



June 2025 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

From Cardboard Cradle to the Eucharist

By Rachel Bulman

I was born in a cardboard box. It's not a metaphor or an exaggeration—it's the literal truth. My biological mother brought me into the world in a makeshift lean-to, pieced together from scraps of cardboard and tin, tucked into an alleyway in the heart of the Philippines. It was a fragile shelter against the harsh world outside. My mother, hemorrhaging badly, was alone, clinging to life as she held her newborn daughter. It was a scene that should have ended in tragedy, but even in that moment, God was at work. He wasn't distant; His presence was there, tangible and real, stepping into the mess with a miracle.



Just when it seemed like there was no hope, a group of missionaries happened to walk by. They weren't supposed to be there—they had taken an unexpected detour. But God has a way of leading His people right where they needed to be. They heard the faint, desperate cries and rushed over, finding my mother slumped against the alley wall, barely conscious, with a tiny, fragile baby—me—wrapped in torn blankets. Without hesitation, they scooped us up. They carried my mother to the nearest hospital, while I was taken into the arms of someone who cradled me gently, whispering a prayer of thanks. It was the first of many times that God's hand would reach down to rescue me, even before I knew how to call out to Him.

At a different moment, halfway across the world, in a quiet American kitchen, my soon-to-be adoptive

mother was praying a different kind of prayer. She had recently suffered the heartbreak of a miscarriage, and the empty ache left her feeling lost. But instead of giving up, she turned her pain into a plea: "Lord, please give me a little girl by Christmas." It was the kind of prayer that Pentecostals understand—a prayer filled with bold faith, the kind that doesn't make sense on paper but trusts that God hears and answers in miraculous ways.

In November, I was born. By December, I was on an airplane bound for the United States. My new parents had come for me with open arms, but they hadn't brought a fancy bassinet or carrier. Instead, they lined a simple cardboard box with soft blankets and held me close for the long flight home. It's hard not to see the connection between the cardboard lean-to where I was born and the cardboard cradle that carried me to a new life across the sea. From the very beginning, my journey was marked by makeshift

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...Journeys Home Continued...

miracles and the unmistakable touch of God's hand.

We settled into a small house at the end of a dirt road—a house my new father had built with his own hands. It wasn't grand, but it was home. It stood just a stone's throw from the little church where he pastored, a humble beige brick building with red-cushioned pews and a giant painting of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. That image—Christ holding a lamb close to His chest—became a symbol for my life. I was that lamb, plucked from the streets, held in the arms of a Savior who had orchestrated every step of my journey.

Looking back now, I can trace His fingerprints over every part of my story. He took a baby from the streets of the Philippines, placed me into the arms of a family who had prayed me into their hearts, and set me on a path that was marked by His miraculous care. It's a story that couldn't have been written by human hands—a story filled with divine intervention, the kind that feels like you're walking through the pages of Scripture, where God shows up in the most unexpected ways.

This was just the beginning of God's relentless love for me—a love that would carry me from the most humble of beginnings into a life I could never have imagined.

Faith on the Outside, Fractures on the Inside

The tent revivals of my childhood were filled with a kind of electricity that's hard to describe. My father would sing "I'll Fly Away," holding the first note so long that it felt like he was carrying the whole congregation with him. People would join in, their voices swelling together, creating a wave of sound that seemed to lift us all closer to heaven. It was powerful, and I loved watching the way people responded—tears streaming, hands raised, as they came forward to pray and receive what they believed God had for them.

In addition to our own church activities, I remember spending time with a group from Youth With a Mission (YWAM). They were a vibrant, energetic group of young people, completely on fire for the Gospel. I was struck by their enthusiasm and the way they lived out their faith so openly. There was a kind of freedom and joy in the way they worshipped that left a lasting impression on me. I loved being around them, seeing their passion for sharing the message of Jesus with everyone they met. It made me realize that there was something powerful about youth coming together with a shared purpose, and it sparked a deeper desire in me to experience that kind of faith for myself.

One night, a visiting evangelist took the stage, delivering a message with an intensity that held everyone captive. He focused on God's judgment, warning us about the urgency of repentance. But then, he did something I had never seen before. He stepped to the front of the stage and began counting down. "10... 9... 8..." His voice boomed, filling the tent. "The gates of heaven are closing! Will you follow Him? 7... 6... 5..."

The crowd surged forward, a sense of urgency gripping everyone. "This is your last chance," the evangelist called out. "4... 3... 2... 1!" It was dramatic and unsettling. I remember sitting there, feeling a knot in my stomach, trying to make sense of what I was witnessing. I had never imagined God in this way—a God who would close the gates of heaven in a countdown. It was a moment that left me feeling uneasy, a glimpse into a different side of faith that I wasn't prepared to understand.

Looking back, that experience was a reflection of a deeper contradiction at work in my own family. On the surface, we were a picture of unity and faith—my father's powerful preaching, my mother's beautiful singing, the dynamic ministry they led together. But beneath the surface, there was a tension growing, something that didn't fit the image we projected to the world. It was like a crack forming in the foundation, something I couldn't

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

PENTECOSTALISM AND CATHOLICISM (DVD)

DR. PAUL THIGPEN

In this talk from our 2008 Deep in History conference, Dr. Paul Thigpen looks at the history of Pentecostalism, and its global impact on Christianity. He discusses 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.

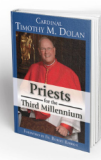


#1253 - \$15.00

PRIESTS FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

CARDINAL TIMOTHY DOLAN

Whether he is stressing the necessity of regular Confession and the Liturgy of the Hours, or discussing priestly celibacy in frank, realistic terms, Cardinal Dolan emphasizes true priestly identity by presenting a life worth living, a life worth sharing, a life worth offering up to the Father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit.



#3218 - \$13.97

RECLAIMING VATICAN II

FR. BLAKE BRITTON

In Reclaiming Vatican II, Fr. Blake Britton presses beyond the political narrative foisted upon the post-conciliar Church and contends that Vatican II was neither conservative nor liberal, but something much more beautiful and challenging. Britton clears up misconceptions about the council and reveals how—when properly understood and applied—it fosters a richer experience of being in the Church.



#3281 - \$17.95

...Journeys Home Continued...

name at the time but could feel widening with each passing year.

When I was ten years old, the crack split wide open. My father's infidelity came to light, and it was like a bomb had gone off in the middle of our family. The life we had built around church and ministry shattered almost instantly. My mother, who had always been the heart of our home with her singing and her faith, stopped going to church altogether. The hymns that had filled our house—songs of joy and hope—fell silent, replaced by a heavy, painful silence. It was as if the music had been turned off, leaving only the echoes of what had been.

My father remarried quickly, and our family was divided. I found myself splitting time between two different homes, caught between my father's new family and the remnants of the life we had once shared with my mother. It was disorienting and confusing, like being torn between two worlds that didn't fit together any more.

For me, the fallout was more than just the practical challenges of shared custody—it was a deep, internal struggle. The powerful moments of worship and the experiences of God's presence that I had clung to now felt out of sync with the brokenness in my family. It was difficult for my young mind to make sense of how a family that had been so devoted to God's work could fall apart so completely.

A Journey Through Uncertainty and Growth

The dissolution of my family left a deep impact on all of us. My father, despite everything, continued his ministry as if nothing had changed. He was still preaching, still leading services, while

my mother, heartbroken and disillusioned, stopped going to church altogether. The hymns she used to sing around the house, the prayers that filled our home—those sounds were gone. It felt like a part of my world had fallen silent. I found myself caught between two worlds, splitting time between my father's new family and my mother's quiet, empty house.

Despite the chaos, church remained a refuge for me. At 17, a friend from work invited me to attend a youth service at a Church of God. I didn't think much of it at first, but that night changed everything. The service was run by the youth group—teenagers like me, pouring their hearts out in worship. The music was raw and emotional, covering the full spectrum of human experience: praise, lament, joy, sorrow. I looked up from the back pew, where I had been praying, and saw something I had never witnessed before. The altar was packed with young people, two people deep, praying fervently with tears streaming down their faces. I was struck by the intensity of it all. "Whatever that is," I thought, "I want it."

I started attending regularly, becoming part of the youth group at Cornerstone Church of God. I found friends who shared my hunger for God, and I quickly became involved in the praise and worship team. Leading worship felt like stepping into a new calling, one that was mine alone, separate from the expectations of my family. It was here that my faith began to feel real—tangible and deeply woven into the fabric of my everyday life.

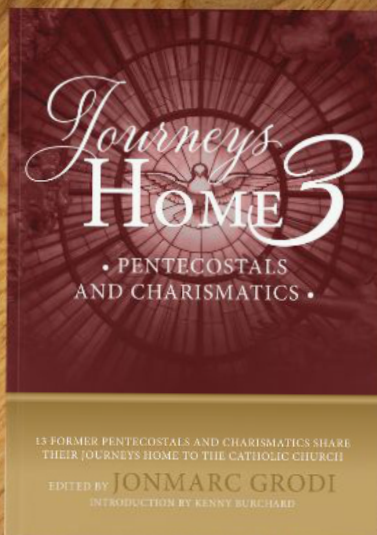
One of the most memorable experiences during this time came when the youth pastor's wife pulled me aside one night to pray over me. Her words were unexpected and powerful. "Rachel," she said as she laid her hands on me, "your prayers have been

Coming Soon!

A new collection of stories is hitting the shelves this month!

Journeys Home 3 highlights the experiences of thirteen former **Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians** as they discovered the fullness of faith present in the Catholic Church and made the decision to come into full communion with the Church. Though created especially for converts and those exploring the Catholic Faith from a Pentecostal background, this compilation is sure to provide insight, encouragement, and inspiration for all.

Order your copy today at chnetwork.org/jh3.





Conforming Our Hearts to Christ



Dear Friends,

I pray that you and your families are having a blessed and leisurely Easter season. As we approach the great conclusion of this season, the feast of Pentecost, we keep in prayer particularly those many men and women who entered full communion with the Catholic Church and received the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation so far this year. As we await with Mary and the Apostles the promised descent of the Holy Spirit, this is a

good time to reflect on the ongoing journey that all of us—new converts, journeyers, and lifelong Catholics—share as disciples of Our Lord. Just as the disciples were, we too are in need of the Holy Spirit to give us renewed strength for the journey and to purify our hearts, conforming them more fully to the Sacred Heart of the Master.

Christian conversion, as we frequently discuss, is ongoing and multifaceted. The most common and straightforward aspect is the intellectual—for example, asking questions about one's Protestant theology, seeking insight into the Early Church Fathers, reading and researching what Catholics really believe, and ultimately coming to conclusion and conviction. But of course we know that mere "head knowledge" is not enough and that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:17). Hence intellectual conversion must ultimately culminate in decision, action, change, and the building of a new way of life in accordance with God's call. Thus it is, with great joy, that we welcome those neophytes who have endured the long, hard road "home" to the Catholic Church.

The journey doesn't end there though. For one thing, it takes time to learn to think and act like a Catholic—to learn the prayers, to get in sync with the Liturgical Calendar, and to form new habits of prayer and worship, incorporating the great gifts of the sacraments and traditions of the Church. For another thing, however, even once these have been incorporated into practice and habit, a deeper and ongoing journey still remains, and that is the slow, steady conversion of *our hearts*, by grace, to conform to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In Scripture and Christian tradition, the heart is a mysterious reality—the deepest center of our being, where intellect, will, and emotions converge. It is the "I" that chooses, loves, and encounters God. Yet, even when our intellect grasps truth and our will strives for goodness, our hearts can remain divided, revealing selfish impulses that resist God's grace. We discover through our experiences as well as in prayerful reflection that deep down our hearts are not *pure*—they are divided, fractured, inconstant—they remain wounded and marred by sin, even after those sins have been forgiven.

When I look inward toward this mysterious "heart" of which Scripture speaks, I find that part of me does love God and is moved to return His love and share it with my neighbor. But part of me also just...doesn't. Part of me remains utterly selfish and self-centered, in a way that is so deeply rooted as to not be directly accessible to the

searching of my intellect or the exertion of my will. At odd moments, this impurity in my heart comes to the surface and surprises and alarms me! These moments humble me, driving me to my knees, where I recognize my need for God's grace—the only power that can heal this deepest wound. By cooperating with that grace through prayer and charity, we open our hearts to God's transforming love.

Once again, now is an ideal time to reflect on the journey of ongoing conversion and our need for the Holy Spirit to bring purification and healing to our hearts. This ultimate healing is the great and humbling promise Our Lord makes to us throughout sacred Scripture:

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)

This promise made to the ancient Israelites takes a new and ultimate dimension in the incarnation, birth, passion, death, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, we not only have the coming of the Messiah to bring about the promised healing and renewal of our "hearts of stone", but even more than this: We have the heart of the man, Christ Jesus—the Sacred Heart which, as Catholics, we honor particularly in the month of June. It is given to us as Christians to encounter this Sacred Heart in prayer, to come to know and experience His love, to be united with this Sacred Heart in Holy Communion. We are called and promised, if we but cooperate with grace and persevere in charity, that not only will our thoughts and actions be conformed to Jesus, but ultimately and especially *our hearts*. That we, in the end, would have hearts like Jesus—hearts that are turned fully in love toward the Father, and hearts that look with mercy at the woman caught in adultery (John Chapter 8), with love at the rich young ruler attached to his wealth (Matthew Chapter 19), with forgiveness at the soldiers who put him to death (Luke Chapter 23).

Once again, as we anticipate the great feast of Pentecost, let us ask and look for, in a new way this year, the coming of the Holy Spirit to bring this *conversion to the Sacred Heart* that we are so much in need of. May we remain pilgrims on the journey together, comforting and encouraging each other to persevere through every trial and difficulty, knowing that all these things work together for our good (Romans 8:28)—they bring us close to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and conform our hearts to His.

Come Holy Spirit!

JonMarc Grodi
Executive Director of *The Coming Home Network*
Host of EWTN's *The Journey Home*

Joyful Journey Updates

From James, a former Lutheran pastor

"Being a pastor, I thought I knew all there was to theology. But the more I studied the Catholic Faith, the more truth and beauty I saw, like a flower slowly unfolding its petals in April. Whenever I share my story or a new nugget of Catholic doctrine, people say they can see and hear my excitement in my face and voice—I cannot contain it!" ■

From Stephen, a former Mennonite primary:

"O great glory and splendor! And all my wishes have come true! And then he wept (Sam Gamgee—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*). Out of the shadows of a long and thirsty pilgrimage of decades, the sheer physicality of the Vigil caught us up. Dazed after receiving the Body and the Blood we knelt, sated, the sacred chrism blending with tears running down our faces. My heart is full, as at a banquet." ■

From Aaron, a former Reformed Church pastor:

"In May of 2023, I began studying Catholicism in depth so that I could better understand a friend of mine who had gone from Protestant pastor to Catholic convert in 2017. I had no idea that this deep dive would end up not just informing me, but transforming me. Long-held biases and objections dissolved, and a new-found appreciation for the doctrines and history, and the life and liturgy of the Catholic Church took their place. My journey culminated at the 2025 Easter Vigil, when I too went from Protestant pastor to Catholic convert, along with my wife and two of our children. We are grateful for all our supporters and cheerleaders along the way, not the least of which has been the Coming Home Network. Glory to God in the highest!" ■

Do you have a journey update to share? Submit it to info@chnetwork.org.

WELCOME HOME!

Were you received into full communion with the Catholic Church this Easter?
Are you celebrating a milestone anniversary of your reception into the Church?

Let us know!

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director

Monday, June 2

Christopher O'Keefe

Former Mennonite Pastor

Monday, June 9

Kenneth Parker

Former Pilgrim Holiness Church

Orig. Air Date: 10/26/20

Monday, June 16

Eddie Trask

Former Evangelical, Catholic Revert

Monday, June 23

Rae-Mi LeRoy

Former Buddhist

Monday, June 30

Fr. Bradley Elliott, O.P.

Former Lutheran



TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sat. 6PM ET

RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET
Encores: Sat. 7AM ET, Sun. 1AM ET and 5PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Mon.–Fri. 1AM ET

Monday, July 7

Deacon Scott Carson

Former Agnostic and Episcopalian

Orig. Air Date: 11/9/20

Schedule is subject to change.

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

The Impact of Irenaeus

by Matt Swaim, Director of Outreach

The early Church Fathers are a hinge in Christian history; they illustrate for us a strong continuity between the Church of the Scriptures, the Church of the first centuries, and the Church of the present day.

One of the clearest examples of that continuity is St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus hailed from Smyrna, the home of St. Polycarp, who learned the faith at the feet of St. John the Apostle.

As he testifies in *Against Heresies*:

"Polycarp also was not only instructed by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also by the apostles in Asia appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried on earth a very long time...having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down..." (Against Heresies 3:3)

This proximity to the Beloved Disciple alone ought to make the writings of Irenaeus worth considering, but their content is also extraordinary, due to the picture it gives us of 2nd century Christianity, and how it was guarding and passing on the faith of the apostles.

Regarding the authority of Sacred Tradition in the life of the Church, St. Irenaeus says this:

"(I)t is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life." (Against Heresies 3:4:1)

Elsewhere in *Against Heresies*, he speaks of the "tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul..." and goes on to say that "it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority..." (*Against Heresies* 3,3:2).

St. Irenaeus also articulates a view of the Eucharist consistent with historic Catholic teaching, a doctrine which he learned from those who were taught by the apostles:

"He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the

bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies." (Against Heresies 5:2)

Interestingly enough, in *Against Heresies*, St. Irenaeus has as his primary target the Gnostics, who early on began to lead Christians astray by pitting matter against spirit, denying the incarnation, and professing the true Gospel to be a kind of secret knowledge. His rebuttal:

"(T)he doctrine of the apostles is open and steadfast, holding nothing in reserve; nor did they teach one set of doctrines in private, and another in public...for error is plausible, and bears a resemblance to the truth, but requires to be disguised; while truth is without disguise, and therefore has been entrusted to children." (Against Heresies 3,15:1-2)

It should be noted that combatting Gnosticism was also a hallmark of the writings of John, in his Gospel, and especially in his first epistle. John, who mentored Polycarp, who mentored Irenaeus. The apple does not fall far from the apostolic tree.

It is also fitting that it was Pope Francis who eventually declared Irenaeus to be a Doctor of the Church only a few years ago. Francis had long treasured a devotion to Mary under the title "Undoer of Knots," the origins of which can be found in the writings of St. Irenaeus around 189 A.D.:

"In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word.' But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin... And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith." (Against Heresies 4,22:4)

For anyone exploring the ancient roots of our Church, St. Irenaeus is an indispensable resource. His voice rings out among the great cloud of witnesses who carefully guarded and passed down the faith of the first Christians, who still had the voices of the Apostles echoing in their hearts.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, pray for us!



Prayer List

Clergy

■ **For Brian, a former Baptist pastor** who was received into the Church with his wife at the Easter Vigil in 2024; that the Lord will continue to help him lead his family into their new life in the Catholic Church.

■ **For Cameron, a Baptist pastor** exploring the Catholic Faith and dealing with many questions; that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire him to seek the answers he needs.

■ **For Andrew, a Protestant minister** for many years who has begun exploring the Catholic Church; that the Holy Spirit will lead him in his studies.

■ **For Gideon, a Protestant Youth Minister** who has been on the journey for some time and this Easter Vigil was welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church; that the Lord will bless him as he reimagines his future with Christ.

■ **For Guillaume, an Evangelical Pastor** who was baptized and raised Catholic, later became Protestant, and now finds himself wanting to go back; that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide him as he continues to struggle with certain issues and seeks to lead his family into the Church.

■ **For Karl, a Mennonite Missionary** on the journey into the Catholic Church; that the Lord will give him answers to questions that remain.

■ **For Mathieu, a Protestant seminarian** who has begun to study Catholic theology, is reading widely, and feels drawn powerfully toward the Church, but has many questions; that Jesus will lead him home.

■ **For Nicholas, a Lutheran minister** in OCIA praying there will be a way for him

to work in ministry in the Catholic Church; that the Lord will grant him the desire of his heart, unless he has something better in mind.

■ **For Nicklaus, a Presbyterian seminarian** who has been drawn to the Catholic Church for some years and recently decided to pursue full communion with the Church after completing his Master's program; that the Holy Spirit will lead his family as they move to a new location and he begins a new job.

■ **For Paul, a Baptist minister** who has become convinced that the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* isn't true and is struggling with what to do in an area of the country with few, if any, Catholic Churches; that the Lord will give him wisdom and courage to do what he increasingly sees he must.

■ **For Scott, an Anglican priest** who entered the Church with his wife this past Advent; that the Lord will help him as he develops his work as a Christian counselor.

Lay

■ **For Albert, a Reformed Baptist**, that our Lord Jesus would honor his prayer: "I believe, help my unbelief."

■ **For Donald, a former Non-denominational Evangelical**, that he finds good answers to his many questions.

■ **For Isabella, a Presbyterian**, that there may be a unity of faith within her family and spiritual guidance for herself and her family members.

■ **For Jamie, a Baptist**, that the Lord would bestow the grace of wisdom as she and her husband discern what is true on their journey to the Church, and the grace to overcome the anti-Catholic things they have been taught.

■ **For Jason, a Reformed Baptist**, that he may find good and faithful guidance from the priest in his parish.

■ **For John, a Presbyterian**, that our Lord would give him a hunger for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

■ **For Keith, from a Latter-day Saint** background, that he may find the answers that he needs to his many questions.

■ **For Kolten**, that his dive into Scripture would bring about the fruit of his embracing the fullness of the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Kyle**, that our Lord Jesus would motivate someone at his local parish to positively respond to his request for guidance in joining the Church.

■ **For Morgan, a formed oneness Pentecostal**, that he may find a mentor willing to assist him in his journey to the Church.

■ **For Natalia, a Non-denominational Protestant**, that the Lord might lead her to family unity in the Catholic Faith.

■ **For Nathan, a member of the Church of England**, that the Holy Spirit would guide him into full-communion with the Successor of St. Peter.

■ **For Patrick, a Free Methodist**, that God would heal him of his fear of being rejected by friends and family if he should become a Catholic.

■ **For Ryan**, that as he prepares to begin OCIA this fall, the Lord would give him a hunger for His grace and truth.

■ **For Scott, a former Catholic**, that our Lord Jesus would guide him home to His holy Church.

■ **For Susan, an Evangelical**, that she may receive clarity and an understanding of God's will to be done, as well as His truth and peace.

"You shall receive power when the HOLY SPIRIT has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." (Acts 1:8-9)

PRAYER FOR THE REPOSE OF POPE FRANCIS

O God, faithful rewarder of souls, grant that your departed servant **Pope Francis**, whom you made successor of Peter and shepherd of your Church, may happily enjoy for ever in your presence in heaven the mysteries of your grace and compassion, which he faithfully ministered on earth. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

(from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

PRAYER FOR THE SUCCESSOR OF PETER

O God, who in your providential design willed that your Church be built upon blessed Peter, whom you set over the other Apostles, look with favor, we pray, on **Leo XIV** our Pope and grant that he, whom you have made Peter's successor, may be for your people a visible source and foundation of unity in faith and of communion. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

(from the Collect for Mass)

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CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church and make the journey home.

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Please contact Ann at **740.450.1175** or via email **ann@chnetwork.org** if you have any questions.

heard by God, but there's a battle happening right now. Just like in the book of Daniel, when the angel's message was delayed for 21 days because of the Prince of Persia, there's spiritual warfare holding back what God has for you. But don't lose heart—your answer is coming." I wept as she prayed over me, feeling a wave of reassurance and the unmistakable presence of God. It was a moment of clarity, a reminder that He was still guiding my steps, even in the silence and the struggle.

By the time I finished high school, I knew I needed to make a change. The tension at home was unbearable, and I felt a strong pull toward independence. Moving out of my father's house was one of the hardest decisions I had to make, but it was necessary. For a short while, I stayed with my boyfriend's family, which caused quite a stir in our church community even though there was nothing improper going on. Eventually, I moved in with my best friend's family, who welcomed me with open arms. Despite the physical distance, my father and I worked hard to maintain our relationship. He attended my high school graduation, organized a dinner for me, and was there as much as he could be, while still giving me the space I needed.

College was a breath of fresh air. I enrolled at Florida Southern College, majoring in communications. It felt like the world was opening up to me, full of new opportunities and experiences. I was brought to campus early as one of the editors of the campus newspaper, which gave me a chance to become familiar with the grounds and meet new people right away. I also joined a campus ministry group called Upper Room. When I first joined, it was a small gathering, but by the time I graduated, it had grown into one of the largest ministries on campus. My role in the group deepened my faith and my connection to God in ways I hadn't expected. I found myself leading worship again, drawn to the powerful image from 2 Chronicles 20:21, where the musicians led the army into battle. It felt like a calling, a space where I could lead others into the presence of God.

During this time, I explored different church communities, dipping my toes into various denominations. I remember visiting a Vineyard Church, where I encountered a statement of faith posted in the lobby. It was the first time I had seen a church's "tenets" spelled out like that, and it struck me as both interesting and strange. I read it briefly, thought, "Huh, tenets of faith," and moved on, not giving it much more thought. I embraced the Non-denominational movement, floating between churches like a social butterfly at a packed party, enjoying the diversity in worship styles without feeling tied down to any specific tradition.

This season of my life was one of searching and discovery, a time of building my own faith separate from my family's influence. I was piecing together who I was and who God was calling me to be.

Jason: The Catholic Boyfriend and the Crisis of Faith

In February 2007, I met Jason, the man who would eventually become my husband. He looked like a younger version of Keanu Reeves—Matrix-era, not John Wick—and had a quiet strength about him that immediately drew me in. We clicked almost instantly, and our conversations flowed easily. But there was something I hadn't anticipated: Jason was Catholic.

Growing up, I hadn't known much about Catholicism. My knowledge was limited to the stereotypical portrayals in movies like *Boondock Saints* and the occasional fictional references in book series like *The Mortal Instruments*. In my mind, Catholics were Christians who prayed in Latin and kept weapons hidden under church altars—a humorous but superficial impression I'd picked up along the way.

It wasn't until I started spending more time with Jason and his family that I realized just how devout they were. They prayed before meals, reciting the same prayer in unison, something that felt both strange and oddly comforting. It was a new experience for me, but I didn't give it much thought until, one night at work, a friend made a comment that changed everything.

We were chatting at the end of a long shift when she mentioned her new boyfriend. "He's great," she said, smiling. "Is your guy a Christian?"

"Yes!" I replied confidently. "What about yours?"

She looked at me, her smile fading slightly. "No, he's Catholic."

Her words hit me like a punch in the gut. "Wait, what?" I said, my face contorting in confusion. "Are Catholics not Christians?"

She shook her head, looking almost amused at my ignorance. "No, they're not," she said bluntly.

"Oh," I replied, feeling a wave of unease wash over me. "I've never heard that before." And I wasn't lying—I truly hadn't. Growing up, I was never exposed to anti-Catholic rhetoric. I had no idea there was such a stark divide between Catholicism and the Protestant traditions I knew.

Later that night, I couldn't get the conversation out of my head. As soon as I clocked out, I called Jason. "Hey, I'm coming over," I said. "You won't believe what this girl at work said to me."

When I arrived at his parents' house, I found him sitting on the floor of his childhood bedroom, a bewildered look on his face. "What happened?" I asked, sitting down across from him.

Jason pointed to his laptop, which was open on the floor. "I googled it," he said, sounding stunned. "I searched 'Catholics aren't Christians,' and look at this." The screen was filled with page after page of websites labeling the Pope as the antichrist and the Catholic Church as the Whore of Babylon.

I was shocked, but I tried to stay calm. "Jason," I said, "we can't

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...Journeys Home Continued...

both be right about this.”

He looked up at me, his eyes filled with a mix of confusion and hope. “What do you mean?”

I took a deep breath, feeling a sense of clarity that I couldn’t attribute to anything but the Holy Spirit. “I mean, we can’t both be right,” I repeated. “Let’s figure this out together. Let’s research, ask questions, and be open to finding the truth. Maybe I can go to Mass with you, and you can come to church with me. We owe it to each other to do this.”

And just like that, a pact was made. It wasn’t a formal agreement, but it was a turning point in our relationship, one that set us on a path of exploration and discovery.

Over the next few weeks, I dove headfirst into the world of Catholic apologetics. I discovered Catholic speakers and writers like Tim Staples, Scott Hahn, and Karl Keating. I devoured everything I could find—books, CDs, online articles—trying to wrap my mind around the doctrines and practices I had never encountered before. I had so many questions: Why do Catholics pray to Mary? What’s the deal with Confession? And why do they believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

I also began meeting with my Protestant pastors—yes, plural, from several different denominations. I never told them I was considering Catholicism; I simply asked them the questions that had become my own. “Why did Jesus give the disciples the power to forgive sins?” I asked. “If Jesus is God, and Mary is His mother, doesn’t that make her the Mother of God?”

Their answers were polite but vague, often sidestepping the deeper issues. It felt like they were avoiding the questions, which only fueled my curiosity more.

As Easter approached, Jason invited me to attend Mass with his family. “It’s Easter Sunday,” he said. “It would mean a lot to me if you came.”

I agreed, feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness. The night before, I called the only Catholic friend I knew for some advice. “I’m going to Mass tomorrow,” I said. “Is there anything I need to know? I don’t want to look like an idiot.”

He laughed. “Just follow the crowd,” he said. “There’s a lot of standing, sitting, and kneeling. It’s kind of like spiritual calisthenics, but you’ll be fine.”

The next morning, I arrived at Jason’s house, and we drove together to the church. We were late—something I later learned is

a big no-no for Easter Mass. We ended up in the back of the choir loft, where I couldn’t see much, but I could hear the music, the chanting, and the faint sound of bells. It was unlike any church service I’d ever attended.

As we drove back to Jason’s parents’ house, I sat in silence, replaying the entire experience in my mind. The smells of incense, the reverent kneeling, the prayers spoken in unison—it all felt strangely familiar, like something I had been missing but didn’t know I needed.

Jason parked the car and turned to me, looking nervous. “Did you hate it?” he asked. “Are we breaking up?”

I shook my head, struggling to find the right words. Finally, I took a deep breath and said, “I think I found home.”

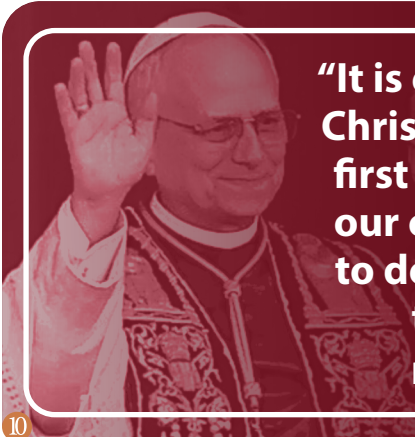
Wrestling with Doctrine: Struggles, Questions, and Breakthroughs

After months of deep conversations with Jason and our commitment to figuring out the truth together, I knew I needed to go deeper. That’s when I decided to enroll in RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. At first, it felt like an extension of our research, a way to understand what Jason believed. But as the classes went on, I realized it was becoming a personal journey for me, too. I wasn’t just trying to learn about Catholicism; I was trying to see if it could be my home.

The classes covered everything: Church history, the sacraments, the teachings of the Church Fathers. I was struck by how much I didn’t know, how much I had never even considered. I had grown up reading the Bible, but I started to see it in a new light, through the lens of Catholic teaching. Yet, there were still some doctrines that felt like walls I couldn’t get past.

The first major hurdle was the Eucharist. The idea of the Real Presence—that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus—was completely foreign to me. In my Pentecostal upbringing, communion was a symbol, a way to remember Jesus’ sacrifice. But Catholics believed something much deeper, something literal. It was hard for me to grasp. “How can this be true?” I asked Jason one night. “How can something that looks and tastes like bread and wine actually be Jesus?”

Jason didn’t have all the answers, but he shared what he believed. “It’s not just a symbol,” he said quietly. “It’s Him. He’s really present there.” I could see the sincerity in his eyes, and it



“It is essential that we too repeat, with Peter: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ It is essential to do this, first of all, in our personal relationship with the Lord, in our commitment to a daily journey of conversion. Then, to do so as a Church, experiencing together our fidelity to the Lord and bringing the Good News to all.”

POPE LEO XIV, *FIRST HOMILY AS THE HOLY FATHER*—MAY 9, 2025

made me want to understand, even if I wasn't there yet.

Confession was another major stumbling block. I had always prayed directly to Jesus for forgiveness. It was one of the core beliefs I had held onto from my childhood—that Jesus was my direct connection to God. So the idea of confessing my sins to a priest felt not only unnecessary but uncomfortable. “Why do I need a mediator?” I asked during one of the RCIA classes. “Can’t I just go straight to Jesus?”

The instructor paused, then explained that in Confession, the priest acts *in persona Christi*, standing in the place of Christ. “When you confess to a priest,” he said, “you’re not just talking to a man. You’re speaking to Jesus Himself. It’s an encounter with the mercy of Christ.” For the first time, it started to make sense. I had felt God’s voice before in prayer, but this was different. It was personal, tangible, and I began to see Confession as more than just a ritual—it was an encounter with Jesus, with “skin on,” as the instructor put it.

Mary was another hurdle. In all my years as a Pentecostal, I had never really thought much about her. She was a minor figure in my mind, present at Christmas and then fading into the background. But in the Catholic Church, Mary was everywhere—statues, prayers, devotions. It felt overwhelming, and I struggled to understand why she was given so much attention. “Why do Catholics need Mary?” I asked Jason one day. “Isn’t Jesus enough?”

I kept wrestling with this until one night, we decided to watch *The Passion of the Christ*. There’s a scene where Mary watches Jesus carry the cross, her face filled with a mixture of pain and love. For the first time, I saw her differently—not as an obstacle between me and Jesus, but as His mother, sharing in His suffering. It hit me like a wave. Mary wasn’t distant or disconnected; she was there, at the foot of the cross, united with her Son in His pain. It was a moment of clarity that changed everything for me. I began to see why the Church honored her—not as a replacement for Jesus, but as a powerful example of faith and obedience.

As the Easter Vigil approached, and with it my formal entry into the Church, I felt a mix of excitement and fear. I had been through so much to get here—months of questions, doubts, and hard conversations. But I felt ready. I wanted to take this step, to finally say yes.

The vigil itself was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The church was dark when we arrived, the only light coming from the small flame of the Paschal candle. I could feel the anticipation in the room as we processed in, the light slowly spreading as everyone lit their candles.

When it came time for Communion, I approached the altar with my heart pounding in my chest. This was the moment I had struggled with the most, the teaching that had been the hardest for me to accept. But as I received the Eucharist for the first time, something inside me shifted. It was like everything clicked into place. I can’t explain it fully, but I knew, in that moment, that it was true. He was there—truly present, just as the Church had taught. It was the fulfillment of everything I had been searching for, a peace I had never known before.

Jason was nearby, smiling through tears. It felt like we had crossed a finish line together, united not just in our love for each other, but in our shared love for Christ and His Church. I knew I was home.

From Cardboard Lean-To to the Fullness of Faith

My life began in a cardboard box lean-to on the streets of the Philippines. It was an uncertain start, but even then, God’s hand was guiding me. That fragile shelter carried me through a journey I could never have imagined—from the prayers of my adoptive mother to the altar of the Catholic Church, where I found my true home.

I’m so grateful that as a Pentecostal, I was taught to expect God’s presence—to believe in miracles and to seek Him fervently in every moment. We prayed with the hope that heaven would touch earth, and I longed for that real encounter with Jesus. In the Catholic Church, I didn’t leave behind that expectation; I found its fulfillment.

The Eucharist became the miracle I had been searching for—the Real Presence of Jesus, offered to us in the humble forms of bread and wine. When I received the host for the first time, it felt like everything had come full circle. The cardboard cradle that once held me had given way to the embrace of Christ in the sacraments. Here, I wasn’t just remembering Jesus; I was encountering Him.

Mary, who had once seemed distant, became a spiritual mother who pointed me to her Son with the same tender care I saw in the women who prayed over me as a child. Her intercession reflects the kind of heartfelt, faith-filled prayers I knew growing up, showing me a new depth to the communion of saints and the family of God.

Looking back, I see how every step of my journey was a preparation for this homecoming. The miracles, the prayers, the encounters with the Holy Spirit—they are all here, woven into the fabric of the Catholic Church. I started my life in a cardboard box, but I’ve found my true home in the Church—the cradle of God’s love, where I have finally come to rest. ■

*Rachel Bulman is a wife, mother, author, and national speaker. She served as editor for *With All Her Mind: A Call to the Intellectual Life* (Word on Fire, 2022) and authored *Becoming Wife: Saying Yes to More Than the Dress* (Our Sunday Visitor, June 2023). She appears with her family in the series *Meet the Bulmans on the Word on Fire Institute* YouTube channel, and she and her husband wrote and recorded a novena for married couples that is featured on the *Hallow* app. You can also listen to her every Thursday on Sirius XM’s *The Catholic Channel* where she co-hosts *Strong Voices*. Rachel lives in central Florida with her husband, Jason, and their six children.*

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PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

from Saint Augustine

Breathe in me,
○ Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me,
○ Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart,
○ Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me,
○ Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then,
○ Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.
Amen.

