



April 2018 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



I Will Sing to the Lord a New Song

By Bonnie Rapkin

I can pinpoint the exact moment I first heard the word Christ. I was five years old and had been playing across the street with a friend. I was just beginning to cross the street toward home when a school bus stopped nearby to drop off older kids. I had walked about halfway across the street when seven or eight boys, twice my size, came rushing up to me. They formed a circle around me, raised their arms and pointed at me, shouting in unison, "You killed Christ! You killed Christ!"

They marched around me, faces glaring with hatred, and they blocked me from going home.

I had no idea how they could say I had killed someone. I didn't even know who this Christ person was. These boys terrified me, and I began to cry loudly.

My mother heard the commotion and came running. She yelled at the boys, ordering them to go home, and to my relief, they scattered off.

The moment I was safely home, my mother asked me what had happened and what they were shouting. I told her, asking who Christ was.

"Jesus Christ," she answered. "The Gentiles believe he is the Son of God."

Bewildered, I asked more questions.

"Why did they say I killed him? I didn't even know him! I didn't know God had a Son."

My mother then began trying to explain, to the best of her ability and from a Jewish perspective, who Jesus Christ was and how Jews had been blamed for his death nearly two thousand years ago.

Now, being only five, I didn't have much of an understanding of the religious theologies separat-

ing Jews and Gentiles, but even at that age, I knew there were very distinct differences. No child can grow up Jewish in America and not know that. After all, the Gentiles celebrated Christmas. We did not; we were Jewish. What child wouldn't notice the beautiful Christmas trees and dazzling lights brightening every house on the block but theirs? What child could possibly miss seeing all the other children, giddy with anticipation over the arrival of Santa Claus flying through the sky in his magical sleigh on Christmas Eve? What child didn't know about the mountain of presents all the other children would wake up to on Christmas morning? Of course I knew the difference between Jews and Gentiles, even at age five. It didn't take a theologian to see that. It only took Christmas gifts and Easter bunnies.

But I still had no idea why I had been accused of killing Christ.

"They didn't mean you killed him, personally," my mother continued. "They meant all Jews, as a group. And you are a part of that group."

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

She then told me that the Gentiles believe that Jesus was their Messiah or Savior. She added that Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah to come.

"But if Jesus wasn't the Messiah," I asked her, "who was he?"

She replied that although Jewish people don't believe that Jesus was the Son of God, or the Messiah, he was a very good man, incredibly smart, and a devout Jew.

"In fact," she continued, "I believe he was way ahead of his times and amazingly intelligent, and that's why people thought he was the Son of God. He knew and did things that people of those times couldn't understand, so they said he must be God."

"How do we know he wasn't the Son of God?" I asked my mother one last time.

"Because we're Jewish," my mother said impatiently, indicating the conversation was over.

Thus began my quest to know who Jesus was.

Growing up, I received no formal religious instruction. My older brother, however, attended Sunday school (In Judaism, no work or school can take place on the Sabbath, so Sunday was the perfect day for religion class.), and later Hebrew School. According to my mother, girls did not need religious instruction. My Sunday school consisted of getting up early, before my parents, and watching *Davey and Goliath* on TV.

I wanted to know everything I could about God but didn't know where to look. One day, my brother came home after religion class and said they learned today that God was everywhere. I loved that.

I went all over the house saying "hi" to God. I reveled in knowing that every inch of my domain was filled with God's presence. My brother, of course, thought I was an idiot.

In 1970, when I was nine, the girl next door asked me to come over to her house to listen to the new record she had just bought. As soon as the first song began, I knew this was unlike any record I had heard before. And as I listened, I learned a story I had never heard before. The record was *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

This was a man whom everyone seemed to praise. He healed sick people and treated everyone with tremendous love and compassion. And he taught them about God. But there were some people, the authorities and officials, who didn't like him. They didn't believe his miracles and teachings and wanted to stop him. And then, suddenly, for no apparent reason, his best friend betrayed him and turned him over to the authorities. Though I couldn't understand why, the people who had sung his praises before were now spitting on him and hating him. They whipped and beat him, then put him to death by nailing him to a cross. I was in tears.

I felt love for this man; I loved his teachings; I loved his love. And somehow, the love he showed to others through the words and music felt safe and warm inside me, and I wanted to be enveloped in it.

But I was bewildered and sickened by his death. What was this crucifixion? I had never seen a picture of Jesus on the cross. Why didn't he save himself if he really was the Son of God? Why did the people turn against him? What had he done?

I asked my friend all these questions. She told me that he had to die to fulfill God's plan. She then explained how, after he died, they placed him in a cave. Three days later he rose from the dead. That was why Christians believed he was the Son of God.

But I needed more answers. I needed to know more than just the fact that Jewish people did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. I needed to know why.

My mother gave me the same answer as she had when I was five.

I remained dissatisfied and began asking God directly for answers.

In the meantime, my brother attended Hebrew School and prepared for the day of his Bar Mitzvah. He hated every minute of it, while I yearned to go. I thought maybe I could find the answers to my questions there. But I would not be going to Hebrew School or preparing for the day of my Bat Mitzvah because, according to my mother, girls did not need this.

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FEATURED RESOURCES

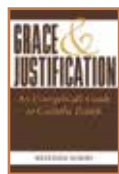


Deep in Scripture CD

In this *Deep in Scripture* CD, Marcus Grodi is joined by Matthew Leonard, a preacher's kid and a former Evangelical missionary. They discuss Scripture passages from Romans addressing righteousness and justification and the role that Baptism plays.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a donation of \$35.



Grace & Justification: An Evangelical's Guide to Catholic Beliefs — By Stephen Wood

Does the Catholic Church teach that justification is by grace? For 500 years, the answer to this question has divided Protestants and Catholics. Many Evangelicals and, surprisingly, some Catholics believe that the Catholic Church teaches justification by unaided human works. Steve Wood presents a unique ecumenical perspective on several of the contentious doctrines relating to justification (such as works, merit, and infusion) by viewing them through the lens of our adoption by God the Father. He also encourages a simple, yet profound, way to grasp the priority of grace taught throughout the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that many unfortunately miss.

\$50

Receive *Grace & Justification* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *Grace & Justification* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

A Tail of Three Justifications

By Marcus Grodi

Besides playing on the title of Dickens' book concerning another example of revolutionary differences of opinion, I'm beginning this reflection with the word "tail" because I thought of this as I was walking our golden-mix dog. I was considering a fistful of ideas and events, all related to the various conflicting and combating views of justification afloat among Christians:



■ Ken Hensley's fine series on the Reformation in the last few newsletters;

■ A recent debate between Bishop Barron and a prominent Protestant theologian, who said he could never become Catholic because he could not agree with the Catholic view of justification;

■ My recent trip to my old Protestant seminary in which over twenty Protestant speakers all expressed their united assumption that Catholics "still believe they are saved by works";

■ Two talks I was preparing to give on "continual conversion," which, from my old Protestant background, I may once have interpreted as "Catholic works righteousness."

As I considered these and more ideas, it occurred to me that there are basically three combating views of justification afloat today: (1) a generic Protestant view of forensic justification that includes the assumption of the "perseverance of the saints" or "once saved-always saved"; (2) the view of "works righteousness" that these same Protestants assume is taught by the Catholic Church; and (3) the actual Catholic view of justification by "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6b).

It's important to begin by clarifying that all three of these views are nuanced. (1) There certainly is no one Protestant view — many non-Catholic Christian traditions hold views identical to the Catholic position or, on the other hand, even more radical views (some, for example, believe a person cannot be saved unless he speaks in tongues or gives up dancing or playing video-games). I'm referring, in this short reflection, to the more common Evangelical perspective, based initially on the teachings of Luther and Calvin, which has evolved through the evangelical and fundamentalist preachers of the 16th through 20th centuries and now is pervasive among the growing independent mega-churches of this 21st century.

(2) There are often conflicting opinions among non-Catholics as to what Catholics supposedly teach concerning "works righteousness." I'm referring in this reflection to the idea that Catholics supposedly believe that God, through His Church, has replaced the Old Testament Laws of Moses with a new list of ecclesial obligations, which includes "days of obligation," "no meat Fridays," and "corporal works of mercy," as well as the need for "continual conversion" so a Christian can grow to be "perfect

in charity." If Catholics are successful in completing these works, then God is obligated to let us into heaven. And since Catholics supposedly believe there is no end to our sinfulness, in "words or thoughts, or what we have done or failed to do," a Catholic, therefore, can never have assurance of salvation. Life becomes one sacrifice after another, offering up one suffering or failure after another.

(3) I have to admit that the reason so many non-Catholics believe the above to be true is because Catholics often don't know the authentic Catholic view of justification. Sadly, many Catholics live out their faith as if they believe in "works righteousness" — which is why so many non-Catholic evangelists have been successful in pulling Catholics out of the Church: "So, if you were to die tonight, and God asked you why He should let you into His Kingdom, what would you say?" And far too many Catholics answer, "Well, I was baptized and go to Mass occasionally, and I'm a pretty good person! I've never killed anyone, stolen anything, or committed adultery, at least since my last confession three years ago. Why wouldn't God let me into heaven?"

So how should we understand justification — and how do I explain it in the time it takes to finish walking my dog around the block? I believe the key to understanding justification is seeing it through the lens of our relationship with our heavenly Father as His adopted children through Baptism, grace, and faith. The Apostle John wrote, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1). How does a father love his children, and how are children to love

their father? But more specifically, if a father has a generous inheritance set aside for his children, what must they do to receive this inheritance?

Through the lens of the forensic Protestant view of justification, a child does not have to do anything whatsoever in relationship to his father to eventually receive his inheritance: it is

his fully and freely, solely because of his election by birth — there was nothing he did to earn his sonship or his inheritance, and there is nothing he can do to lose it. If the child refuses to obey or love his father or if the child leaves home and never gives his father a second thought, still, when the father dies, the child will receive his inheritance solely because he was born into the family.

Now, is this how a family truly operates? And is this the salvation that Christ died to give us — to win a salvation that becomes rightfully ours, even if we live in sinful rebellion of our heavenly Father? As St. Paul warned the Corinthian Christians, all adopt-

“There certainly is no one Protestant view...”

ed children of God the Father must “appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body” (2 Cor 5:10).

Through the lens of the supposed “works righteousness” view, a father presents a long list of obligations that his children must do for them to earn their inheritance. A child can then focus his life on fulfilling that list — but not necessarily out of love for his father. The child might obey only for the love of his inheritance or for the love of himself. He may inwardly despise his father, but all he has to do is put on a good face, do whatever his father demands, and move forward knowing his inheritance will be his by right because he earned it.

Is this the kind of salvation Christ died to give us: a new life of service, like a slave to an owner? After all, Scripture reminds us, “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).

To understand the authentic Catholic view, one must see our relationship with our heavenly Father as our relationship ought to be with our earthly father. Our focus is not to be on our inheritance at all; rather, we are to love, honor, cherish, and respect our parents, leaving any hope we might have for an “inheritance” in their hands. An earthly father sets boundaries and rules for his children, not as criteria for earning his love and benefits, but because he wants to protect them from harm and bad decisions and so that his children might flourish and grow. And good children obey their parents, not to earn their love or benefits, but out of gratitude. If a child becomes disobedient and ungrateful, a good father disciplines out of love; if a child becomes rebellious, a good father may boot his (older) child out of the house, even disinherit him with the goal of bringing him to his senses.

Of course, in the above caricatures, I’ve painted the worst-case scenarios. Actually, in all three cases, if a child lives in loving, grateful, respectful obedience to his father, without any thought of his inheritance, they will all appear the same. The fact that his inheritance might be guaranteed, or that it has to be earned through a life of obedience, will in fact be identical to a child who lives a life of love, honor, and grateful obedience, with rarely a thought to what might happen in the distant future.

And such is true with the three views of justification. Any Christian who has experienced by grace a truly converted heart — regardless of how they understand justification — will want to imitate Christ, will want to grow in holiness, will want to walk as Jesus walked, and will want to love God with heart, mind, body, and soul and will love his neighbor as himself. What really separates true, faithful Christians of any tradition is mostly, in fact, the praxis of their traditions — and in this topic of justification, it is not so much the actual details of our traditions, but our misunderstandings, our ignorance.

Protestants, who do not understand what Catholics do or why they do it, project onto Catholics what they themselves would be thinking if they did what Catholics do. A Protestant would never kneel before a statue because, for a Protestant, this could only mean idolatry! And so when they see a faithful Catholic kneel before a statue, they presume idolatry. A Protestant has no ecclesial rules like “days of obligation” or “no meat Fridays” or

“penance to offset the temporary punishment for confessed and forgiven sins.” To a Protestant, this all smells of works righteousness. But I truly believe if faithful Protestants understood why a faithful Catholic kneels before statues of saints or gratefully submits to ecclesial rules like those mentioned above, they might do the same — out of gratitude to a loving heavenly Father who has given us the models and intercessions of holy saints and a Church through which we are drawn along the path of sanctification and holiness through faith, hope, charity, suffering, repentance, and obedience.

Justification is not about a courtroom, though we recognize there are forensic elements in our redemption; rather, it is primarily about the relationship of love we have been freely given by grace through the sacrificial love of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Like love, faith and hope are both action verbs, and justification is not an “either/or” proposition, but a “both/and” relationship of grace and freedom. Being saved by grace through faith is not a one-time surrender to Christ or a life of fearful servile obedience, but a life of active faith, hope, and love, in which we focus not on whether or not we’ll be saved, but on the constant love of our Father, from which nothing can separate us. We trust not in our election or our obedience, but in His love and mercy. Our focus is not on what we one day may receive, but on one day being able to stand before Him without embarrassment — not on being saved from hell, but on being welcomed into His presence. The rules of our faith are not criteria for entrance, but boundaries to help us stay, by grace, along the narrow path to the narrow gate through which only His faithful children will enter. ■

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 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.



CHNetwork

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The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

God Always Answers "Yes!"

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | LittlePortionHermitage.org

As Lent has come to a close and we are now rejoicing in the Easter season, we should consider new ways to continue to draw closer to our Lord Jesus even after our Lenten penances are over. In this reflection, I'd like to share with you one thing that has been helpful to me in my continuing faith journey.



At some point during my journey, I learned that God answers prayer in one of four ways: "Yes"; "Yes, and here's more"; "Yes, but not yet"; or "No, I love you too much." One of my prayers of petition that God has never failed to answer with anything but a resounding "yes!" is my prayer for opportunities to increase in the virtue of humility. This prayer of petition takes the form of a litany known as the Litany of Humility.*

"The sin that has pride of place is the sin of pride itself," author Kevin Vost wrote. Humility is the chief anecdote to pride. Since I want to grow in holiness, to grow by grace into the man God has created me to become, I need to cultivate the virtue of humility.

I first learned of the litany from Marcus Grodi several years ago. I don't recall exactly why he mentioned the litany to me. There's a good chance he mentioned it because I was telling him how very humble I considered myself to be. But after praying the Litany of Humility for some time now, I realize just how self-centered and lacking in humility I can be! (The fact that I feel prideful in saying so should tell you something!)

Much to the chagrin of my ego and the devil — both would have me believe I'm humble enough already — the Lord routinely answers my petition in spades. For instance, no sooner have I asked the Lord to remove from me the desire of being praised, I then experience a twinge of irritation when I'm not given a "shout out" for a job well done. I could go on with examples of my lack of humility, but humility forbids me from doing so!

To the right you will find the Litany of Humility. I encourage you to pray this litany and watch how quickly and routinely God gives you opportunities to grow in holiness. Whether you are a new Catholic recently received into the Church this Easter and are finding your place in the Church (perhaps missing the many ways you served or ministered in your previous faith community) or a lifelong Catholic or a convert who wants to battle the spiritual smugness we sometimes exhibit, I hope that this prayer is an encouragement to your journey. ■

"God Always Answers "Yes!""

By Brother Rex Anthony Norris A

EWTN's *The Journey Home* Schedule B

Prayer Requests D

Litany of Humility

O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, hear me.

From the desire of being esteemed,

Deliver me, Jesus. (repeat after each line)

From the desire of being loved,

From the desire of being extolled,

From the desire of being honored,

From the desire of being praised,

From the desire of being preferred to others,

From the desire of being consulted,

From the desire of being approved,

From the fear of being humiliated,

From the fear of being despised,

From the fear of suffering rebukes,

From the fear of being calumniated,

From the fear of being forgotten,

From the fear of being ridiculed,

From the fear of being wronged,

From the fear of being suspected,

That others may be loved more than I,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

(repeat after each line)

That others may be esteemed more than I,

That, in the opinion of the world,

others may increase and I may decrease,

That others may be chosen and I set aside,

That others may be praised and I unnoticed,

That others may be preferred to me in everything,

That others may become holier than I, provided

that I may become as holy as I should, Jesus,

grant me the grace to desire it.

Amen.

*The Litany of Humility is commonly attributed to Rafael Cardinal Merry del Val y de Zulueta who was the Vatican Secretary of State under Pius X, from 1903 until his death in 1914.

CHNetwork Staff Interview

What is your name and title? My name is Ken Hensley. I am the Online Resources and Pastoral Care Coordinator with the Coming Home Network International.

How long have you worked for the CHNetwork? Close to two years, now.

Before working at the Coming Home Network, what was the most unusual or interesting job you've ever had? Well, for a few months when I was 21, I was a professional gambler, living in North Lake Tahoe and playing Blackjack for a living. But in light of the work I do now, most interesting probably is the fact that I was an ordained Protestant minister for eleven years before becoming Catholic. Oh, the reason I was a gambler for only a few months? I lost all my money.

How would you describe your job to a stranger on an airplane? Before coming to work full-time with CHN, I was an adjunct professor in the Biblical Studies department at St John's Seminary for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. I taught Old and New Testament introductory courses. In order to sound a little more "professional" when speaking with a stranger, I usually start by describing myself as a teacher of Catholic theology, and then, if pressed, I say that I work with an organization that helps people who are interested in becoming Catholic.

What does a typical day in the office look like to you? Beyond meetings with various staff members, the bulk of each day is taken up with emailing and calling contacts in the network who have been assigned to me, or responding to their emails and calls. After this, I'm always involved in working to improve our website design and resource recommendations.

What is the most rewarding part of your job? I would have to say it is the pastoral care work I do, especially with non-Catholic clergy who are contemplating Catholicism. Some have hard questions they need answered. Others come to CHN convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and seeking encouragement and friend-

ship from someone who can understand what they are facing. Even for laymen and women, conversion can be very painful since converts often suffer misunderstanding and even rejection by family members and friends. For non-Catholic clergy, conversion almost always means the loss of occupation and income, not to mention a sense of identity and calling often developed over decades. Since I experienced all of this, I feel like I can really be used by God in the lives of these men and women.

What is one fact about you that might surprise people to know? I am an amateur classical guitarist.

Who do you nominate to be our next staff interview? Marcus Grodi ■

CHNetwork Retreats

A time of fellowship and prayer with converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church. Visit CHNetwork.org/retreats for more information.

JUNE
4-7, 2018
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

OCTOBER
15-18, 2018
BIDDEFORD, MAINE

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS MAY 18TH

REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS SEPT 28TH

For more information and/or to register:
740-450-1175 | retreats@chnetwork.org

Limited spots available!

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, Thursdays 2 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sundays 7 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

April 2

Amy Daniels*
Former United Methodist minister
Re-air from 4/13/15

April 9

Oscar Herrera*
Former Jehovah's Witness

April 16

Keith Little*
Former non-denominational
Evangelical

April 23

Katie Wing*
Revert

April 30

Dr. Leroy Huizenga*
Former Lutheran, Presbyterian,
and Anglican

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

**Schedule is subject to change.*

Joyful Journey Updates

We would like to share with you a few encouraging updates and anecdotes from CHNetwork members. Thank you for helping us to assist converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church!

FROM NIKKI, ON THE JOURNEY: “Thanks again for checking in with me. I have loved learning so much from your wonderful website, the Facebook page, and the newsletter. I love conversion stories — they have helped me so much! God bless all that you do, and thanks for praying for us.”

FROM MIKE, A FORMER EVANGELICAL MINISTER: “Thank you for your recent email. I am deeply moved by your care. I suspect that email is indicative of how you carry out your ministry with everyone, but I want you to know that in my experience, your personal touch is uncommon, and I am grateful.”

FROM LANA, ON THE JOURNEY: “There seems to be developing within me a true hunger for the sacraments . . . especially the Eucharist and Penance . . . The more I study the Catholic Faith, its richness and truth become so apparent. I have literally fell in love with it and with this new relationship with Jesus that is being nurtured by His grace. I'm overflowing with gratitude to God and everyone that God has placed in my path since I began this journey.”

JONMARC GRODI, STAFF UPDATE: “Out of the blue we received an email from a retired Protestant pastor who was thinking about becoming Catholic. Then he heard about our upcoming retreat in Biddeford, Maine and now wants to know more! We’re hoping to see him there!”

FROM KATHY, A REVERT: “I want to thank you and the Coming Home Network for your apostolate and for the very important work you do in supporting converts. *The Journey Home* played a very significant role in my own

return to the Church, and for that I am eternally grateful. I have no doubt that there awaits a ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’ for each of you.”

FROM MIKE, A RECENT REVERT: “Today, I received the sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in 48 years . . . During a study of St. John’s Gospel about five years ago, we discussed John 6:55 ‘For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him’ . . . This planted a seed that led me to understand the truth about the Eucharist. Consequently, I began further study that led me to view many videos on the CHNetwork. I could appreciate Marcus Grodi’s views, as our church backgrounds are similar, as well as stories of the reverters. Over time I also found St. Thomas Aquinas, Peter Kreeft, Trent Horn, as well as others on YouTube. With everything I’d learned over the past few years, I felt I could no longer remain in the Reformed faith.”

FROM SHERRY, A BAPTIST ON THE JOURNEY: “I look forward to being a part of the Catholic Church and parish family and finding my place and ‘work.’ Thanks again for checking on me. I’ve so appreciated the support and resources. I value your prayers as I and all the others go through these next few months!”

FROM KATHIE, A RECENT CONVERT: “Just to let you know that I finally made it. Yesterday I had my Confirmation and First Communion. What a beautiful experience. I am so happy and so blessed! The Lord spoke to me six, going on seven, years ago: ‘I know the plans I have for you,’ and for years He has been telling me to sing a new song yet I could never figure out what that new song was. Well, I believe that coming into the Catholic Church is that new song, as He is unfolding the plans He has for me. Thank you for all your prayers! I sure needed them. Many blessings and thanks.”

SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to chnetwork.org/donate/ or complete this form and mail to:

CHNetwork
Attention: Ann Moore
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Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or ann@chnetwork.org if you have any questions or concerns.

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Prayer List



Clergy

■ For Brook, an Anglican priest, who wants to become Catholic but has no idea how he will make a living if he were to convert.

■ For John, a minister in Kenya, that the Holy Spirit may lead him back to the Catholic Faith of his youth and bring him fully home.

■ For Fr. Frank, an Episcopal priest, that our Lord Jesus may open his eyes to the truths of the fullness of the Catholic Church.

■ For Matt, a former Free Methodist minister, that God may soften his wife's attitude about the Catholic Church.

■ For a United Methodist seminarian in Kentucky, that, as she prays and studies about the Catholic Faith, she may be given a hunger for Jesus in the holy Eucharist.

■ For Tricia, the wife of a minister, that God would clear away all obstacles blocking her path to the Catholic Church.

■ For the wife of a Baptist minister, that the Lord would open her husband's heart to the Catholic Faith.

■ For Richard, a former Nazarene minister, that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide his journey of faith.

■ For an Assemblies of God minister in Minnesota, that Jesus may grant him a blessed home in the Catholic Church.

■ For Brian & Meg, former non-denominational missionaries, that the Holy Spirit may empower their lives as Catholics.

■ For R.J., a former Baptist seminarian in Florida, that our Lord Jesus Christ may shower him with His many graces as a Catholic.

■ For Barbara, the wife of a minister, who doesn't feel like it is the right time for her to pursue her interest in the Catholic Church, that she continue to draw closer to our Lord Jesus.

■ For Ryan, a student at a Baptist seminary whose family is strongly anti-Catholic, that he know how to pursue his desire to become Catholic.

■ For a Protestant clergyman, who is continuing to struggle with what to do now that he has become convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith.

Laity

■ For Angela who recently returned to the Catholic Church, that her faith may grow and flourish through receiving the sacraments.

■ For Nick, a convert who has difficulty going to church on account of transportation difficulties, that Jesus make a way for him to receive Him in the Eucharist.

■ For a man in Canada who has been casually interested in the Church for years but on account of difficult prior experiences in religion is hesitant to move forward with his journey.

■ For Heather, that she know how to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a Mormon who is having a hard time leaving behind her close-knit community and moving towards the Catholic Church.

■ For a Baptist in Pennsylvania who wants to learn more about the early Church Fathers, that he be guided to full communion with the ancient Church.

■ For a woman in Africa who is struggling with hurt and trauma from a cult-like background and is earnestly seeking good, wholesome connections in the Church.

■ For Trinity who is trying to learn as much as she can about the Catholic Church, especially the sacraments.

■ For Michele who doesn't know what to do since she believes Catholicism is true, but her husband is opposed to her converting.

■ For Cindy who feels very drawn to the Church but is concerned about losing friends and all the changes becoming Catholic would entail.

■ For Amanda who was unexpectedly drawn towards the Catholic Church after trying to show a Catholic friend the "errors" of his beliefs, that the Holy Spirit continue to enlighten her mind and heart.

■ For Jessica, that she have clarity as how to best move forward with her faith journey.

■ For Michelle who is feeling called to return to the practice of the Catholic Faith but is not sure of the timing, especially out of concerns for her non-Catholic family.

■ For Anna who has a number of concerns remaining about Catholic practice and devotion, that she find the encouragement she needs as she moves closer towards the Church.

■ For Mary who is attending Mass and reading about the Catholic Church, that her friends be receptive to her journey towards the Church.

■ For a convert who is going through a very trying period in her spiritual life, that she find good local support to help guide her.

■ For Jim, a former Lutheran, that as he and his son are received into full communion with the Catholic Church, his wife and daughter may soon follow in his path.

■ For a former Reformed Baptist in England, that the Holy Spirit may bless and guide his life as a Catholic.

■ For Sam who has left the Church but is still drawn by the Eucharist, that he come fully home.

■ For Jeff in Virginia, that, as he returns to the Catholic Church, the Lord Jesus may heal his many hurts.

■ For a woman in Canada who knows she is no longer Protestant but is afraid that Satan is deceiving her and distracting her from Jesus through her exploration of Catholicism, that she have peace and clarity in her faith journey.

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.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

So I decided I would learn on my own. I would wake up early in the morning and sneak my brother's prayer book into my room, hiding it under the covers. Although I couldn't read the Hebrew, I could read the English translations. It was my heart's desire to know God. I knew the story of Abraham and Isaac and had learned that we please God through obedience. It was my hope that by reciting these morning prayers, God would find me obedient and be pleased.

As the time of my brother's Bar Mitzvah approached, I listened through the bedroom walls to hear him practicing the part of the Torah that he would chant. As he recited and chanted and memorized, I did the same secretly, in my room. I wanted so much to be closer to God.

By the time I started high school, my family had moved to a new neighborhood. There were many more Jewish families there. I joined a Temple Youth Group in the Reformed synagogue and began going to Friday night Shabbat services. I learned the musical settings of many of the liturgical prayers and began playing the guitar and singing for services, thrilled to be a part of the liturgy.

I began learning much more about Judaism, discovering its richness and beauty. I also loved having a regular, formal setting in which to worship God, along with a sense of united community.

I still privately wondered about Jesus in my heart, and why the Jewish people didn't believe in him, but kept such thoughts to myself. My task was to embrace my Jewish faith and learn as much as I could, pushing aside those nagging feelings about Jesus.

On Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in my sophomore year of high school, my life took a dramatic turn. I was, of course, home from school for the High Holiday and was sitting at the family kitchen table. My mother was seated next to me. She turned to say something to me when, suddenly, her eyes opened wide with alarm.

“Stop doing that with your eyes!” she demanded.

“Doing what?” I asked, totally confused.

“What do you mean, doing what? That twitching! Your eyes are moving back and forth. You mean you're not doing that on purpose?”

My mother made an appointment with an ophthalmologist who informed us that my eye condition might be the symptom of a brain tumor and that I needed to see a neurologist. My mother promptly made an appointment, but it was my father who took me to see him. The neurologist did a routine exam and asked me a slew of questions. He asked if I often experienced headaches, dizziness, or nausea. To all his questions, I answered, “No more than normal.”

The doctor concluded that everything appeared normal, with the exception of the peculiar see-saw eye movement. My father then asked the doctor if I were his daughter, would he pursue any further testing. The doctor replied no, that at this point, seeing as I displayed no other symptoms, he would not. However, he also indicated that should I begin to display such symptoms, we should return. With that, my father and I left.

Two weeks later, the symptoms showed up — everything the neurologist had mentioned. I began suffering constant, horrible

headaches. I would throw up daily and was constantly dizzy. Standing still was impossible; I had to keep my body somehow in motion. But the headaches intensified to the point where I didn't dare move my head.

Yet my parents did not believe me. They were convinced that I had just had a “scare” put into me after seeing the neurologist. They insisted that since the doctor said no further tests were needed, everything was normal. I was simply “doing this to myself.”

But the symptoms continued. For the next six months, I threw up in school, on the bus, and at friends' homes. I bumped into walls when I walked. It was relentless. I lost all my friends; I was losing weight; my grades, which had always been excellent, were suffering.

Meanwhile, the pain continued.

Many nights I went to bed and prayed to God, begging Him to take all this away. I remember telling Him that if I was indeed making it up, I had no idea how to stop it. All I knew was that the pain was real; the dizziness was real, and the vomit was real.

Finally, when I believed I couldn't take it one more day, I begged my mother to take me back to the doctor. At her wit's end, she finally agreed. The doctor took one look at me and knew something was wrong.

When my parents realized I might indeed have a brain tumor, they made arrangements for me to go to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Before we left, I remember a born-again Christian boy coming up to me in school. He told me he would pray for me, and I thanked him.

“Though I don't know what good it will do,” he added, “with you being Jewish and all.”

Incredulous, I retorted mentally, “What kind of religion is this born-again Christianity?”

I knew I could never belong to such a faith community.

At Mayo Clinic, I underwent many painful, invasive tests. But as bad as the tests were, I was happy to have people caring for me and believing that I was really sick. The hospital was thus a source of comfort for me.

Eventually, the doctors told my parents that, although they could not definitively say what was wrong with me, they strongly suspected it was a brain tumor. I had severe hydrocephalus, and all indications pointed to cancer. They scheduled me for brain surgery the following Monday. What they didn't tell me was that they believed there was a strong chance that I would never leave the hospital.

The following Monday, I underwent neurosurgery. When I awoke, they informed me that there was no brain tumor. The surgeon had discovered that I had a congenital neurological disorder called Arnold-Chiari Brain Malformation. The doctors informed my parents that, though extremely rare, it could be surgically corrected, which they believed they had successfully accomplished.

Two weeks later, I was back home, symptom free. I hadn't noticed it until then, but I had been living with a headache pretty much my entire life. I just thought that was “normal.” Now, there was no trace of pain. If it weren't for my newly-shaved head and stiff neck, no one would know that anything had ever been wrong.

Spiritually, however, things were a little different.

...Journeys Home Continued...

Mayo Clinic has several hospitals, and I was in the pediatric ward of St. Mary's. On the wall of every room was a crucifix. At the time I was in the hospital, the late 1970s, visiting hours were very strict. When my parents left each day, I was alone for the night. The only one keeping me company was Jesus on the cross. I still hadn't allowed myself to talk to him yet, but I certainly fixated on him. I thought about when I first learned of his crucifixion through listening to *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I thought about the pain and loneliness he must have suffered, being abandoned by his friends. I thought of the humiliation he had endured, being stripped naked, spat upon, and mocked. With that, I didn't feel so alone.

Upon entering St. Mary's, I had asked God why He was allowing this to happen to me. Why me? After being in that hospital, on the pediatrics floor of one of America's greatest hospitals, after seeing so many children suffering from incurable diseases, I again asked God the exact same question but with a completely different meaning. Why me? Why did God let me live? Almost without exception, every child I met at Mayo was either dying or had a painful, debilitating illness that would be with him or her for life. Not only would I live, I was completely pain free — cured. Why me? At the age of 15, I suddenly had a very different perspective and realized that life was truly a gift from God.

I still don't know the answer to that question of "Why me?" but I do know that the experience changed me forever. For that reason, I wouldn't trade it for anything. It was that experience which led me, for the first time, to meditate on the Passion and the cross of Jesus. That meditation gave me some small insight into the price Jesus paid for my life.

Recovering from my surgery, I settled back into the routine of high school life. During spring break of my junior year, coming home from a weekend Temple Youth Group retreat, my parents had gone somewhere, and the house was empty. It was Easter Sunday. I turned on the television. The final segment of *Jesus of Nazareth* was on. I sat down and watched it to the end. By the time it was over, I was sobbing uncontrollably.

I ran into the bathroom and locked the door. As I sat there crying, picturing the image of Jesus hanging on the cross, I made my first-ever direct prayer to Him out loud. I cried out that I loved Him, that I believed in Him and accepted Him as my Savior. But then, with tears streaming down my face, I added, "And I can never pray to You again! I can't do this. I'm not strong enough. My parents will kill me!"

For a long time, I remained true to those words. I kept my feelings hidden, never talked to anyone about it, and continued my involvement with the Temple Youth Group until I graduated from high school.

After that, I didn't have much to do with any formal religion for quite some time. I only re-affirmed that I would never become a born-again Christian after experiencing yet another judgmental encounter with a young woman I worked with. She was in her early twenties, member of a Pentecostal church. One morning, she looked at me with deep sadness in her eyes.

"You're such a nice person," she said to me, with almost a sense of resignation. "I like you so much."

I could hear the "but" that was coming.

"Thanks ..." I responded suspiciously.

"It's just that ... well, it's just that ... it makes me so sad...."

I just looked at her, waiting for what was bound to come next.

Finally she blurted out, "It's just that it makes me so sad because you're so nice, but *you're going to go to hell.*"

Once again, I knew I could never be that kind of Christian. The God I believed in was a God of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, who would never abandon or forsake His children. The God I believed in was the *only* one reserved to pass judgment, and I was sure He was not cruel or heartless. Who were these people who thought that only they held the key to the kingdom of God? Where was the love, mercy, and compassion of their God? Why did they always talk about nothing else but sin and condemnation? Didn't they know Jesus embraced the sinner? Where was their trust in God's grace to work in ways above and beyond them? Had they even read that Book they quoted so pedantically?

When I entered college, I acquired some friends who were Catholic and attended church every weekend. In fact, their attendance at church was so important to them that it meant they might not be able to attend a social event or would have to arrive late if there was a conflict. This made an impression on me. One Sunday, I asked to go along with one of them, with no idea that once again my life was about to change.

Upon entering the church, what struck me first was seeing people genuflect before the altar and then kneel in prayer before Mass began. I had never before witnessed this practice, and something about it moved me deeply. Like davening (reciting prayers) at the synagogue, there was heartfelt reverence and humility in this gesture. The concept of humbling oneself before God made sense to me, and though I didn't dare participate, something deep inside me desired it.

When the processional song began, I opened my hymnal to read along. I saw the words, "Yahweh's love will last forever. His faithfulness, to the end of time. Yahweh is a loving God, Yahweh, the faithful one." And I thought to myself, what's a Yahweh? As a

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...Journeys Home Continued...

young Jewish girl who had never learned to read Hebrew, I was unfamiliar with the sacred tetragrammaton. I knew that there was a pronunciation for the name of God that was forbidden to be spoken out loud, but since I could not read Hebrew, I had never known what letters they were. I only knew we used *Adonai*, *Eloheynu*, or *HaShem* to refer to God. Yahweh was a completely foreign, unknown word to me.

My friend looked at me like I was from another planet when I asked in a whisper what the word was. Upon learning it was the name of God, I was confused for a moment. Then the realization hit me that this was the Unspoken Name I had heard about all my life. It was an exciting revelation. (Later on, the Church no longer allowed that Name to be spoken in the liturgy, thus recognizing the Jewish tradition.)

As the Mass continued, I sat there listening to the prayers, astonished at the similarities between this liturgy and Jewish services. I was amazed to hear “Holy, Holy, Holy God,” and recognized it as the *Kadosh*, *Kadosh*, *Kadosh*. When the priest pronounced the offertory blessings over the bread and the wine, I was stunned that they were the same as those said in Hebrew.

But nothing had prepared me for what I heard next. Everyone started to sing the words,

“Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world.”

I had never heard Jesus referred to as the Lamb of God. But a moment later, I made the connection, and the words simply and honestly took my breath away. I was covered with goosebumps, and tears streamed down my face. I think my friend thought I was crazy. The truth was, I had never seen things so clearly. It all finally made sense.

In Exodus, at the first Passover, a lamb was slain, whose blood would save all first-born sons from death and deliver the Hebrew people from bondage. But now, once again at Passover, another Lamb was slain. But this Lamb’s blood would save all of us, of every nation, for all eternity. This paschal sacrifice, the Eucharist (another word unknown to me at the time) was the Passover meal. Jesus had become the Passover Lamb, and our partaking of the bread and wine in this meal was the new and everlasting Covenant. Jesus really was the Messiah, and Catholicism was the true completion of Judaism. Every promise God ever made to the Jewish people was fulfilled through Jesus and the Catholic Church. I realized I had finally come home.

I had found the key to all the questions I had grappled with since I first learned, so many years ago, who Jesus Christ was. The Catholic Faith was unlocking all of those mysteries. And now that I knew where to look for the answers, all I had to do was seek them out.

I began learning everything I could about the Church and its teachings, amazed at how every teaching not only made sense, but fit perfectly into the completion of every prophecy and Hebrew Scripture I read. The deeper I delved, the more amazing it all became. I saw Jesus in God’s promise of fulfillment to the Jewish people in every Old and New Testament verse, from the story of Abraham and Isaac to the sacrificial laws in Leviticus to the apostolic succession, from the suffering servant in Isaiah to the psalms of King David and the Davidic Covenant, to ev-

ery prophet’s words. I saw how we experience the fullness of our faith through the sacraments of the Catholic Church, especially through the Eucharist.

Not only that, I saw how only the Catholic Church continues in the tradition of the Jewish faith. It is through the Oral Tradition that Moses received on Mount Sinai that the Jewish people were able to hand down all the teachings of the faith that were not recorded specifically in the Scriptures. And so, too, the Catholic Church continues in this same manner, through what is called Sacred Tradition. This is how we learn the teachings of the saints and Doctors of the Church. This is where Marian prayer originates.

But all of this only comes alive in the Catholic Church. Protestant faiths rely solely on Scripture the basis for their protests — which argue that such teachings aren’t found in the Bible. But Judaism never claimed to be built solely on the Bible, but rather on *both* the Bible *and* Oral Tradition. So too, the Church, stemming out from its Jewish roots, is built upon holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition. It is the one, true, total completion of the Jewish faith.

In March of 1983, I was baptized into the Catholic Faith, received my first holy Communion and was confirmed in the faith. Some would say that I had converted, but I always considered myself to be completed. To convert implies a complete change-over in belief — the giving up of one set of beliefs to be replaced by another. I never gave up anything, but only expanded my set of beliefs; they were *completed* and fulfilled, and I felt blessed by this realization.

More than thirty years have passed since I entered the Church. I have served as a cantor since 1985, later as a catechist, and a member of the liturgy and worship committees. In 2000, through St. Joseph Communications in California, I became a speaker for the Church and travelled throughout the country sharing the story of my “completion” and talking about the Jewish roots of Catholicism. St. Joseph published my series of audiotapes and distributed them at workshops and conventions, as well as through their catalogue. It was unbelievably humbling to encounter people from as far away as China who had listened to and enjoyed my tapes. ■



BONNIE RAPKIN is the Pastoral Associate at Holy Trinity Church in Kewaskum, Wisconsin. She continues to make presentations locally, which have been approved for catechetical training through the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Bonnie is a cantor and choir director and loves providing music for liturgies. It is her greatest joy to teach others about the Catholic Church, how beautiful it is, and how it is the fulfillment of every promise that God has made.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

Please visit CHNetwork.org/converts to comment on and share this or one of hundreds of other powerful testimonies!

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