



November 2020 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Be Not Afraid

By Per Saelid

As a young man, I loved listening to Keith Green's contemporary Christian album *So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt*. I laughed at the foolishness of the Israelites he described, and couldn't fathom how God's Chosen People could experience such miraculous encounters and then fearfully refuse to follow their Savior. Little did I know that decades later, after having experienced many wondrous revelations of God, I would similarly fail to follow.

A Lutheran Upbringing

I was raised by loving parents who in 1963 presented me for infant baptism at St. John's Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. It was a great gift. My parents, both immigrants from Norway, did not regularly practice their faith. In the first decade of my life, I can recall going to church only a time or two with my parents, usually at the invitation of their friends. Even so, I distinctly remember as a young child having an awareness of, and attraction to, a Presence far greater than myself.

At the suggestion of a believing Christian friend, my dad began to take me and my siblings to Sunday school when I was about 10 years old. He would pack us in the car, drive fifteen minutes to the nearest Lutheran church, and leave us there. My first Christian formation, presented by kind Sunday school teachers whose names I no longer remember, planted seeds that began to grow.

I don't know the exact age, but sometime during my early teens, I realized the Lord

was calling me to come closer. I felt an inexpressible love for God who, by virtue of my Lutheran formation, I now knew as Jesus. The attraction was so strong that I committed my life to serve Christ. In my Lutheran tradition, that translated for me into a desire to become a pastor.

Nearly simultaneous to that desire, a missionary pastor started a Lutheran Church nearer our home. He was very kind, and upon hearing of my interest, he invited me to become more involved. I served as an acolyte and lectured at the church, and was invited to sit in on pastoral meetings. At the same time, in my private devotional life, I fell in love with the Bible and began devouring it, reading through its entirety, and marveling at its mystery.

Introverted by nature, my high school years couldn't pass quickly enough for me. A good student, I proudly thought I was ready for college, and having decided to become a pastor, I also decided that I would

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

go to a Lutheran college. And so I did, traveling halfway across the country. My first year of college proved to be quite a shock. I was surprised to find so little evident faith. My first religion class was taught by an apparent non-believer, who within a few sessions had used the science of Higher Criticism to tear down the frail faith of most of my classmates. Only an adult student and I challenged the professor's weighty pronouncements. My apologetics weren't perfect, but I knew Scripture well enough by then to push back on some of the basics.

Not finding the faith I'd come looking for, and being surrounded by worldly temptation, I fell into depression and wondered how I could so miserably fail in my attempt to follow Jesus. I returned home after my first year, humbled and quite depressed, still desiring to follow the Lord with all my heart, but realizing I didn't know how. God seemed so distant.

A God Who Reveals

One weekend during summer break, I was alone at home reading a fictional book by C.S. Lewis. In the story, Lewis described a man surrounded by the presence of God and

in direct communication with his Creator. The passage resonated with me, stirring a longing deep within my soul. I offered up a simple but very earnest prayer: "That's the kind of relationship I want with you, Lord."

Suddenly, God was in the room with me, or perhaps it would be better said, I was in God. The experience was far beyond words. Physically, it felt as if a cool electrical wind was blowing from infinity to infinity as it passed through every cell of my being. Psychologically, the peace of God enveloped me, instantly driving away my depression. Spiritually, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God had revealed Himself to me in an undeniable way. The entire experience seemed outside of time, though I think it lasted only moments.

This encounter with God became a pivot point for my entire faith life. In the Lutheran church I attended, discussion about the Holy Spirit was rare, at least in any concrete personal manner. My pastor, a wonderful man, was not comfortable with charismatic experiences. But, as always, the Lord provides.

SUPPORT THE CHNETWORK!

Through your donation to the CHNetwork, you become a partner in our ministry of assisting non-Catholic clergy and laity on the journey to the Catholic Church. As a thank you, we are delighted to offer the following resources to help enrich your faith.



The Road From Topeka to Rome:

How the Pentecostal Movement Has Brought Millions Closer to the Catholic Faith CD — By Dr. Paul Thigpen

In this talk, Dr. Paul Thigpen looks at the history of Pentecostalism in the United States and its global impact on Christianity. The legacy of Pentecostalism is complex; for some, it's a road out of the Catholic Church, but for others, it's an opening to a fresh understanding of how the Holy Spirit works through liturgy and the sacraments. Thigpen explores the roots of revivalism in John Wesley and how the mystery and mysticism at the heart of Charismatic prayer can be a pathway to following the Holy Spirit's call into unity and truth in the Catholic Church.



Personal Prayer:

A Guide for Receiving the Father's Love

— By Fr. Thomas Acklin and Fr. Boniface Hicks

Prayer is at the heart of the Christian life. Given that we are weak and even sinful human beings, how can it be that God has anything to do with us? What does it mean to have a personal relationship with God? Why is God so silent and hidden? How do we grow in prayer? *Personal Prayer: A Guide for Receiving the Father's Love* brings the depth of human experience together with the Catholic tradition of prayer to present the path to an intimate and vulnerable relationship with God. This book explores the many forms of Catholic prayer and demonstrates that vulnerability is essential to growing in relationship with God. Rich with the wisdom of Scripture, Catholic teaching, and the writings of the saints, *Personal Prayer* is an exhaustive guide for anyone desiring to receive the Father's love in a profoundly personal way.

\$35

Receive *The Road From Topeka to Rome* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *Personal Prayer* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive *The Road From Topeka to Rome* CD and *Personal Prayer* for a donation of \$75.

— THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain resources by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to chnetwork.org/respond.

...Journeys Home Continued...

The following Monday, I had a dental appointment scheduled. In the morning, the phone rang. It was the dentist's office. They had an emergency to deal with and needed to reschedule my appointment to another day. Just minutes after I hung up, the phone rang again. It was my pastor. He said someone who'd committed to assist a contractor in building an addition to the church had cancelled at the last minute. He asked if I was available to come to the church that morning to help. I happily noted my calendar was now free for the day and said I'd be there shortly. After the call ended, I wondered at the coincidence.

I immediately liked the contractor. He was about 30 years old and filled with radiant joy. He engaged me in Christian conversation as we worked, and it wasn't long before I shared my recent encounter with God. His face lit up and he began sharing Scriptures that explained what I'd experienced. Everything he taught seemed new to me even though I'd read the Bible often. He spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, revelations from God, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and more. Our friendship grew quickly, and he invited me to go to church with him.

A Non-Denominational Turn

I was impressed by the size of his church, many times my own, with seats for several hundred, all of which were filled. It was an Assemblies of God congregation. The music was good, and I appreciated their enthusiasm for worship. The greatest memory I have of that first visit is witnessing the spiritual gifts being exercised, particularly the gift of prophesy. There were three pronouncements given at that service. The first two, spoken loudly so all could hear, seemed like nice words but carried no power for me. Then a third person prophesied and it was like God, in the midst of the large crowd, was speaking only to me. The prophesy tore at my heart, convicting me of my pride, an interior hardness that separated me from grace. I wept inconsolably, so much so that I think I embarrassed those seated near me.

As the summer came to a close, feeling quite empowered by the Holy Spirit, I decided to not return to my previous college. I enrolled in a Lutheran Bible college instead. My mind was awakened by orthodox Biblical scholarship taught by committed Christians. What a joy it was to dive into Scripture. My schedule was filled with class titles like *The Pentateuch*; *Isaiah and Jeremiah*; and *The Gospel of John*. I appreciated the knowledge I gained, but also noticed that each professor had his own interpretive lens. Being newly baptized with the Holy Spirit, I was looking for more insight into my own experience. Some professors

were happy to address the subject in Scripture, while others shied away from it or rejected it.

During these years, my heart continued to open to the working of God. In addition to the formal Lutheran liturgy which occurred regularly in the school chapel, I joined a small group of students in frequent, informal, Spirit-filled worship. We would gather in dorm rooms, and later, as the group grew, we filled larger spaces on campus. We usually met in the evening, after all the school staff had departed. We were exuberant, joyfully experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

At this school, I also encountered the first overtly anti-Catholic pronouncement I can remember. Attending a Lutheran Bible college carried with it a requirement to take a class on Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism. The professor who taught the class was convinced that Martin Luther had been Christianity's savior, freeing believers from the yoke of Catholicism. One day, he pounded the podium vigorously, shouting, "The Pope is the anti-christ, and the Catholic Church is the whore of Babylon!" He was, of course, just echoing the teachings that Martin Luther delivered long ago.

Despite the anti-Catholic pronouncement, Catholicism wasn't really anywhere on my radar during this time. I wanted to go deeper in the Spirit and earnestly sought the Lord in prayer. I was drifting away from Lutheranism in my heart, and growing suspicious of institutional religion in all its forms, particularly those I perceived as closed to the working of the Holy Spirit. My fellowship expanded to include a circle of men and women in the Seattle area who'd left their respective denominations to worship solely in their homes. We took seriously the foundations of Protestantism, that each man was the priest of his own home and that each was an authority unto himself. We worshipped together in a loving environment, studied Scripture together, exercised the spiritual gifts we'd received, and emphasized the teaching that all believers must learn to recognize the voice of God.

But listening to God while not recognizing any authority can be dangerous. While I was blessed with some amazing encounters, I was still a young man, often driven by impulse, unformed in faith from my youth, not properly discerning the shortfalls of my own nature, mixing God's desires with my own, and even more foolishly at times, projecting my own will as God's. This was never done with malice. I was zealous for the Lord, but because I lacked humility, I was not open to correction. I subsequently stumbled awkwardly through several errors. But the Lord,

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Meditations of a Hermit

By Brother Rex Anthony Norris

Jesus Christ calls His disciples to be saints. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “saints are persons in heaven (officially canonized or not), who lived heroically virtuous lives, offered their life for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation” (For more information on the Church’s procedure for canonization visit usccb.org/about/public-affairs/backgrounders/saints-backgrounder.cfm).

On May 27 of this year, Pope Francis announced that Blessed Charles de Foucauld (Brother Charles of Jesus) should be enrolled in the Church’s calendar of saints, thereby becoming St. Charles de Foucauld. This came as great news to me. Brother Charles is one of a group of disciples of the Lord Jesus who attracted me to the Catholic Church. The Pope’s announcement inspired me to retrieve from my bookshelf a book that had been sitting unread for some time.

Meditations of a Hermit is a series of letters and diary entries penned by Brother Charles spanning the years

1890 to 1916. In them, he shares insights into his personal relationship with Jesus Christ while encouraging others through the inevitable ups and downs of their relationship with Jesus. Below is an excerpt from the book that holds particular meaning for me, having spent a fair amount of time in prayer before the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the hermitage oratory. Perhaps this mediation on the Eucharist will inspire you to spend time with Jesus who is present, — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — in a nearby Tabernacle where He is waiting to spend time with you.

Jesus in the Holy Eucharist

You dwell, my Lord Jesus, in the Holy Eucharist. You are here, within a few feet of me, in the Tabernacle. Your body, your soul, your humanity, your divinity, your whole being is here in its twofold nature. How close you are, my God, my Savior, my Jesus, my Brother, my Spouse, my Beloved. You were no nearer to the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph in the cave at Bethlehem, in the house at Nazareth, than you are to me here now, so often, in the Tabernacle. Saint Mary Magdalen was no nearer to you when she sat at your feet at Bethany than I am at the foot of the altar. You were no nearer your apostles when you were seated in their midst than you are to me now, my God. How happy, oh, how happy I am! It is sweet to converse with you alone in my cell in the silence of the night and you are present as God as well as by your Grace; but, still, if I were to stay in my cell when I might be before the Blessed Sacrament is as though, when you were at Bethany, Mary Magdalene had left you alone to go and think about you in her chamber. It is a good and pious act to kiss the places you have sanctified in your mortal life, the stones of Gethsemani and of Calvary, the soil of the Way of the Cross, the waves of the sea of Galilee, but to prefer that to your Tabernacle would be to leave the living Jesus at my side, him alone, and to go off alone to venerate dead stones where he is no longer. It would be like leaving the room in which is his divine companionship, to go and kiss the floor of a room where he once was, but is no more. To leave the Tabernacle to go and venerate statues is to leave Jesus living at my side to go into another and salute his image. When one loves one feels that all hours spent beside the Beloved are well spent. One’s time is best spent so, except when we are called elsewhere to work for the Beloved. Wherever the Sacred Host is there is the living God. There is your Savior as truly as when he lived and spoke in Judea, and as truly as he is now in Paradise. “*Never miss a communion through your own fault; communion is more than life, more than all the wealth of the world, more than the whole universe: it is me, Jesus. How can you prefer something else to me? How can you, even if you love me a little, of your own will forgo the grace I offer you of entering within you. Love me with an open and a simple heart.*” ■

CHNETWORK RESOURCES

Find them all at chnetwork.org

Be sure to listen and subscribe to these informative resources brought to you by the Coming Home Network!

On the Journey with Matt and Ken

Former Baptist pastor Ken Hensley and former Wesleyan Matt Swaim came from two very different theological backgrounds, but they both ended up finding a home in the Catholic Church. Each week, they take a look at a major issue or question they faced along the way, and share the series of events and discoveries that led them to embrace the Catholic Faith.



Deep in Scripture with Marcus and JonMarc Grodi

Marcus Grodi has recorded hundreds of episodes of *Deep in Scripture*, featuring conversations with *Journey Home* guests and CHNetwork staff members about passages from the Bible that have particular meaning to them. Lately, Marcus has been joined on a number of these episodes by his son, JonMarc Grodi, the Chief Operating Officer of CHNetwork. JonMarc's background in philosophy and his interest in the classical virtues brings a wonderful element of application to these familiar, and sometimes unfamiliar, passages from God's Word.



Deep in History with Marcus Grodi and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

Marcus Grodi and Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson have been producing a new series for the Coming Home Network, explaining how the study of early Christianity and the Fathers of the Church helped guide each of them to the Catholic Faith.



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?

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CHNetwork Attention: Ann Moore

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THE
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ONLINE COMMUNITY



We have a great way for converts and journeyers to connect online! CHN's Online Community is the quickest and easiest way for people on the journey to Catholicism to connect with converts, as well as CHN staff, for fellowship on the journey home. We invite you to connect at community.chnetwork.org.

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: Saturday 6 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-Friday 1 AM ET

November 2

Nathan Crankfield*
(former Lutheran)

November 9

Deacon Scott Carson*
(former Episcopalian)

November 16

David Woodby* (former
Lutheran pastor)

November 23

Dr. Alicia Thompson*
(former agnostic)

November 30

Barbara Heil* (former Charismatic,
Pentecostal, and Word of Faith)
(re-air from 9/18/17)

December 7

Deacon Joe Calvert*
(former atheist)

*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 a recent convert “I just wanted to let you know that on Holy Saturday afternoon, in an empty church with my sponsor in the back, my priest in a mask, and my family with me in prayer but staying at home, I came home and received the Body of Christ. Man I can’t tell you how ethereal it all felt. But now I’m more confident than ever in caring for my patients, my fears are subdued, and my joy is unbounded.”

From Jim “Celebrated my tenth anniversary into full communion with the Catholic Church [on] Easter 2020. After sixty years as an evangelical Protestant, I finally made it home. Regrets? Only that it took me sixty years (broad grin). But a series of events over three decades, including a post-retirement doctorate in worship

studies, painted me into a corner where a radical decision profoundly guided by the Holy Spirit brought clarity and the greatest sense of belonging I’d ever encountered — home in the Catholic Church.”

From Alec “I’m excited to report that I received the sacraments of initiation yesterday morning along with another young lady in my RCIA class . . . I am so grateful for you and the Coming Home Network. I have watched countless episodes of *The Journey Home* where I found comfort in the stories of people like me who had experienced similar challenges. I also can’t thank you enough for the book on justification you sent me almost a year ago. To date, I’ve probably read close to two dozen books in addition to all the resources available on the

Internet, especially on Youtube. The Catholic community online is amazing, and I will always be grateful for folks who make content available for discerning souls and lead people like me into communion with Jesus Christ and the Church He founded. Thank you, thank you, thank you! . . . There are many challenges ahead, but I am filled with joy and I have the Church to guide me and for me to lean on. Again, thank you for everything you guys do. I will always be grateful for it.”

From Robert “WOW WOW WOW!!! ... I GET IT!, MY GOODNESS, LORD, I GET IT!!! WOW! I can’t even hold back the tears of ABSOLUTE JOY!” ■

SHARE SHARE YOUR STORY!

The CHNetwork **always welcomes** those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their **written conversion stories** of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to go to chnetwork.org/converts to review our writer’s guidelines, see sample stories, and upload your testimony.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- **For a Methodist pastor** who is ready to resign his ministry and enter the Church but faces strong opposition at home, that the Lord will show him how to reach those close to him who at this point have no interest in even hearing his reasons for wanting to become Catholic.
- **For an Assembly of God pastor and teacher** who is convinced he must become Catholic and is on the verge of resigning his ministry, that he will be able to find a job as well as the courage to face the response of his family and friends.
- **For Mark, a pastor on the journey towards the Catholic Church**, that the Lord will give him wisdom in dealing with his family as well as a congregation he loves very much.
- **For Jon, an Anglican priest**, that the Lord will continue to lead him toward his true home in the Catholic Church.
- **For a Lutheran pastor** who is convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and beginning to think about how to find work so that he can resign his ministry to enter the Church.
- **For Adam, a Baptist pastor on the journey toward the Catholic Church**, that he will find a way to convince close family members that he is still a Christian and that the Church isn't what they think it is.
- **For Kent, a former Protestant seminarian** who entered the Church this Easter season and is in the process of discerning the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood or religious life in the Catholic Church.
- **For Jacob, a Baptist pastor** convinced of the truth but strongly opposed by everyone around him, that the Lord will give him wisdom and fortitude as he attempts to follow the truth and love his family at the same time.
- **For Michael, a former Pentecostal pastor and his wife**, who were raised Catholic and have now made the decision to return home.

- **For Joe, who is moving to enter the Catholic Church** after decades of pastoral ministry as a pastor and street evangelist, that his wife will come to understand what he's doing.
- **For a Presbyterian pastor in Brazil** who wants to return to the Catholic Church and is struggling with how to deal with everything this will mean for his family and livelihood.
- **For Susan, a Protestant minister** who is open to learning more about the teachings of the Church, that the Holy Spirit will lead her in her journey.
- **For an Episcopal priest** who has wanted to become Catholic for some time and is exploring a possibility that would allow him to support his family and enter the Church.

Laity

- **For Andrew, an Anglican**, that, as he and his wife journey closer to the fullness of the Catholic Faith, our Lord Jesus would confirm in their hearts that this is where He wishes them to be.
- **For Stephanie** as she seeks truth and learns more about Catholic devotions.
- **For Michael, an Evangelical**, that he may continue his journey to full communion with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- **For Ann**, that her husband will be supportive of her interest in the Catholic Church and that the Holy Spirit will guide her heart and mind.
- **For Carleton**, that his love for Jesus will continue to deepen in his search for truth.
- **For a member of the Churches of Christ**, that his study of the early Church Fathers would bear fruit in his reception into the true Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **For a Charismatic in Washington State** who is having a lot of anxiety and doubts as she moves forward with her interest in the Catholic Church, that she will not be discouraged or give up.

- **For Sean, a non-denominational Christian**, that the Holy Spirit would guide his journey.
- **For Nancy**, that her RCIA experience will be a blessed and fruitful opportunity to draw closer to our Lord Jesus and His Church.
- **For Helen** who is continuing to study about the Catholic Church while navigating a lot of personal struggles.
- **For a Baptist in North Carolina**, that our Lord would bless and guide him and his family as they participate in RCIA.
- **For a non-denominational Christian** who is no longer interested in the Catholic Faith, that she will continue to seek truth and a deeper relationship with Jesus.
- **For Randy**, that his study of Augustine, Aquinas, and Anselm would draw him home to full communion with the Catholic Church.
- **For Catherine**, that her new life as a Catholic Christian will bring her abundant joys and blessings.
- **For Tyler, a Lutheran**, that, as he studies and prays through the *Catechism*, the Lord Jesus would give him a growing hunger for the Holy Eucharist.
- **For an Anglican in England** who is very drawn to the Church but is troubled by the divisions she sees between Catholics and also with devotion to Mary.
- **For John in Georgia**, that he would find a faithful and knowledgeable Catholic in his neighborhood that he can talk to.
- **For Carmen** to find good, solid answers to her concerns about the Church.
- **For Seventh-day Adventist** in the Philippines, that the Holy Spirit would enable him to overcome the false teachings about the Catholic Faith that he has been taught.
- **For Sally and her journey**, that she will feel fully at home in the Catholic Faith.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the *CHNetwork* and its members and supporters. We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 3

ever merciful, always picked me up and set me back on the path.

One of the many positive outcomes from my time at Bible college was that I discerned that I was not called to be a pastor. I recognized that my gifting was towards the prophetic and teaching, and my desire was to know the truth. As I continued my studies at other schools, I left the Lutheran Church in practice and simultaneously committed myself to strengthening my fellowship with my loose confederation of charismatic friends. We loved and encouraged one another, especially towards deepening our relationship with Christ in community worship. But for me, seeking encounters with God in a group setting proved unsatisfactory in the end, leading me to spiritual laziness. I was looking for charismatic fellowship to deepen my walk with God, but God was calling me to solitary prayer, a type of prayer that demanded personal discipline and sacrifice.

“...God was calling me to solitary prayer, a type of prayer that demanded personal discipline and sacrifice.”

A Deeper Way

My first substantive encounter with the Catholic Church occurred in 1986, by means of a saint, in the basement library of the Methodist university I was attending to finish my bachelor's degree. I was perusing the religion section for weekend reading material. Seemingly hidden among hundreds of other books, I noticed one in a tattered black binding. I pulled it out and examined it, wondering about its strange title and unfamiliar author: *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross. I flipped it open and began to read. I was struck with awe. The author's words were stunningly beautiful and resonated with truth. As a too self-confident Spirit-filled young man, I already thought myself “deep.” Just a few paragraphs of St. John of the Cross' writing convinced me otherwise. I immediately embraced this Catholic mystic, though strangely enough, I never really considered it relevant that he was Catholic.

God then led me on an unexpected career path. I'd seriously weighed graduate studies in theology, but instead felt called to serve my country. Following my graduation, a door opened for me to be commissioned as an officer in the United States Air Force. After my commissioning and training as an intelligence professional, I was shipped off to the Philippines. It was there that I met the love of

my life, Maribel, who'd left the Catholic Church at sixteen years of age to become a devout Seventh-day Adventist. While our spiritual heritages were quite different, we had a common love of Christ. Maribel joined me on my non-denominational journey. We were soon married and blessed with two beautiful girls and joyfully faced the many challenges of a young family.

The military life is one of mobility. Friends are passing, and Christian identity is ecumenical by demand. A common facility is used for worship by varieties of religions and denominations. This environment suited me well, as I saw no need to submit myself to any particular religious authority. Maribel and I prayed regularly, were faithful to daily devotions, studied diligently,

and fellowshiped with other Christians, mostly in our own home. I continued to drift farther from mainline Protestantism. It became increasingly evident to me that a spirit of rebellion underpinned Protestantism's beginnings and modern denominationalism. Their schismatic nature seemed inconsistent with God's revelation. Unfortunately, while the shortcomings of others seemed increasingly apparent, I remained oblivious to the same spirit of insubordination rooted firmly in my own soul, as well as in the form of Christianity I was practicing.

A few years later, in my early thirties, we were stationed in Guam, a small, isolated island in the vast Pacific Ocean. It was here that God would first open my eyes to the Catholic Church.

In prayer, I continued asking God to reveal Himself more profoundly to me. One day, as I was driving through the city of Agana, I saw a small Catholic bookstore. Thinking it might offer something of interest, like the Christian bookstores so popular then in the United States, I stopped and went in. I was a bit bewildered by the unfamiliar Catholic sacramentals that filled the store. A religious sister in a habit approached me and asked if she could assist. I told her that I was looking for something to read but not sure what they might carry. She asked me what authors I liked. I told her John of the Cross. Her eyes opened wide and she smiled knowingly. She recommended a book by an Anglican author named Evelyn Underhill titled *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. I didn't know it at the time, but the book,

...Journeys Home Continued...

written in the early 1900s, remains one of the best ever written on Christian mysticism. I happily purchased it.

Evelyn Underhill's writings exposed me to a wide array of Christian mystics. I found myself more and more drawn to the substance and orthodoxy of those who were Catholic. I began to purchase books by Catholic mystics such as Bonaventure, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, and more. My prayer was to go deeper into the Spirit, and these Catholic writers were showing me the way.

Another encounter that opened my eyes to the Church was with a co-worker. He was the first Catholic I'd encountered who was comfortable sharing his faith. He and I had both read Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which opened a dialogue. It wasn't long before I realized that my Catholic friend posed a theological problem for me. He was Catholic, and yet at the same time, I recognized him as a brother in Christ. In my mind, it seemed a contradiction.

The witness of my co-worker soon challenged me to reflect on what I believed about Catholicism, an understanding delivered to me by non-Catholics. I wanted to know what Catholics themselves taught. Thankfully, it was 1994, and Pope John Paul II had recently promulgated the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I purchased one and read through it, fascinated by its spiritual depth and its Biblical heft. It was the most beautiful summation of Christian thought I'd ever encountered. After reflecting on all that I'd read, I came to a glad conclusion: today's Catholics were Christians, too. Recognizing that, I also began to realize that the lives and teachings of the Catholic mystics I so admired were inseparable from the identity, authority, and teaching of the Catholic Church.

After reading the *Catechism* and other Catholic material, my intellectual barriers had fallen to a sufficient degree that I could hear the Holy Spirit leading me in a new way. I continued to pray, "I want to go deeper, Lord." And now I could hear God gently speaking in the depth of my heart: "I want you to go deeper too. Right this way." To my

great shock, I realized He was leading me to the Catholic Church.

And I said "no."

Lukewarm Christianity

To be fair, I didn't phrase it quite that way. My response was really more: "I *do* want to go deeper with you, Lord. But let's do it my way instead." In fear, I turned away from the invitation to enter the Church. I was like the Israelites I'd once mocked. I'd experienced miracles in my life, and had been gifted with profound encounters with God, but when the Lord invited me to enter a new place of promise, fear stopped me in my tracks. Other than my co-worker and his wife, I personally knew no other living Catholics whom I admired. And I dearly treasured my Christian friends whom I suspected would reject the path to which

I was being called. So I compromised my faith, thinking I could live with my feet in both worlds, Catholic in my spirituality and Protestant in my community.

Turning away from God's invitation had a profound effect on my spiritual life. I still loved God, but the Lord was in truth no longer first in my life, even though I said He was. Like the Israelites, having fearfully turned away from the Promised Land, I began wandering in a spiritual desert. I still periodically experienced

God's miracles, and the Lord still used me to encourage others in their Christian faith, but my interior life stagnated. Over the next twenty years, my double-minded faith slowly withered and sin crept into aspects of my life. Fruitful fellowship shriveled up, reading of Scripture became like chewing on sand, and prayer felt like a pointless labor.

Humility Through Suffering

Then tragedy struck our family. In 2014, Maribel's mother died unexpectedly in our home. Maribel was devastated and suffered from post-traumatic stress. In her agony, I could see that she was looking to me for spiritual consolation, some manner of finding meaning in her suffering. And I, because of the poor state of my own spiritual life, had absolutely nothing of real value to offer her.

One day, as I sat in my office at home, looking out the window and humbly reflecting on my ongoing struggles,

"I'd experienced miracles in my life, and had been gifted with profound encounters with God, but when the Lord invited me to enter a new place of promise, fear stopped me in my tracks."

...Journeys Home Continued...

I asked the Lord, "Why is it like this?" Immediately, what felt like scales fell off my eyes and I could see with perfect clarity the moment twenty years earlier when I'd said "no" to the Lord's invitation to become Catholic. And then God spoke to me, the words ringing like a bell in my head: "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your heart." (cf. Heb 3:15).

The revelation crushed me. In an instant I realized that I'd been lying to the Lord, to myself, and everyone else about the true state of my spiritual life. I'd been living separated from God for decades. I wept. I also immediately asked the Lord to forgive me. After composing myself, I turned to my computer and searched for a nearby Catholic church. I wasn't sure how to become Catholic, but I was determined to find out. After getting the contact information, I sent an email to the parish asking for assistance.

Next, I knew I needed to tell Maribel. She was in the living room reading a devotional. I told her I had something important to share. I said that I was going to become Catholic. I explained that I'd been disobedient for a long time and I wasn't going to remain that way any longer. I also said that I would love for her to join me, but I wouldn't pressure her. I asked her to pray about it.

Maribel was stunned. Her first comment was, "This goes back to Guam, doesn't it?" She'd known! And her first thought as a fallen-away Catholic was, "Why would I want to return to the Catholic Church? I learned nothing there." She'd been born into a culturally Catholic Filipino family where Mass was attended, but the life of Christ wasn't visibly lived out at home. Her first real encounters with the Bible and Christians living a committed life of faith had come through Protestants. But Maribel didn't reject my invitation. Instead she took it to prayer, and to her surprise she felt a clear call to join me. We went to our first Mass the next weekend.

The Mass was vaguely familiar to me. My distant Lutheran upbringing was liturgical, so I knew the basic rubrics. I don't know that I got much out of that first Mass, but for me that was irrelevant. I knew I was being obedient, and I was committed to faithfully following God's call.

For the next four months, God gifted me with an amazing spiritual high. The Scriptures came alive again and I read through the Bible anew with an additional seven books to celebrate. My prayer life was suddenly dynamic, as I discovered and embraced the ancient Catholic practice of *Lectio Divina*. I read through the entire *Catechism of the Catholic Church* again. I read the Apostolic Fathers and many of the early Church Fathers. I embraced the disciplines of fasting and tithing, and so much more. It

seemed to me that God, in His love and mercy, caught me up in four months on all that I'd missed out on in the past twenty years.

Eventually, I had to come down from the mountaintop, and a month later, RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) started. Intellectually, I probably didn't need to attend the program, but it served an important purpose. I was blessed to patiently and humbly walk the journey with others. Maribel discovered that she'd never been confirmed, so she attended alongside me. Her faith was profoundly renewed. My mom, a Lutheran, and my stepfather, a baptized non-practicing Catholic who'd never been confirmed, also came to RCIA. It was a joyful journey that culminated in a 2016 Easter Vigil Mass that was for us a truly family event.

The Journey Continues

Entering the Church Jesus founded and surveying its endless mystery, from sacrament and saints to suffering and scandal, is at times almost overwhelming. For me, living as a Catholic is a glorious challenge, a continuing revelation, and a life of Spirit-filled joy for which I'm forever grateful. Recalling that St. John of the Cross was an important guide for me along my journey to the Catholic Church, I live today within the richness of the Carmelite contemplative tradition, a tradition that points me along the way of humility and love, virtues of which I'm ever in more need. My prayer today remains that of my youth: "I want to go deeper, Lord." And every day, the Lord continues to answer: "I want you to go deeper too. Right this way." ■



PER SAELID is a retired Air Force officer living near Sequim, Washington. He worships at St. Joseph Catholic Church and assists with parish Religious Education programs, is part of the RCIA team, and serves with the Knights of Columbus. Per is also a member of the Little Flower of the Olympics Lay Carmelite Community.

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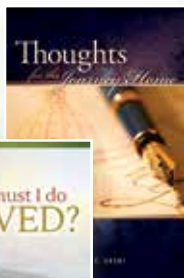
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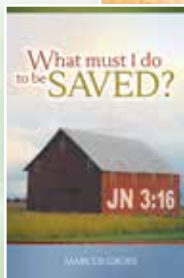
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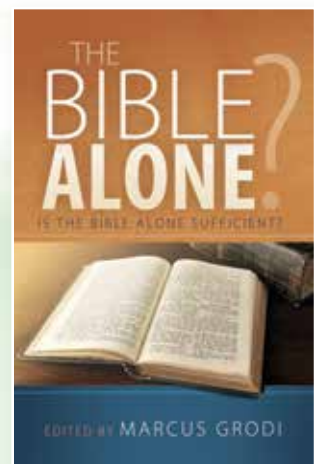
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