



May 2026 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

Making Sense of Christianity

Jeremy Noonan

The story of my journey from serving as a missionary in a Catholic country to becoming a Catholic begins with the prequel of my unlikely journey to becoming an Evangelical missionary in the first place. I was raised in a non-religious home by parents who both had Catholic fathers but were not raised as such. In the midst of the turmoil caused by my parents' divorce in 2nd grade, I sought comfort and refuge in the family of my best childhood friend, who regularly attended a large Southern Baptist church in the Atlanta suburbs, spending most weekends with them, and thus attending Sunday school and worship services regularly.



Meeting Jesus

Under the influence of this beloved family and their faithful church, I began to identify myself as a Christian, finding in this community the stability, security, and definitive moral guidance that was lacking at home. While I cannot identify an exact moment when I became "born again," I was eventually baptized at this church in 1992, at the end of my sophomore year of high school, making my "public profession" at that time.

Sadly, my faith journey soon calcified into a self-righteous moralism. Since Christianity had provided a way of escape from my dysfunctional family, I felt morally superior, not only to them, but also to the rest of the world. Filled with pride, I supposed that most of

the world's problems would be solved if people were just as religiously moral and serious about education as I was! This attitude was exemplified in the way I utterly shunned my younger sister when she got pregnant during my senior year, something I viewed as a threat to my stellar reputation.

Receiving the Father's Discipline

After a year at a private university, I transferred to Georgia Tech, where I encountered academic failure. This shook me to the core of my achievement-based identity and threatened my sense of worth. Through it, the Spirit made plain to me the folly of my academic idol—basing my worth and confidence on the judgments of men (my professors) was shaky ground for building an identity. The Spirit led me to understand and embrace that my worth and identity were based foremost on being a redeemed child of God. This was liberating!

During this time of spiritual growth, I became

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...Journeys Home Continued...

involved in the ministry of Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ). Cru impacted me greatly by giving me opportunities to discover and use my gifts in teaching and evangelism. I quickly became obsessed with sharing the Gospel on campus and viewed this as my primary mission as a student, regularly initiating conversations that I hoped would lead to a presentation of the “Four Spiritual Laws” so I could lead people to “pray to receive Christ,” and engaging in apologetic debates on campus, while trying to equip other students to do the same. Upon graduation, I joined the Cru staff as an intern, then worked for the organization for five years while enrolled in a Reformed seminary part-time, with a view towards an academic career in theology or philosophy.

My experience in seminary, though, left me increasingly skeptical about the possibility of ever knowing theological truth with certainty. I encountered endless doctrinal debates, replete with conflicting arguments that seemed equally compelling and impossible to adjudicate. There was no basis for distinguishing between ‘major issues,’ for which consensus was required to achieve unity, and ‘minor issues,’ over which believers can healthily disagree. This skepticism devolved into a cynicism-bred depression for which I sought professional counseling. Soon thereafter, I left the Cru staff and seminary, abandoning plans for an academic career in theology or philosophy.

Looking back, my real problem was with *sola Scriptura*, which I saw as creating doctrinal division and confusion. Lacking a framework for critiquing this presupposition of Protestantism, or any alternative to it, I did not have a healthy way of dealing with it.

Throughout my college years, I had affiliated more with Calvinism and became involved with a Presbyterian (PCA) church that had a vibrant campus ministry. I converted to Calvinism because I believed its doctrines to be more faithful to the teaching of the Bible, as I understood it, than the Baptist tradition I had grown up in. I remained a Presbyterian until

formally dissolving my membership with our local congregation upon developing Catholic convictions and taking RCIA classes.

A Sudden, Unexpected Conversion

These new convictions became manifest in a rapid, unexpected conversion experience that unfolded in the course of a little over a week, the soil of my heart and mind having been cultivated by months of listening to Atlanta’s Catholic radio station, The Quest, and by reading Paul Kengor’s *A Pope and a President*, which tells the marvelous story of how God providentially used the informal alliance of Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan to topple the Soviet Empire. This book greatly increased my esteem for the papacy, as I realized that the pope was the only Christian leader on earth who was in a position to have such enormous geopolitical influence for God’s Kingdom, and I could not deny the evident holiness radiated by the pope.

The conversations on Catholic radio made the faith feel both fresh and familiar at the same time—most of it felt deeply agreeable and consonant with what I already believed. As for distinctly Catholic doctrines that I disagreed with, for the first time I was listening to Catholics explain these things on their own terms instead of Protestant polemical critiques of them, and I grew to appreciate that they were at least coherent within the Catholic system. For example, I quickly accepted that praying to the saints was a valid application of the idea of the communion of saints, and that invoking their intercession was no more problematic than asking your pastor to pray for you.

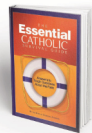
As a result, I became open to the critiques of Protestantism I encountered on certain programs, especially Dr. David Anders’s *Called to Communion*. I only had to consider his arguments against *sola Scriptura* a couple of times to become persuaded of the folly of this Protestant presupposition. Dr. Anders taught me that this doctrine, along with many others I had taken for granted, were not held historically by the early Church.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

THE ESSENTIAL CATHOLIC SURVIVAL GUIDE

CATHOLIC ANSWERS

Seventy of the best tracts in one cohesive, comprehensive book that can be used by anyone, anytime, anywhere to defend the Catholic faith. It covers the questions and misconceptions people have about the Catholic faith on a variety of topics, including, Mary, the saints, the papacy, and more.



#3082 - \$24.95

I’M CATHOLIC. NOW WHAT?

SHAUN MCAFEE

Shaun McAfee has been where you are. He knew what it looked like on paper to be Catholic, but wasn’t sure how to begin the practical daily work of living as a Catholic once OCIA was finished. If you are trying to get your “sea legs” in the Church, Shaun’s book is the perfect resource for you!



#3256 - \$19.95

NOW WHAT? A GUIDE FOR NEW CATHOLICS

PATRICK MADRID

If you’re at a loss about how to participate fully in the Church, connect with your local parish, and understand all those “quirky” Catholic things they didn’t cover in OCIA, this book can help. Patrick Madrid offers a practical guide for all those who feel out of their element now that they are in the Catholic Church.



#3199 - \$14.99

Once this pillar of the Reformation dissolved in my mind, I knew that, logically, Catholicism was now a real option—a realization that was deeply unsettling, given that the trust gap between my heart and the Church was enormous. If *sola Scriptura* is not true, then the Church was God’s main vehicle for preserving His revelation in Christ, and God had given this Church the authority to infallibly define Christian teaching. Now open to the interpretive authority of the Church, I became receptive to its other teachings that clashed with Protestant pillars. I soon reconsidered the doctrine of *sola Fide*, finding in Church teachings a much wiser and more coherent understanding of the relationship between faith, works, and salvation that made more sense of the biblical data and presented a richer understanding of justification.

Still, to bridge the trust gap that remained, I had to take a step of faith in the direction the Holy Spirit had been tugging me subliminally. On the way to pick up my children from school, I called Dr. Anders to make plain “what was stopping me from becoming a Catholic.” This was the first time in my life I had ever felt inclined to call a talk radio program of any kind! My question expressed my lack of faith in the Church due to its alleged historical sins and errors: “Why didn’t the Church have the capacity to reform itself in the 16th century? Why did it take someone like Luther to confront the Church’s errors?” As usual, Dr. Anders gave a well-informed answer with gentleness and respect, but it was not so much the content of his answer that impacted me as the humbling sense that there was SO much more I did not know.

This small step of faith proved to be the catalyst that propelled an irreversible paradigm shift in my mind within a single week. I discovered a lecture by Dr. Anders on the problems with the Reformed conception of assurance of salvation—namely, that while the elect’s salvation is secure, knowing that one is elect is based mainly on one’s own personal assessment of growing holiness achieved via introspection. That spoke to the core of my existential struggles caused by Calvinism.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the LORD search the mind and try the heart, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9–10).

Whereas the *sola Scriptura* critiques were mostly theoretical to me, this argument was deeply personal. Since my first depressive episode, mentioned earlier, I had gone through two other very serious episodes of depression and had never been able to identify and address the root causes. However, with the help of a loving, skilled Presbyterian therapist, I discovered that I was suffering from scrupulosity, a form of religious OCD. There are a number of varieties of this disorder. Mine was very similar to the Puritan’s notorious obsession with finding evidence of their own election to obtain assurance that their eternal destiny in heaven was secure. I had been doubting my own standing as one of the elect for many years, often finding insufficient evidence in the motives of my heart and damning counter evidence in my thoughts, frequently obsessing over the meaning of blasphemous

thoughts I occasionally had for the state of my soul.

Dr. Anders quoted a historian on the Puritan psyche, who said that they had “exchanged the treadmill of penance and indulgences for the iron couch of introspection.” This cut to my heart like a knife! I too had lived for years tortured by an introspective approach to gaining “assurance of salvation,” morbidly obsessing over the spiritual meaning of my thoughts and emotions. Simply contemplating his portrayal of the sacramental approach to assurance offered by the Church as a more objective way of knowing one is in a “state of grace” was enough to liberate me from the “iron couch”! I now knew there was another way!

All of these thoughts were stirring in my soul when I told my wife that I believed God was calling me to the Catholic Church. Exhausted from the pandemic as an ER nurse and a number of family issues, she declared, “I don’t have the emotional energy to engage with this right now. Call and talk to Brad.”

Dr. Brad Gregory is a theology professor at the Catholic University of America, hired originally as a Reformed Presbyterian scholar. My wife and I both knew that if anyone could talk me out of converting, it would be Brad! I wanted to ask him, with as much as he knew about Catholicism, why he was not a Catholic. I emailed to ask for a phone meeting. He replied, “I would be happy to talk with you but full disclosure: I am joining the Catholic Church at Pentecost. I will try to be as objective as I can.” Whoa!

We talked for over two hours the next week, and it was the most exhilarating, meaningful conversation of my life, covering history, philosophy, sociology, biblical theology, and more. We were truly of one mind. By the end of the conversation, I knew my mind had changed fundamentally, along with my heart, and that this change was irreversible. The Catholic Church was who she claims to be!

How God Prepared Me, In Retrospect

Though my conscious conversion process took place over the course of one dramatic week, looking back on the last 20 years of my life, I can see how my mind and heart were prepared gradually and subliminally to open me to the claims of the Church through three developments: 1) a deep, gradual change in my personal epistemology; 2) a growing awareness that the essence of Protestantism is a spirit of subversion; and 3) a PCA church that made increasingly plain the weaknesses of Calvinism by practicing it consistently.

While teaching Theory of Knowledge, an informal epistemology course for academically advanced high school students, I immersed myself in my own study of epistemology with a particular focus on the work of the chemist-turned-philosopher Michael Polanyi, known best for his magnum opus, *Personal Knowledge*. A convert to Catholicism from Judaism, Polanyi argues for the centrality of a personal faith commitment to a particular historical paradigm for knowing anything, including natural science. A paradigm consists of a received tradition and an authority structure one submits himself to that defines the normative domain of knowledge. By rejecting the authority of the Church and the need for Sacred Tradition for

Re-Reading Your Day with Jesus



Dear Friends,

Many years ago, a cradle Catholic viewer of *The Journey Home* program wrote in to express her gratitude for the encouragement she received hearing so many converts share the stories of being drawn home to the Catholic Church. Her note included a comment to the effect of: "These amazing conversion stories... they almost make me wish I was a convert, too." That comment always stuck with me, and when I was blessed to step into the hosting seat

for my father, I continued his habit of reminding the lifelong Catholics in the audience: *you too are on a journey, you too have a story to tell!* You may not have discovered it or learned to articulate it yet—but you too have a "conversion story" that God wants you to be able to share with people in your life. As one convert summed it up: "*Every Christian has a testimony and it goes like this: I was (___), Jesus did (___), Now I am (___).*" Uncovering this story and learning to tell it are themselves parts of the continuing journey.

There is a connection between this notion of discovering and learning to share one's faith testimony and the practice of the daily *Examen* or *Examination of Conscience* that many converts learn as part of their spiritual formation as new Catholics. The *Examen* was popularized in 1522 by St. Ignatius of Loyola as part of his Spiritual Exercises and has been a treasured practice for centuries. In brief, the *Examen* is the practice of taking time every day, perhaps most especially before you go to bed, to intentionally reflect on the day's events in prayer. The steps of the *Examen* can vary in number and content, but they generally involve the following aspects:

1. **Transition**—Beginning your time of prayer by recognizing the presence of God and inviting the Holy Spirit to aid your reflection.
2. **Gratitude**—Taking note of and thanking God for the blessings of the day.
3. **Reflection**—Examining your conscience and identifying sins and vices.
4. **Repentance**—Expressing contrition for sin and making a firm purpose of amendment.
5. **Resolution**—Learning from your experiences and making plans for the future.

Some form of daily *Examen* is crucial for the Christian journeyer because every day, as we experience the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows of the journey, we are always, intentionally or unintentionally, building a mental narrative of our life. Without an intentional daily practice of examining our experiences and consciously and prayerfully bringing them before God, we risk building up a mental narrative that is divorced from reality and reflective only of our vices rather than our faith in Jesus.

During his *Regina Caeli* address on April 23, 2023 in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis commented on the importance of a daily *Examen*, describing it as "*re-reading the day with Jesus*". He went on to say:

"It is important to re-read our history together with Jesus: the story of our life, of a certain period, of our days, with its disappointments and hopes. Besides,

we too, like those disciples, faced with what happens to us, can find ourselves lost in the face of events, alone and uncertain, with many questions and worries, disappointments, many things. Today's Gospel invites us to tell Jesus everything, sincerely, without being afraid of disturbing him: he listens, without fear of saying the wrong thing, without shame at our struggle to understand. The Lord is happy whenever we open ourselves to him. Only in this way can he take us by the hand, accompany us and make our hearts burn again."

As Pope Francis notes, without intentionally "re-reading" our lives with Jesus, our own auto-generated mental narratives can become sources of discouragement and temptation to despair. It is in re-reading our lives with Jesus, that we allow Him and His words to become the primary lens through which we interpret our experiences.

Perhaps we feel some amount of hesitancy or spiritual resistance to the idea of practicing a daily *Examen*. Perhaps we would rather not rehash the negative and troubling experiences of the day, or perhaps it feels a little prideful to focus on ourselves and our experiences in prayer. If rightly understood and carried out, the daily *Examen* can be a powerful exercise in the virtue of humility and a remedy to both our fears and our pride. Once again, we are always subconsciously building up narratives about ourselves and our lives. These narratives may be presumptuous—*look how great I am and how great I am handling things on my own!*—or they may be despairing—*I'm such a sinner—how could God love me! Everything goes wrong for me. Where has God gone?*—or likely some combination of the two. In the *Examen*, we invite Jesus and the words of Scripture to be the primary lens through which we consciously read and interpret the events of our lives. We surrender our self-made narratives and turn to Jesus in humility to ask Him: "Who do YOU say that I am, Lord?" A humble daily *Examen* is the attempt to read the book of one's life and experiences through the lens of prayer and sacred Scripture, in order that all the things we experience—the good and the bad—may work together, by grace, to help us move forward on our journey deeper in Christ.

This month of May is dedicated in the Catholic Liturgical Calendar to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is a model for Christian journeyers of both the spirit of the daily *Examen*—"*Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (Luke 2:19)—and of sharing one's Christian testimony—"*The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*" (Luke 1:49) As we enter the month of May and continue our Easter journey toward Pentecost, let us seek her intercession and follow her example. Consider making some form of the daily *Examen* part of your prayer routine—whether it be the exact method of St. Ignatius, a prayerful journaling practice, or Scripture study. Re-read your days with Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to uncover the truth of your own Christian journey and testimony—a testimony that is meant first and foremost for your own continued edification and encouragement, and then to be shared with others when the Holy Spirit presents the opportunity.

In Christ,

JonMarc Grodi

Executive Director of the CHNetwork
Host of EWTN's *The Journey Home* Program

Joyful Journey Updates

Guillaume H., former Evangelical Pastor

After being Protestant for about 15 years, and “pastoring” for about 3 years, I reverted to the Catholicism of my youth last year. My household was completely rocked. My wife was terribly upset and told me she’d never convert to Catholicism. My three kids were very confused as well. My wife agreed to attend RCIA with me (out of curiosity), then 6 months later she came into full communion and received Confirmation. Now, my two older kids happily attend First Communion class, and my youngest daughter received the Sacrament of Baptism. Praise the Lord! ■

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

“Even through Joseph’s fears, God’s will, his history, and his plan were at work...At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.”

Pope Francis (Feast of St. Joseph the Worker—May 1)

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his
lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call
me blessed:

the Almighty has done great things for
me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him in
every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from
their thrones,

and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,

the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.

Luke 1: 46-55

*Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
May 31*

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

Monday, May 4

Patrick Correa

Former Atheist

Monday, May 11

Brenda Caster

*Former Seventh-day
Adventist*

Monday, May 18

Garrett Hines

*Former Evangelical
Missionary*

Monday, May 25

Fr. Matthew Hawkins

*Former African Methodist
Episcopal
Orig. Air Date: 3/15/21*



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, June 1

Fr. Allan Phan

Former Buddhist

Schedule is subject to change.

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



THE IMPORTANCE OF MYSTAGOGY

By Msgr. Jeffrey Steenson

“Instructed Masses” are not so common these days, but they are a wonderful way for a new Catholic to learn about the Mass and its parts while participating in its celebration. Of course there are many handbooks available to explain what happens at Mass, but there is something special about being on the journey of discovery together with our spiritual family.

The Church has always called her sacraments *mysteria*, and the work of helping the faithful to understand these mysteries is called *mystagogy* (initiation into the mystery). It is so important that the faithful know the hows and whys of the celebration. Pope Benedict XVI said that “the mature fruit of mystagogy is the awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 64). In the modern Church, mystagogy traditionally extends throughout the Easter season (concluding at the feast of Pentecost) as a period of accompaniment for new Catholics, helping them to explore more deeply what it means to fully participate in the sacramental mysteries of the Church.

Mystagogy goes back to early Christian times, when it had a special significance. Pagans were curious about what was going on inside the Christian assemblies and not always for the right reason. Thus, the early Christians observed the *disciplina arcani* (the discipline of the secret), when only the baptized were permitted to be present during the celebration of the sacraments and were instructed not to talk about it on the outside. St. Basil the Great taught that there are mysteries that should not be told to the uninitiated, lest they be profaned (*On the Holy Spirit*, 27.66). We’ve certainly come a long way from that time, with our live-streamed masses and Eucharistic processions and the way we interact with each other digitally!

But mystagogy also had a real catechetical purpose—to prepare the catechumen to receive the sacraments properly. “The mysteries must be experienced as well as lectured on,” St. Ambrose taught. That is why they waited until after baptism. “To have given a reasoned account of the mysteries earlier would not have been right, for in a Christian man, faith must come first” (*On the Sacraments*, 1.1.1; *On the Mysteries*, 1.2).

Perhaps the foremost Christian mystagogue was St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who in the mid-fourth century delivered five mystagogical lectures to the newly baptized in the days after Easter. Three of these were about the rite of baptism and two about the Eucharist. In the fourth lecture, Cyril speaks of how the bread and wine are truly transformed into the body and blood of Christ, supported by many references from the Old and New Testament. The fifth lecture is a guide to the parts of the mass after the offertory, with an emphasis on the sense of awe when the deeper meaning of these rituals is perceived. “You must never deprive yourself of these holy and spiritual mysteries because of your sins” (23).

Egeria’s *Diary of a Pilgrim* from this time describes the time of mystagogy at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem: During Easter week, after the Eucharist, the bishop leads the faithful to the Anastasis (the place of Jesus’ resurrection), and the doors are closed to everyone else. “While the bishop is discussing and explaining each point, so loud are the voices of praise that they can be heard outside the church. And he explains all these mysteries in such a manner that there is no one who would not be drawn to them, when he heard them thus explained” (47).

In *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI taught that mystagogy is crucial so that we do not fall into ritualism by treating the sacraments as something mechanical. An interior faith is needed. The process of mystagogy should have three elements (64):

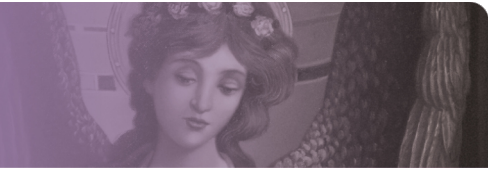
1. Interpreting the rites in light of the events of salvation by learning to walk with Jesus;
2. Understanding the meaning of the signs contained in the rites;
3. Bringing out the significance of the rites for the Christian life in all its dimensions.

The Holy Father spoke of how the outward signs of reverence (such as kneeling during the central moments of the Eucharistic prayer) open our hearts to receive Christ (64). He quoted St. Augustine: “No one eats the flesh of Christ without first adoring it” (*On the Psalms* 98.9).

Mystagogy, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, “aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’” (CCC 1075). Mystagogy thus helps us to be more aware of our place in the celebration of the mysteries and how our lives are enriched by their effects, as Christ truly becomes present to us. One of my favorite passages from the Church Fathers, from St. John Chrysostom’s *On the Priesthood*, expresses this so well:

“When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being tintured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you not at once transported to heaven, and, having driven out of your soul every carnal thought, do you not with soul naked and mind pure look round upon heavenly things? Oh, the wonder of it! Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father is at that moment held in our hands, and gives himself to those who wish to embrace and receive him ...” (III.4.177).

Prayer List



Clergy

- **For Austin, an Evangelical pastor** who left his pastoral position late last year, entered the Church, and has moved his family to begin a new career; that the Lord will bless him in his work and as he seeks to lead his wife and children forward.
- **For Toby, a Baptist pastor** who began a deep study of the early Church and the case for Catholicism two years ago; that the Lord will lead him in his studies.
- **For Aaron, a Non-denominational pastor** who has entered OCIA; that the Lord would continue to lead him as he works to bring his family into the Catholic Church.
- **For Henry, a Presbyterian minister** who has begun attending OCIA and is preparing himself for the very difficult work of resigning his pastoral ministry to enter the Catholic Church; that the Lord will give him the courage he needs to follow his conscience in this matter.
- **For Guillaume, who left the Protestant ministry** and returned to the Catholic Church of his youth with his wife and children; that the Holy Spirit will lead him as he seeks to lead his family in their new lives as Catholics.
- **For Karl, a Mennonite missionary** who is learning, praying, and finding himself drawn to the Catholic Church; that the Lord will help him as he faces many difficulties.
- **For Andrew, a Baptist minister** who recently resigned his position, entered OCIA and is reading everything he can

get his hands on about Catholic teaching and history; that the Holy Spirit will inspire him and lead him home to the Church.

- **For Joshua, a Baptist pastor** who was raised Catholic and knows now that he must return to the Catholic Church, but who loves his current ministry and has no idea how and when to make a move back; that the Holy Spirit will give him the wisdom and courage needed.
- **For Tyler, a Pentecostal pastor** who recently stepped down from ministry as he feels drawn to the Catholic Church; that the Lord will bless him with peace as he seeks to lead his family home and discover God's plan for his future employment.
- **For Veli, a Lutheran pastor** who after a number of years ministering within the Lutheran Church feels himself being called to the Catholic Church and is meeting with a bishop to discuss his options; that the Holy Spirit will lead him.
- **For Dan, a Protestant pastor** who has begun seriously studying the case for the Catholic Church; that the Lord will light his journey and grant him wisdom as he discerns the way forward.
- **For John, a Baptist pastor** who has been drawn toward the Catholic Church for some time but faces serious difficulties that would make it very hard for him to actually leave his ministry at this time; that the Holy Spirit will lead him and comfort him as he tries to understand what he should do.
- **For Daniel, a Protestant minister** raised by extremely anti-Catholic parents who has recently come to

believe that "Bible only" Christianity cannot be true and finds himself on a path toward the Church; that God will give him the courage he needs right now.

Laity

- **For Glen,** that the Holy Spirit would bless, guide and anoint his relationships and his journey of faith.
- **For Nicholas,** that the Lord would answer his prayers and guide him to the center of the love of Jesus.
- **For Robert, a Evangelical,** that as he dives ever more deeply into the study of early Christian worship he may develop a hunger for Jesus in the holy Eucharist.
- **For Leo, an Anglican,** that his desire to be immersed and involved with the history Church would bring him into full communion with the successor of St. Peter.
- **For Ray, a Mennonite,** that his attendance at adoration and praying the rosary would bring him Home to the Catholic Church.
- **For Ed, an Orthodox brother,** that he may find his true home in the Catholic Church.
- **For Andrew, a member of the Assemblies of God,** that he may grow strong in his Catholic faith, and reach out to his Protestant brothers and sisters.
- **For Stephen, a former agnostic,** that his love for Jesus in his real presence in the holy Eucharist would bear much good fruit in his life.

READ, PRAY, GIVE AWAY!

Once you've finished reading this issue of the CHNewsletter, consider sharing it with someone who might enjoy it as well! (They can always sign up to receive their own at chnetwork.org/join)

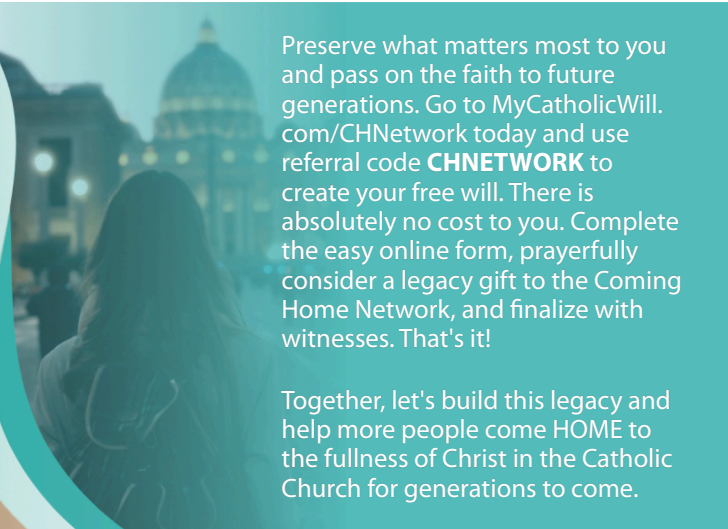


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Together, let's build this legacy and help more people come HOME to the fullness of Christ in the Catholic Church for generations to come.

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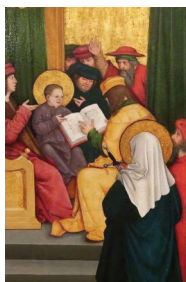
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Praying the Rosary with Art

By Matt Swaim



The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a brief description of three expressions of prayer: Vocal Prayer, Meditation, and Contemplation (CCC 2700-2724). Vocal prayer involves expressing oneself to God either silently or audibly; meditation has to do with reflecting intentionally upon the mysteries of faith; and contemplation, sometimes referred to as the "prayer of presence," is perhaps best described in Psalm 46:10—"be still and know that I am God."

In my experience as a young Christian growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, I was really only conscious of two expressions of prayer; praying aloud (usually in the presence of other Christians), and what we called "praying in the silence of our hearts," which was actively talking to God but without saying audible words. Both of these, I would come to discover, fall under the umbrella of Vocal Prayer in the Catholic tradition; and I was more than a little dismayed to learn that Meditation and Contemplation were both considered higher expressions!

That's not to say that I never engaged in Meditation (certainly I did when reading the Scriptures), or even Contemplation (such as when a worship leader or pastor would ask us to quiet our hearts and place ourselves in the presence of God), but Meditation, as a term, had a negative connotation in my world because some of the Christians from the generation before me had been "born again" after experimenting with Transcendental Meditation. Contemplation, on the other hand, I do not recall being used explicitly to describe a specific prayer style at all.

As I began to make my way towards the Catholic Church, I knew I wanted to try my

hand, or at least my thumbs, at the rosary. However, because I was still trying to sort out the distinction between Vocal and Meditative Prayer, I found it difficult at first; how could I make my brain focus on one of the Mysteries when my mouth was doing all the talking? Amid all of this, my wife-to-be got me a book by the late Fr. Benedict Groeschel, *The Rosary: Chain of Hope*. The power of the book, for my specific situation, was in its selection of classic depictions of the mysteries of the Rosary as painted by some of the greatest sacred artists in the Church's history: *The Annunciation* by Carl Bloch, Carracci's *Flagellation of Christ*, Giovane's *Wedding at Cana*. Soon, I found myself focusing on the images and placing myself in the scenes beside Jesus and Mary, with the repetitive prayers serving as a rhythmic anchor to help my mind stay with each mystery. Ever since, I've tried, whenever possible, to find visual depictions of the mysteries of the Rosary to aid my meditation.

Through the CHNetwork Online Community, we're blessed to host a live Rosary on a Zoom video call every Monday afternoon for all of our members, but especially for those who are just getting started with the Rosary, and are perhaps having the same difficulties I've experienced. Selecting the art to go along with our Monday afternoon Rosary has quickly become a highlight of my week!

If you're interested in praying the Rosary with us each Monday, or in our other weekly prayer and fellowship opportunities, we would love to have you join us online at chnetwork.org/onlineevents. ■

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER: IN BRIEF

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

2720 The Church invites the faithful to regular prayer: daily prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Eucharist, the feasts of the liturgical year.

2721 The Christian tradition comprises three major expressions of the life of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. They have in common the recollection of the heart.

2722 Vocal prayer, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ's example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples.

2723 Meditation is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make

our own in faith the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life.

2724 Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.

knowledge of divine revelation, the Protestant Reformation prepared the way for the modernist epistemological position that eschewed all authority and tradition, supplanting it with individual reason as a sufficient starting point for knowing truth with certainty. But if scientific knowledge requires dependence on tradition and authority, surely one needs these to have theological knowledge!

As I watched the conservative, “white Evangelical” political and cultural bloc become overrun by wild conspiracy theories arising from a settled disdain towards experts—whether in government, science, or media—I began to see that at the heart of Protestantism was a revolt against the very notion of divinely appointed, human authority as being essential to rightly knowing God’s revelation, and that this same spirit animated postmodern secularism, with devastating results for Western Civilization.

This problem became evident to me in my PCA church’s response to COVID. Once we returned to in-person worship services in the Fall of 2020, the church started acting like the pandemic was over. The congregation largely ignored the pastors’ weekly exhortations at the end of the service to follow social distancing guidelines and to socialize outside—so much so that the pastors soon ceased giving them—and everyone was ignoring our local health officials’ urging to wear masks in public. My wife saw firsthand in the ER how COVID was raging through our community, and every time the elders prayed for her publicly, I felt upset that they were engaging in the kind of disregard, even open disdain, for authority that was making the pandemic much worse than it had to be.

Eventually, I confronted the elders privately concerning their violation of Scripture’s commands to respect government authorities. The entire session of elders respectfully met with me—unbeknownst to them, on the same day I called Dr. Anders. Here, problems with the exercise of their own ecclesial authority became evident. Reformed ecclesiology makes a fundamental distinction between *ministerial* and *magisterial* authority. It claims the church only has the ministerial authority to bind the consciences of its members by simply *declaring* what is revealed in the Bible. They renounce the magisterial exercise of authority that proscribes belief and practice not found plainly revealed in the Bible.

So, for example, one elder argued that they cannot tell people to wear protective masks at church services because the Bible does not say anything about masks. I noticed, though, that they could be more magisterial in their application of Scripture when it came to unforeseen behaviors that they cared more about. I left that meeting seeing clearly a fundamental problem with the relationship between their ecclesial authority and their interpretation of Scripture. Hebrews 13 commands us to obey our church leaders and submit to them. But if I am only compelled to obey what is plainly taught in infallible Scripture, and I have a sacred right to private judgment, then why am I told to submit to them as fallible men? Why do I need them to “declare” what is in the Bible to me, when its meaning is clear to all in the first place?

This church held to a number of ecclesiastical ideals that I

grew to view as incompatible with its Evangelical Protestant foundations. In this way, my Calvinistic church prepared me to become Catholic. As the Spirit opened my mind to the claims of Catholicism, I found in the Church a solid foundation for these ideals and a richer application of them.

First, my PCA church was committed to liturgical worship, taking seriously the “normative principle” that we should only do in public worship what is commanded in Scripture, thus eschewing contemporary, innovative worship styles governed by the desire to be “relevant” and to entertain. God has revealed how He wants to be worshipped and our highest obligation is to do so rightly.

However, the Bible was not written to function as a liturgical manual, and defects in the *sola Scriptura* framework arise when it is treated as such. For instance, not long after we hired a new senior pastor, the church started only permitting ordained elders to read the Bible in worship services. Ironically, this approach felt too “Catholic” to me, suggesting that only our priestly class of leaders could be trusted to handle the Bible. When I brought this concern to the pastor, he replied that this practice was taught in the Westminster Confession on the grounds that, whenever Scripture is read publicly in the Old Testament, it is done by ordained ministers. I objected that this detail may be incidental in these stories, and not a normative rule for all time, but knew that there was no way, on the basis of Scripture alone, to know the difference.

Second, the church emphasized the sacraments as vital “means of grace,” admonishing us, whenever there were baptisms, to “remember and improve upon” our own baptisms, drawing on the fact of our baptism for spiritual strength. Even more important was carefully examining oneself in preparation for receiving the Lord’s Supper, which was administered weekly. We were urged each week to examine ourselves lest we receive the elements in an “unworthy manner” and thus “eat and drink judgment upon ourselves” (2 Corinthians 11:27).

I struggled to make sense of these warnings. Without faith in Christ, we stood condemned already by our sin, destined for eternal torment if we were not elect. How could consuming this bread and wine “unworthily” make this condition even worse? And while Calvinists believe these elements are more than symbolic, emphasizing the “spiritual presence” of Christ, there wasn’t anything particularly sacred about them that would give them this power. Their sincere emphasis on the importance of these sacraments was incongruent with the underlying sacramentology.

Third, the pastors, who preached through entire books in the Bible, did not gloss over passages that suggest our eternal destiny is somehow contingent on our continuing faith or ongoing obedience. Calvinism teaches that all of those who are really “justified by faith alone” will, invariably, persevere to the end. Though perseverance is guaranteed by God’s sovereign might for all “true believers” who have been irrevocably declared righteous in justification, it is still nonetheless required to get to heaven.

Here is where the fault lines first began to emerge for me. I knew of people personally, and throughout history, who fell away

from faith, in spite of having given every indication of being “true believers.” The only possible explanation for this phenomena is that they were not sincere Christians in the first place. But surely they, and those closest to them, thought they were. How, then, could anyone who regarded himself as a Christian, consciously believing the Gospel and practicing the faith, ever know whether he was actually saved?

The simple answer to this question of “assurance” was that you can know that you truly belong to Christ through the fruits of the Spirit: all true believers will progress in sanctity, evidencing increasingly Christlike character, and conquering the power of sin. I knew, though, that these people had evidenced this fruit in their lives, and I myself had gone through periods of much greater fruitfulness in my younger years compared to what I experienced in middle age. In fact, since 2015, for over a five year period, I had been in a prolonged state of “spiritual desolation,” largely fulfilling my Christian duties, but with a heart that felt “lukewarm” and plagued by persistent sin patterns.

Consequently, I began to doubt whether I myself was a true Christian and thus one of God’s elect (and could not shake the suspicion deep in my soul that I was actually a reprobate—one elected for damnation before the foundation of the world). If I was not a true Christian, I never had been one, and thus had been deceiving myself, and those closest to me, for nearly 30 years. But how could I become a true believer now? Pray to accept Christ and get baptized again? Even if I did, how could I know if it was sincere and authentic this time?

These head games wrecked my psyche and drove my scrupulosity, making me preoccupied with the spiritual meaning of my secret thoughts and deepest motives, looking to them for evidence of my election, or lack thereof.

This problem was exacerbated by my experience of participating in the Lord’s Supper, which I rarely found meaningful or spiritually beneficial. I would go through seasons of study where I tried to meditate on sacramental theology to prepare myself for the table while making sure I was scrupulous to confess my sins. How could a true, elect believer have such a persistently inert spiritual experience at the Table?

Studying the Catholic Church’s soteriology, ecclesiology, and sacramentology while beginning to attend Mass, I encountered these same three themes, but taught with a wisdom that is much more coherent, beautiful, and credible than in Calvinism.

Counting the Costs of Discipleship

Because my former church is stridently anti-Catholic, and my family continued to attend until last September, my journey has brought with it painful social strife. When I first disclosed to my pastor that “my thinking about the relationship between the Bible and the Church has become essentially Catholic,” this created a crisis among the church’s leadership. My teenage children were approached without our knowledge or consent by the pastors and given grave warnings not to listen to me about Catholicism and that my soul was in danger of being lost.

Not long after that, I went through a couple of meetings that amounted to depositions (or inquisitions!) whereby my beliefs

were ascertained. By August, the session of elders voted to not serve me communion. Within weeks, they asked me to renounce my membership vows or face an excommunication trial. To bring the issue to a head, I was mailed a formal request from the Session to cease attending Mass and RCIA, and to “return to the church of Jesus Christ” and believe the Gospel. They knew I wouldn’t do this, so in my written response I said I could still fulfill all my vows but one: to submit to the leadership of the local elders. By February 2022, they called a congregational meeting to announce that I had left our church to pursue Catholicism, a church whose sacraments they do not regard as validly administered.

This conflict caused me to forgo joining my RCIA cohort at the Easter Vigil. I wanted to give my wife more time to come to terms with these sudden, profound changes. Instead, I was confirmed later, on All Saints’ Day of that same year. Since my confirmation, the conflict with my family’s church has only worsened. I felt a strong obligation to support my wife in raising our children in that church, so the elders granted that I would still be welcome to attend, so long as I agreed not to discuss Catholic doctrines. Having no interest in stirring controversy, I gladly agreed and kept my promise.

Yet my very presence as a Spirit-filled Christian in their midst became a threat to their belief that Catholics are not Christian, which they wanted the congregation to hold to. In the summer of 2023, the elders voted to ban me from the premises of the church, going so far as to send the deacons to confront me at a Vacation Bible School event for parents to compel me to leave. When I pushed back on their accusation that I was “proselytizing,” they considered the matter again, deciding that my simply *being* Catholic was sufficient reason to ban me from the church—this time using their otherwise renounced magisterial authority to apply to me the command in Romans 16 to avoid false teachers!

Since becoming Catholic, I have experienced a spiritual revival, marked by a significant healing of my mental health problems and a renewed desire to use my gifts to build up the Church. I help teach RCIA and have started a local evangelism team for St. Paul’s Street Evangelization. Still, I feel deeply the wounds of division caused by the Protestant revolt, as these are manifest within my family. I continue to pray and strive for a unified family life that mirrors the unity of all Christians that Christ prayed for and that will be ultimately realized when He returns. ■

After graduating from Georgia Tech with a chemical engineering degree, Jeremy Noonan worked on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ for five years where he met his also redheaded wife. They have four redheaded children ages 11 to 24. Following multiple, very public ethics conflicts with public schools, he found his way to St Mary’s Academy in Georgia, where he teaches high school science and math.

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PRAYER TO THE *Holy Spirit*

*Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

Let us pray.

*O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful
by the light of the Holy Spirit,
grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Feast of Pentecost: May 24, 2026

May 2026 CHNewsletter

