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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



The Solace of Beauty

By Dale Pollard

“Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and new.”
— St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 27, 38.

Encounter

I was born in 1957, at the dawn of the “space age,” when the Russian satellite Sputnik set the “space race” in motion between the United States and the Soviet Union. My father, mother, brother, and I lived just south of Seattle, WA. My father was employed as a space and defense engineer at Boeing. His work involved Cold War issues and the Saturn V main-stage rocket, which eventually sent Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins to the moon and back. Boeing sent us to various places around the country: to Huntsville, AL, back to Seattle, down to Cape Canaveral and Cocoa Beach, FL, then back to Seattle for good. My childhood was shaped by NASA and Boeing, a developing interest in beauty and the arts, and the great outdoors of the American west. This background would prepare me for a career as an Evangelical Protestant pastor — and for a later unexpected pilgrimage with my wife, Diane, and two teenage girls, a pilgrimage that took us into a strange, yet beautiful world of grace, love, and wonder.

My memories of church life during my early childhood, mostly at a small Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Huntsville, AL, are vague but important images of loving people treating both my siblings and my mother with kindness. My father rarely, if ever, attended. My mother did a good job in giving us all a knowledge of God’s existence and

basic Christian morality — the do’s and don’ts of life formed from the Ten Commandments. One especially significant event from this time occurred one Sunday after church. I was watching a program on a Christian television station. This particular episode had to do with a family tragedy, and as I watched, the thought ran through my mind that, when I grew up, I wanted to help families with hardships and challenges. This event guides me still.

As I grew older and entered high school, my family’s involvement in church waned, and I became enthralled by the NFL and Sunday football. In short, we became “Christmas and Easter Christians,” neglecting church life in general. If I had to describe where I was at that time with regard to religion, I would say I was a believer in God, but didn’t see how God was interested in my life. I did believe that Jesus was the Son of God, but I had no concept of what that meant or why it should matter. As for the Holy Spirit, somehow He was part of this — but how, I had no clue.

My life after high school was confused and unguided. I had no idea of where I was going or how to formulate a plan to get there. Engineering didn’t interest me; working at Boeing in any capacity didn’t interest me; getting into business didn’t interest me, either. For the first time in my life, I began to search for

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

a purpose, deeper meanings to life, and goals to pursue. College sounded like it might help with these questions, so I effectively rolled the dice and wound up at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. What was I going to study? I didn't know, but I was attracted to psychology and sociology.

Before entering college, I worked for a time in Tacoma, WA. There, through a series of events, I came to a profound faith in Jesus in a small Baptist community. It reminded me somewhat of the church I had attended in Alabama, because the people were friendly and genuinely cared for me. I professed my faith in Jesus and was baptized in front of the congregation in a flowing white robe. Bible studies, Bill Gothard seminars, and service to the community through that church built up my young faith. I read all that C.S. Lewis had to offer, bought Keith Green, John Michael Talbot, and Second Chapter of Acts albums. I was well equipped, so I thought, for my new life in Christ. After a time, and influenced by friends, I left that small church for a more "hip" Evangelical gathering where people, mostly young adults, sang, danced, and proclaimed the goodness of God in a more contemporary style. I soon left for college, convinced I might be the only Christian on campus, but I was determined to fight for my faith, no matter the hostile environment.

I arrived at Western Washington University just south of the Canadian border in Bellingham, WA, in 1978. The times were the afterglow of the "Jesus Movement" of the late 60s and early 70s. Surprised that there was no real opposition to my religious inclinations, I quickly became involved in campus ministry — something which I was totally unaware even existed on college campuses. In the dorm rooms was a plethora of posters recruiting students to any number of secular and religious group meetings. One of those was Campus Crusade for Christ, which I visited and became involved in for a short time with a friend I met

on the crew team. Here, I was introduced to the Four Spiritual Laws and helped my crew buddy lead people to Christ. One day, my teammate asked if I had ever visited a monastery. Of course, I had not, so he invited me to visit a Benedictine Abbey just across the border in Mission, B.C., Canada, named Westminster Abbey. This is where a new world of beauty, peace, and prayer was introduced to me, which began a long journey deeper into Jesus' heart, and, eventually, into the Catholic Church.

The beauty of that monastery is stunning. Overlooking the Fraser River, with a north side view of Mt. Baker in Washington State, bald eagles flying overhead, and big timber all around, the impact of this first visit remains with me all these years later. I have revisited this monastery many times over the years and have brought groups up for retreats and study. I became acquainted with the Benedictine history and Rule, encapsulated in their motto, *ora et labora* — "pray and work."

But it was the beauty and artistry of one of the monks, which was displayed in the chapel and around the monastery, that focused my attention on God's creativity through human genius. The monk's name is Father Dunstan Massey, OSB, and he is well known as an artist around the Fraser River Valley area. He specializes in concrete reliefs and frescos, and even now his artistry speaks to me of God's wonder. Fr. Dunstan is still creating, at age 94, in ways that resonate in my soul. Indeed, his work is prayer.

This divine beauty reminds me of the last class I took in college. It was a summer class on The Art of Listening to Music. Needless to say, it was not a difficult class but one of my assignments was to describe a great work of art. I chose the Pietà, by Michelangelo. Though vaguely aware of the statue, I had not really studied it in depth. I was at a loss to describe how a human being could produce such a masterpiece. But I knew God had guided this sculpture, and that God speaks to us intensely

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FEATURED RESOURCES

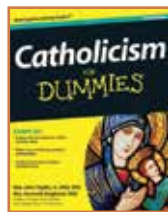


John 6:53 – Symbolic or Literal? (CD)

In this talk, Marcus Grodi delves into unpacking the Scripture verse, John 6:53: "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'" Listen and gain a deeper and richer understanding of the biblical roots of the Eucharist.

\$35

Receive *John 6:53* CD for a donation of \$35.



Catholicism for Dummies

— By Rev. John Trigilio Jr. and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti

Catholicism For Dummies is an insightful, down-to-earth introduction for Catholics and non-Catholics. It gives common sense explanations of Catholic morality and devotions as well as worship and liturgy. *Catholicism For Dummies* presents a rich tapestry and history of the Catholic Church that will give Catholics and non-Catholics alike a deeper appreciation and understanding of the Catholic Faith.

\$50

Receive *Catholicism for Dummies* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *John 6:53* CD and *Catholicism for Dummies* for a donation of \$75.

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Are You Preaching or Believing a Contrary Gospel?

By Marcus Grodi

Thirty years ago, I was an evangelically-minded Presbyterian pastor. I took my responsibility to proclaim the Gospel very seriously. I posted on my pulpit, right in front of me where I couldn't ignore it, the quote from John 12:21, "WE WOULD SEE JESUS!"



As I stood in my pulpit each week, and looked out at my congregation, I assumed that they trusted me to teach them clearly what they needed to believe or to do to be saved. Actually, though, in my experience I found that most Protestants have already drawn their own personal conclusions on "what one must do to be saved." If their pastor has the audacity to veer from this, they may rise up in rebellion — which has led to the formation of thousands of new churches. This had been the case in the first Presbyterian church I served. Sometime in the mid-1800s, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church had proclaimed that a baby who had recently died without Baptism would, therefore, not be going to heaven. Half the congregation angrily walked out and formed Second Presbyterian Church down the block in response to this teaching. Preachers, of course, carry a heavy responsibility to warn their congregations what is necessary for them to face the Final Judgement — to determine whether they will spend eternity with God, or eternity in hell. The only two options. Period.

When one becomes "deep in history," by reading Church history, one realizes that almost all the doctrinal battles, one way or another, had to do with clarifying this very subject: What is necessary for a person to believe or do, or not to do, to one day enter into the Beatific Vision of God? This was essentially what the Reformation was all about: What is the correct understanding of guilt, sin, grace, faith, works, justification, sanctification, holiness, the Church, the Scriptures, Tradition, the Sacraments, popes, bishops, etc., all in relation to what is necessary for salvation?

The primary reason I stepped down from my Presbyterian pulpit, resigned from my ministry, and eventually, by the grace of God, entered into the fullness of the Catholic Church, was because I recognized that I did not have the infallible wisdom and intellect, or more importantly the authority, to offer eternally trustworthy, alternative explanations to Scripture passages that countered our Presbyterian/Evangelical/Calvinist understanding of salvation. And neither did any of the other Presbyterian pastors in my presbytery, or the other Protestant pastors in my community, or any of the Protestant Reformers, or the great Christian writers (whom I admired), like J.I. Packer, C.S. Lewis, F.F. Bruce, Mark Noll, N.T. Wright, or Billy Graham. We all gave our sincere opinions on how to understand Scripture, and consequently how confident we — and our people, and our children — should be that when we died we would go to heaven — but we all gave contradictory opinions! Who did we think we were?

As St. Paul warned the Christians of Galatia, "If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal 1:6-9). How can any Protestant pastor — who is teaching a "gospel" different than other Christian pastors

in his community, or different than has been taught for centuries by other more historical traditions, like the Roman Catholic Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church — be certain that what he is teaching is true and not accursed? Can any Protestant minister stand before his congregation, or look in the mirror, and declare with absolute certainty that what he is teaching is eternally true, and not just one's own opinion, or one's own conscience-easing, rationalization — so that their congregations can know for certain that how they are believing and living will hold them in good stead when they stand before God in the final judgement?

Below are a selection of Scriptures for which Christians of various traditions have strongly-held, but often contrary, interpretations. I present these with one underlying question: How do you interpret these passages, and what is the authoritative trustworthiness of the source behind your interpretation? If your interpretation offers an explanation contrary to the clear, literal meaning of the text, implying that you (and your congregation, your children, and grandchildren) can ignore one or more of these Scriptures, do you feel confident that you can stand before God without guilt if one day you discover that you were wrong? ("Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" Mt 18:6.)

I once heard a world-renowned evangelist proclaim on television that he was absolutely certain that when he died he would go to heaven. He "knew" this because when he was a little boy, he had accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, and, therefore, there was nothing he or anyone could do to cause him to lose his salvation! In other words, he was telling the world that they could ignore many of the following passages. This evangelist has passed away, God rest his soul, but I wonder what he discovered when he stood face-to-face with his Creator?

"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

.....
"Enter by the narrow gate ... For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Mt 7:13-14).

.....
"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers'" (Mt 7:21-23).

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"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16).

"So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day'" (Jn 6:53-54).

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me'" (Jn 14:6).

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (Jn 15:5-6).

"For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury" (Rom 2:6-8).

"Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19-21).

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

"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:17-18,24).

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for

ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 Jn 1:6-2:6).

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:12-15).

These verses collectively stress that, to enter heaven, we must believe in Christ and be baptized; we must abide in Him and bear fruit; we must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man; we must with "patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality"; we must walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh; we must strive for peace with all men, for holiness, and for perfection; we must confess our sins; we must walk as Jesus walked; all so that, by grace, we may enter through the narrow gate.

In summary, when we meet Jesus, He must know us. If you are intimidated by the demands of this list — maybe offended by the "works-righteousness" of it all — by what authority do you explain it all away, for these are the words of Scripture, the words of Christ, and the words of the Church? ■

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.



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The Coming Home
Network International



www.chnetwork.org

With Easter Comes Rejoicing

By CHNetwork Staff & Members

Each year, we at the Coming Home Network have the opportunity to rejoice with many of our members who have come into full communion with the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. These men and women have been seeking a closer relationship with our Lord Jesus and His Church and have reached out to the CHNetwork for fellowship and support on their journeys and we are delighted to welcome them home.

These are seekers who have journeyed to the Church often at great personal cost and sacrifice. Many leave behind the security of work in Protestant ministry, others lose friends and familial relationships become strained, still others have experienced marital trials when their spouse hasn't shared or understood their journey. Yet, through all these heavy crosses and struggles, they have persevered and now rejoice because they have found the pearl of great price and are eager to partake of the Eucharistic table and the sacraments Jesus gave to us in His Church.

We would like to share with you some of their reflections so you, too, can rejoice with them — and, more importantly, pray for them — in their new life as Catholic Christians. Becoming Catholic in many ways is just the start of a new part of their journey and the CHNetwork is dedicated to helping these new converts find their place in the Church and support them as they continue living faith-filled lives centered on Christ and His Church. Thank you for your support as we seek to support them!

FROM ANITA, A RECENT CONVERT

"Yes, I was received and confirmed yesterday. What a beautiful and meaningful Mass! It is impossible to describe receiving Our Lord for the first time! I didn't want Communion time to end ... I just wanted to stay in His presence in the quietness. I want to be at Mass every day that I can ... This obviously doesn't mean I am finished, or complete. I have just passed the first leg of my journey and am opening my heart and life to where Our Lord leads next. I will continue with the Coming Home Network in every way I can, and will be praying for those who are struggling with the first leg of their journeys and those who are experiencing issues with family and friends."

FROM A FORMER PRESBYTERIAN

"I have chosen 'Benjamin' as my confirmation name, since I am a favoured son of God, who never abandons me even though I tried to do that to Him before However, with Jesus as my life guide, I don't need to worry too much. I believe that He will help me through all kinds of challenges."

FROM AMANDA, A RECENT CONVERT

"I was confirmed last night! God is good! No regrets! Thank you for all that the Coming Home Network is doing!"

FROM A FORMER ANGLICAN

It's my great joy to let you know that my family and I (wife and three young children) were all received into the Church this past Saturday evening at the Easter Vigil. Our youngest, Leo (3 months old) was also baptized. You might recall that I teach Patristics at an Evangelical seminary, and that my wife works for the Anglican Church in North America. We were both prepared to lose our jobs and endure a season of unemployment, but in God's infinite mercy, He (miraculously) provided me with a full-time post as Asst. Prof. of Theology at a wonderful little Catholic seminary. That in itself is quite a story — the job came unexpectedly and at precisely the moment we needed it. That said, it was nothing but joy for us this past weekend. Thanks to all of you at the Coming Home Network, for your prayers and countless resources! We're eternally grateful.

FROM ANGELA, A FORMER PENTECOSTAL

"I was confirmed!!! It was an amazing experience and I've never been happier! I feel like I'm home now, finally where I've always belonged! Praise God for His faithfulness in drawing me home for the last fifteen years. He never gave up on me. He continued to pursue and woo me for all these years, patiently waiting for the moment when I could answer His call. I am so incredibly blessed ... I still can't believe it's real ... I'm home where I belong. God is so good!"

FROM A FORMER QUAKER

"I just wanted to tell you that I finally made it home! Saturday night I came into the Church. Thank you for your encouragement along the way. It was nice to have someone who continued to check in with me. Peace to you!"

FROM AMALIA, A RECENT CONVERT

"Your generous and personal outreach to me was a foreshadowing of how members of the body of our Church

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

FROM A FORMER UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST PASTOR

"Sunday's Mass was beautiful, quite a moving experience! My Confirmation and First Communion were on Divine Mercy Sunday. Had my First Confession last month ... Enjoying everything immensely!"

FROM FRANK, A FORMER PASTOR

"Entered the Church! ... We had a beautiful ceremony to sacramentalize and bless our marriage and profess our faith. Thanks for everything!"

FROM A FORMER BAPTIST MINISTER FROM CANADA

"It has been an amazing journey for me from Baptist pastor to Roman Catholic Christian. My journey unfolded over a number of years, winding its way through the pages of Catholic authors, pilgrimages, conversations with Fr. Mark Cherry and other Catholic friends, and a reading of the Roman Catholic *Catechism* under the tutelage of Msgr. Charles Pope, with the Institute of Catholic Culture. Finally, I asked God to confirm my decision with a 'word.' I got a 'word' all right. When I informed my Protestant pastor of my decision, far from opposing me, he supported my decision and said, 'I've known for a while your heart was in the east (Rome).' That very same evening I visited Fr. Cherry and informed him of the response of my Protestant pastor. Fr. Cherry looked at me with a stunned expression and said, 'He said what??' Then Fr. Cherry said, 'I am going to show you something.' He went and got the lectionary reading for Sunday on which he had been working. Here in part is how the Scripture read: 'LOOK TOWARD THE EAST and see your children gathered and see your children gathered from west and east AT THE WORD OF THE HOLY ONE' Baruch 5:1-9."

Have you recently been received into the Catholic Church?

Please let us know so we can welcome you home. Contact Jim at jim@chnetwork.org (former non-Catholic clergy/academics) or Mary Clare (former non-Catholic laity) at maryp@chnetwork.org with your update! ■

NEWSLETTER

The CHNetwork encourages members to make copies of the newsletter and distribute them to family and friends to encourage them to join our mailing list. They may also request to receive our mailings by using the response card included with this newsletter. We do ask that copies of the newsletter not be sold. Unless otherwise indicated, the contents of this newsletter are Copyright © 2019 by the Coming Home Network International. All rights reserved.



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. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

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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☐ Yes! I wish to make a monthly donation of \$25.00 on auto-payment to help support the CHNetwork's ministry.

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Prayer List

Clergy

■ For Rodney, a Church of England clergyman, that our Lord Jesus will successfully guide him through his vocational questions and concerns.

■ For an Evangelical Presbyterian seminarian in France, that, through her search for identity and her Christian roots, she may joyfully embrace the riches of the Catholic Faith.

■ For Wendy, a missionary, that the Holy Spirit would help her in her quest to cultivate spiritual disciplines.

■ For Douglas, a former minister, that his love for Ignatian spirituality and St. Francis of Assisi may guide him fully home to the Catholic Church.

■ For a Celtic Catholic priest, that his study of Catholic theology and history will bring him into full communion with the Successor of St. Peter.

■ For a Lutheran pastor in Denmark, that the Lord Jesus may guide his curiosity concerning the Blessed Virgin and the Sacrament of Confession to bring him fully to the Catholic Faith.

■ For a former Pentecostal Holiness missionary to Africa, that Our Lord would bring her and her husband rejoicing to His Holy Eucharist.

■ For Richard, an Anglican deacon, that, through the witness and guidance of a Catholic friend, he may embrace the fullness of the faith which subsists in the Catholic Church.

■ For Kent, a Protestant minister, who is being strongly drawn to the Church, that Jesus will work powerfully in his life.

■ For Shane, a Protestant minister who has become drawn towards the truth of Catholicism.

■ For Will, a Presbyterian pastor becoming more and more convinced that he must become Catholic.

Laity

■ For Vicki, that the Holy Spirit will guide her discernment and give her undeniable clarity in her journey and that her husband's heart will be softened towards her interest in Catholicism.

■ For a man on the journey who has begun reading about Catholicism with his wife and senses her becoming more open to the Catholic Church.

■ For Doug, who has been away from Christ and the Church for many years, that he will receive the grace to come fully home and to repair family relationships.

■ For Agustin, on the journey, who lost his wife to cancer after only a year of marriage, that Jesus will strengthen him in his time of suffering.

■ For Jason who is looking to join the Ordinariate and come home to the Church soon.

■ For Paula, that God will grant her the answer to her prayer intention.



■ For Janet who is watching EWTN and continuing to learn more about the Catholic Church, that she be able to move forward to becoming fully Catholic.

■ For Maureen who is on the journey but is struggling being the caregiver to her ill husband, that they both be given the grace they need in this difficult season of life.

■ For a lady in Europe who is on the journey and is having serious financial difficulties, that the Lord will provide for her needs and bring her closer to Himself.

■ For Chris who is attending an Anglo-Catholic church and is learning more about the Catholic Faith, that his wife will be more open to his pursuit of Catholicism.

■ For a Baptist on the journey who has concerns about becoming Catholic without her husband's support.

■ For Liz to know God's timing as to when to enter the Church.

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.

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► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

through beauty. Father Dunstan, Michelangelo, the grandeur of creation, and other encounters with God through beauty formed for me a gentle path deeper into His love and compassion. These glimpses of the divine would prove to be an immense consolation in future storms of life.

Reception

I graduated college with a BA in Psychology and learned that not only was I a good listener and loved to minister on the streets, in jails, and occasionally on campus, but that a BA in psychology was not the most employable degree. After a year of carpentry with a friend, I was invited to intern with an Assembly of God campus ministry, Chi Alpha, in the hope of being equipped enough through the experience to pioneer a campus group at a college somewhere in the United States, provided there was a supporting church that desired to form a new group. We studied from well-known works of Protestant Evangelical theologians, occasionally mixed with an Anglican and, rarely, a Catholic spiritual perspective. We conducted street dramas, traveled to different parts of the western United States to help other campus ministries, led small groups, raised our own funds, and generally became confident that we could pioneer a campus group anywhere, if called upon. I was indeed called upon to begin a new campus ministry, but I needed a partner for this adventure.

Diane and I had met when we were college students. I didn't know her well during our time as students, but in this year of internship, our relationship began to flower. I admired her faith in Jesus, her prayer life, her willingness to step out of her comfort zone in teaching, street ministry, and drama, and planning outreach. In fact, at the end of the year, we were teamed up to start a campus group in Kearney, NE, at what was then known as Kearney State College. We set out on a cross-country adventure to another culture amidst the cornfields and hog farms of south-central Nebraska, along the Platte River. Here, our relationship was tried in the difficult circumstances of a new culture, of an unfamiliar land with intense winters and springs, and of a yearning for the big timber, mountains, and water of the Pacific Northwest.

In spite of the difficulties, the two years we spent in Nebraska were fruitful. The campus ministry grew, and Diane and I grew closer. We were engaged in Kearney. Then we said good-bye to our Nebraska friends and headed back to the Evergreen State to start our new life as a married couple.

While in Nebraska, we had become acquainted with many campus pastors from different denominations, all of whom were helpful to us. What Diane and I discovered, however, is that our internship fell far short of being adequate in conversing with these other campus ministers in Church history, theology, and many topics having to do with pastoral ministry. I desired to go to seminary to learn about these different areas of knowledge. But we needed to earn money to do this, so off we went to Alaska and Yukon to drive tour buses in the Great White North for two seasons.

We then enrolled at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, an interdenominational seminary begun by two Anglican Professors from England, J.I. Packer and James Houston. This is a marvelous place to learn, and many of the themes introduced to us there found their fulfillment in the Catholic Church. Over a four-year span, we learned about Church history, Christian spirituality, systematic theology, preaching, pastoral care, the Greek and Hebrew languages, and — most important to our journey — the early Church Fathers and beauty. The early Church Fathers introduced us to an intriguing world of commitment to the Eucharist and tradition, two aspects of the Church which we would later come to understand in a truly Catholic perspective, instead of our then curious, but still Protestant worldview. Beauty and artistry are stressed at Regent College, with many artists displaying their paintings, reciting poetry, performing dances, or playing compositions before contemplative audiences. All this we received as God's gift in our lives. It was a wonderful time of reception, a time of fulfillment.

Embrace

As I worked toward completion of my Master's degree in Theological Studies, I concentrated on pastoral care and family ministries. At this time, I was working in an addiction recovery center for adults and teens, helping families deal with recovery issues and treatment plans. Diane, meanwhile, was working at a local nursing home, giving care to a neglected population of elderly people. After graduation, I was eventually hired as an associate pastor at a local large Assembly of God church, which functioned more like an Evangelical Community church. This is the same church that sponsored the college campus group with which Diane and I had interned. We were familiar with it, and it was an honor to serve on staff. My duties were to run counseling services, recovery groups, develop internships in pastoral care, expand our local food pantry into a Food Bank, and partner with community services in the county to help families. I enjoyed this work immensely, since (as God had intimated to me years earlier with that childhood insight) I felt called to care for people in distress. However, during the sixteen years I worked at the church, there were three experiences, all having to do with personal trauma and loss, which drew us into a search for consolation and care which only the Catholic Church was able to provide.

The first of these was the discovery that we were infertile. Anyone who has faced this issue in his own life knows what a loss and burden it can be for a couple totally open to children and wanting to raise a family. We quickly found out that there was nowhere we could turn to find comfort or solace. There were no groups, no people to talk with, no support. We were alone, and the church had no resources to help us. Diane and I spent five years praying for God's direction in this devastation. Were we to have children or not? Should we utilize artificial means to conceive? Was adoption for us? Where and how were we to proceed with adoption? How were children to be part of our lives? These questions drove us deeper into prayer and into intense listening for the Lord's guidance.

...Journeys Home Continued...

The Lord did indeed guide us and grant us comfort during these difficult years. We came to the firm conviction that the Lord wanted us to adopt, and that we were to pursue adoption overseas in China. We were in the early wave of North Americans adopting Chinese orphans. Due to the one-child policy instituted by the Communist government, many “unwanted” female babies were either aborted, were victims of infanticide, or were sent to crowded makeshift orphanages. Describing the adventures of this adoption experience is beyond the scope of this account. Suffice it to say that we traveled to China without a child and two weeks later came back with our 8-month-old daughter Amy. Two years later, we would travel to Vladivostok, Russia, adopt our younger daughter, Anna (also eight months old), travel across the vast geography of Russia to Moscow, then overnight in Copenhagen, and finally back to Seattle and home. In spite of our diverse origins, we have a truly “nuclear family.” We were surprised that the pain of infertility was overwhelmed by the joy of adopting our children. Every family is a miracle; ours is no exception.

As the years passed, we nurtured our family and our ministry, building a community of caring and outreach through the church. In time, the mission of the church became obscured, and growing a church in numbers became the top priority of the ministers. In the midst of this change, the second of our three losses occurred. This was the sudden death of my mother, due to cancer. She had been the “hub” of the family, and her death brought about profound changes in our extended family relationships. This was a time of confusion and deep grief; another time when we sought solace from the community we served in but found none.

My understanding of pastoral ministry meant that, as a pastor, you went into the depths of people’s pain and misery, not taking it on, but traveling as a friend, a guide. I was to discover at this time that not all pastors think the same about this. A few helped — some really tried — but in the end, we were again alone. Coupled with the changes in the congregation’s goals, we found ourselves searching intently for a deeper meaning and purpose of the people of God and church worship.

This search steered me into a doctoral program in urban leadership and spiritual formation at Bakke Graduate University, at that time based in Seattle, WA, subsequently moving to Dallas, TX. In that environment, we learned more of the spirituality and leadership of serving the needs of the poor in urban settings, of creating communities of caring and outreach, and of diving

into the mystery and majesty of human interaction by ministering God’s compassion. I would often pray in the St. Ignatius chapel at Seattle University and found this quiet place compelling, drawing me toward beauty and prayer. Here, I discovered

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many contemporary Catholic authors and others who became heroes to me. Diane and I were also drawn to Celtic Catholic spirituality and the “thin places” of the world, those places where heaven and earth are thinly veiled to one another. We had no idea that this would be a perfect description of the Catholic Mass, but the journey was beginning to take on new dimensions for us. In addition, I came across a wonderful quote from G.K. Chesterton in his masterpiece, *Orthodoxy*, that provided us a new insight into the Christian life:

Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man’s ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small Joy, which is the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian.¹

Chesterton’s influence, as well as that of many other authors, primarily Catholic, would shape my ministry of care to the community. One of those avenues of caring would become a ministry to the community to address loss and grief, named *Lamentation*. This ministry to the bereaved has helped many to travel the long road of sorrow, which can be an isolating journey if not experienced within a loving community that grows in wisdom and joy.

In 2007, I graduated with a Doctor of Ministry degree in Transformation Leadership and Spiritual Formation, and soon afterward discerned that my time at the Assembly of God church was coming to an end. Through a series of staff changes and awkward circumstances, Diane and I knew that our hearts were being pulled somewhere else — where else, we did not know — although we did know that our view of the communion service was changing, that the Lord was somehow present in it in ways we couldn’t articulate.

Our view of Mary was changing, too. We knew that Protestants don’t understand her or her role in salvation history. What is her role and what is our relationship with her? It has to be more than a casual appreciation for her at Christmas. And one final issue that we could not resolve. What about the issue of authority? With so many opinions about Holy Scripture, whose opinion are we to trust, and why should we trust it?

1 G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1996, p. 239.

...Journeys Home Continued...

I resigned my position, which for a career pastor can be devastating: loss of income, uncertain future, community and friends disappearing, and support networks vanishing. This was the third of the losses that would send us into a “desert wandering” for five years, until one Christmas Eve, when our world was turned upside down.

My family loves Christmas. As part of our Christmas tradition, we attend a Christmas Eve Service somewhere in the county. Diane thought we needed a new experience of Christmas Eve as a family, so in her wisdom and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, she suggested we attend the Children’s Mass at Sacred Heart Parish, just up the hill from the church where I used to be employed. This sounded like a good idea to me, since I had been in that parish church occasionally to pray and look at the beauty of the sanctuary, the statues, and candles. So off we went to the Children’s Mass. We had no idea what to expect, but we knew the kids would be cute, Christmas carols would be sung, and hopefully English would be spoken, with very little Latin. We were right: the kids were cute, Christmas carols that we knew were sung, everything in the church was decorated beautifully, and very little Latin was used. We were stunned!

We left that Mass wondering what the Lord was doing to us. While there, my eyes had become fixed on the crucifix in the front of the church. It seemed that Jesus was speaking directly to me, saying that He knew the pains and sorrows of humanity, of myself and my family. That here, in the Mass, in the Catholic Church, my search for deeper meaning and purpose would find its answer. That here, Mary would be our Blessed Mother. Here, living water would finally quench our thirst.

We stayed away from church, and from Mass, for two weeks, trying to sort it out. We were a bit numb, but Diane and I were convinced that God was ushering us into full communion with the Catholic Church. We asked the girls if they were inspired to attend with us, and even, perhaps, to explore the possibility of becoming Catholic. They were game to try. Meanwhile, we needed to find out more about the Church, so that we could become better prepared for this further adventure, so we headed over to our local Barnes and Noble and found a book which became incredibly helpful to us, *Catholicism for Dummies*.² We still refer to this book from time to time.

When we were better informed and more sure of our direction, we were introduced to the parish priest. We invited him to our house to pepper him with questions. Then we attended RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, instruction for those considering becoming Catholic) and prepared to enter into the Church at Easter Vigil, 2012.

Entering into full communion has been an oasis for us, quenching our thirst for God and providing us strength for the remainder of our lives. Our journey has been not so much a wrestling with doctrine and tradition as it has been discovering where consolation, beauty, and joy manifest Jesus’ love on earth, in the most deeply personal and authentic way. We have been over-

whelmed by Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist, by the love of our Triune God and our Blessed Mother, and by the wonder and beauty of the Church unfolding before us. Why enter into the Church in this time of internal trial and scandal? Perhaps it was because of these very wounds that the Lord has brought us here: to help tend a Church that needs renewal, strength, and care. What does the Lord have for us in the future? In the uncertainties and mysteries of life, we are learning to trust in the joy and beauty of Christ’s embrace. As St. Brendan, a sixth century Irish Monk and evangelist, prayed:

Lord, I will trust You, help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.

Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with You.

Christ of the mysteries, can I trust You to be stronger than each storm in me?

Do I still yearn for Your glory to lighten on me?

I will show others the care You’ve given me.

I determine amidst all uncertainty always to trust.

I choose to live beyond regret, and let You recreate my life.

I believe You will make a way for me and provide for me, if only I trust You and obey.

I will trust in the darkness and know that my times are still in Your hand.

*I will believe You for my future, chapter by chapter, until all the story is written.*³ ■



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3 Northumbria Community, *Celtic Daily Prayers – Prayers and Readings from the Northumbria Community*, New York: HarperCollins, 2002, pp. 191-193.

2 To purchase this book, please see page 2.

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