

The

Coming Home Network

International

NOVEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Journeys Home

The Story of Two Souls: My Journey to the Catholic Faith

by

Elizabeth Ficocelli



I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran faith, but, in reality, I was raised in a secular environment. My parents, a former Episcopal altar server and a Lutheran Sunday school teacher, had once been active in their local Lutheran church in Long Island, New York, but a change in pastors left them disillusioned and disappointed. They could never get used to the younger, more modern pastor and simply stopped going to church. They saw that their five children attended Sunday school and received confirmation, but after that, we were on our own.

I can recall going to Sunday services by myself as a teenager and feeling very alone, not just because my family wasn't there, but because there didn't seem to be much connection between the people in attendance. The hymns and sermons did not have a big impact on me, and the large empty cross behind the altar felt just like that—empty. In short, I did not experience God in the place that I was taught was his house.

Nonetheless, I had a keen awareness since early childhood that God existed. Not only did I know he was real, but I knew he was with me all the time. I have often marveled at this understanding, recalling that my family never prayed together. We never spoke about our faith. There were no religious symbols or artwork in our home to indicate we were Christians. Although we celebrated Easter and Christmas, it was all about the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus, not Jesus Christ.

My experience of God did not come from my parents or any other person. It did not come from Sunday school or church. My experience of God came from God himself. I

can remember talking to God a lot as a child, asking him for things and telling him about my problems. I never expected him to actually answer me, but one time during my childhood, he did. I can remember it like it was yesterday. I was about eight years old, and I was feeling distraught about some problems in my family. I wanted out. Not just out of the family, but out of life. I wanted God to take me with him to someplace—any place—better than this. That's when I perceived a voice. It was not an audible voice, but one that was silent. Looking back on this brief but poignant interchange, two things really strike me. The first is the fact that I was not at all surprised by the voice and, in fact, responded

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>Necessity of the Church?</i>by Marcus Grodi.....	page A
<i>Bulletin Board</i>	page C
<i>Prayer List</i>	page D
<i>Tax letters!</i>	page 3



Deep in History, Deep in Scripture, Deep in Christ... Deep in History, Deep in Scripture, Deep in Christ... Deep in History, Deep in Scripture, Deep in Christ...

to it quite naturally. The second is that I, as an eight-year-old Protestant child, would ask such a precocious question. To me, the Virgin Mary was nothing more than a figure in a manger we displayed at Christmas time that I played with like a dollhouse.

A second interesting incident happened to me at the same age. I was walking to school when I noticed a small silver medal on the sidewalk. On the front was a woman wearing a veil, with a cross and flowers in her arms. I supposed it must be the Virgin Mary, but I found the inscription on the back confusing: “After my death, I will let fall a shower of roses.” I didn’t recall any Bible stories about Mary saying such words. For some reason, I kept that medal (with the consent of my parents, which was rather unusual since they had strong reservations about the Catholic Church) and for years it lay at the bottom of my jewelry box.

At the age of fifteen I was confirmed and became somewhat active in my youth group, but my church experience still did not coincide with my personal experience of God. In time, I allowed the distractions of high school and early college life to replace my church involvement. Truthfully, I didn’t miss it at all. For about six or seven years, God seemed to slip to the last place in my priorities.

It was in my third year of college in Connecticut that I met a young Catholic named Mark who would eventually become my husband. Mark was a cradle Catholic, and he attended the Sunday night services at our college’s little Newman Center more out of obligation than devotion. He knew I was not happy with my Lutheran experience. He knew I had questioned my associate pastor at home about where our church stood on specific issues and that I was dissatisfied with his wishy-washy answers. Mark invited me to go to Mass with him. What happened was quite surprising. There in the tiny college chapel, with only a dozen or so sleepy, jean-clad students and a priest who wore sandals no less, I suddenly experienced God in the worship. There was no organ music, no pomp and circumstance, and the dress was far more casual than I was accustomed to, but I felt connected to the people in a way I had never experienced before. Even more amazing, I knew with absolute assurity that at Consecration, this was truly the Body and Blood of Christ. He was present in a way that made perfect sense to me. I can even remember thinking, “Oh, so this is where you’ve been hiding!”

At the age of 23, feeling like I had “come home” both with

Mark and with Catholic worship, I secretly took RCIA classes in Manhattan where I had been working. I was still not quite ready to tell my parents about my impending conversion, as I knew it would be difficult for them. I was confirmed and received the Eucharist in the chapel of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, which is a pretty awesome place to start one’s Catholic life! Although my parents weren’t happy initially, over time they saw my serious commitment with my new-found faith and with the young man who was instrumental in leading me there, and they accepted my decision.

From the day I became Catholic, I focused my voracious love for reading exclusively on Catholic subjects. I had come into the Church through my heart, not my intellect, knowing with confidence that this is what God had been asking of me. But I also knew I was responsible for understanding the commitment I had just made, and there was lots to learn about a Church with a 2,000-year history.

I began my study with mystical phenomena such as Eucharistic Miracles, the stigmata, apparitions, and incorrupt bodies because these things were so foreign to my Lutheran upbringing. From there I read about the saints, Church history, papal encyclicals, and Catholic apologetics. A pilgrimage to a Marian apparition site in Europe with Mark and his family fanned the flame on our passion for Mass, Confession, prayer, fasting, and Holy Scripture. As years passed, our family grew, and with it grew my love for my Catholic faith. I simply could not get enough of it. I prayed every day for ten years, asking God to let me be an instrument to share my love and passion for my faith

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with others.

It was during my study of the saints, by the way, that I learned the correct identity of the woman on the medal I had found as a child. It was St. Therese of Lisieux. I fell in love with her after reading *Story of a Soul* and began to get the feeling that this special saint had been looking after me since I was small.

St. Therese would play a pivotal role in my transitioning from a freelance advertising writer to a Catholic author of books and magazine articles for adults and children, the answer, I believe, to my ten years of prayer. I can remember the day clearly. I was lying on the couch with a terrible headache. I had just found out I was pregnant with a fourth child at the age of forty. I was not exactly elated by this news, because we were already blessed with three children, and I had been looking forward to pursuing a dream of being a secular children’s author. Mark excitedly handed me an acceptance

Necessity of the Church?

By Marcus Grodi

Sometimes in discussions with non-Catholics the question arises, “Where in Scripture is the necessity of the Church?” They aren’t asking specifically about the necessity of the Roman Catholic Church, but whether Jesus intended there to be a Church through which believers receive the graces and the truth necessary to be saved.

This is a good question and deserves a much longer, more thorough answer than I can give here, but let me briefly outline how I, in my own journey from Protestantism to Catholicism, became convinced that Jesus not only intended there to be a Church, but that apart from this Church we can not be certain of what is true.

I need to begin, though, from where I was as a Protestant minister. Originally ordained a Congregationalist, the Scripture that most defined “church” for me was Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.” Like many Protestants, I believed, based on this text, that any local gathering of believers is, therefore, an *ecclesia*, a “church,” and can freely discern, guided by the Holy Spirit dwelling within each believer, what is true. I operated under this assumption for years—before and during seminary, and on into my first year as an ordained pastor—but then I began experiencing the craziness of this assumption. As a pastor, I fought the confusion and divisions that this assumption, this misrepresentation of Scripture, produces. This institutionalized autonomy reaps nothing but chaos and never results in any form of authentic Christian unity. There, in fact, is no least common denominator that all independent, Evangelical Christians agree on. They are not all Trinitarian; they do not all agree in their theologies of Jesus; they do not all agree upon what is necessary for salvation; they do not agree even upon whether sinners need to be saved. Maybe the one thing they can agree upon is the necessity of love, but yet they can’t even agree upon what this requires. Is this confusion what Jesus promised his followers when he said: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32)?

It was the witness of an old seminary friend, Scott Hahn, who drew my attention to another verse that clarified why this understanding of “church” is absurd. 1 Tim 3:14-15, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instruc-

tions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.” Which of these individual, autonomous, self-initiated gatherings, or even which association or denomination of these independent congregations, or even which of the remaining Churches of the Reformation, none of which can identify even one point of theology upon which they all agree, can be considered the “pillar and bulwark of truth”? Could I as a pastor claim that my independent Congregational church, or—after my ordination was switched—that my particular Presbyterian denomination, apart from all other Christian churches, was the “pillar and bulwark of truth”?

“Could I as a pastor claim that my independent Congregational church...apart from all other Christian churches, was the “pillar and bulwark of truth”?”

As I struggled with this, I was confronted by another verse from within the same paragraph in Matthew: 18:15-17, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Could Jesus have meant that merely any gathering of 2-3 believers has the authority to decide the outcome of conflicts between individuals? If this is true, then essentially the problem would have been solved in the second step, when 2-3 had come together to confront the sinful brother. But Jesus indicated that when this wasn’t successful, they were to “tell it to the Church.” This “church,” therefore, must be something different than any mere self-initiated group of believers, no matter how small or large. And how could the existence of thousands of individual independent “churches” or separated denominations carry any kind of authority to make these kinds of decisions: the authority to separate a sinful brother from their gathering, to “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”? All any 2 or 3 who had been kicked out had to do was declare that



they were now the true church. My discovery of the necessity of the Church grew through re-reading a very familiar verse, Matt 16:18, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of death will not prevail against it." Setting aside for now the issue of Simon Peter, I recognized that Jesus intended to build His Church. Not "churches" nor the idea that "church" would be some kind of later development or dispensation. No, Jesus would build his Church, against which the powers of the evil one will never prevail.

But how and when would Jesus build this Church? In Matthew 16 He states that He will build this Church upon Simon Peter; more specifically in the context of all the New Testament, He will build His Church upon His hand-chosen Apostles centered around the leadership of Simon Peter. And to ensure that this Church will have the trustworthy authority to determine what is true, Jesus promised His Apostles the Holy Spirit. We read of this in John chapters 14-16.

Like the majority of Evangelical Protestants, I interpreted these verses to refer to every Christian in general, and used this to back my understanding of private interpretation. But again, once examined, this application breaks down. In John 14:15-16, Jesus promised to his Apostles on the night before He was crucified, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." On the surface so far, this seems to support the idea I once held: that all believers know the Holy Spirit because "he dwells with you and will be with you," and we Catholics do believe this to be true for all baptized believers. However, the following references do not make sense when applied in general to all believers:

John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the

Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

Either the Holy Spirit has been terribly "mixed up" over what is true, leading to such irreconcilable divisions and confusion amongst Christians, or Christians just don't hear very well. If the latter is true, however, then how can anyone be certain that they are hearing the Holy Spirit and following correctly? It makes more sense, at least to me, that in these verses, Jesus was primarily speaking to his hand-chosen Apostles, promising that they would receive the Holy Spirit, who would then help them remember and know the fullness of the deposit of faith.

I'd like to conclude this article with a quote suggested by Fr Ray Ryland, our vice president and chaplain, from John Cardinal Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Newman states, "the most obvious answer, then, to the question, why we yield to the authority of the Church in the questions and developments of faith, is, that some authority there must be if there is a revelation given, and other authority there is none but she. A revelation is not given, if there be no authority to decide what it is that is given."

There is, of course, much more to say, but in my journey, these and other verses helped me to see that the Church established by Jesus Christ in his hand-chosen apostles and united with the Petrine office, needs our attention and our loyalty, since it is the one trustworthy pillar and bulwark of truth, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely in Christ,



Come and hear

Marcus Grodi
speak on conversion
and the truth of the Catholic Faith:



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Information and Registration:
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November 13, 2008
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH
7:30 p.m.

BGSU Student Union, room 308
Mary Alice Newnam (419) 409-3799,
m_newnam@yahoo.com

December 6, 2008
St. Joseph's Catholic Church
36 Melmore Street
Tiffin, OH 44883
(419) 447-5848



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Former Anglican minister

November 10
Elizabeth Ficocelli
Former Lutheran

November 17
Julian Chadwick
English Pre-Tape

November 24
Fr. Douglas Lorig
Former Episcopal minister

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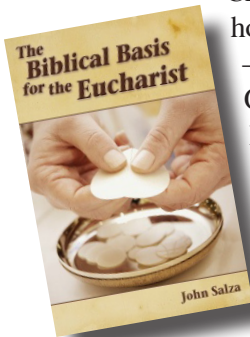
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Re-air

Featured Resources

The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist

By John Salza

For over 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has been celebrating Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian faith. John Salza demonstrates how, without question, the Eucharist — as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ — is deeply rooted in biblical history. Whether you are defending, questioning, or exploring the role of the Eucharist in the Catholic Faith, you will come away from reading *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist* with a crystal-clear understanding of what the Church teaches and why, from a scriptural perspective.

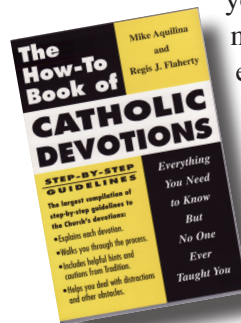


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By Mike Aquilina and Regis Flaherty

You know a lot about the Catholic Church, or maybe you are just learning, but there are things that confuse you — like what to do when you pray a novena, or how to “offer up” something, exactly what the Angelus is, or any of the dozens of other devotions that set Catholics apart from other Christians. But help is here! *The How-To Book of Catholic Devotions* provides the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the most time-honored traditions of the Catholic Church.



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Please pray ...

✦ CLERGY ✦

✦ For Father James, an Anglican priest in Canada, that, as he explores the possibility of coming into full communion with the Catholic Church, God would open unforeseen doors to him.

✦ For Lee, a Baptist minister in Kentucky, that the Holy Spirit would draw him ever closer to God the Father as he learns the beauty of the sacraments of the Church instituted by the command of Jesus.

✦ For Father Ron, an Episcopal priest in Illinois, that he would continue to inquire into the truths of the Catholic faith and that Jesus would call him to full communion with his Church.

✦ For Jim, a Lutheran minister in South Carolina, that God would provide for him and his family as he leaves behind the full-time ministry and that the Holy Spirit would work a miracle in the hearts of those he loves most.

✦ For Robert, an Evangelical lay minister in Virginia, that God would lead him to realize that Catholics also believe that one must be born again, but they understand it the way Jesus taught this sacred and vital Truth.

✦ For Glenn, a former Episcopal priest in Alabama, that, as he begins the journey to full communion with the Catholic Church, God would fill him with every grace and blessing that he needs to accomplish the works he set out to make.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. Each person mentioned has contacted us and is somewhere along their journey home. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs in general and specific of the *CHN* network, its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to :

CHN Prayer List
P. O. Box 8290
Zanesville, OH 43702

You may also email your prayer requests to:

prayers@chnetwork.org

We use only first names to preserve anonymity, and the following code:

(QV) Quo Vadis Requests



✦ LAITY ✦

✦ For all families who have loved ones who have walked away from the faith and for their re-version to the fullness of truth.

✦ For Terri's health.

✦ For Jeff, Carol, and their daughters as they look to discern Gods will in their lives.

✦ For Jennifer, Jason, Graham, and Beth as they begin their journeys to the Catholic Church.

✦ For all who are entering RCIA this year.

✦ All our priests and religious and those discerning their vocational calls.

✦ For all those within the Helpers Network.

✦ In thanksgiving for the success of the Deep in History conference.

✦ For Gary's healing.

✦ For Michelle and her family, that they may experience God's love in a profound way.

✦ For baby Bek and his brain injuries, that God may grant him health and give strength to his family in his time of trial.

✦ For the Riello family in their time of need.

✦ For Laura and Oliver.

✦ For Melissa and her family in this time of hardship. That God may give them his healing and his peace. (QV)

✦ For all the members of Quo Vadis. (QV)

✦ For Spencer, Jessica, Elena, Sarah, Carolyn, Melanie, and Melissa in their search for truth. (QV)

Continued from page 2

letter from Catholic Parent magazine. I read it over and over, thinking it must be a joke. For months I had been receiving rejection letters from various publishers, turning down all of my book ideas. Then, out of the blue, I had the inspiration to write a magazine article about a powerful experience involving our eight-year-old son and the intercession of St. Therese of Lisieux, and the story was accepted immediately. It was my first published work, and St. Therese was at the center of it. She would become the inspiration for my first adult book as well, a collection of intercessory stories, which developed out of the positive response from the article. My Catholic writing career was launched and there would rapidly follow several books and magazine articles for adults and children.

During a women's retreat I attended two years ago, we were asked to recall our very first awareness of God. I remembered with fondness my short but sweet "conversation" with him at the age of eight. Reflecting on where life had taken me as wife, mother, and Catholic author, I felt affirmed I was living out the mission foretold to me as a youngster. That retreat helped me appreciate the great grace I had received as a child through no merit of my own, and my love for God deepened.

Shortly after, I was at daily Mass with our youngest in my arms. For some reason, my childhood chat with God came to mind again. I couldn't help but smile, thinking how I had asked the King of the Universe if he had plans for me to

be another Blessed Mother. Suddenly, the sideways voice spoke again, after 37 years. "No," it said. "You are going to glorify my mother." In stark contrast to my calm response to the voice as a child, this time I was overwhelmed and speechless. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I had just finished writing a book about a Marian apparition, and I thought perhaps this was what God was confirming. Little did I know I would author a book on Lourdes the following year, a book on the Rosary for children the year after that, and be discerning a number of other Marian-related book topics today. Just where is all this going? I don't know. You may have to ask me in another 37 years.

Biography:

Elizabeth Ficocelli is a best-selling, award-winning author of books for adults and children. Her books include Lourdes: Font of Faith, Hope & Charity; Shower of Heavenly Roses: Stories of the Intercession of St. Therese of Lisieux; and The Imitation of Christ for Children. Elizabeth has also authored numerous magazine articles. She has appeared on EWTN and has presented at national Catholic conferences such as the LA Congress and NCEA. For more information on her books, magazine articles, and presentations, please visit her website at: www.elizabethficocelli.com.

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Take our Catholic history wherever you go as we continue to make our resources more accessible to you.



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Marcus Grodi, Founder



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The Coming Home Network *International* works with the [Eternal Word Television Network \(EWTN\)](#) to provide the *Journey Home Program* and *Deep In Scripture Radio*. In addition CHNI provides a variety of books, tapes, cd's, and downloadable material which can be accessed here or purchased from the Coming Home Resources Catalog (CHR). In the near future CHNI will be expanding its involvement with print, audio, and visual media.



This Page is still under construction! - Bookmark/check out the [Members](#) page for updates on the site, resources, and upcoming events.

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November, 2008