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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Unexpected Journey

By Sharon Plascencia

We often think of miracles as a physical demonstration of the supernatural, such as bodily healing, but, personally, I think for a die-hard fundamentalist Protestant to make his way into the Catholic Church is equally miraculous. Thank God for His generous gift of grace!

I am from New Hampshire, born into a faithful Fundamental Baptist family. From my first week in this world, I attended church with my family whenever the doors were open. While my childhood was troubled in many ways, I give thanks to God for the constant exposure to Scripture during those early, formative years of my life. Reading and memorizing Scripture were strongly encouraged — things for which I am very grateful and that I hope to pass on to my children as a wonderful habit to strengthen the Christian in his walk.

When I was twelve years old, I remember standing up in church and pledging before God and the congregation to serve God with my life; however, at the time I didn't know in what capacity. I was soon to get some direction as to “how” when we moved to El Paso, Texas. I was fourteen at the time. I absolutely fell in love with the Hispanic culture, to which I had never been exposed, since I am from the northeastern corner of the United States. Though we only stayed there a short time, my heart had been touched. Even as a teenager, I immersed myself in the language and study of the culture.

When I graduated, I went to what was, perhaps, the most “Fundamentalist” of the Fundamental Baptist colleges, Fairhaven Baptist College in Chesterton, Indiana. I wanted to study to be an

ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and through that means bring the Gospel to the Hispanic people, who in my mind were blinded by the Catholic Church. I studied Spanish and English and obtained my degree as a teacher.

From there, I found a teaching position at a Fundamental Baptist school in northern California. I lived on the premises and completely immersed myself in the life of the school and the church. Then, during the economic crisis of 2008, the school had to close. I prayed for what to do next.

God led me to work as a missionary teacher in Tijuana, Mexico. Once again, I was completely immersed into the life of the church and Christian school. I lived directly on campus, located on the outskirts of Tijuana. It included a church, Christian school, orphanage, and Bible Institute. I look back to this time of my life with extreme fondness and as a formative period in my Christian walk. It was there that I really learned what it meant to completely depend on God's provision by faith.

It was also there where I met my future husband, José Plascencia. He had grown up in a culturally Catholic home but had a dramatic conversion experience when he was nineteen. He had then started attending a Baptist church with his neighbor friend, and out of a desire

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

to serve God full-time, he came to the mission, which is where I met him two years later. He worked there as the director of the Bible Institute. We both lived there and worked 24/7. I am so deeply grateful to God for bringing me all the way from the northeast corner of the United States to the opposite corner and across the border so I could meet this wonderful man, whose sole purpose in life was to follow God, no matter what. Of course, at the time, I had no idea what that would entail!

We got married two years after we met; then we stayed on there at the mission in Tijuana for another year, after which God started moving us in another direction.

We were sent by our Fundamental Baptist church in Tijuana to plant a Hispanic church in downtown San Diego. We started the church plant in the spring of 2011. Starting a church entailed spending a lot of time knocking on doors and passing out tracts. Through the financial support of another church congregation, we were able to rent and meet at the local public school on Sundays. Around the same time, we were expecting our first child. Our home was situated about a block from that public school. We thought this was what we were going to be doing the rest of our lives — right there in downtown San Diego.

In hindsight, I can see that it was there that our journey commenced, though at the time I still had no idea what was coming. My husband has always been an avid reader, and through studying on his own, he began to have questions about the role of God's sovereignty in man's salvation and the significance of "predestination" from the Bible. However, "predestination" and "God's sovereignty" were considered Calvinistic doctrines, not something that Fundamentalists believed. He was on the verge of officially being ordained as a Fundamentalist Baptist pastor and decided he must go to our sending church's pastor

with his questions. Yet he was simply met with "that's just not what we believe" and "you should stop asking questions" as answers. As Calvinistic leaning beliefs were not accepted by our denomination, and José had started adopting many of those beliefs, in the end, after his six years of full-time ministry work with that pastor and three years on my part, we were simply kicked out — privately and by one individual, that pastor.

We continued having services in our house for a couple months, but we felt that it just wasn't right to not have accountability to someone. At the same time, we were already expecting our second child. After praying, and with much sadness, we decided to leave the work in San Diego and move to northern California to be with family and to "regroup" after the terrible blow of being rejected by our sending church. It was as if the very floor underneath us had been ripped out! Where did we belong?

Then began the agonizing time of depression and lostness. Our dreams of planting a church and being totally involved in it for the rest of our lives were dashed. We knew that we didn't belong to the Fundamental Baptist group any more. Our beliefs on various issues simply didn't line up. We were starting to see an emphasis on outward rules and an over-emphasis on tithing and other extra offerings. We didn't believe in the system of dispensationalism, including the so-called "rapture," that was strongly upheld by the Fundamental Baptists. We also didn't believe that the King James Version of the Bible was the only inspired version. And, of course, we were starting to gain interest in the Reformed doctrines of predestination.

How could this happen to us when all we wanted was to serve God? What had we done wrong? We didn't understand because, before, everything had been so certain and so clear — we knew exactly who we were and what we were going to do. Now nothing

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FEATURED RESOURCES



How Are We Saved? CD

— By Marcus Grodi

In this insightful talk, former Presbyterian pastor Marcus Grodi delves deeply into Old Testament Judaism and the fulfillment of salvation in Christ Jesus to answer the question, "How are we saved?"

\$35

Receive a *How Are We Saved?* CD for a donation of \$35.



My Journey to the Land of More — By Leona Choy

After a lifetime of evangelical missionary work in China, Leona Choy never thought she would ever consider, let alone convert, to Catholicism. In *My Journey to the Land of MORE*, Leona Choy chronicles her surprise faith paradigm shift into the joyous fullness of biblical faith in the Catholic Church. At the age of 80, she faced abandoning her lifelong reputation in evangelical leadership, the potential misunderstanding of family, friends, and coworkers, and losing readers of the books she wrote from a Protestant perspective. Leona counted the cost and courageously took the risks rather than reject the truth she believed God showed her in the Catholic Church.

\$50

Receive *My Journey to the Land of MORE* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *How Are We Saved?* CD and *My Journey to the Land of MORE* for a donation of \$75.

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Called To Help Them Home

By Marcus Grodi

Twenty-five years ago, by the mercy of God's grace, my wife, Marilyn, and I left our life-long pilgrimage as Protestants, and my work as a Presbyterian pastor, to *come home* to the Catholic Church. While on our "journey home," we met many other non-Catholic clergy and laity who were either cautiously exploring Catholicism or had already come home and were still trying to find their place in the Church. Out of this came the inspiration for the Coming Home Network International.



During these past twenty-five years, I've had the undeserved privilege of interviewing nearly a thousand converts / reverts to the Catholic Church, and we have published hundreds of conversion stories in our newsletter, books, and on our website. I've often been asked what are the most common reasons that non-Catholic Christians become Catholic — or why they should — and my staff and I could make a long list, with authority, truth, and beauty being at the top. But truly, the real reason, and the one most common and important thread that runs through all the conversions I have ever heard or read, is the mysterious work of grace.

The Catechism, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 14, states:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it (846).

It seems to me that the operative word in this very bold claim is "knowing." There are many scriptural, apologetic, historical, theological, philosophical, and experiential reasons to become Catholic, but none of these can bring a person home to the Church unless the gift of grace has first opened that person's heart and mind. If this has truly happened, it doesn't (or at least shouldn't) make the recipient arrogant about their discovery or their "intellectual prowess," but rather humbly grateful. And also, once this has happened, it doesn't guarantee that the person will become a Catholic or always remain one, for my staff and I know from experience that a response to grace is always an invitation to the spiritual battle.

Unfortunately, during this challenging time of scandal in the Church, these apologetic arguments seem even less convincing, even offensive, to many outside the Church and even for many inside the Church! But as I've written elsewhere (chnetwork.org/2018/08/16/will-you-also-go-away), the reason my staff and I are committed to our work is that our hearts have been so changed by the mercy of God's grace that our only answer remains that of St. Peter, "To whom shall we go?" (Jn 6:68).

The context of this statement from St. John's Gospel is very significant. In response to the rejection of His "hard saying" concerning the eating of His Body and drinking of His Blood, Our Lord said "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn 6:65). In other words, by the inner working of grace. "After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (Jn 6:66). For whatever reason, most were either not given the grace to believe, or they freely resisted the grace and rejected Christ. But those few who responded freely to this grace — the Twelve, led by Simon Peter, who would become the foundation of the Church — confessed to our Lord: "You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69).

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By grace they had come to “know,” and, therefore, no matter how hard things got, they would not abandon Christ. Yet, still, even with the grace and the knowledge, we are always free to turn away, as one in that small group eventually did — surrendering to the temptations of the devil, as apparently some in our present hierarchy have done (“Put not your trust in princes.” Ps 146:3f).

Some might argue that this was all about coming to the knowledge of Jesus as Christ and Lord, but when St. Paul was persecuting the Church, Jesus, in one of the most miraculous interventions in the history of the world, said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). By grace, my staff and I have come to believe and *know* that the Catholic Church is not only the Church established by Christ in His Apostles, but the very

Body of Christ. Just as Our Lord and St. Paul both warned that a husband must not leave his wife regardless of how unacceptable she might become, neither can we leave His Body. This is why the Coming Home Network International exists: to help non-Catholic Christians discover the beauty of the Church and come home, and to help Catholics stay safely home.

There were lots of lame people around that pool in Bethesda (Jn 5:1f), but Jesus only healed one. Why? I don’t know.

I don’t know why Jesus opened my heart to Him when I was a 21-year-old stubborn, fallen-away-Lutheran, scientific materialist, but by grace He did.

And I don’t know why He opened my heart to His Church when I was a 40-year-old “successful” Presbyterian pastor, but by grace He did.

Why doesn’t He open the hearts of more Protestants to the Catholic Church? Our data shows that less than 1% of American Protestant clergy and laity show any interest in becoming

Catholic. Why not more? The scandal? We have continued to receive a steady stream of inquirers through both the 2002 and the present scandal. Our ministry continues to receive 2-5 new contacts every week from non-Catholic Christian clergy and laity wanting to learn more about the Catholic Church. But the knowledge of “why” more Protestants aren’t drawn towards the Catholic Church is above my pay-grade.

My staff and I recognize that our responsibility is only to

follow our Lord Jesus Christ; to trust Him; to be grateful that by grace He has brought us home to His Church; to be the best husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, friends, and witnesses we can be by grace; and whenever possible — to anyone who comes to us with questions about the Faith — to give clear and charitable reasons “for the hope that is in” us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15f). ■

“This is why the Coming Home Network International exists: to help non-Catholic Christians discover the beauty of the Church and come home, and to help Catholics stay safely home.”

ONLINE COMMUNITY

We have a great new way for converts and journeyers to connect online! Accessible through an internet browser or mobile device via the MightyNetworks iOS/Android app, CHN’s new Online Community is now the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with other converts as well as CHN staff for fellowship on the journey home.

Members can share their stories, ask or answers questions about the Faith, subscribe to new stories and resources, participate in CHNetwork webinars and other online events, and more. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.



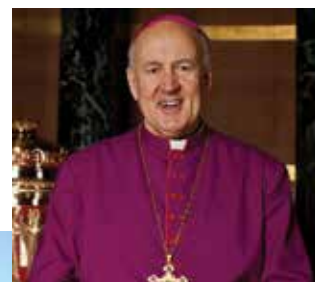
COMING HOME NETWORK PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY

Exciting news! Our very first CHNetwork "Deep in History" pilgrimage will take place Sept 23 - Oct 4, 2019. We invite you to travel to Italy with Marcus Grodi, Ken Hensley, and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson to learn about "The History of the Catholic Church in Rome."

While focused in and around the Eternal City, the trip will also include a few days enjoying the beauty of Assisi, with excursions to Siena and Orvieto as well.

Please email Ken Hensley at kenh@chnetwork.org for a full itinerary, pricing, and all other details.

We hope to see you on the trip!



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.



CHNetwork

P.O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH
43702-8290



740-450-1175



info@chnetwork.org



The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

READ. PRAY. GIVE IT AWAY.



PLEASE CONSIDER
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LOVED ONE WHO
MIGHT BE INTERESTED
IN THE CATHOLIC
CHURCH!

TAX LETTER

If you need a record of your 2018 contributions for tax purposes, please contact **Janna Pitcock**:

janna@chnetwork.org
740-450-1175 ext 102



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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: Sunday 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

February 4

Dr. David Anders and Ken Hensley*
(Deep in History Roundtable)

February 11

Don Smith* (Former non-denominational
minister)

February 18

Chris Padgett* (Former Baptist,
Assemblies of God, and Nazarene)

February 25

Mark McNeil* (Former Assemblies of God
and United Pentecostal)

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

CHNetwork Staff update Praise God together with us for an ordained minister with a long background in the Unitarian Universalist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Lutheran Church. She is drawn to the truth and beauty of the Catholic Faith. Her CHNetwork staff caregiver says that she is one of the best students he has ever seen. She's been doing nothing but reading, watching lectures online, watching EWTN, and is now meeting with a priest who is very happy to help her.

From Julie, a recent convert "Thank you so much for your email. I was happy to hear from you. Knowing what I know now about the Catholic Faith, I would have made the move 25 years ago and would have encouraged my family to make the move with me. However, the journey to the Catholic Church was not in vain. The journey showed me the faultiness of Protestantism and the indispensable need of a living, authoritative interpreter of Scripture and an authoritative voice that only the Magisterium provides. I

would not have seen this outside of the Catholic Church, so for that reason, the journey showed me this undeniable truth. The lack of authority couldn't be more apparent than it is in Anglicanism, where my family came from. The range of theological and moral relativism left many parishioners to parent themselves, as the same is true in all of Protestantism combined. One beautiful stint of time was the time we spent in the Baptist church. This time taught me strict adherence to the authoritative voice of Biblical morality. The downfall of this and *sola Scriptura* is there is no authority to hold up and interpret what the Bible actually says, so there can be all kinds of theological and moral misinterpretations. If liberal pastors creep into any Protestant church, they can change their own interpretation of the Bible to suit their fancy for any matter of faith and morals. This is not the case, and never will be the case, in the Catholic Church; although some are trying to make major changes, they can't. Anyway, these are my experiences and observations. I couldn't be happier about coming home

to the Catholic Faith. I am praying that the rest of my family does as well. Thank you for checking in!"

From Sherry, a former Methodist "We are doing well! We haven't missed Mass in three years. When we converted, we gained so much from learning to pray the Rosary and novenas to the saints, along with love of the Eucharist. We love our new friends and pray to make a real difference in the lives of our family and friends and those in need. Thank you and the Coming Home Network for the great work you do!"

From Drew, on the journey "Italy was great. The highlight for me was Assisi and the Basilica of St Francis, where I attended an English Mass in the lower Basilica. It's the most beautiful church we visited in Italy, and we visited many ... I've also started reading and learning more about the Church Fathers — fascinating and inspiring. I'm wishing I'd made this move earlier in my life, but I have no doubts that this is the right thing to do." ■

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Could you give \$25 a month or more to help support the CHNetwork as we help men and women come home to the Catholic Church?

The 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
PO Box 8290

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 James, a Protestant minister, that the Holy Spirit would soften his wife's heart toward the Catholic Faith.

■ For Ben, a Christian & Missionary Alliance missionary, that he and his wife may find an open door to the Catholic Church.

■ For Brandon, a Presbyterian seminarian, that, through the guidance and grace of Jesus, he may successfully work through his doctrinal difficulties with the Catholic Faith.

■ For a Church of Christ lay minister in Alabama, that through his experience of RCIA he may draw ever closer to Jesus and His holy Church.

■ For a Reformed Church in America minister, that the love of the Lord Jesus may enable him to overcome his family's opposition to his journey to the Catholic Church.

■ For a United Church of Christ pastor who has been studying the Catholic Faith and meeting with a local priest, that she will be able to embrace the teachings of the Church and come into full communion very soon.

■ For Paul, a Pentecostal minister, that as he and his family draw closer to Jesus their hunger for Him in the Eucharist would also grow.

■ For Emmanuel, a Lutheran seminarian, that he may complete his journey to full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For a Quaker missionary, that she and her husband may find a home in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

■ For Paul, a Baptist minister in England, that the Holy Spirit may guide his every step in his journey to the Catholic Faith.

Laity

■ For Maureen who is reading and studying but feels like she is struggling with her faith journey, that she not be disheartened or give up.

■ For Marie, who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for a long time and has been attending Catholic Mass, that she will know how to move forward with her journey.

■ For an Evangelical who wants to become Catholic but will have to make this decision in a very difficult environment, where his wife, in-laws, current pastor, and friends will also oppose him, that he will have the grace to make this decision and then defend it in love.

■ For Simon's wife to be more open to his desire to be Catholic.

■ For a former non-denominational Christian, that her very Protestant family come to understand her conversion and support her Catholic Faith.

■ For Beth who is having a lot of her questions about Catholicism answered, that she have the courage to meet with a priest to discuss her lingering concerns and discern how best to move forward with her journey.

■ For Judith to have clarity and peace as to how to proceed with her interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For Greg as he learns more about Catholic doctrines and comes to a deeper appreciation for the Eucharist and Confession.

■ For Cindy who is going through RCIA, that her loved ones be understanding and accepting of her desire to be Catholic.

■ For Becky who is interested in the Catholic Church but unsure how best to proceed with her journey on account of her husband not understanding her desire to be Catholic.



■ For Leslie who is reading and learning about the Catholic Church, that the Holy Spirit guide her heart and mind.

■ For Amber who is going through a difficult time and struggles knowing how to continue with her journey, that Jesus be close to her during this difficult time.

■ For a Baptist in California who says she is no longer interested in the Catholic Church on account of being poorly treated by a priest and local parish.

■ For Rachael, that she will be able to overcome the struggles she has with the Catholic Faith.

■ For Liz who desires to draw closer to our Lord Jesus in the Eucharist though she is not able to receive Him sacramentally yet.

■ For a young woman in Wisconsin, that her parents come to accept her journey and she have the courage to do what God is calling her towards even in the face of significant crosses.

■ For Sheila, a Baptist, who is diligently studying about the Church but feels that she doesn't agree with everything at this point, that the Holy Spirit guide her heart and mind.

■ For a Presbyterian in the south who is very drawn to the Catholic Church but is discerning how best to navigate her journey and her husband's hesitancy.

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

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

seemed certain. We didn’t know where we belonged. Of course, God was in control all along, and He was leading us in a certain direction, but at that stage of our journey, we really felt lost, as if we were simply wandering.

We attended our family’s church in northern California for the next two years, which was officially a Fundamental Baptist church but not as radical as the branch to which we had belonged in Mexico. During those two years, we focused on our new and growing family and really weren’t heavily involved in church activities. For me, that was a really difficult adjustment! The previous ten years of my life had been spent living on church grounds and pouring myself into church work. I even felt like I just wasn’t serving God as I should. It wasn’t until much later into our journey that I learned of the Catholic teaching that marriage was a vocation and family life a beautiful way to grow in holiness.

While we stayed in our family church, we began looking to see where we might belong — what church fit in with our beliefs. We leaned toward Reformed Baptist teachings; however, I can still remember my husband putting on debates between differing Protestant groups and realizing that both sides had verses from the Bible to support their arguments. Listening to those debates really left me even more confused. How could two different Protestant groups (Calvinist and Arminian, for example) present their arguments and both of them have verses to seemingly support their side? Yet, the sides disagreed.

Then one day, Catholicism made a tiny blip on the radar. We came across the conversion testimony of Eduardo Verástegui on the EWTN program *Nuestra Fe en Vivo*. I’m not even sure how that video showed up on YouTube. We watched it spellbound! Eduardo recounted his story of how he had been totally dedicated to the sinful life of a Hollywood actor, which left him feeling completely empty. His English teacher, who happened to be a faithful Catholic, didn’t pull any punches. He told him of his need to turn his life around. By God’s grace, he did exactly that. There was no doubt in my mind that he had had a genuine conversion — but he became Catholic! How could that be possible? I shrugged it off as a single-case scenario and thought, *Well, I suppose there are a few Catholics out there who are real Christians.*

Not long afterwards, my husband rediscovered *The Journey Home* programs on YouTube. He recognized them, having seen a few when he was a teenager on the TV programs locally dubbed in Spanish in Tijuana. Watching the conversion stories was, to me, like opening the door to a whole world I didn’t even know existed. When I first started watching them, I have to be honest and say that I thought, *Those Catholics are ridiculous! They have to put on conversion stories to try to persuade people to become Catholic!*

But something did happen from watching those first conversion stories. It put an intense, burning desire in us both to prove that the Catholic Church was wrong! And by intense, I mean it was pretty much the only thing that occupied our thoughts for several months. In the beginning, I thought it was going to be a

piece of cake to prove the Catholics wrong. In my mind, Catholics didn’t believe the Bible, and it was quite possible the Pope was the Antichrist. My husband would put on debates between Protestants and Catholics. I would rarely sit down and watch them; however, I would still be listening to them as I worked about the house. I thought the Catholic side wouldn’t even have a case and was unpleasantly surprised to find that, as much as I wanted the Protestant to win, often the Catholic arguments were more convincing.

One by one, and often without my even realizing it, my objections fell. I had never in my life entered a Catholic church. I had never had any Catholic friends, so all I really knew of the Catholic Church is what I had been taught in my Fundamentalist Baptist upbringing. Needless to say, I had several misconceptions about Catholic beliefs — things I thought Catholics believed but that they actually don’t believe.

Perhaps the greatest misconception was that Catholics believe in salvation by works. The *Catechism* states, “Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993). I came to realize that “salvation by works” was a misleading and far too simplistic way of explaining the Catholic belief. Catholics believe that salvation can only be given through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and that God gives you grace to live out your Christian life. In my upbringing, I had been taught that you pray to ask Jesus into your heart, and that was it — you were saved forever. But I began to realize that such a teaching could only be supported by taking some verses out of context, rather than considering the New Testament as a whole. Under that premise, I couldn’t explain passages like Philippians 2:12, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” or James chapter 2, particularly verse 24, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” I had never noticed that verse before! Without my realization, my paradigm began to shift ever so slowly. Many things that I had been taught were true, but there was also another facet to be added to make them more complete, more rich! I found that to be true about numerous things. Salvation was not only given by an initial gift of grace, as I already believed, but it was also a continuing process made possible by God’s grace. Jesus’ teachings are filled with this concept (Matthew 10:22, 24:13; Mark 13:13) As the *Catechism* states in paragraph 1999, “Man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him.” I was amazed how the Catholic teaching on salvation made room for the Bible passages I had been uncomfortable trying to explain before. Everything just fit together!

The second barrier to fall was that of the Eucharist. This perhaps was the easiest one for me and the one that most opened me up to the idea that the Catholic Church just might be onto something. The “Lord’s Supper,” as I used to refer to it, had never been a topic of study for me. As soon as I began to study it, I was amazed at how clearly it was presented in Scripture. I looked

to see where it was described as “merely a symbol” and simply couldn’t find it! However, there were two passages that really struck me as purely “Catholic.” The first was John 6, particularly verses 51–56, where at the end, it states, “For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” His followers were revolted at the thought of “eating his flesh” and turned from following Jesus. Jesus never reprimanded them for taking Him literally, as He had in other instances — because He *was* speaking literally! The other passage was actually a passage I had heard hundreds of times but hadn’t meditated upon very deeply, 1 Corinthians 11:27–30, which includes, “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” How could a “symbol” cause such severe consequences? It did seem logical, however, that a physical thing such as the Real Presence could cause a physical consequence such as sickness or death when received incorrectly.

The drop that made the cup overflow came when I was introduced by my husband to what the earliest Christians from the very first century after Christ had to say about the Eucharist: “They have no regard for charity, none for the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, none for the man in prison, the hungry or the thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His graciousness, raised from the dead” (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, paragraph 6, circa AD 80–110). How Catholic does that entire quote from the very first century sound! I was blown away by reading these early Christians and learning that it was possible to experience the Christian life just as they described in their writing — not in my Baptist church, as I had always imagined we were closest to the New Testament Christians, but in the Catholic Church! Thus, one by one, my objections vanished.

As I began understanding Catholic teachings, the Bible, which I had read so many times and from which I had memorized so many passages, changed from two dimensional (which was nice) to three dimensional (which was amazing!). The continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and how Catholic teaching brings it all together, made the Bible so new and fresh to me!

In a last-ditch effort to remain Baptist, we moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where my husband entered the Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary to better prepare him to become a pastor. There, certainly, he would learn from the best minds, and all doubts would be resolved. But oh, the irony! I can envision God looking down from heaven grinning. In an effort to escape Catholicism, and without our being aware of it, we had run right into the heart of a very rich Catholic heritage. Louisville has a lot of Catholics, beautiful, old Catholic churches, and a deep Catholic history! Seminary had the opposite effect from what my husband had imagined. He saw how the professors frequently had differing opinions on various topics and an incomplete understanding of Catholicism and were often unable to answer his questions.

I have to admit, my biggest struggle was not understanding all the intellectual arguments to support the Catholic Faith; I actually was intellectually persuaded long before I became Catholic. There were two walls that were very difficult for me to overcome. The first was moving all of that “head” understanding to the heart. The second very difficult wall was my feeling of a loss of identity.

Having already been persuaded intellectually, I decided to enter

RCIA (St. Martin of Tours parish, Louisville, KY) in September 2016, although not necessarily with the end of becoming Catholic in mind. At that point, my husband was already far ahead of me, ready to return to the Catholicism of his youth. He only needed to retrieve his Confirmation certificate and receive the Sacrament of Penance to be returned to full communion since he had already received the sacraments of initiation as a child. Even though he was ready, he did wait for me a bit longer so that he could return to full communion close to the time that I was received into the Church.

Even though I had entered RCIA, I was still not ready. I vividly remember thinking, *How do I get my heart to grasp all that I’ve understood in my head?* I felt frustrated! A month later, we went on a Coming Home Network retreat in Biddeford, Maine. That was really my first encounter with Catholics. It was wonderful to meet Catholics who were dedicated to their faith. While I was still struggling with a lot of things during that time, I can look back on that week as being really influential in my journey.

Having never been in a Catholic atmosphere before, with Mass every day and adoration every evening, I was overwhelmed. I remember even expressing out loud, “I just want to sing ‘Victory in Jesus.’” I was starting to get that feeling of a loss of identity. I think what struck me most from that retreat was listening to the testimonies of each person and how they came to the Church. Almost everybody shared their heartbreak of a loss of family

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...Journeys Home Continued...

and friends, many even weeping. But everyone, without exception, said they wouldn't change it for anything in the world! I determined I had to be one hundred percent sure that this was the right thing to do because it was certain that I would also experience the heartbreak of loss of relationships, and it had to be justified. I looked around at all the faces in the retreat and deeply desired to have in my heart the love for the Catholic Church that they had. I just didn't know how to get it!

There was one unexpected help in this great difficulty: praying the Rosary. When I got home, I decided to try the Rosary. The first time I prayed it, I was skeptical. I thought, *To say the same thing fifty times is ridiculous*. I must say that, due to my attitude, I got nothing out of it. I contacted a friend from the retreat and asked for advice. She sent me a link to a YouTube page that included videos depicting the five mysteries, meant to be played while praying the decade. I tried it again. This time, the whole thing started working for me. The video kept my mind meditating on each mystery as I prayed the decades. Wow, what an experience! I couldn't even get through the Rosary without crying. Meditating on the Mysteries allowed me to see the Gospel in a profound light I hadn't really considered before. As a Baptist, I didn't really know the value of meditative prayer ... what a joyous discovery! In this way, I began to understand Catholicism with my heart, as I had so much desired!

The second wall, equally difficult to overcome, was the loss of identity. I had been a Fundamental Baptist all my life. I went to Bible college. I had lived on church property for many years, being completely involved seven days a week. Being a Baptist wasn't just a part of my life; it *was* my life; it was who I was! What was I going to do as a Catholic? So many things were strange and different. I knew only a handful of Catholics. This wall was not quickly resolved. It requires a lot of patience to wait for the timing of finding your new identity as a Catholic. In fact, I have found a specific purpose, my true identity as a Catholic, only recently.

I do have to say, however, that something did help me out significantly. This was perhaps the last thing that really persuaded me that Catholicism was where I ought to be: reading and learning about the lives of the saints. For me, the saints were a whole new thing. I didn't know anything about them. When I began reading books and watching documentaries on the lives of various saints, I was moved to the core. So many people, throughout all the centuries of Christianity, dedicated their entire lives to God, some in service to others and some giving up their lives

as martyrs. These Catholic saints produced rich and profound writings only possible through a close walk with God. It gave me a deep desire to do the same in some way. As a Catholic, I could go back to any century and find other Catholics, saints who lived out their faith. That was something I could never have done as a Fundamentalist.

How could a Church teaching a "wrong doctrine" produce such profound faith and charity as seen in the saints? That was it! I was getting close to the end of RCIA before I became completely convinced that the Catholic Church was where I needed to be. The testimony of the saints was the last thing that persuaded me.

José made his way back into full communion a few weeks before I entered the Church at the Easter Vigil, 2017. A couple of months later, our two daughters were baptized. Now I can finally say, along with those converts I met at the retreat, that, yes, there is the pain of a loss of friends and family, the indifference, the distancing, but I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I have found that "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:46) in the richness of the Catholic Faith!

We have now moved back to Tijuana. Our journey moved us not only spiritually, but also physically. God literally moved us all over the country to find His truth and in the end brought us back to the exact city where we started. He has now given us a mission. One of the reasons why we were able to make our journey was due to the abundant resources for converts in English; however, these resources are mostly not available in Spanish. There are not many Spanish-speaking apologists. We have started working towards an apologetic apostolate in Spanish to not only teach the uncatechized Catholics, of which there are many, but also to reach out to ex-Catholics who have become Protestants. Our goal is to be available to answer questions and to present the truth of Catholicism via social media and to go out and evangelize here in our community. My husband named it "La Fe de la Iglesia" (teaching and defending "The Faith of the Church"). We have started a YouTube channel and Facebook page named *La Fe de la Iglesia*, as well as a website, catolicismo.tv. We have included content such as conversion stories, teachings, questions and answers, and have an emphasis on personally corresponding with people who are searching for truth. We humbly ask for your prayers to be used by God to spread the beauty of the Catholic Faith in Spanish. ■



SHARON and her husband, José, currently live in the San Diego/Tijuana area with their two children. They are serving in the catechism department of their local parish in San Diego. Their apostolate, *La Fe de la Iglesia*, is a full-time ministry specifically designed to help Spanish-speaking converts along their journey.

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