



March 2019 CHNewsletter

<i>"An Ordinary Pilgrim on a Journey Home"</i> By Mike Sollom	1
Featured Resources	2
<i>"The Role of the Cross in Christian Suffering"</i> By Mary Clare Pieczynski	3
Online Community	4

THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



An Ordinary Pilgrim on a Journey Home

By Mike Sollom

We are pilgrims progressing from time to eternity,
and our goal is the Father himself.

He constantly calls us beyond what is familiar and comfortable to new paths of faith and trust.

– Homily of John Paul II | Canberra, Australia, November 24, 1986

My pilgrim's journey is not a story I would have chosen. The story I would like to tell is of a sure and steady ascent filled with confidence and triumph. The story I have lived has been more like a convoluted descent filled with doubt and loss.

Over the course of my journey, nearly everything I thought I understood about mercy, grace, faith, hope, and even about love fell away, until there was nothing left but Christ. And then Christ brought me home.

Grateful for Good Roots

I was born in 1954 and raised in the farmlands of northern Minnesota. My father died of cancer before I knew him. My mom, sister, and I did the best we could, shuffling back and forth from one relative to another. It was a hard life for a single mom back in the 50s. When I turned nine, Mom married a man ten years her junior. I've known siblings with more years between them than my new dad and I had. We got off to a rocky start, but he was a good man, and we eventually figured it out.

At the ripe old age of fifteen, I fell in love with my high school sweetheart. We married in 1973. LuAnn and I have four children.

I've been a Christian since my earliest recollections. My family was faithful to the Evangelical Free Church, a denomination with a conservative culture and fundamentalist tradition. I'm grateful for good

roots and for the family in which I was raised. I was taught to revere the Scriptures and to treasure my relationship with Jesus above all else.

My family and friends were all Protestants, but I knew very little about what Protestantism meant. I knew nothing about Catholicism.

We had neighbors who were Catholic, but we never associated with them. We distrusted Catholics and despised what they believed, even though none of us knew what they believed. My conservative tradition prohibited alcohol, cigarettes, movies, cards, dances, and rock 'n roll music. All I knew about the Catholics in our town was they were allowed to do those forbidden things. When I first heard the term "Catholic guilt," I was confused. Why would they feel guilty when they got to do all the bad stuff?

The First Signs of Our Journey

LuAnn and I have walked hand in hand on our journey. We have never — not even once — been out of step with each other. Our mutual quest has been a great gift from our Heavenly Father.

Early in our marriage, LuAnn and I spent a year in Venezuela, working with Evangelical Free Church missionaries. It was in Venezuela where I first entered a Catholic church. Our fellow missionaries took us to a nearby cathedral as tourists, but it became apparent that the visit was intended

Continued on page 2 ➤

Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

as a criticism of Catholicism and a justification of our “mission.” I remember the cathedral only as one of the most incredible places I had ever seen. Somewhere, between what our friends were hoping to teach us and what we were experiencing, there was a disconnect. Something was missing between what they were saying and what we were seeing.

Upon returning to the States in 1978, we moved to California, where I earned a degree from Biola University. Following graduation, I served as interim Director of College Ministries at the Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California under Chuck Swindoll. In 1981, LuAnn gave birth to our first child, James. Soon afterwards, I secured a position as program director and resident musician at Mount Hermon, a Christian conference center near the beaches of Santa Cruz, California.

Though Mount Hermon had Presbyterian roots, it had become non-denominational. We were ecumenical, but that ecumenism was narrow, restricted to Protestantism. Yet it was there where the signs of LuAnn’s and my journey to the Catholic Church became apparent.

Shortly after I began at Mount Hermon, I purchased John Michael Talbot’s album, “Come to the Quiet.” The depth and the serenity of those recordings inspired me to read *Troubadour for the Lord*, the story of his conversion to Christ and to the Catholic Church. A few years later, knowing my interest in John Michael Talbot and his Catholicism, a friend gave me another conversion story, *Evangelical Is Not Enough*, by Thomas Howard.

There it was. Someone finally put words to what I was feeling. In spite of my lifelong devotion to God, I had always felt my Evangelical perspective was *not enough*. I knew there had to be *more*.

On the inside cover of *Evangelical Is Not Enough*, I wrote, “For the part of my heart that always knew something was missing.”

Finding Solid Ground

I became friends with a man who attended an Antiochian Orthodox Church just down the road from Mount Hermon. I began

going with him to morning prayers. After prayers we’d go for coffee, where I bombarded him with questions about the incense, the water, the statues, the icons, the altar, the sacraments. I asked questions like, “How exactly do I make the sign of the cross, and why would I do that?” Those were inspiring days. There was definitely *more*.

Mount Hermon had a small chapel — cozy, quiet and, most of the time, locked. I obtained a key and began visiting the chapel in the early mornings. I would lock the door behind me and practice “being Catholic.” I would cross myself, raise my hands, kneel, lie face down on the old wooden floor, and do something I’d never done before: recite prayers other people had written.

Behind closed doors, I was trying out all the practical and tangible “stuff” I was learning about Catholic worship and devotion. I didn’t know what I was doing, but I liked it. There was something “right” about it.

The prayers, coffee, and conversations with my friend didn’t lead me to the Orthodox Church. They did, however, introduce me to the historical Church. Before that friendship, I knew nothing about early Church history, the Church Fathers, the first martyrs, or the origins of the great Christian doctrines, not to mention the true source of sacred Scripture. My earlier, fundamentalist view of history extended back only a few hundred years.

With a longer view and a deeper understanding of history, I realized Christ had founded the Church — His Church, the Church which became known as the Catholic Church — in AD 33. A group of Scandinavian immigrants had founded my church, the Evangelical Free Church, in 1950.

Discovering the truth about the historical Church began to change the way I thought about *all* churches and *all* truth. I was finding ancient and solid ground upon which to stand and base my faith.

Though we had no thought of becoming Catholic, LuAnn and I had both become discontent with being Protestant.

Continued on page 5 ➡

FEATURED RESOURCES



The Mystery of Redemptive Suffering CD — Jeff Cavins

In this insightful talk, Jeff Cavins delves into the mystery of redemptive suffering. He discusses from a Catholic perspective how suffering can be meaningful when united to the cross of Jesus.



The Church: Mystery, Sacrament, and Community — Pope St. John Paul II

Newly brought back to the English language by the CHNetwork, *The Church – Mystery, Sacrament, and Community* presents John Paul II’s Wednesday audiences that address the Church and her place in salvation history. John Paul gives remarkable insights into a wide range of topics such as the unity of the Church, the role of the papacy and ordained clergy, how the laity build up and spread the Kingdom, and the Church’s dedication to ecumenism and unity among Christians. The scope and depth of Pope Saint John Paul II’s discussion on the Church is a treasure for its readers.

\$35

Receive *The Mystery of Redemptive Suffering* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

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2

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“The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2015

The Role of the Cross in Christian Suffering

By Mary Clare Pieczynski | Publications & Pastoral Care Coordinator

Lent begins this month, giving us the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the tremendous love of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us on the cross. Catholics view suffering in a way unlike many other Christians. Most non-Catholic Christians don't see the need for or value in suffering. In this article, I'd like to reflect a little on the role of suffering in the Christian life and its value when united with the cross of Jesus.



As our conversion story by Mike Sollom this month shows, sometimes crosses can come unexpectedly and not in the way we would like. Illness, unemployment, loneliness, underemployment, loved ones who lose their faith — these are all part of the human experience. Through these sufferings, though, we believe that God can do a tremendous work in our lives, if we but let Him.

Sin, suffering, and death are almost as old as the human story. From nearly the beginning of time, man has stood in need of redemption. The fall of Adam and Eve dealt a grievous blow to our human nature and wounded it — but didn't destroy or completely disfigure it. On account of this original sin, sin and death became a part of our world, and we were unable to enter heaven. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that because of the fall, “Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice.”¹ Even though sin and death entered the world through original sin, God, in His grace and mercy, promised a Redeemer. Ultimately, the beauty of the Christian story is that Jesus on the cross would fulfill that promise and reconcile man with God.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, man is brought back into friendship with His Creator and is redeemed. By having a spotless human nature and dying upon the cross, Jesus took humanity's fallen nature and raised it up to something even greater.² It doesn't, however, end there. Lent is an appropriate time to reflect on how we are called to willingly embrace our own crosses as Jesus embraced His.

How do we even understand suffering though? Jesus' death on the cross provides meaning to suffering. Jesus helps Christians understand suffering because He “did not come to suppress suffering all at once, nor to explain it, nor to justify it. He came to assume it and to transform it.”³ We can only understand the mean-

ing of suffering by recognizing the supreme love of God, who, for us, “gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁴ For John Paul II, this Scripture passage introduces Christians “into the very heart of God's salvific work ... Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering ... God gives his Son to the world to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering.”⁵ By Jesus' death upon the cross, He transformed suffering from something previously associated with evil into the means for man's salvation.

Why is suffering still necessary though? Didn't Jesus die on the cross to take away pain and suffering? Well, not exactly. We still live in a fallen world (thank you, Adam and Eve!) and still experience the effects thereof — which include sin and suffering. But, Jesus allows us to assist in a mysterious way in the redemption that He procured by His cross. St. Paul reminds us that suffering isn't optional: “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.”⁶ Also, as John Paul II explains, “In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed.”⁷ Therefore, every Christian “is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished ... In bringing about our Redemption through suffering, Christ has also elevated human suffering. That means that each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.”⁸ Because of the one sacrifice of Calvary, we who are united to Jesus in Baptism can unite our sufferings with His sacrifice on the cross to be an acceptable offering to the Father.

How are we able to do that? Why does our suffering have meaning? It's because we are incorporated

Continued on page 4 ➡

1 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 417.

2 *Ibid*, paragraph 412.

3 Louis Evelyn. *Suffering*. Translated by Marie-Claude Thompson. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 69.

4 John 3:16.

5 John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, paragraph 14.

6 Col 1:24.

7 *Salvifici Doloris*, paragraph 19.

8 *Ibid*.

into Christ through Baptism and thus receive a share in His ministry. Through Baptism we are made part of Christ’s Body.⁹ St. Paul writes that those “who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death.”¹⁰ We are re-created by means of Baptism, which is a kind of participation in the death of Jesus upon the cross.¹¹ So we the baptized are called to transform our lives into images of Jesus crucified.

The cross also is significant and integral to the Christian life because as Christians we are called to imitate Jesus. Part of that imitation involves sharing in His cross. The suffering of the cross is the ultimate model for the Christian to imitate to draw closer to God through His grace because the cross is the prototype of how to love. Jesus suffered and carried His cross and ultimately laid down His life on it. So when difficulties and trials draw near, we can respond to them not out of fear but with a certain kind of love since we are being given the opportunity to imitate our Savior, Jesus. St. Peter reminds us that “because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”¹² Jesus commands His followers, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”¹³ In imitating the suffering of the cross, Christians unite themselves with Jesus Christ. Though it’s often not easy, and even heroic, we should try to accept suffering out of love for God, following Jesus’ example shown through the words He said right before the crucifixion: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”¹⁴ The cross has given us a beautiful reason to embrace suffering and has made it sacred since “it confers upon those whom it rends the most intimate resemblance to the sorrowful Son whose cross saves the world ... a tortured heart committed to the Father is the most living image of the Redeemer.”¹⁵ An authentic Christian thus should accept suffering with love since it is a beautiful gift from God that allows us to be transformed into more exact images of the Savior.

9 1 Cor 12:13.

10 Rom 6:3.

11 E. L. Kendel. *A Living Sacrifice A Study of Reparation* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1960), p 57.

12 1 Peter 2:21.

13 Mark 8:34.

14 John 14:31.

15 Louis Evelyn. *Suffering*, p. 71.

How then should we approach suffering? Because we should show love for God out of willing acceptance of suffering, a certain kind of joy should accompany affliction. About to suffer on the cross, Jesus spoke of His joy that He wished to share with His followers: “that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”¹⁶ Furthermore, St. Paul writes that he glories in nothing “except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”¹⁷ St. Peter says something similar in reminding us to “rejoice in so far as you share in Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”¹⁸ John Paul II stresses, “Joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering.”¹⁹ Another pope, Pius XII, writes that we “glory in a thorn-crowned Head ... [it] is a striking proof that the greatest joy and exaltation are born only of suffering, and hence that we should rejoice if we partake of the sufferings of Christ, that when His glory shall be revealed we may also be glad with exceeding joy.”²⁰ Vatican II also reminded us of the importance of this mystery when the Council Fathers wrote, “On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, tracing in trial and in oppression the paths He trod, we are made one with His sufferings like the body is one with the Head, suffering with Him, that with Him we may be glorified.”²¹ What a challenge! The next time we are presented with a difficult cross, remember that we should try to approach it with a kind of joy since it is through this cross we are able to draw closer to Our Lord.

As we go through Lent, let’s reflect on why the cross is not simply the means and symbol of man’s salvation, but is also the enduring model for how we are to live authentic Christian lives. We are to take up our own cross and follow Him. Let’s ask for God’s grace to do that well. ■

16 John 17:13.

17 Gal 6:14.

18 1 Peter 4:13.

19 *Salvifici Doloris*, paragraph 1.

20 Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, paragraph 2.

21 *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

REGISTER FOR OUR SPRING RETREAT!

CHNetwork Retreat in Columbus, OH

April 29-May 2, 2019

A time of fellowship and prayer for Catholic converts and those on the journey to the Catholic Church. To register, please visit CHNetwork.org/retreats or send an email to retreats@chnetwork.org.

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.

"That We May Share His Holiness"

By Marcus C. Grodi A

Joyful Journey Updates C

Prayer Requests D

That We May Share His Holiness

By Marcus C. Grodi

Before you read this short article, please read the inspiring spiritual journey of Mike and LuAnn Sollom and the fine article by Mary Clare Piczynski on "The Role of the Cross in Christian Suffering," both of which are in this *CHNewsletter*. Reflecting on their experiences and thoughts, combined with our mutual entrance into Lent, I thought I'd add just a few reflections on chapter 12 of the Book of Hebrews.



After relating the experiences of many people of faith in the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews gives what I consider a perfect invitation to our Lenten pilgrimage:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (12:1-4).

The first thing we do every month in this *CHNewsletter* is give you another witness to what grace can do in the life of anyone open to the love and mercy of God. These witnesses, accompanying those from Scripture, Church history, and our own lives, give us hope that, even in the midst of great suffering, when we're tempted to "grow weary or fainthearted," our loving Lord is always very near, observing our lives and listening to our hearts for our prayers.

The author of Hebrews presents the image of a runner who keeps his focus forward to the end goal — to Jesus, to joy, and to the Beatific Vision of God — who does not let the discouragements of the past, present, or future distract him. As St. Paul wrote elsewhere, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13b-14). Lent is a time designed to train our focus forward.

And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? — "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disci-

plines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Heb 12:5-11).

Do we appreciate the great gift of Lent — "that we may share in his holiness"? Or do we just take it for granted every year as "just another one of those inconveniences the Church is always dropping into our lives"? Or, especially given the disgusting embarrassment of the ongoing scandal in the Church, "Why should I allow some bishop or liturgist to further burden my life"?

But just as a truly loving father disciplines his children, the Church, following the inspiration of the Spirit, knows that for us to truly appreciate the meaning of Easter, we first need to experience the self-imposed sacrifices of Lent. By willingly letting go of one or two otherwise harmless conveniences, we allow the Holy Spirit to train and strengthen our hearts and minds, and especially our wills, to face the unpredictable inconvenient trials of life. Our Mother, the Church, wants us to reap "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." But as Our Lord told His Apostles on the night on which He was betrayed, "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:2).

In your walk with Jesus Christ, are you producing fruit? St. Paul explained that "the fruit of the Spirit" — or how we are changed by grace when we abide in Christ — "is love, joy,

► "That We May Share His Holiness" continued from page A

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). Are you growing in these virtuous character traits? To do so, we need to be "pruned," which is how and why our loving Lord disciplines us, challenges us, sometimes with suffering, discouragement, loneliness — and why the Church challenges us to accept and even impose some level of suffering and detachment upon ourselves for forty days. Why? Because He wants us to be more loving, joyful, patient, kind, etc., as demonstrated by the many witnesses whose lives give evidence of the work of grace.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed (12:12-13).

This is exactly how I sometimes feel when Lent arrives. Have any of you experienced this? All of a sudden, in the busyness of life, co-workers come back after lunch with smudges on their foreheads, and you realize you've forgotten it's Ash Wednesday! The author of Hebrews reminds us that, in order to follow and abide in Christ and to experience the joy He promises (cf. Jn 15:11), we are called to ignore whether we feel like it or not (i.e., "drooping hands" and "weak knees") and willfully respond to the nudge of His grace, to realign our otherwise wandering paths, "straight" back on course in His direction.

Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (12:14).

Seriously, did you *hear* that warning? Without "holiness ... no one will see the Lord." If you stood before Him tonight, would you do so without embarrassment? This is what Lent helps us prepare for.

See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; that no one be immoral or irreligious (12:15-16a).

There is much in these verses that speaks to the effects of the present "immoral" and "irreligious" scandal in our Church, as

well as our modern culture. Lifelong Catholics, clergy and laity, as well as non-Catholics exploring the Church, can grow bitter, discouraged, doubtful, even disenchanted, which can cause "trouble" in the souls of so many, even leading hearts and consciences to feel "defiled."

These last few verses so clearly express the motivation behind the ministry of the Coming Home Network. Many of our separated brethren, because of their particular theologies, do not emphasize the need to grow in holiness. So we must not take it for granted that just because our non-Catholic family members or friends say they have faith in Jesus and read their Bibles and go to their churches that they "are just fine where they are." They need to know — from us — that both Scripture and the Church warn that they must "strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." And they can't grow in holiness without "the grace of God," so we do everything we can to make sure "no one fail[s] to obtain [it]." And our staff, volunteers, and online support community are here to encourage those who are growing bitter — even feeling "defiled" as a result of the present crisis.

Please make this Lent an opportunity to offer up in prayer our families, our friends, our Church, and especially those struggling with a "root of bitterness," begging for God's mercy and encouragement. And as the author of Hebrews closes this chapter, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire" (12:28-29). ■

PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY

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

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

March 4

Billy Kangas* (former Lutheran and Evangelical Covenant)

March 11

Mother Seraphina Marie, FDM* (Revert)

March 18

Matthew Leonard* (former Methodist)

March 25

Steve Faulkner* (former non-denominational Christian)

*Schedule is subject to change.

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

Joyful Journey Updates

From William, in RCIA "The Coming Home Network played a big role in my converting. I did weeks of research using resources off your site before I even contacted the local parish to start my formal discernment and ultimate conversion. Yours is a wonderful ministry that not only brings new and returning members to the flock but also provides a great resource for those who are already Catholic! Again, thank you for all you and your team do! What a great ministry!"

From Jane, a revert "I just want you to know how extremely happy and joyful I feel these days — able to go to Mass, receive the Eucharist, confession, and on and on! Talking to you really helped me getting to make all the things I had to do

to get back to the Church. Life is good! Thank you."

From Mickey, a former Southern Baptist military chaplain "I just wanted to check in with you and update you on my and Samantha's journey home back to the Catholic Church. I am currently in my candidate year of the Diaconate Formation process. I have come a long way from the Protestant ministry that I left years ago ... I owe you and the CHN a great deal of gratitude for all your help and advice when we were discerning our journey back home. In fact, I was telling one of my professors from

my Diaconate program about you. He told me he knew who you were!"

CHNetwork staff update More than a year ago, Sammy's wife became Catholic. He's been reading and studying but, although interested, and drawn to the Church, had a great many questions and concerns. In November, after many, many years as a Baptist, he was received into the 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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Prayer List

Clergy

- For a Mennonite minister in Canada, that his wife might become open to his journey to the Catholic Faith.
- For an Episcopal seminarian, that the Holy Spirit would guide her to a proper understanding of apostolic authority.
- For Michael, a minister in Colorado, that Our Lord would guide him back to the Catholic Faith of his youth.
- For Eduardo, a minister in Brazil, that our Lord Jesus would cast out all his fear and confusion and open a path for him to the Catholic Church.
- For a Primitive Baptist minister in the south, that the Lord would guide him to a faithful and effective RCIA group in his area.
- For Walter, a Southern Baptist minister, that the Holy Spirit would continue to prompt him in his prayers and reading to seek full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For a Holiness minister in Pennsylvania, that his wife and daughters may join him on the path to the Catholic Faith.
- For Janis and her husband, who are both ministers, that as they seek the fullness of the faith of Jesus, they may fall in love with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For a Seventh-day Adventist minister, that his wife would join him on his journey to the Catholic Faith.
- For Frank, a minister in Arizona, that God would guide him to get his finances stable and clear his path to the Catholic Church.

■ For a husband and wife who are Pentecostal pastors and are becoming more and more Catholic in their beliefs, that they know how to continue to go deeper in their faith journey.

■ For a convert clergyman who is seeking meaningful employment, that God reward his search with a job where he can serve the Church.

■ For Sue, a lay minister, that Jesus will guide her heart and mind as she pursues truth and discerns the next steps in her faith journey.

Lay

■ For a woman on the journey in Texas who has concerns about Baptism, that she come to understand the full meaning behind the sacrament.

■ For a Baptist in TN who has spend many years wandering through Protestant churches and is now considering returning to the Catholic Church, that God will guide her steps.

■ For Sherry and her husband as they attend Mass and wait for an annulment petition, that they will receive a favorable decision soon so they can come into full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ For an Anglican, who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for years but is unsure if she will be able to become fully Catholic, that the Holy Spirit give her wisdom as to how to proceed with her journey.

■ For Tammie, a recent convert, who is experiencing serious health and financial difficulties, that Jesus in the Eucharist will give her comfort and healing during this time.



■ For a woman in Kentucky who is discerning how best to move forward with her faith journey, that the Holy Spirit will give her clarity.

■ For a convert in Pennsylvania, that her husband will overcome his disinterest in the Catholic Church and make the journey home.

■ For Susan to be able to continue pursuing her interest in the Catholic Church in spite of the difficulties she is encountering.

■ For Cheri's family who doesn't understand her journey, that she will still be able to celebrate and rejoice in God's goodness in the work He is doing in her faith life.

■ For Judith, that she will know whether to move forward with becoming a full member of the Catholic Church.

■ For Tina who is struggling to understand the abuse crisis in the Church, that she not be discouraged in her journey.

■ For Amy who is hoping to be confirmed in the Church soon, that the Holy Spirit opens the door for her to come fully home.

■ For Christina who is drawn towards many things about the Catholic Church but still struggles with a lot of issues related to Catholicism, that the Holy Spirit will give her peace in her 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. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth

As worship leader at Mount Hermon, I began introducing songs from John Michael Talbot into my repertoire. After one service, a couple came forward and asked if I was Catholic. They were cradle Catholics but had never told anyone at Mount Hermon. We became instant friends. Soon the husband, Phil, invited me to a silent retreat for men at a Jesuit retreat center. I loved it. At the close of the retreat, I left a comment card which read, “I never knew God was so big.”

During those early music leadership years, I was more concerned about a song being singable than sensible. As a result, it was easy to sneak bad theology into my repertoire by tying it to the back of a good melody. I was unaware of my ignorance until, after one meeting, the speaker informed me I had sung two songs about the second coming of Christ with two opposing perspectives.

I was embarrassed. How many other contradictions was I guilty of in my singing? How was I to know for sure which songs could stand the test of theological accuracy? What was the standard of measurement for that accuracy, and who held that standard? Too many of us worship leaders chose our songs based on popularity or on how well they showcased our voices and instruments. That had to stop.

The conferences and retreats our staff at Mount Hermon created had a degree of theological consistency, but the myriad of multi-denominational groups who rented our facility brought a confusing array of conflicting doctrinal perspectives and spiritual practices. I was certain we couldn’t all be right. My growing concern was that we might all be wrong.

So I decided to seek the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I decided to take Christ at His word — the living word of His life and teaching, the written word made known through His Scripture, and the word on fire from His Holy Spirit through His Church.

I began asking: “Is there absolute truth — an objective truth that’s true at all times, in all places, and for all people?” I knew there had to be. And if so, “Who is the guardian, sustainer, and administrator of that truth?” I was beginning to realize it wasn’t me. And it wasn’t the Protestant and Evangelical traditions I had inherited.

Something Changed

It was then, amidst my growing realization of truth, when I was presented with an opportunity after which Christianity, as I knew it, would never be the same.

In 1987, during his papal visit to the United States, Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass at the Laguna Seca Raceway outside Monterey, California, about an hour from Mount Hermon. I was invited to attend as ecumenical clergy.

The day began with a dense fog limiting vision to a matter of yards. Those low clouds added a heavenly quality, and the music seemed to come from everywhere. As the fog cleared, I began to get a glimpse of the estimated 70,000 people sitting on the surrounding hillsides. I saw flags and banners. I saw candles in candelabra and men in robes. I saw the altar. I saw the crucifix. It was as if a curtain was being lifted and everything was becoming known.

And then I saw him — the Pope. I knew nothing about him. I couldn’t even remember his name. I had no idea why I was so moved by his presence. And I certainly didn’t understand why, at the close of Mass, as he was airlifted from the raceway, I stretched my hands toward him and wept.

Something changed that day. It was as if I had stepped into a different country and culture. I had no idea what was happening, but I loved it. I longed for it. I had been moved deep within my soul, in a place untouched by any other spiritual experience.

Developing a Catholic Spirit

I was beginning to think like a Catholic. I was praying like a Catholic. I was seeking an absolute truth, discovering the historical Church, and expanding my theological understanding. I’d had an encounter with the Pope. Things were changing.

Yet, with all the winds of change blowing inside me, not much changed on the outside. Other than a few new songs in my repertoire, I kept my growing interest in Catholicism to myself. My library, on the other hand, populated by contemporary Evangelical authors, began to change. For some reason, the Catholic author Henri Nouwen was accepted in my circles. I began there. Nouwen introduced me to Thomas Merton, and with that, the doors to the world of Catholic writing and ancient texts flew wide open.

I was discovering a depth of theological intelligence and a breadth of spiritual awareness I had never before imagined.

As our encounters with Catholicism mounted, LuAnn and I began asking, “What are we supposed to do with all this?” The “all this” we were referring to was the gentle, persuasive, Catholic spirit beginning to permeate our conversations and lives. We yearned for the full embrace of Christ we perceived in the Catholic Church.

Sadly, there seemed to be nothing we could do. We felt stuck, tethered to the limited traditions of our past. So we decided to live with the spiritual tension. I would remain in Evangelical ministry but do it with a Catholic spirit. Perhaps, we thought, I could lead people into a deeper and more complete relationship with Christ without revealing the Catholicity of that relationship.

As Close as I’d Get

In 1991, I joined the staff at Forest Home, a Christian conference center in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California. But after only two years, I was diagnosed with calcified nodules on my vocal folds and severe scarring on my larynx. Thanks to too much singing in too many difficult and damaging environments, my musical career, my vocation, my employment, and my identity came to a screeching halt.

Frustrated, confused, and questioning who I should be if I could no longer be a singer, I returned to school and earned a master’s degree from Azusa Pacific University.

While at Azusa, I met Richard Foster and became a follower of his Renovare Ministry. I was introduced to spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines. Though Catholic in spirit, Renovare was a Protestant ministry and fell short of introducing me to the Catholic Church. It led me to the doors of the Church but didn’t open them.

Inspired by the Catholic spirit of Renovare, I began regularly visiting Catholic churches and finding, as I had found in that cathedral in Venezuela, they were more beautiful on the inside than

...Journeys Home Continued...

the outside. Sadly, I could not yet see the whole truth of that metaphor. I was still a Protestant, still on the outside looking in.

As I learned about spiritual disciplines, I also learned about Secular Orders. I was intrigued. One afternoon, I visited the offices of a Catholic church and told them I was interested in joining such an order. They informed me I'd have to be Catholic, and, unfortunately, I was not. I walked away dejected. Looking back, I have thought what a perfect opportunity for someone to have said, "Oh, but Mike, you can *become* a Catholic."

By then, John Michael Talbot had founded an order called The Brothers and Sisters of Charity. They had an Ecumenical Domestic Expression for non-Catholic, married people like me. I became a postulant in 1995. I was close to Catholicism. Yet, as the years of my quest dragged on, I resigned myself to the thought that this was as close as I'd ever get.

The Walls Came Crashing Down

Still in need of work since losing my voice, I cast my nets of inquiry across the nation. In the fall of 1996, I made a Providential stop in Holland, Michigan, where I sensed a voice saying, "Mike, I'm moving here by my Spirit, and I want you to be a part of it." Believing I'd heard a call from God, I relocated my family to Michigan the following summer.

I assumed we would be arriving at "the Promised Land." It was not. But God remained faithful to His words. Through a series of divine events and a year of uphill climbing, I became a fulltime chaplain at a local manufacturing company. My role as a workplace chaplain proved to be the most fulfilling and fruitful ministry I had ever encountered. It was the obvious purpose for that original "call" to Holland.

But just as we were settling in and getting our stride, when things were finally looking up, the walls came crashing down.

On March 15, 2005, LuAnn's and my firstborn son, Jim, was diagnosed with an untreatable cancer. Eight grueling months later, on November 11, the day after his twenty-fourth birthday, our beloved son died in my arms. Our brave, sweet boy was gone.

Despair and devastation cascaded over our family. Everything parents dread happening to their children began happening to ours.

Our daughter, blinded by her grief, lost her way into drugs and became a heroin addict.

Our middle son blamed God for Jim's death and turned his back on the church. Then his young bride divorced him.

Our youngest son began suffering panic attacks & night terrors.

Then my chaplain job was terminated.

Then my mom died.

Then, then, then ... the avalanche of anguish and loss would not stop. Overwhelmed by the layers of grief and pain, I disappeared into a state of numbness and fog. I stopped caring. Even worse, I didn't care that I had stopped caring. My dear wife was equally lost in her brokenness, but I couldn't see past my own grief. Rather than being a blessing to her, I became a burden. Those were desperate days that turned into desperate years. I feared for our survival.

I became angry, angry with God. I stopped going to church. I wanted to stop believing in God. The God I had believed in since my youth was not the God I wanted to believe in anymore.

By God's tender mercy, it didn't work. I couldn't stop believing in Him. I discovered that even if you're able to stop believing in truth, it doesn't stop being true. I retained my faith, but I did not return to church.

I did, however, return to my library. I read and searched and read some more. I re-read *Evangelical Is Not Enough*. It didn't help. Not only was Evangelicalism not enough, nothing was enough. Nothing and no one could console me. No explanation could satisfy the deep lament of my soul. It seemed as if all might be lost.

To Become Catholic

For seven long years, as we tried to endure the death of our son, LuAnn and I were consumed by our daughter's addiction. She was lost. We were helpless. We were convinced our precious girl was not going to survive her addiction. We were going to lose another child.

Finally, in 2012, again by God's grace, we took our daughter to a rehab hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina and left her there for seven months. It worked. She has been clean ever since.

We rejoiced in her recovery, but every silver lining seemed to have a cloud. Debilitated by our loss of income, the financial drain of Jim's cancer battle, and the high cost of rehab, LuAnn and I were forced into bankruptcy and would eventually lose our home. We will never regret the sacrifices we made for our children and wouldn't hesitate to make them again, but consequences and debts have to be paid.

During one last attempt to recover from our financial losses, we attended a popular money management seminar, where we met a young couple from the local Catholic parish. Jared and Rhonda invited us to their home. We learned Rhonda was a convert to Catholicism. We told them about our romance with the Catholic Church. They told us about something called RCIA, the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults*. They wondered if, after all our searching, we might like to become Catholic.

There it was. Someone finally said the words and suggested we could become Catholic. Who would have thought it? After all those years, we had begun to think that becoming Catholic was like becoming Italian. It was something we simply could not do.

A Risk Worth Taking

The next day I called the parish office, and the following Sunday LuAnn and I were in the RCIA class.

Every class was amazing. We couldn't have been more excited. Nevertheless, after every class, we'd look at each other and say, "What are we doing? Are we really going through with this?"

We knew if we were to become Catholic, we would run the risk of leaving a lot of friends and family behind. None of them would understand our journey. Most of them would resent our decision and reject our Catholic faith. Some of them might reject us. Yet, every Sunday, as we returned to class, having faithfully completed all our assignments, we were confronted with the incontrovertible truth of Catholicism. This was real, and regardless of the cost, it was a risk worth taking.

...Journeys Home Continued...

An old song kept singing in my ear: “Not my will, but Thine I choose; no matter what I stand to lose.” Where else could we go? Only the Catholic Church had stayed faithful to the truth. We wouldn’t reject that truth any longer. Our protest was over.

Finding Home

Shortly after we began the RCIA process, the Catholic Church around the world celebrated All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day. LuAnn and I, along with everyone in our parish, were invited to carry a candle to the altar in memory of departed loved ones.

We carried a candle for our Jim. We presented it to our parish priest, Fr. Charlie. He blessed us. He blessed our son. He placed Jim’s candle at the base of the altar — at the feet of Jesus. We wept. We had finally found a place for our suffering and lament. We had found a place for our boy. We had found redemption. We had found communion. We had found home.

With great joy, at sixty years of age, during the 2015 Easter Vigil at Saint Francis de Sales Church in Holland, Michigan, LuAnn and I reconciled with the entirety of Catholicism and came into full communion with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

It had been thirty-four years since I purchased that album by John Michael Talbot and had unknowingly taken the first step on LuAnn’s and my journey to the Catholic Church.

Thanks be to God for His patience and loving kindness.

Being Home

LuAnn and I love being Catholic. It’s like coming home after a long journey and knowing we’re never going to leave again. It’s like having the blinders taken off so we can finally see the whole amazing picture. It’s like being given the ultimate spiritual tool shed, filled with every tool we’ll ever need — all the substance and truth — to explore, explain, and express our lives in Christ and His life in us. It’s experiencing Christ the way He had always intended to be experienced. It’s like falling in love.

We love the sacraments. We love the Mass. We especially love the Eucharist. Many times, upon the completion of Mass, I look at LuAnn and say, “I’ve never been so glad to be Catholic.”

Equal to the joys of the sacraments and the Mass have been the friendship and fellowship of God’s people. LuAnn and I have been welcomed home by so many amazing, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Catholic Christians along our journey. We are humbled and inspired by the depth and authenticity of their faith and devotion.

The Catholic Church is a family — a worldwide family. Now it’s our family. And no matter where we go — from town to town, from state to state, from country to country — our family is already there waiting for us. Being home has taken on a new meaning.

Ordinary Pilgrims

A few months after joining the Church, we finally lost our home. We whittled our earthly belongings down to a 10-by-15 foot storage space and found temporary housing with generous friends.

Then, shortly after losing our home, LuAnn lost her job. Her career as a medical transcriptionist came to an end as she was displaced by voice recognition technology.

So there we were: jobless, penniless, homeless, and sleeping on a borrowed bed. Becoming Catholic had been amazing. Our spirits had been lifted and our souls settled. But LuAnn and I were physi-

cally and emotionally exhausted with a kind of tired you can’t just sleep off. We had been undone by too many years and too many layers of hardships. We feared we had lost more than we could ever regain. We needed to renew and rebuild.

Still sustained by God’s grace, we decided to take another big risk. We couldn’t change what had come to us, but we could choose what to do with what had come. So in June of 2016, we packed the back of our minivan with the essentials to survive, threw a mattress on top, and drove off on a Great Adventure — a Grand Quest to expand our faith, find our joy, restore our hope, discover God’s direction for our lives, reconnect with people and places from our past, and perhaps, by God’s grace, introduce the fullness of Christ and the Catholic Church to our Protestant family and friends who remain, as yet, unaware.

We’re still driving. We’ve traveled on every kind of road, through every sort of weather, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. We’ve covered the majority of the continental United States and parts of Canada and Mexico. We’ve stopped at nearly every Catholic church we’ve seen. We’ve prayed in roadside chapels and worshipped in grand cathedrals. We’ve listened and laughed and cried so hard our hearts ache. As uncertain as life can seem, we believe, by God’s grace, we are being guided to where we still need to go and what we still need to do. But that, my fellow pilgrims, is for the next chapter of this story.

Like many of you reading this, LuAnn and I remain on our journey from here to the Father, *Ordinary Pilgrims* looking for the extraordinary in every day and around every corner.

And That Is Enough

LuAnn’s and my lives began anew on that blessed Easter Vigil night. It was as if we had been born again. We didn’t become Christians that night. Our conversions to Christ had happened decades ago in our youth. That night we became complete. We were made whole. We filled in what had been missing. We became fully alive Christians — unreservedly, unapologetically, and unashamedly Catholic. And, no matter what we have lost or still stand to lose, that is enough. ■



MIKE SOLLUM and his wife, LuAnn, are still living the life of pilgrims having recently departed on their third lap around the country in as many years. They both took early (albeit temporary) retirement to fund their pilgrimage. As they travel, they are diligently preparing to walk the 500-mile Camino de Santiago. They will walk in memory of their son, James (their own beloved Santiago). They will walk as a testimony of endurance and hope to their other children and to honor and acknowledge God’s faithfulness along their way. They invite you to join their journey at *Ordinary Pilgrims: Stories Along the Way* at www.sollomclan.com.

Continue the **JOURNEY**

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