



April 2015 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



Within the Gates of Jerusalem

by Michael Lofton

*“And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem.”
(Psalm 122:2, NAB)*

No other verse describes my conversion to Catholicism better than this passage. Although I’ve had the privilege of standing within the literal gates of Jerusalem, I rejoice much more over having the privilege to stand within the gates of the spiritual Jerusalem, the Catholic Church.

Who is Jesus?

I was born into a Christian family and, at the age of two, my family moved to Israel so that my father could work at the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. When I was four, my parents divorced and I moved back to the United States with my mother. I didn’t have much of a spiritual life at this early age; in fact, I remember how happy I was as a seven year old when my mother told me that we weren’t going to have to go to church anymore. My mother converted to Judaism and, shortly after, we moved to Israel for a second time. Though I was a small child and didn’t have any real Jewish convictions, I was expected to perform certain Jewish rituals, especially on the Sabbath, since I was the “man of the house.” During this second time in Israel, I was indoctrinated by the society in which I lived to have a hatred for Jesus. This lasted until I was twelve years old and moved back to the United States to live with my father.

At the time, my father was a non-denominational, charismatic Christian. I began to attend church

with him and, by God’s grace, on December 31, 1996, I was baptized in a Trinitarian charismatic church. Finally, my participation in Christ’s Mystical Body began.

For a short period of time, I was interested in God and wanted to follow Him, but this eventually turned into a nominal lifestyle, especially when I became a teenager. By the time I was nineteen, I moved from Louisiana to New York City where I met my wife, Leslie. In New York City, I began to live a profligate lifestyle. After going through an incredibly traumatic experience at the age of twenty-two, I hit rock bottom and began to cry out to God for help.

In God’s mercy, He answered my call. In His providence, He sent two non-denominational Christians to the store in which I worked. I was delighted to learn they were Christians and accepted their offer to attend one of their preaching events that night. At this event, I met a man who converted to Christianity in prison, after killing two men. Thank God

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Journeys Home

...Journeys Home Continued...

for this man; though he sinned greatly by taking the lives of two people, by God's grace, he saved mine! In a kind and generous gesture, he gave me a study Bible during this event. I recall being so impressed by the fact that someone cared enough about me to give me a Bible that I read it from cover to cover in a little over a month. My life completely changed from that moment, and I've never been the same. I began to have a relationship with Christ, and all who knew me saw that I immediately became a completely different person.

Considering Infant Baptism

After nearly a year of being involved in a Bible study on Staten Island, New York, I moved back to Louisiana in 2007 and began to attend a local Southern Baptist church. I began to study the Bible intensely and became convinced of the five points of Calvinism after nearly a year of moving back from New York. After several additional years in the Baptist communion, my wife and I learned that she was pregnant with our first child, so I was forced to study the question of infant baptism.

I considered the fact that in the Old Testament children were brought into God's covenant by receiving the sign of the covenant, based upon the faith of their fathers. For example, Abraham was justified by faith (Rom 4:3), prior to circumcision, but then he was instructed to give the sign of the covenant, circumcision, to his infant son, Isaac (Gen 17:11-14). This demonstrated that the reception of the sign of God's covenant does not require faith on the part of the individual who receives the sign, provided they are too young to exercise faith and their parents are part of God's covenant. Likewise, I realized that since Bap-

tism is the New Covenant version of circumcision (Col 2:11-12), I should not withhold the sign of the covenant from my children, simply because they are incapable of exercising faith. Furthermore, I knew how seriously God reacted when Moses withheld the sign of the covenant from his child (Ex 4:24-26), and for this reason I could not withhold the sign of the covenant from my child if I wanted to be obedient to God.

After becoming convinced of the biblical necessity of infant baptism, especially after listening to a debate between a well-known Presbyterian and Baptist on this very issue, I joined a Presbyterian communion and had my daughter baptized in 2011. At this time, I began to study Church history, especially the early Church Fathers. I was curious to know what happened in all those years before the Reformation. I began to read historical theology and Church history books written by well-respected Protestants. I also devoured Church history lectures that were available on the Internet, particularly the ones by Reformed Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Covenant Theological Seminary. As I studied the Fathers of the Church, I became painfully aware that they did not believe some of the fundamental doctrines which triggered the Reformation, but rather believed the Catholic view in regards to these doctrines.

Faith and Works

During this time of study, I learned that the early Church Fathers did not believe in the Protestant doctrine of justification, which meant the Reformers, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, were wrong. The Reformers,

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FEATURED RESOURCES



Working Towards Reunion: A Dialogue Between a Catholic and a Protestant — By Michael Lofton

Working Towards Reunion is an intriguing and fast-paced fictitious dialogue between a Catholic named Thomas and a Protestant named Martin. In this dialogue, they discuss their differences when Martin learns that Thomas converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. In their discussion of topics such as apostolic succession, Tradition, *sola scriptura*, and Marian doctrines, the reader discovers the logical, scriptural, and historical basis of Catholic beliefs.

\$35

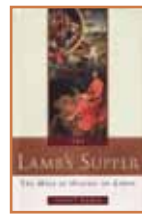
Receive *Working Towards Reunion* for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *The Lamb's Supper* for a donation of \$50.

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Receive *Working Towards Reunion* and *The Lamb's Supper* for a donation of \$75.



The Lamb's Supper — By Dr. Scott Hahn

The Lamb's Supper reveals a long-lost secret of the Church: The early Christians' key to understanding the mysteries of the Mass was the New Testament Book of Revelation. With its bizarre imagery, its mystic visions of heaven, and its end-of-time prophecies, Revelation mirrors the sacrifice and celebration of the Eucharist. Beautifully written, in clear direct language, this book will help readers see the Mass with new eyes, pray the liturgy with a renewed heart, and enter into the Mass more fully, enthusiastically, intelligently, and powerfully than ever before.

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From Here to Eternity: Five Essentials of Conversion

PART TWO: FROM PRIVATE JUDGMENT TO UNIVERSAL CONSENT

By Dr. Kenneth J. Howell

Remaining Catholic is as important as becoming Catholic. That's why it's so important to understand that conversion is not a one-time event in the life of a Catholic. In fact, every year the Church sets aside a six-week period where conversion is front and center. Lent is a time when every member of the Church is asked to acknowledge his or her need for deeper conversion.



Metanoia or true conversion begins in the mind. Even though the Bible tends to use the word heart as the center of human life, as that secret place where the battle for holiness is fought, the Scriptures are not speaking of the kind of romantic emotions that we associate with the word "heart." Call it the heart or the mind, the Catholic vision is one of being changed from the inside out. Conversion requires and brings about a profound alteration in the way we think.

In my first installment, I stressed the high value the Church places on knowing history and living by its best lights. In the process of conversion from the present to the past, an emerging convert realizes that conversion to Catholicism is not about coming to agree with a list of doctrines that the Church teaches. It's about coming to believe that the Magisterium is the infallible guide that Christ gave to His flock. The task of determining proper Christian doctrine and morals was not given to me. It was given to the whole Church represented by the Apostles and passed on to their successors, the bishops of the Church. Embracing such a belief has a liberating effect on a person. He doesn't have to figure out every last theological issue; he can rely on the Church of the past.

Western Individualism & Catholic Universality

Becoming a Catholic represents a huge challenge for a person growing up in the West today because a Westerner imbibes the attitude that I can and should decide for myself what is right and wrong. Naturally, there is a kernel of truth in this statement in that every individual is the *agent* of his or her decisions but most everyone also takes this to mean that he or she is also the *criterion* of the decisions. It was not that long ago that this attitude was reflected in the justification for abortion, "It's my body so I get to decide. It's my choice." Of course, the pregnant woman is the one who decides; no one should dispute that. She is the agent of the decision making process. But the fact that she is the one who decides does not ensure that she will make that decision in accord with truth.

The individual convert to Catholicism is also the one who decides (i.e. the agent of the decision), but he is not the criterion of his decision. That is why it is so difficult to embrace Catholicism for a person who has become highly secularized, whether a Christian or not. Suppose a person takes a long time to study

every aspect of the Catholic Faith. If this person tends to be the cautious type, such a process could last a long time. Suppose too that at the end of the process this person says, "I have studied every aspect of Catholicism inside and out and I have come to agree with every last item on the list. Now I am ready to become Catholic." Unfortunately, there is still one more vital step this person has missed. Becoming Catholic is not only a matter of agreement with the Church; it involves believing that the Church is the one who decides in matters of faith and morals, not oneself.

“...the Church is the one who decides in matters of faith and morals, not oneself.”

Truth From Christ to Us Through the Church

Why is the Church the agent of decision making with regard to authoritative faith and morals? Very simply because it is Christ's truth which the Church must teach and which the individual Christian must follow.

Jesus wrote nothing down and did not leave a book. He left His Apostles on earth to establish the Church He founded. Or, as Paul would later say, the Church "is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:20).

Those who take the New Testament seriously have ample evidence that Jesus intended to establish a Church that would teach His truth with His own authority. In the classic passage of Matthew 16:13-20 — the one where He names Peter as the rock on which He would build His Church — we find the startling promise, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you release on earth will be released in heaven" (16:19). Jesus speaks in the second person singular, limiting this binding/releasing to Peter alone. Yet in Matthew 18:18 almost identical language occurs but in the plural, "Whatever you (pl) bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you release on earth will be released in heaven." Here Jesus gives the power of binding/releasing to all the Apostles for the maintenance of the Church. A natural question is why Jesus spoke in the singular in one instance and in the plural in the other. The most natural answer is that He intended both. The binding/releasing spoken of belongs to all the Apostles in union with Peter as the sign and instrument of unity.

Jesus explains His promise further in John chapters fourteen to sixteen. Here He speaks of the future ministry of the Holy Spirit as a teacher and guide:

Continued on page 4 ➤

The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of all I have said. (Jn 14:26)

Whenever the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in all truth. He will not speak of his own (initiative) but (only) the things he hears will he declare to you and he will declare the things to come. He will glorify me because he will take from what is mine and will declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that He takes from what is mine and will declare it to you. (Jn 16:13-15)

Perhaps it is these promises from Jesus' lips that prompted Luke to include the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts chapter fifteen. In that story we find the Apostles and presbyters (priests) gathering to decide whether the Gentiles must be circumcised according to the Mosaic custom to be saved. Underlying the story is a strong sense that such a question can only be decided in a universal (ecumenical) council. The role of the Holy Spirit in the final decision is mentioned in Acts 15:28, "It seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us that we should place on you no other burden than what was necessary." Here the whole Church decides the issue while being led by the Holy Spirit.

Subsequent history confirms the wisdom of this ancient idea that the whole Church is needed to decide what is the true teaching of Christ. When questions about true doctrine or even heresy arose, the Church had a strong sense that the universal Church should decide. This is why the early Church held ecumenical councils. One explanation of this belief in universality is found in the *Commonitorium* of Vincent, a fifth century monk on the island of Lérins off the coast of France:

In the Catholic Church itself we take the greatest care to hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. That is truly and properly Catholic, as is shown by the very force and meaning of the word, which comprehends everything almost universally. We shall hold to this rule if we follow universality, antiquity, and consent. We shall follow universality if we acknowledge that one Faith to be true which

the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is clear that our ancestors and fathers proclaimed; consent, if in antiquity itself we keep following the definitions and opinions of all, or certainly nearly all, bishops and doctors alike.

Careful reading of Vincent's words show the method of determining the content of faith and morals. The Church of the past informs present decisions (antiquity). The universal (catholic) teaching of the Church must be the basis of the decisions; and the consensus of the universal Church must be the agent of the decisions. In none of this is the notion of private judgment ever countenanced. And why? It is simply because private judgment might lead to disunity whereas corporate determinations will foster unity. And unity among His disciples is what Jesus desires for His Church (cf. Jn 17:20-21).

The Practical Value of Universal Truth

Realizing that the Church is God's chosen body of articulating Christian truth is liberating. The accent and burden no longer falls on me and my thinking but on how my thinking may be in align with the truth that the Church as a whole sees. Here a convert gradually comes to think with the Church. Whether a life-long Catholic or a new member of the Church, everyone should understand that the force of Catholicism is centripetal, i.e. towards the center of unity. The Holy Spirit is guiding the Church in its deliberations even if individuals do not always embrace the decisions.

This truth can be comforting in times when the Church and/or its leaders seem adrift from their moorings. There have been many times when the Church seemed to be adrift and there will be undoubtedly more as well in the future. But Jesus has entrusted His truth to the whole Church in union with Peter. Individuals may fail but the Church as a whole will not. We have Jesus' own promise, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). The Church here and now moves in fits and starts but it will endure into eternity because the Church is God's great Sacrament of Love for the world. ■

EWTVN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television and radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 1 PM ET

RADIO

Mondays at 8:00 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET, Sundays 5 PM ET
The Best of the Journey Home: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

April 6

Jay Lampart*
Revert, former Evangelical

April 13

Amy Daniels*
Former Presbyterian and United Methodist minister

April 20

Jack and Jamie McAleer*
Revert (Jack) and former Lutheran (Jamie)

April 27

Tom Grossman*
Former non-denominational Charismatic

The Unless Journey

By Marcus Grodi



When we use the term *unless* in everyday life, don't we normally mean something very definite, something black and white? We recently rushed my youngest son to the emergency room with abdominal pain. Initially we read the data as nothing more than an upset stomach but a voice inside said it was something more. It turned out to be a gangrenous appendix, and *unless* this was removed, he would die.

After a snowstorm this winter, I backed my aging Toyota Prius precariously away from our woodland home. I felt a slight bump, but looking out all mirrors I saw nothing. Switching into drive, I started down the long snow and ice covered gravel driveway. As I progressed, I heard a strange repeated squeaking sound. After about a hundred feet, I had to stop. Something inside of me was screaming that the squeak was not something mechanical. I got out, walked around to the rear, and there trapped under the car, in front of the right rear tire, was our matriarch dog named My Girl. She was glaring up at me in fear, but neither she nor I could extract her. The Prius was too low to the ground. So I quickly got out the jack and raised the car, until Marilyn and I could slide her out. After a quick smirk and a wag of her tail, she pranced away to join the other dogs, apparently unharmed, to relate her most recent harrowing inconvenience with humans.

Normally our dogs scurry out of the way whenever we back out, but the Prius is quiet like a golf cart. My Girl never heard me coming! Then it struck me: *unless* I had heeded that interior voice, I may have driven most of the way to the office, on pavement, with our beloved dog trapped under the car. She would have succumbed to a gruesome death!

In Scripture, the word *unless* usually denotes a serious, critical condition or decision, and interestingly, can lead us along a challenging path through the Gospel of John. This word appears more in John than any other book in the Bible. Consider the importance of the following Scriptures in this *unless* journey through John. Do they say anything to that inner voice?

This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher

come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, *unless* God is with him." (3:2)

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless* one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (3:3)

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless* one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (3:5)

Jesus therefore said to him, "*Unless* you see signs and wonders you will not believe." (4:48)

No one can come to me *unless* the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (6:44)

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless* you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (6:53)

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me *unless* it is granted him by the Father." (6:65)

I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins *unless* you believe that I am he." (8:24)

Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless* a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (12:24)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, *unless* it abides in the vine, neither can you, *unless* you abide in me. (15:4)

Jesus answered [Pilate], "You would have no power over me *unless* it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin." (19:11)

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But [Thomas] said to them, "*Unless* I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." (20:25)

Consider the following summary reflections from these "Unless" statements:

- Are you in awe of Jesus? His words and actions? His death and resurrection?
- Do you recognize what your baptism has done for you?

April Evangelization Challenge

VISIT CHNetwork.org/signposts

By JonMarc Grodi | jmgrodi@chnetwork.org

This past fall I began working on a new series of short, 5-10 minute video interviews with various converts. The tentative name for this video series is "Signposts" and as the name implies they are intended to be short evangelistic videos that might catch the attention of our non-Catholic friends and family members, potentially pointing them on their way to a more serious look at the Catholic Church.

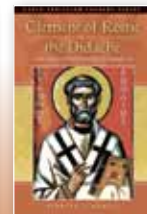
As you may have noted, three early steps in my Dad's recent article *Helping Them Home: 10 Steps of Dialogue* (featured in our December 2014 newsletter) involve engaging with non-Catholics first on the level of our common Christianity. These are people who truly and rightly put first their fidelity to Jesus Christ. If they have any lingering suspicion that the Catholic Church is not a Christian institution or that, even if the Church is technically Christian, Catholics and the things they do are not so, we can understand why they may be so hesitant to look further.

With this in mind, one of the primary purposes of these videos is to have a Catholic convert talk about their conversion to Jesus Christ, something that most often happened long before they considered the Catholic Church. In the context of this conversion and their subsequent relationship with Christ, I have them give a short summary of what drew them to the Church and what they found inside.



My hope, again, is that we can highlight in a few short minutes the essential Christianity of these men and women who went on to do something that may seem so foolish to other Christians. That they were, and by all accounts continue to be, devoted followers of Jesus Christ despite joining the Catholic Church may be a challenge to the assumptions of many non-Catholics. It may be the nudge they need to watch or read a longer testimony, pick up the *Catechism*, or contact the Coming Home Network with more questions.

My challenge to you this month is to visit CHNetwork.org/signposts, watch a few of the videos (or all of them — they're short!) and pick some to share with a friend or family member. Secondly, I would heartily welcome your input on how to make future short interviews more effective. Let me know what sort of reactions you receive and what sort of dialogue they spark. Together, we can show more people that ultimately there is, as there has ever been, only one answer to the question "Why would you become Catholic?" The answer is: Jesus. ■



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or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

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Prayer List



Clergy

- For Daniel, a former Orthodox Presbyterian minister, that the Holy Spirit would fill his mind and heart as he receives the Easter sacraments.
- For a Greek Orthodox priest, that our Lord Jesus would guide him to embrace the successor of St. Peter as his Papa.
- For a non-denominational minister in Arizona, that she may be given the grace to embrace the Catholic Church of her youth.
- For Eric, a former minister in Canada, that his interest in the Catholic Faith would flower and grow.
- For an Anglican priest in Montana, that God would guide his path as he and his family journey to full-communication with the Catholic Church.
- For Mike, a non-denominational minister, that he may discover the fullness of the faith of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.
- For a lay missionary in Tennessee, that, as she is received into the Catholic Church this month, God would direct her into continued fruitful paths in ministry.
- For a former Evangelical minister in Europe, that Jesus would open his wife's heart to the beauty and truth of the Catholic Faith.
- For a clergyman in Illinois, that he find peace and clarity as to how best to pursue his interest in the Catholic Church.

■ For a Methodist deacon in England, that our Lord would guide him to the person he needs to assist him through the annulment process, enabling him to approach the altar of Jesus.

Layity

- For all those who are coming into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter, that Jesus bless them abundantly.
- For Casey, that she be able to move forward with her interest in the Catholic Church.
- For Betty, as she watches EWTN and feels pulled towards the Catholic Faith.
- For Mary, that she is able to move forward with her faith journey.
- For the wife of a Protestant pastor, that her husband will remain open to her desire to be Catholic and support her in her faith journey.
- For a Baptist in Georgia, as she practices Catholic devotions and recognizes the power of prayer, that she be drawn closer to the Catholic Church.
- For a man on the West Coast as he wrestles with the decision to pursue the Catholic Church or Orthodoxy since he has come to the conclusion that he can no longer remain Protestant.

■ For Steve, an Anglican, who is concerned about the practical implications of becoming Catholic.

■ For a recent convert from a non-denominational faith background who is struggling with how to tell her family and friends of her conversion.

■ For Sam who is learning more about Catholicism through personal research, that he be able to make connections with his local parish.

■ For a young man who is struggling with knowing whether his interest in the Catholic Church is good or not, that the Holy Spirit give him clarity and peace.

■ For Madeline who is considering becoming Catholic but has concerns about the annulment process.

■ For Bruce as he reads about the Catholic Faith and watches *The Journey Home*, that the Holy Spirit guide him closer to the Church.

■ For a Baptist who is growing deeper in her faith and knowledge of the Church, that she have peace about the direction of her journey and especially telling her family of her desire to be Catholic.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to prayers@chnetwork.org.

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

Please also pray for the Coming Home Network International's staff and Board of Directors.

President/Founder, Marcus Grodi
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Resident Theologian, Dr. Kenneth Howell
(former Presbyterian pastor)

Senior Advisor: History & Theology, Jim Anderson
(former Lutheran)

Director of Studio/Media, Scott Scholten
(former Presbyterian)

Office Manager, Ann Moore
IT/Facilities Coordinator, Bill Bateson
(former Mormon)

Publications and Laity Coordinator, Mary Clare Pieczynski

Manager of Outreach, JonMarc Grodi

Financial Assistant, Wendy Hart
(former United Methodist)

Board of Directors: Marcus Grodi (President), Msgr. Frank Lane (Chaplain), Dr. Robert Geiger (Vice President), Dr. Charles Feicht (Secretary), Bruce Sullivan (Treasurer), Dr. Marian Schuda (Director), Donald Brey (Director)

...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

such as Luther, believed that justification was a one-time event, which did not actually make the sinner righteous in God’s eyes. Rather it left the sinner as unrighteous and merely considered righteous before God, based upon the merits of Christ. Luther even believed that justification was by faith alone, apart from works. The Catholic view is that the sinner is actually made righteous when he or she is justified, by the grace of God. It also teaches that there are degrees of justification and not simply a one-time event (Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 24). Furthermore, it teaches that justification is by grace, through faith, but not necessarily faith alone. Initial justification (when a person goes from being unrighteous to righteous) is by faith alone, though it is a living faith that works through love (Gal 5:6). Subsequent justification is by faith and works, though always by God’s grace. Luther believed that when Paul wrote in Romans 3:28 that a sinner is justified “apart from the works of the law” meant that faith alone is the instrumental cause by which a person is justified. However, after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that Luther’s understanding of Paul’s use of the term “works of the law” was flawed, in that Paul was referring to Old Testament Mosaic laws, such as circumcision, the Sabbath day, etc. Paul’s use of this phrase did not include good works done by God’s grace after initial justification, as James was referring to when he said that the sinner is not justified by faith alone but by works (Jas 2:24). Thus, James was not contradicting Paul; they simply were dealing with two different issues, Paul with the Law of Moses that was unique to the nation of Israel alone, and James to the good works that are obligatory on all people, everywhere.

As I studied the Church Fathers, they seemed to side with the Catholic view of justification rather than Luther’s view. For example, St. Augustine affirmed the Catholic view of justification when he wrote: “Now, if the wicked man were to be saved by fire on account of his faith only...then faith without works would be sufficient to salvation. But then what the Apostle James said would be false” (*Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love*, chapter 107; NPNF 1, volume III). He further states: “Unintelligent persons, however, with regard to the apostle’s statement: ‘We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the works of the law,’ have thought him to mean that faith suffices to a man, even if he lead a bad life, and has no good works” (*A Treatise on Grace and Free Will*; chapter 18; NPNF 1, volume V).

From this we see that St. Augustine clearly did not agree with Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s view of faith and works. In fact,

he explicitly stated that works are meritorious after justification when he wrote: “When St. Paul says, therefore, that man is justified by faith and not by the observance of the law, he does not mean that good works are not necessary or that it is enough to receive and to profess the faith and no more. What he means rather and what he wants us to understand is that man can be justified by faith, even though he has not previously performed any works of the law. For the works of the law are meritorious not before but after justification” (*On Faith and Works*, chapter 14, 21).

He further states that eternal life itself is a result of good works, not simply faith alone: “Wherefore, even eternal life itself, which is surely the reward of good works, the apostle calls the gift of God...We are to understand, then, that man’s good deserts are themselves the gift of God, so that when these obtain the recompense of eternal life, it is simply grace given for grace. Man, therefore, was thus made upright that, though unable to remain in his uprightness without divine help, he could of his own mere will depart from it” (*Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love*, chapter 107; NPNF 1, volume III).

“ ...St. Augustine clearly did not agree with Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s view of faith and works. In fact, he explicitly stated that works are meritorious after justification...”

How Does the Holy Spirit Lead Us Into All Truth?

Quotes like these, among others, can only be explained from a Catholic perspective; they simply don’t fit within a Protestant paradigm of justification. This led me to ask the following questions: Who determines whether a doctrine is heretical or not? How can I know if the early Church was right about justification, the Eucharist, the papacy, the canon of Scripture, etc.? Or if the

Protestants were right about these matters? I could not look to Scripture alone to settle the matters since the canon of Scripture itself was one of the matters I was trying to determine: Who has the authority to determine which books belong in the canon? I couldn’t say that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to each Christian on this matter because different Christians have different canons. For example, Catholics follow the Greek translation of the Old Testament made in the late second century B.C., which includes books such as Tobit, Judith, Baruch, Wisdom, Sirach, First and Second Maccabees, and additions to Daniel and Esther. Most Protestants omit these books from the canon. If a person believes the Holy Spirit directly reveals the canon to every Christian, either one has to say that Catholics aren’t Christians or that Protestants aren’t Christians for the same reason. If this approach is taken, one must then ask how they are able to determine who is a Christian. Some might answer, those who believe the gospel, but this is problematic because one must know which books are canonical first before they can judge

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what is the authentic gospel, especially with all of the false gospels in circulation during the first few centuries of the Church. For this reason, it became obvious that the Holy Spirit does not directly reveal the canon to each believer, but must have established some other reliable means of determining the canon.

I later learned that the Holy Spirit gave us the Apostles and their successors, to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13), and He guided His Church to determine the Catholic canon through councils such as the Council of Hippo (393 A.D.), the Council of Carthage (397) and the Council of Rome (382), as well as the Ecumenical Councils of Florence (1442) and Trent (1545-1563). As I began to delve into the question of authority and apostolic succession, I also began to ask the question: How does one determine who is in schism? It is stated clearly in Scripture that there is such a thing as schism and that the Church should remain united. With all of the divisions in Christianity, I began to wonder which communions are in schism from the Church established by Christ. These questions also forced me to consider the matter of authority and apostolic succession.

Who Has the authority?

Throughout this time of searching, I was still actively intending to become either a pastor or a priest, and was investing much of my efforts toward this end. In which church could I be confident?

As I studied the issue of apostolic succession in order to be a part of a Christian community with historical pedigree, I began to consider Anglicanism and Eastern Orthodoxy. At that time, Catholicism wasn't an option, primarily because I was previously indoctrinated with many misunderstandings about Catholicism, which made me extremely anti-Catholic (even going so far as to say the Catholic Church was the Whore of Babylon in the Book of Revelation).

I ruled out Anglicanism after I realized they did not have a magisterium that could definitively determine what is heretical and what is not, who is in schism and who is not. I began to study Eastern Orthodoxy and, reluctantly, Catholicism just so that I could make sure I had looked into all the options. I loved much about Eastern Orthodoxy, and still do, but I realized the fatal flaw of Orthodoxy is also that they do not have a magisterium that can determine what is heretical and what is not. It is true that the Eastern Orthodox believe an ecumenical council can determine such things, but I was not able to find an answer to the question: Who determines what is an ecumenical council,

and why haven't the Orthodox Churches had an ecumenical council since the eight century? I learned later that the reason they are not able to determine what constitutes an ecumenical council, is because it is the Pope who determines such things, and they are not in full-communication with the Bishop of Rome.

As I considered Catholicism, I began to read and listen to Catholics explain their faith. After listening to some lectures by Scott Hahn, especially on the papacy, I became convinced the Catholic magisterium was the answer to all of my questions.

The nail in the coffin, so to speak, was when I first properly understood Matthew 16:18-19, in which Jesus gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom. I learned that the concept of the keys of the Kingdom is derived from Isaiah 22:22. In the Old Testament, the king who ruled over the kingdom would appoint a person to bear the keys of his kingdom. This person would have the same authority as the king in his absence. It is similar to the concept of an ambassador. For example, since a president cannot be in more than one place at one time, he may delegate an ambassador to speak for him. So, when Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, He gave him His authority in His physical absence.

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Once I understood this, I began to realize that Scriptures like “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Lk 10:16) and “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:13) were not meant to apply to the Apostles alone, but are applicable even to their successors “to the close of the age” (Matt 28:20).

These ideas were further unlocked through the words of the disciples of the Apostles themselves. Pope St. Clement I, in the late first century — while the Apostle John was still alive — was contacted by the Corinthian church and asked to settle a disputation going on in their community as if it was common knowledge that the Bishop of Rome had universal jurisdiction over all the churches and the authority to settle disputes in these churches. In this epistle to the Corinthians, Pope St. Clement I acknowledges that the Apostles appointed successors in order to govern the Church after their deaths, as he wrote: “Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier...Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this rea-

...Journeys Home Continued...

son, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry” (*Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4–5, 44:1–3). This and other writings from the Church Fathers convinced me that the Catholic magisterium is the one Jesus put in charge after His departure with the authority to determine the canon, which doctrines are heretical, who is in schism, and which councils are true ecumenical councils. I still had many problems with the Catholic Church, but after studying what Catholics believe, my criticisms began to wane one by one.

The Wedding Feast of the Lamb

On the first Sunday of Advent, 2011, I began to attend a local Catholic church and fell in love with the liturgy from my very first Mass. The vestments, the candles, the incense, the Eucharist as a sacrifice — all resonated with me and it became obvious the Mass is the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s temple worship. I was fascinated by the resemblance between what takes place in the Mass and the description of the liturgy in heaven, particularly in the Book of Revelation. The incense (Rev 5:8), vestments (Rev 15:6), lampstands (Rev 1:12), an altar (Rev 6:9), the Sign of the Cross (Rev 7:3), and liturgical chant (Rev 4:8) were all in St. John’s vision of worship in heaven, and are all in the Catholic Mass. I became intrigued with the fact that what I was participating in, though not fully at the time since I was not able to receive the Eucharist, was heaven on earth — a *real* participation in the worship that takes place in heaven.

I also became fascinated with the Catholic doctrine of redemptive suffering, something that was very important to me with some of the suffering I’ve experienced. I rejoiced to learn that, by virtue of being united to Christ in Baptism, I can offer up my sufferings, in union with Christ’s sufferings, and have a real participation in His crucifixion in order to merit grace for others, as St. Paul said: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Col 1:24). Additionally, I became fascinated by the fact that the Catholic Church is truly catholic (universal). It has over twenty different rites from all over the world; each with its own way of celebrating the liturgy, yet all in communion with the Bishop of Rome.

Laying Aside My Own Plans

I still had one major problem with entering the Catholic Church. I had spent years preparing for seminary to either become a pastor or priest. Now, if I became a Catholic in a Latin rite parish, because I was already married, I would most likely not be able to become a priest. (Only under certain exceptional circumstances are married men admitted to the priesthood in the Latin rite.) I knew that men in the Eastern Catholic rite could become priests if they were already married, but there weren’t any churches in my area. This essentially meant I had to give up my aspirations. It was not an easy decision to make, but

I knew that I could not let my career stand in the way of truth. I knew that the Catholic Church was the Church established by Christ, and “[w]hosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved” (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 14). In order to remain faithful to Him who is always faithful — who gave up His own life for me — I decided to enter into full-communication with the Catholic Church, laying aside my own plans for my life and trusting in Him to provide me with a way to support my family.

I began to attend RCIA classes in preparation for my conversion to Catholicism. On Easter Vigil of 2012, I was received into full-communication with the Catholic Church alongside my best friend JC Gaspard and his wife, who were on the same journey as I was. Shortly after my conversion, my wife, who was baptized a Catholic, was confirmed and returned to full-communication with the Church. After her confirmation, my son was born and was baptized in the Catholic Church. About a year after his baptism, JC had a daughter, and it was an honor to be chosen as her godfather. Since my conversion, I have had wonderful opportunities to catechize a number of youth in preparation for their confirmations, teach an adult catechesis class, and serve as altar server and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in a local parish. ■



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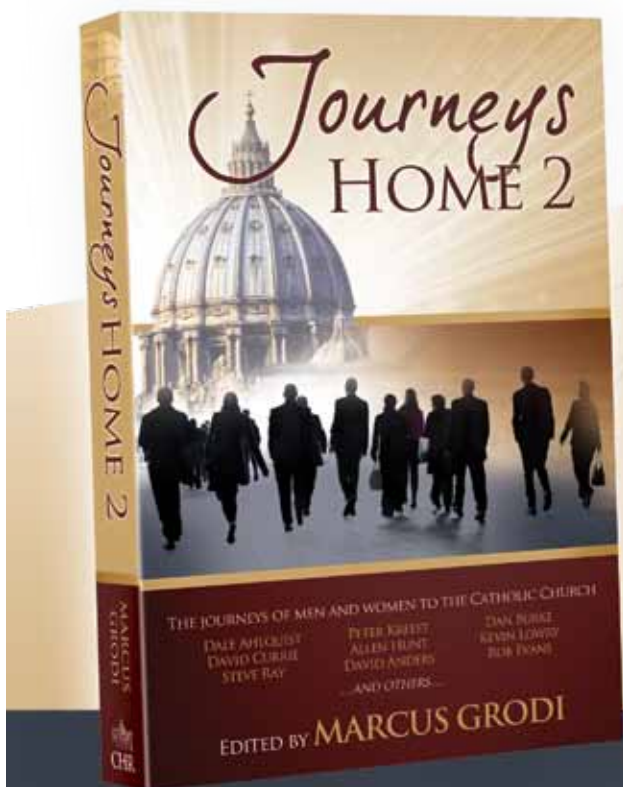
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