is something relatively new in the history of Christianity. It served to drive home the reality that the early Church wasn't Protestant.

As the convert John Henry Newman explained so well:

History is not a creed or a catechism, it gives lessons rather than rules; still no one can mistake its general teaching Bold outlines and broad masses of color rise out of the records of the past. They may be dim; they may be incomplete; but they are definite. And this one thing at least is certain; whatever history teaches ... at least the Christianity of history is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth, it is this.

This is a message that came through to me in a powerful way on this trip. Catholicism is beautiful. And it's old. I didn't bring it up. I didn't mention it. But I think it got through to my friend as well. ■

MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

February 18, 2017

Catholic Men for Christ Conference

St. Louis, MO | catholicmenforchrist.org | 314-792-7185

WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

The **Coming Home Network International** was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, discover the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and through the online community forums and groups at our website CHNetwork.org, we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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The Coming Home
Network International



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With Unveiled Faces

By Marcus Grodi

"With Unveiled Faces"
By Marcus Grodi A

*"From the Hermitage: To Share In Our
Humanity"* By Br. Rex Anthony Norris B

Prayer List D

As we enter the last month of 2016, we also enter into the celebration of the gift of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). But as I consider the implications of this Scripture — specifically the parameters of the phrase, "whoever believes in him" — I'm reminded of a recent statement by Pope Francis:

Let the theologians study the abstract realities of theology. "But what should I do with a friend, neighbor, an Orthodox person?" Be open, be a friend. "But should I make efforts to convert him or her?" There is a very grave sin against ecumenism: proselytism. We should never proselytize the Orthodox! They are our brothers and sisters, disciples of Jesus Christ (Address of the Holy Father on October 1, 2016 in Tbilisi, available online at w2.vatican.va).

Does this, and other statements that Pope Francis has made, mean, therefore, that we should not try to help non-Catholic Christians "come home" to the Catholic Church? There is much that can be said in clarification here, particularly in relation to Orthodox Christians versus other non-Catholic Christians, but let me simply point out that there is a vast difference between "proselytizing" someone and sharing with them out of love the beauty and fullness of our Catholic Faith.

But as I was considering this, I happened to read the following Scripture passage. I'll let you read it first before I comment:

Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor? For if there was splendor in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to

this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:7-18)

Following St. Paul's example, I would like to be "very bold" in applying this verse to our relationships as Catholic Christians with non-Catholic Christians. Besides the wider theological and historical context, St. Paul was addressing the very personal fact that these Corinthian convert Christians had Jewish friends and family members who refused to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They had an "unlifted veil" over their minds, which prevented them from hearing and seeing the beauty of Christ. This "veil" not only included their entire Jewish heritage but also their presumptions and prejudice against this upstart "schismatic" group that had left to follow the crucified man, Jesus.

But St. Paul reminded them that "only through Christ" is that veil "taken away" — in other words, through the gift of grace, God gives "man a new heart ... makes our hearts return to him ... gives us the strength to begin anew" (CCC, 1432). And as St. Paul said, "When a man turns to the Lord" — when he responds to the grace working in his heart — "the veil is removed."

I can only speak for myself, but as a non-Catholic Christian, I had a "veil" over my mind and heart concerning the Catholic Church, built upon how I understood Scripture, how I understood Church history, and the many prejudices I harbored against the Catholic Church and Catholics. In fact, this veil not only convinced me that the Catholic Church wasn't Christian, but that my particular Presbyterian faith was the most true expression of bibli-

Member's Section

Member's Section

cal Christianity. Even once the “splendor” of my Presbyterian denomination had “come to have no splendor at all” — when I watched the liberalism of my denomination implode — I nonetheless rationalized these flaws away with accumulated veils. And we ministers, who were even more aware of the diminishing splendor, supplied the necessary veils to ease the concerns of our congregations, assuring them of their safe harbor, and essentially hardening their hearts even more toward any consideration of the Catholic Church.

But again, using St. Paul’s words, “only through Christ is it taken away.” Here is the mystery of the work of grace on a person’s heart, taking away the veil of ignorance or prejudice to either recognize the faded spender of Protestantism or the true splendor of the fullness of the Catholic Church (even though we Catholics have done far too much to tarnish her splendor!). When such “a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.” And it is the inner working of the Holy Spirit, received in Baptism, that empowers this change of heart and

mind, which allows a person to see the glory of Christ and His Church, and to experience continual conversion — “being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another.” None of this is our own doing. None of this is merely the result of our intelligence, education, or wisdom; or the chance reading of someone’s conversion story; or the hearing of a conversion story on television or radio or internet. Certainly all these resources help those on the journey, which is why the Coming Home Network commits so much time and talent to making these resources readily available. But, ultimately, all of “this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

As we celebrate Advent and Christmas together with all Christians around the world, let us humbly thank God for His grace that has opened our hearts and minds to the gift of His Son and the gift of His Church. And in the many gifts we give this season, may we also extend the gift of our Catholic Faith to our family and friends through the love we share, which even in itself is a gift of God’s loving grace. ■

FROM THE HERMITAGE: To Share In Our Humanity

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org



By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

I think the most spiritually enriching part of any Mass I attend, second only to receiving the Lord Jesus in Holy Communion, is the prayer offered by the priest as he fills the chalice with wine and a little water in preparation for the Eucharistic prayer. The prayer itself is usually offered silently or very quietly, so you may not even be aware of it. But during the preparation of the chalice the priest prays, “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”

This prayer, firmly rooted in holy Scripture (2 Macc 15:39; John 19:34; Rom 5:29; 2 Pet 1:14 and Phil 2:8) and the history of the Church (the prayer itself is found in the canon of the Mass as early as the 7th century), speaks to me of the purpose for which Christ became incarnate; namely, to restore our right relationship with God the Father, in the Son, by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas is the season of the Church year when we celebrate in a particularly intense way the Incarnation of Jesus Christ *who humbled himself to share in our humanity*. Why did He do this? Divine Revelation, written and handed down through the Apostles, makes it clear. The incarnation, the

birth, life, death, resurrection, and bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven, came about so that we — you and I — *may come to share in the divinity of Christ*. And where Christ is, there too is the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Whatever our experience of heaven, that experience will involve being fully united with the holy Trinity. As Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

As I mentioned, the prayer said during the preparation of the chalice is said silently or very quietly. However, a prayer that is prayed aloud for all to hear contains the same words is the Collect offered at Mass during the day on Christmas Day.

O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may share in the divinity of

Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Dear reader, I can think of no better way to end this December reflection from the hermitage than with a paraphrase of the above Collect. May the God who wonderfully created your human dignity, and still more wonderfully restored it, grant you to share in His divinity as Christ, who humbled Himself to share in your humanity. ■



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ARE YOU ON THE JOURNEY TOWARDS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH? Be sure to visit our website, www.chnetwork.org, for lots of great resources about the Catholic Faith and tools to help you on your journey. You can also check out our online community forum, forum.chnetwork.org, where you can dialog with other CHNetwork members, ask questions, and receive encouragement as you seek to follow the Lord's will in your life.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Fr. Paul, an Anglican priest in the United Kingdom, that our Lord Jesus would guide him as he seeks the fullness of the truth.
- For a United Methodist minister in North Carolina, that his search for a deeper walk with Christ would lead him to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.
- For Lisa, a Baptist professor, that her reading and searching would lead her home to the Catholic Church.
- For missionaries in Cambodia, that they may be given the grace to step out in faith, braving ostracism, and seek out full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- For a Church of Christ professor in the south, that his studies of Scripture, history, and liturgy would lead him home to the Catholic Church.
- For a Mennonite seminarian in Brazil, that God would clear away his misunderstanding about the Catholic Church and make a path for him to return home.
- For Manuel, a Baptist minister, that the Holy Spirit would guide him back to the Catholic Church of his youth.
- For a non-denominational missionary in Southeast Asia, that he may soon be able to partake of Jesus in the holy Sacrament of the altar.

- For Nancy, a former Congregational seminarian, that, as she studies and prays through RCIA, our Lord would fill her with a love for His holy Church.
- For Chad, a non-denominational minister in the south, that his curiosity about the Catholic Faith would blossom into the joy of full communion with the ancient Church of Jesus and the Apostles.
- For a Seventh-day Adventist professor in California, that he may find employment in an institution that is not anti-Catholic.
- For Fr. Stephen, an Anglican priest, and his wife, that the Holy Spirit would guide their timing of when to enter the fullness of the Catholic Church.

Lay

- For Irene who is confused as to whether she should go back to her Catholic roots or stay with Protestant denominations where she feels more spiritually connected.
- For Martha, a convert, who has people in her life who are trying to convince her that her Catholic Faith is wrong, that their hearts be touched and opened to the truth of Catholicism through the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- For Sharon who has tentatively made contact with a local parish and is nervous about this big step.

- For Jean who is reading the Bible and *Catechism* as she prayerfully considers returning to the Church.
- For Roger who is in RCIA and asks for prayers for his wife to be open to the Church.
- For Eric and his wife, that they may soon receive of the Eucharistic banquet.
- For Lindy who feels she isn't quite ready to commit to RCIA but is still meeting with a priest periodically for instruction, that she will find new Catholic friends who can support her in her journey.
- For Mary to be able to overcome her hesitation and connect with a Catholic parish in order to return to the sacraments.
- For a woman who is discouraged since she hasn't been able to get to a Catholic parish and her husband doesn't support her interest in the Catholic Faith.
- For Becky that she will be able to move beyond the obstacles and towards full communion with the Catholic Church, that she have the courage to say yes to God's call.

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. 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

December 5

Sonja Corbitt*
 Former Southern Baptist

December 12

Chris Hiles*
 Former Churches of Christ
 in Christian Union

December 19

Fr. Thomas Wray*
 Former Episcopal priest

December 26

Jason Hall*
 Former Free Will Baptist
 Re-air from 12/10/12

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home.

*Schedule is subject to change.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

He would only accept the actual words and teachings of Jesus as the Word of God. He did not accept the Epistles or anything that Jesus did not actually say or do. I could not really explain to his satisfaction (or mine for that matter) why he shouldn't believe the way he did, apart from what the Church has traditionally believed. My arguments were not effective, my meager resource materials of little help. I had not yet discovered the Church Fathers or Catholic Church history.

Kris and I gradually became discouraged with the Presbyterian Church USA, which we had previously thought of as a home for life. The denomination had become increasingly “pro-choice,” and other cultural accommodations were being voted on. Kris and I were pro-life in our views, largely shaped by her early Catholic education and family teaching. It puzzled me that the Catholic Church should have it right on abortion and our denomination had it so wrong. “Who holds to the truth on this issue?” I asked myself.

While it didn't answer our pro-life concerns, Kris and I started attending an Episcopal church after relocating to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Kris liked the formality of the worship. I had an interest in the Episcopal Church because of my father's upbringing in the Church of Ireland (Anglican). We had some familiarity with the Anglican Church from our years overseas. In fact, our three children had been baptized in the Anglican Church when we lived in Korea. We proceeded through the intensive new member's class, learning about the creeds, the formation of the scriptural canon, and Church history, all of which culminated in our being accepted into the Episcopal Church USA. Again, I thought my journey was ending, having now reconnected with the church of my grandparents on my father's side and finding a beautiful liturgical worship that we both appreciated so much. Our Episcopal pastor was a wonderful Bible teacher and also a man well versed in history. He was an Anglo-Catholic (high church) Episcopalian and very committed to ecumenism and the concept of Christian unity. I believed, as many Protestants do, in an “invisible” church which was made up of faithful people from every denomination. Nevertheless, it bothered me that Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all truth, yet we could find folks claiming to be led by this same Holy Spirit who would have contrary views on Baptism, salvation, church organization, as well as other issues. It troubled me that it should be so difficult to know the truth. Meanwhile, we continued to grow in our appreciation of the more liturgical approach of the high church service and learned the meaning behind many liturgical customs. Kris said it reminded her of her Catholic upbringing.

We lived close to a large Catholic church, Santa Maria de la Paz. One day, while driving to our Episcopal church and passing this local Catholic parish, Kris remarked that we might as well start going to the Catholic church since it was the same liturgy and a lot closer to our home. I was taken aback and bristled at this comment. “I am not going to be Catholic,” I said, but her

comment had made me think. I had never really tried to understand why Catholics believed as they did. I just knew they were wrong. But I certainly could not explain any Catholic teaching.

My thoughts went back to the Catholics I had known who had a deep devotion to Christ. If our liturgical practices are nearly the same, why don't we go to the Catholic Church? The Catholic Church claims continuity back to Peter and the Book of Acts. In fact the roots of the Anglican Church and Catholic Church are the same up until the 16th century. Our classes at the Anglican Church began to open our eyes to Church history. For Anglicans, Church history does not have a mysterious 1400 year gap as it did for me in my evangelical tradition. For this I am truly grateful. We learned about the creeds, the Church Fathers, and the formation of the canon of Scripture. My career had taken us to diverse regions of the world, and we had seen the Catholic Church in every country we had lived in or visited. Surely it represented the face of Christianity to the world. After all, when the Pope speaks, the world listens. No other voice represents Christianity to the world. Even the other denominations define themselves by what they do not believe in relation to the Catholic Church. Why wasn't I Catholic? The question bothered me. What were those issues on which I could not possibly compromise? I decided to write them down and at least be able to explain to Kris why we could not be Catholic.

Dealing with the Issues

My list had most of the common issues that Protestants deal with in approaching the Catholic Church. Mary headed the list, followed by Church authority, purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and confession to a priest. I had no intention of ever becoming Catholic, but somehow it always bothered me that the Lord would allow this giant Church to last so long, accomplish so many good works, be right on so many issues, have so many good people worshiping, and still be a false church (as some of my Protestant friends believed). Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Good Shepherd really did leave us an earthly shepherd we could follow? If Christ wanted us to be one, then why didn't He design a single Church? Or did He? If the Catholic Church was the true Church, it would be wonderful — but I knew it wasn't. Then again, it seemed to me that the claims the Church was making were so bold that it was either a great deceit or actually just what it declared itself to be, the Church that Christ founded. The Catholic Church claims that the Pope is the successor to Saint Peter, that bishops are directly linked to the Apostles, and priests are able to absolve sins and preside over an altar where bread and wine are changed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord. These are strong claims and compel more than passive indifference on the part of any serious Christian seeking truth.

My first stop was the “worship” of Mary. There was no way I could or would ever *worship* Mary. She was just a vessel that God had chosen to bring Christ into the world. She needed a Savior just like me. Why, she even said so herself (“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior” Lk 1:47). My view of Mary was shal-

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low indeed. I simply believed she was a good Jewish girl, chosen by God to deliver the Messiah. I did not believe that she was anything special. We would mention Mary at Christmas, show her in a manger with the animals and baby Jesus, and then put her away like a Christmas decoration, not to be mentioned or thought about until next Christmas.

Worship Mary? That would be idolatry. My friend Pat assured me that Catholics *do not* worship Mary. He explained that the Catholic Church forbids the worship of Mary or any other creature — but yes, they certainly do honor her. After all, she was the mother of the Savior. I still wasn't convinced. *But you pray to her!* Pat explained that we ask her to pray for us the way we would ask a close friend or family member to pray for us. I needed to think about this, but the light was starting to shine through a crack in the wall that I had built between my beliefs and anything Catholic.

It was here that I began to realize that I really did not understand much about what the Church taught. We had on our bookshelf a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, given to us by Kris' aunt, who was with the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. I looked up all those topics which were of concern to me with the intention of highlighting things that I could not accept. Finally, I began for the first time to understand what the Church really taught. I was amazed at the clarity and coherence of the *Catechism*.

In her Magnificat, Mary prophesied, "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48) yet I had never called Mary "blessed." Neither had anyone I had known in my Protestant circles. Only Catholics did that! "*But why don't we do that?*" Giving honor to Mary, I reasoned, would take away from the honor we give to Christ. Still, this inconsistency bothered me.

I went looking for books on Mary from a Catholic perspective. I chose Scott Hahn's *Hail Holy Queen*, figuring that a former Presbyterian minister should be able to explain to me the Catholic emphasis on Mary. Reading that book was an eye-opening experience. I discovered that Catholics viewed Mary as a New Testament fulfillment of the Ark of the Covenant. If this was really the case, then I could understand why they honored Mary so much. I knew well the honor that Israel gave to the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament. After I read Dr. Hahn's case for Mary as the new Ark, I knew I had a problem.

This book also explained how the Church down through the centuries had viewed Mary's roles as the new Eve and the Queen Mother. It really began to sink in that Catholics didn't just invent these things about Mary. I began to see that Mary derives all her importance because of her relationship with her Son Jesus and that she always points to Him. "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2:5) were the words Mary spoke to the servants at the wedding feast of Cana. One thing after another about Mary started to make sense. I had turned a corner, but there were more twists in the road.

The next issue was Church authority. I determined that, if the Church was what it claimed to be and the Pope was who he

claimed to be, then so many other issues would just fall into place. By man's standard, the Church is an amazing institution. Pope Francis is Pope number 266. By comparison the United States has had 44 Presidents in roughly 230 years. When the United States Declaration of Independence was signed, the Church was already on Pope 250. What a history! What other human institution compares? The Church was not flawless, but it was certainly under divine protection for two millennia. By God's grace, the Church has prevailed. So many Catholics have left the Church when they are misled into believing that their new Protestant friends know more about interpreting Scripture than the Magisterium of the Church. Saint Peter tells us that no Scripture is of private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20 KJV). The proliferation of denominations is the result of personal interpretation of the Scriptures. I started to see that it made perfectly good sense to trust the same Church that validated, preserved, and protected the Scriptures down through the ages to interpret them.

Christ had prayed for unity. In fact, He prayed three times in John 17, on the night before He was crucified, that we might be one. I asked myself how I had contributed to that unity; I had not. In fact, the opposite was probably true.

I realized that I needed some good reasons not to become Catholic, and I was running out of them fast. We had been encouraged that the Anglican Church had a stated goal of ultimate reunification with Rome, but recent events made this less likely. They were moving away from Rome and disintegrating at the same time. I became convinced that the confusion of denominations, independent churches, and para-church organizations was not what Christ intended for His flock. It made no sense. I realized that I was in the wrong place. I needed to get home to the flock with a shepherd appointed by Christ.

The doctrine of purgatory was also problematic but not a show-stopper for me. On this point, the teaching of our Lord in Matthew 18 was helpful. Here we find the parable of an unforgiving servant who is forgiven much by the master but does not, in turn, forgive his fellow servant a relatively small amount. The Lord expected us to forgive as we had been forgiven (Matthew 6:12). The servant who did not forgive his debtor (as we often do not forgive our debtors) was turned over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. "So will my heavenly Father do to you unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart." This passage showed me that if we arrive before the Master and have not forgiven others as He has forgiven us, we will be expected to complete that forgiving process. No, purgatory is not a "second chance," as I thought Catholics believed, but it is that final opportunity where the Lord can complete His work of sanctification in our lives.

Coming Home

I made an appointment to speak with our Episcopal pastor about my decision to become Catholic. My purpose in meeting with him was to explain the reasons for my decision and assure him that I was not leaving because of problems in the

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Episcopal Church USA (and there are plenty) or because of any local church issue. In fact, we loved our local Episcopal church and the friends we had made there. I told him that I had come to believe that the Catholic Church was the Church that Christ founded and that I had eliminated all my reasons for not being there. I thanked him for his part in my journey and for introducing me to the Church Fathers and Church history. I assured him that we were not leaving for better liturgy, better singing, better fellowship, better teaching, or preaching, but because of my personal conviction that this was what I must do to be faithful to Christ's call. For me it was a matter of being obedient to my conscience. He was most receptive to my explanation, proceeded to encourage me, and gave me his blessing.

My first Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) class made me excited and yet somewhat anxious. There was so much bad news in the press about the Church and the recent scandals. In fact, the newspapers that week had been full of news of pending lawsuits against the Church. I had some second thoughts. The words of one individual echoed in mind: "Why would you get into that mess?" Then I remembered the Old Testament story of Samuel. Hannah had long prayed to the Lord for a son. When her prayer was answered she took young Samuel to the temple and entrusted him to Eli the high priest. Hannah was a faithful, godly woman. Eli, the chief priest, had two sons who were abusing worshippers when they came to the temple. No doubt their reputation was well known even to Hannah, and yet Hannah still took her only son and entrusted him into the care of Eli. My thoughts were on Hannah. Despite the failures and imperfections, this was the form of worship established by God.

I saw this parallel in my own life. Despite failures and imperfections on the part of the leaders and members of the Catholic Church, the Lord had not given us direction to develop a "better way" than the way He had established under Peter and the Apostles. I could see that the Church was both divine and human. I had made my decision.

When I sat down in the church library for our first RCIA class, there was a notebook at each place. On the cover of the notebook, Sister Paula, our RCIA director, had placed a Scripture verse: "Speak Lord, your servant hears." It was exactly what Eli told Samuel to say to the Lord when he heard God speaking to him in the night. It seemed like the Lord was telling me that He knew exactly where I was and that I should open my heart and ears to what He had to say and that He would take care of all those other concerns.

Because Kris had been baptized and confirmed as a Catholic, she did not need to attend RCIA. But she became so interested in what she was hearing from me about the class that she received permission to attend with me. Together we shared a wonderful year of discovery and adventure.

On March 11, 2006, I was presented to the Archbishop to be recognized as a candidate for Confirmation at the Easter Vigil. There were several hundred candidates presented. I did not expect a question from the Archbishop, so was surprised that he paused with me. He asked me what my faith tradition was. I told

him Presbyterian and Episcopalian. He asked why I was coming into the Catholic Church. I told him that I had become convicted that, to be faithful in my call to follow Jesus, I must enter the Catholic Church. He said, "Welcome, God bless you." At the same Easter Vigil Mass, Kris went forward to receive the Eucharist for the first time in over 30 years. We were both home together.

Surprised by Peace

Entering the Church has had a profound impact on our family and my relationship with Christ. I no longer feel the need to be the authority on every issue. I can rely on those who had gone before. This gives me the freedom to learn — and I have so much to learn. I have only begun to explore a Church that is so deep and so wonderful. What appeared from the outside to be shallow has proven to be so deep.

I had wondered what it would be like from the other side. Would I find myself in Mass some Sunday thinking, "What in the world have you done?" Would I start running for the exit and not stop until I had found a good Bible church? What I discovered was something quite different. I felt like I had arrived home. I discovered that there was a whole world of God-fearing folks who were concerned about knowing Him, loving Him, and doing His will. Why had I doubted this? I have found the Catholic Church to be even more beautiful when viewed from the inside than the outside. An actual church building may look large and cold from the outside, but from the inside this same church building is seen in all its beauty, as the sun shines through its stained glass windows. Likewise, it has been so with the Church itself: what appeared large and cold from the outside is seen in all its beauty when viewed from the inside. Both of us are happy and grateful to be home. ■



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