



## December 2010 Newsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## My Journey Home *by Father E. James Hart*

Once a minister of the Episcopal Church, I am today a Roman Catholic Priest, serving as pastor of the parish of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas. As it turns out, becoming a Catholic priest brought me “full circle.” Allow me to share with you how and why.

### The Early Years

I was born February, 28, 1948 in Inglewood, California. As I eventually learned from a copy of my baptismal certificate once I was grown, I was baptized by in the parish Church of St. John Chrysostom of the same city, June 27, 1948, according to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. My mother was of Irish Catholic decent, and she was raised a Catholic, mainly under her older sister's influence. My father, although baptized, had never been confirmed.

When I was still a toddler, my mother was strongly influenced by a neighbor of ours who was a Protestant. My mother left the Catholic Church under this woman's influence to join the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination. Consequently, I was raised in those circles.

Unlike so many who have left the Church, however, my mother always spoke of the Catholic Church with great fondness and the utmost respect — and that respect extended to the priests and religious she had known as a child. I mention

this because my mother's tender recollections were passed on to me and my siblings and helped cultivate in me and in us, implicitly, a love for the Church. In retrospect, I now know that our Lord was mercifully using my mother to cultivate in me and us baptismal grace, even though we were, strictly speaking, outside the Church (CCC, 817–819; see *Lumen Gentium*, 15).

Because my mother had left the Church while I was but a toddler, my formative years were spent in the Assemblies of God, in their Sunday school and their form of Protestant worship. This is what I knew as a boy, and God graciously used it to stir in me, from time to time, a hunger for Him. Indeed, I owe a great debt to the many dedicated souls in the Assemblies of God who selflessly taught me the Bible in these my formative years.

One vivid memory I recall as though it were yesterday is of a particular conversation with my mother. Having returned from services, I expressed to her how much I loved the hymn “The Old Rugged Cross.” I must have been around eight years of age at the time.

I must also note that during this time I absorbed many prejudices that disposed me to distrust the Catholic Church. This too was part of those formative years. ... continued on page 2

Journeys Home

## FEATURED RESOURCES

As a special offer exclusive to Coming Home Network members who send us a donation, we're happy to present a "grab bag" of great Catholic books perfect for giving away as Christmas gifts. Whether you have family who have fallen away from the Catholic faith, or a Protestant friend who would benefit from learning about what the Catholic Church really teaches, we have something for you!

As a premium, each donor will receive selections from the among these titles and others as well:



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## *...Journeys Home Continued...*

### **Adolescence**

My father, although a wonderful provider and in almost every respect a wonderful father, was lacking in this: He was not a godly man. He almost never attended services with my mother. As I grew older I began to identify with him more and more.

As a consequence, I began to rebel at the idea of attending services with my mother. She insisted, and I reluctantly complied. Nevertheless, eventually my father's example won out, and my mother conceded that I was not required to attend services with her.

From about age thirteen, then, I sought to follow my father's example with respect to religion. This choice, of course, had an impact upon the rest of my life. In 1965 at age 17, with my father's consent, I joined the U.S. Navy. That same year, having completed boot camp, I married my high school sweetheart, LaDorne, to whom I am happily married to this day.

During my time in the Navy we had our two girls, Tammy Ann and Michelle LaDorne. Upon leaving the Navy we returned home, where I began working for my father's company as an apprentice carpenter. All during these years, although aware of God, I fled from Him. But by this time my flight from Him had, in His providence, brought me face to face with the depth of my own sinfulness and, subsequently, to a crossroads.

I am reminded of Francis Thompson's immortal poem, "The Hound of Heaven," whose opening stanza reads:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
Up vistaed hopes, I sped;  
And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbéd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat — and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet —  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

I would either persist in my folly and lose all that I held dear, or I would turn to Christ, having repented of my sins and foolishness. By His grace I chose the latter, in so far as I was capable of understanding that choice. LaDorne, our girls, and I began attending services on a regular basis — again, with the Assemblies of God congregation in which I had been raised. Under pastoral care, involvement, and Bible study we grew in our faith.

## Early Adulthood

Our commitment to Christ subsequently plunged us into youth ministry. Both my wife and I worked with the assistant pastor. Because of the era (circa 1969), we helped establish and were part of a ministry to the many young people on the move up and down the highways of California. We became involved in evangelization and teaching that was aimed, first, at bringing these young people to Christ and, second, at integrating them back into the broader society.

During this time I was challenged intellectually on several occasions as a result of our ministry to the “street people,” as we called them then. In search of answers I was led to the writings of men such as Francis Schaeffer and C. S. Lewis, which in turn led me to classical thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, and eventually to the Great Books curriculum.

Being introduced to Anglicanism through Lewis’ writings and those of others, I began to experience a deep dissatisfaction with the manner in which the “Lord’s

Supper” was treated and conducted in the Assemblies of God. (I did not know it then, but this was the beginning of an awareness of a Eucharist-centered quest.) I would observe what we were doing there and reflect upon the fact that, even though we professed to follow Scripture, it did not seem to square with various scriptural texts, such as John chapter 6.

My heart began to yearn for something, though I didn’t know what it was, something I only vaguely apprehended in the Anabaptist fashion in which the Lord’s Supper was administered in our denomination. It was also during these years that I first

sensed a call to the ordained ministry, but I didn’t know how to respond. So this sense of call settled deeply into my heart and germinated there.

As the writings of Lewis and others had introduced me to the Anglican Communion and Tradition, at least in principle, both my wife and I began to desire a more “traditional” expression of the Faith. When we moved in January 1975 to Pacific Grove, California, on the Monterey Peninsula, we purposed, God willing, to find an Episcopal Church. On the day we arrived we discovered St. Mary’s by-the-Sea.

The following Sunday we attended the service of Holy Communion. As the rector began “Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,” I experienced a profound cognitive rest and heartfelt peace. When, with the rector’s permission, we came forward to receive communion on our knees at the altar rail, my heart rejoiced.

I had a real sense of having found what I had been searching for, and a deep satisfaction in Christ. The “Prayer for Quiet Confidence,” in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, perfectly sums up our experience on that day and many days thereafter: ... *continued on page 4*

“...I began to experience a deep dissatisfaction with the manner in which the “Lord’s Supper” was treated and conducted...”

## DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

### On EWTN radio with Marcus Grodi & Guests

Wednesdays **LIVE** at 2:00 PM ET  
Encores: Wednesdays @ 9:00 PM ET  
Sundays @ 7:00 AM ET

### Deep in Scripture Guests for December

#### December 1

Marie Joseph\*

#### December 8

TBD\*

#### December 15

Denise Bossert\*

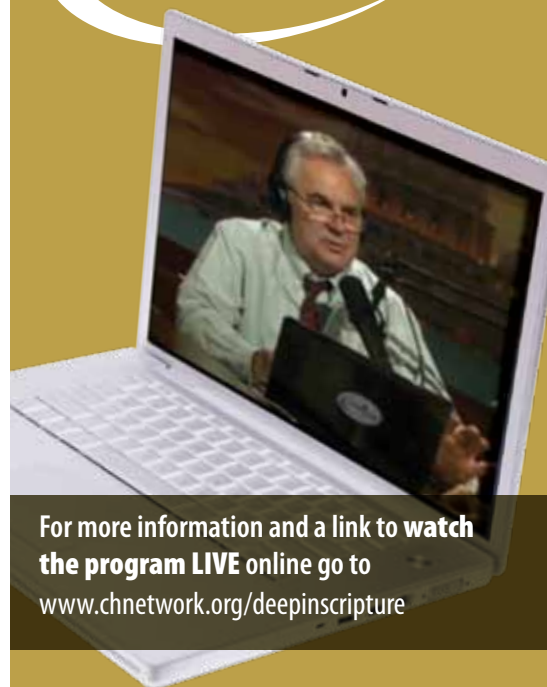
#### December 22

TBD\*

#### December 29

TBD\*

*\*This schedule is subject to change.*



For more information and a link to watch the program **LIVE** online go to [www.chnetwork.org/deeppinscripture](http://www.chnetwork.org/deeppinscripture)





## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME

on television and radio, hosted by  
**Marcus Grodi, president of CHNI**

### TELEVISION

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encores: Tuesdays 1:00 & 9:00 AM ET

Thursdays 2:00 PM ET

Saturdays 11:00 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays **LIVE** at 8:00 PM ET

Encore: Saturdays 7:00 AM ET

### December 6

Open-line with Dr. David Anders\*

*Former Presbyterian*

### December 13

Guest host Doug Keck interviews Marcus Grodi\*

### December 20

The Journey Home in Scandinavia\*

### December 27

Bishop Robert Baker\*

*Diocese of Birmingham*

*\*This schedule is subject to change.*



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

“O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

### Going On

It was at St. Mary's by-the-Sea that we really began to grow in a more Catholic understanding of the Christian faith. We at once entered into the life of the parish. We became the head of the church school department at the request of the rector. We were confirmed in the Episcopal Church, along with our children, in 1976. We attended a Cursillo.

It was at this time that the writings of G. K. Chesterton came into my life: books such as *The Everlasting Man* and *Orthodoxy*. It was also at this time (about 1978) that I began to read the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. I could not possibly estimate the effect that these and other books had upon my life. I suspect, in light of eternity, it is inestimable.

During these years, my sense of call to the ordained ministry was given further specificity. With the encouragement of several parishioners, I consulted with our rector. He concurred and encouraged me to proceed. We began to make plans. As we moved forward, I began an informal, guided reading program under the pastoral oversight of our rector.

Then, through prayer, and what was at the time agonizing reflection, LaDorne and I decided to put things on hold, with our rector's approval and guidance. We came to this decision because our daughters were about to enter junior high. Our first responsibility was to them and their well-being, yet to enter seminary — and all that that would entail — would likely disrupt their lives in ways and to an extent that we determined would be contrary to that well-being. So seminary was postponed.

As with everything in our lives, this decision turned out to be providential. Over the next several years I advanced to the managerial level of the firm that employed me. This promotion eventually included a move to the San Luis Obispo area.

Here our girls entered and finished high school. I continued to pray, read and study. Eventually, we became very involved in a small Presbyterian Church (PCA), although we were still, officially, Episcopalians. Being encouraged by the pastor to co-teach with him a confirmation class, I did so, and I helped him in other ways as well.

During this period (circa 1985) the sense of call to ordained ministry again began to awaken in me. Others also began to ask me if I had ever given thought to going to seminary with a view towards ordained ministry. In light of all of this, and with the encouragement of the local pastor, I took a week off and went to a January term class being offered at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

I attended the class because I needed the time to get away, pray, and think. Since I had been influenced greatly by the Rev. Dr. J. I. Packer, an Anglican clergyman who was the instructor, it seemed to be the perfect opportunity. It turned out to be a

... the sense of call to  
ordained ministry again  
began to awaken in me.



marvelous week, and it confirmed for me that it was time to move forward, the Lord willing, with seminary.

With our local pastor's assistance and recommendation, I applied to Westminster in California. I was required to stand a closed-book examination in philosophy. This I did and was admitted to the seminary in the fall of 1986. I took a normal course of study in the M.Div. program, although I was not at the time officially an M.Div. student.



...there was also much that caused me some pause, mainly in the areas of ecclesiology (theology of the Church) and sacramental theology.



Westminster, my fellow students, and many of my professors cultivated in me a deeper appreciation for Reformed Christianity's emphasis upon Holy Scripture. Again, I owe an immense debt to these wonderful, dedicated, and godly men for communicating to me, in some small measure, their deep reverence and commitment to God's Holy Word. But my time at Westminster also confirmed for me that I was not a Presbyterian, but an Anglican.

At that time, there was much in the Westminster Confession of Faith (used by Presbyterians and other Reformed traditions) that I could affirm. But there was also much that caused me some pause, mainly in the areas of ecclesiology (theology of the Church) and sacramental

theology. I was much more at home with the 39 Articles of the Church of England as found in the Book of Common Prayer (although not without some reservations, even then).

My time at Westminster served to confirm these beliefs. When we had begun our season of study there, we had been part of a local Presbyterian congregation (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) for worship. But by midterm, we had returned to the Prayer Book liturgy of the Episcopal Church, attending services at Grace Episcopal Church in San Marcos.

During this year I was subsequently in contact with my Episcopal bishop. I made him aware of my desire to seek ordination in the Episcopal Church. He confirmed my desire and encouraged me to proceed.

With his permission, I also applied to transfer to a seminary of the Episcopal Church — Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. After an interview, I was accepted into their M.Div. Program with the approval of the Episcopal Bishop. So I spent the next three years at Trinity in order to earn a Master of Divinity degree. I graduated in May of 1990.

## The Trinity Years

In retrospect, it is for me beyond question that these were seminal years in a way that none of those preceding them had been. For these were the years when formation began in earnest, and that for several reasons.

Once we had arrived at Trinity Seminary, the bishop informed us that he thought it would be best if we sought another diocese. I was told, "You ... continued on page 6

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*The Coming Home Network International* always welcomes those of our members who are converts or reverts to share their written conversion stories of how they were drawn (or drawn back) to the Catholic Church. If you feel called to share your story, please feel free to email a written conversion story of approximately either 1700 or 4000 words, along with your name and contact information, to:

**Mary Clare Piecynski**  
maryp@chnetwork.org



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*The Coming Home Network International* would like to remind our members that we are unable to send unsolicited mail. Since our ministry exclusively responds to non-Catholic clergy and laity who initiate contact with us, we cannot add anyone to our mailing list or send materials unless they themselves first make a request. However, if you would like to have *CHNI* send materials with a gift card in your name, or if you have any questions about this policy, please contact our office at 740-450-1175.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

are, beyond doubt, an Anglican. But I'm not sure," the bishop further observed, "that you are an Episcopalian."

At the time I did not appreciate the cogency of that observation. But later I came to appreciate it fully. To be frank, the simple truth was that the bishop did not want anyone, especially an Episcopal priest, in his diocese, who did not and would not accept and affirm both women's ordination and the validity of homosexual acts as aspects of a "normal" and wholesome, faith-filled lifestyle.

Yet being cut loose from my bishop, through no desire of my own, created a crisis for me and for my family. Was I truly called to the (Episcopal) priesthood? I wondered. With the advice and counsel of a local episcopal pastor I pressed on, applying myself to that which God had set before me.

This was a veritable "dark night" in the life of my soul. It prepared me, however, in a way that nothing else could have done. I was thrust upon God in a solitude that I would have never chosen for myself.

Such solitude subsequently oriented me to some of my professors and subjects with an openness that would have otherwise been lacking. It was truly a time of *fides quaerens intellectum* — faith seeking understanding. I recall in this regard my Liturgics professor. He was a first-rate biblical and Patristic scholar, so every aspect of his course was built upon the Church Fathers and the scriptural exegesis that stems from them.

My work under his tutelage and others began to reveal, in a way and depth I had never before seen, the catholicity of the Church — a catholicity that has not only an extensive but also an intensive aspect. I can truly say that I am still working with the tools that he gave me. In my senior year I took a class that he conducted off campus, in the evenings, in Patrology. Johannes Quasten's four-volume *Patrology*, along with primary sources, were the loci of my study, a study that continues to this very day.

I didn't realize it at the time, but my studies and God's providence were moving me, however slowly and sometimes reluctantly, to find my way back to the Church of my baptism, the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1989 my wife and I interviewed with the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Quincy, Illinois. He agreed to see us on recommendation of the faculty, and this interview led, in due time, to my being accepted into that diocese as a postulant. I stood physical, psychiatric, and canonical examinations and completed my M. Div. degree. On September 5, 1990, I was ordained to the diaconate in the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas, in the parish of St. Andrew's. There, in Our Lord's gracious providence, I had been called to serve.

## Fort Worth to the Present

Upon my ordination to the Sacred Order of Deacons, I was transferred canonically to the Diocese of Fort Worth. On the Feast of St. Patrick, 1991, I was

“I was told, “You are, beyond doubt, an Anglican. But I’m not sure,” the bishop further observed, “that you are an Episcopalian.””



ordained as an Episcopal priest. In that parish I served, first as curate and then as assistant rector, until my decision to leave the Episcopal Church to return to the Church of my baptism and to seek ordination in the Catholic Church under the Pastoral Provision.

The years of serving God and His people at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, at the altar and through the ministry of the Word of God, were some of the most wonderful and challenging years of my life. It was during these years that LaDorne and I came to desire Catholic fullness, amidst the demands of pastoral care, through study and the guidance of our rector and our bishop. There I came to believe, through reading the Fathers and the Vatican II documents *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and *Lumen Gentium*, that such fullness is only to be found in communion with the See of Peter, and that the successor of Peter is the Vicar of Christ, the visible head of His Body the Church (see *Lumen Gentium*, 18–23).

It was also during these years of ministry that I came into a fuller understanding of the Catholic priesthood. Although my ministry in the Episcopal Church had genuine significance, I came to realize that, whatever else I was, I was not a Catholic priest (*Apostolicae Curiae*). I began at this time to make clandestine trips to St. Patrick's Cathedral, just down the street, on Wednesdays — days of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

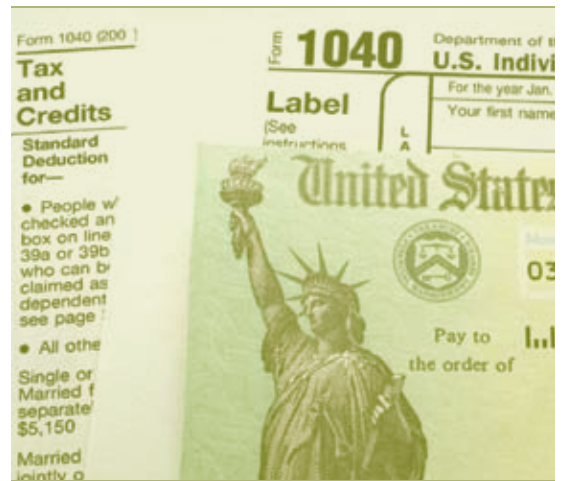
“As I knelt down, I was literally overwhelmed by the sense of our Lord's presence—His Eucharistic Presence. Although I knew that our Lord was present everywhere and certainly at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, He was present in St. Patrick's in a manner I had never before experienced.”

I shall never forget the first time I walked through those doors to kneel before Jesus, exposed in the monstrance on the Altar for adoration. As I knelt down, I was literally overwhelmed by the sense of our Lord's presence — His Eucharistic Presence. Although I knew that our Lord was present everywhere and certainly at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, He was present in St. Patrick's in a manner I had never before experienced.

All this led me to understand two things. First, the sacramental Sacrifice of our Lord. Although of necessity it includes the elements of thanksgiving and memorial — elements that would be affirmed by any

informed traditional Protestant — it especially includes the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic Species. Second, the mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic Species is utterly unique.

Indeed, I came to believe with all my heart that the mode of Christ's presence raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection ... *continued on page 8*



## TAX LETTERS

If you need a record of your 2010 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart.

**Wendy Hart**

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## NEWSLETTER COPIES

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## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**February 5, 2011**

**Saint Brigid Catholic Church**

3400 Old Alabama Road

Johns Creek, GA 30022

(678) 393-0060

# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INT'L

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend” (Aquinas, *Summa*, Pt. III, Q. 73, art. 3). I came to believe and know, without doubt, that “in the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ — and, therefore, *the whole Christ* — is truly, really, and substantially contained” (CCC, 1374). Furthermore, I realized that this Presence did not depend upon my belief; rather, my belief depended upon that Presence.

This belief, to a very great extent, is what compelled me towards Catholic fullness. I came to desire fervently, first and foremost, to return to the Church of my baptism — a Church I had never known. If the Church would permit it, I also desired to serve God and His people in the fullness of the truth, in the fullness of the priesthood, in the fullness of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Word and Sacrament, in the fullness of the Catholic Church.

It is worth noting that the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* played a pivotal role in my journey. I remember well taking it with me on a vacation in California by the Pacific Ocean. There I concluded reading it from cover to cover.

Having done so, I remarked to LaDorne that the publication of the Catechism at the end of the twentieth century stood, in my opinion, as a veritable miracle. It was proof positive that the Roman Catholic Church was the Church that Jesus had founded, protected under the promises made to St. Peter (see Mt 16). For only an institution so protected and watched over by the Holy Spirit could be the instrument of such a remarkable and faithful exposition of the Faith, that Faith once for all delivered to the saints (see Jude 3), in our day.

It was not long after I read the Catechism that we were received into the Church. And on September 25, 1996, after designated preparations, psychological examination, written and oral examinations and subsequent certification, the Holy Father’s indult having been granted, I was ordained, *in forma absoluta*, under the Pastoral Provision, a Roman Catholic Priest in St. Patrick’s Cathedral. I was home.

There is much more to the story, of course, many twists and turns that I could not mention here. Suffice it to say that it has been one grand adventure. Sometimes frightening, sometimes dark and drear, sometimes joyful and full of light and glory, but at all times accompanied by our Lord’s grace and a providence that is full of mercy. I shall ever be thankful for the gift of my Catholic faith. ■



**Fr. James Hart** was ordained a Catholic priest in 1996 under the Pastoral Provision of Pope John Paul II. Since then, he has served as a parish priest in various parishes of the Diocese of Fort Worth. His last assignment was as the Chancellor and Moderator of the Curia for the diocese, in which capacity he served from 2006 to July of this year. He is now the canonical pastor of the parish of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, a parish of more than 5,700 families with a parochial school, pre-K through 8.



# Prayer List



## Clergy

■ For Charles, a non-denominational minister in Texas, that the Holy Spirit will show him how he can follow his conscience and at the same time continue to employ his unique gifts to further the Kingdom of God.

■ For a Baptist minister in Kansas, that as he receives private instruction toward full reception into the Catholic Church, he will continue to be an excellent Christian witness to his senior pastor and the elders in the Baptist congregation who are aware of his journey.

■ For Jim, a Lutheran minister in Florida, that he will find freedom from doctrinal relativism in the teaching authority promised by our Lord Jesus when He breathed on the Apostles, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

■ For David, a Presbyterian minister in Texas who is now doctrinally convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith, that God will guide his discerning of future vocation once he is received into the Catholic Church.

■ For John, a non-denominational missionary in Japan, that as he seeks the Truth, God will guide him to find and then prompt him to knock so that He can open the doors and allow him to enter into full communion with the Church founded on the Rock of St. Peter.

■ For a Pentecostal minister in Texas, that as he delves deeper and deeper into the wonderful truths of the Catholic faith, he will soon reach the reward of his journey: the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of his Lord Jesus.

■ For Joe, a Christian and Missionary Alliance minister in Ohio, that as he reads and prays about the history of the Church, he will be granted the grace to seek all the sacraments instituted by the Lord Jesus.

■ For Thomas, an Episcopal minister in Ohio, that his heart will open wide to all that God, in His love and mercy, has planned for him.

■ For a Lutheran minister in Texas, that his heart will find comfort and peace in the fullness of the one true faith of Jesus Christ preserved in the ancient Catholic Church.

■ For Robert, a Lutheran minister in Connecticut, that the Holy Spirit will grant him the peace that surpasses all understanding and guide him into the holy Catholic Church.

■ For a Baptist minister in New Hampshire, that God will give him the grace to come home to the Catholic Church.

■ For Deacon Tom, that he will experience complete health and recovery.

## Lay

■ For Clara's health and healing.

■ For Edward and his intentions.

■ For Angie, that she will recover fully from surgery.

■ For Fr. Anthony, recently diagnosed with cancer, that he will completely recover.

■ For Bret, who is sharing the truths of the Catholic faith with a Protestant minister.

■ For a family who recently lost their teenage daughter, that they will experience God's healing presence during this difficult time.

■ For Agnes, recently diagnosed with brain cancer, that God will give her peace and strength.

■ For Dorothy, that she will offer her sufferings for the good of the Body of Christ.

■ For Joan, that she will receive abundant health and blessings from our generous God.

■ For Steven, who is seeking employment, that he will soon find a job opportunity that is best suited to his abilities.

■ For Paz's health and financial stability.

■ For Ellen, that she will receive good health if it is in accord with God's will.

■ For Lanel, who is suffering from lung disease, that God will give her strength and grant her a full recovery.

■ For David, who is suffering from a mental illness, that he will unite this cross with the Suffering Servant and understand God's marvelous plan for his life.

■ For Danielle, who is struggling with an addiction to alcohol, that she will be healed from her dependency and find freedom in the Lord Jesus.

■ For Theresa and her family and their intentions.

■ For Tom and Maryanne, that they will be granted health and every good and perfect gift from our heavenly Father.

■ For Lloyd, that God will guide his heart and give his wife the insight to answer his questions about Catholic beliefs in a way that he can understand.

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 CHN Prayer List, P. O. Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702. Or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org).

We use only first names to preserve privacy.

# Why Call Mary

## *“Mother of God”?*

By Paul Thigpen, Ph.D.

**A**s we approach the celebration of Our Lord’s nativity, those who take time to ponder the mystery can find deep meaning in praying to Mary as the “Mother of God.” Calling her by that name seems so natural to Catholic and Orthodox Christians that it may come as a surprise to them that other Christians sometimes object to the title. Non-Catholics considering the claims of the Catholic Church may even find the name to be a stumbling block.

Why? Because it may sound to them as if “Mother of God” implies that God Himself somehow has His origin in Mary. How could the Creator of all things, who depends on no one else for His existence, possibly have a “mother”?

To understand why Christians have called Our Lady by this title since ancient times, we need to take a look at the controversy that arose when prayers addressed to her in this way first became popular sixteen centuries ago.

### Christ Is God and Man

From the very beginning of the Church, at the heart of the faith she has proclaimed, lies the insistence that her founder, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is both God and Man. Jesus claimed for Himself the very name of God revealed to Moses, “I AM” (Jn 8:58), and He assumed divine prerogatives such as the forgiveness of sin (see Lk 5:18–26).

Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries understood that He was making such a claim, even though many of them rejected it. Some sought to put Him to death, saying to Him: “We stone you ... for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God” (Jn 10:33; see also Jn 5:18; 8:58–59).

The Apostles testified to the reality of His deity. St. Thomas, for example, having known Jesus in His humanity, affirmed His divinity as well when he said to Him after His resurrection, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28).

St. John wrote in his Gospel that Jesus was “the Word” who “became flesh and dwelt among us,” and that this “Word was God” (Jn 1:1, 14). St. Paul taught that in Christ “dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily” (Col 2:9; see

also 1:19). The Second Epistle of Peter calls Him “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pt 1:1).

When early Christians pondered these and other declarations of the apostolic witness, they wondered: How exactly was Christ both human and divine? Was He, as some claimed, simply God and only *appeared* to be human? Was He, as others speculated, a human to whom God attached himself in a special way, dwelling inside Him? Or was He, as still others imagined, a kind of hybrid, partly human and partly divine?

Ultimately, in the light of Scripture and Tradition, and led by the Holy Spirit, the Church concluded that none of the above answers is correct. The Council of Ephesus, an ecumenical Church council held in the year 431, helped to resolve the issue.

That council was provoked by a controversy over one particular question: Can we legitimately call Mary the “Mother of God”?

One prominent archbishop, Nestorius of Constantinople, began to preach against the use of the Marian title *Theotokos*, which we translate into English as “Mother of God.” (It literally means “God-bearer,” or “the one who gives birth to God.”) Christ was actually two persons, Nestorius claimed — one human, One divine — joined together in Christ. Though Mary was the bearer (or mother) of the human person in Christ, she was not the mother of the divine Person (God the Son). So she could not rightly be called the “Mother of God.”

### Two Natures in One Person

After carefully examining this teaching, at Ephesus the Church pronounced Nestorius mistaken. Christ was not a combination of two persons, one human and One divine. That would be close to saying that He was simply a man to whom God was joined in a uniquely intimate way — a man specially indwelt by God, more like one of the Old Testament prophets.

Instead, the Church declared, Christ is only one divine Person — the Second Person of the Trinity. This single Person took our human nature and joined it to His divine nature, making it truly His own as well, so that He possesses two natures (Jn 1:1–3, 14).

But those natures don't constitute two different persons. Christ is not a committee. The two natures belong to one and the same Person, the divine Son of God. And those two natures, though not to be confused, cannot be separated.

In this light, the Church concluded that not only is it correct to call Mary the Mother of God, but it is important to do so. Mary conceived and gave birth to the one Person, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God in the flesh. If we deny that she is the Mother of God, then we are denying that her Son, Christ Himself, is God, come down to us from heaven.

To help our family and friends who are non-Catholic Christians understand the meaning and importance of this Marian title, we should focus on its history and its role as a safeguard of the truth of Christ's divinity, which they affirm. The logic, after all, is simple: Is Jesus Christ truly God? Yes! Is Mary truly His mother, the woman who conceived and carried Him in her womb, then gave birth to Him on that first Christmas Eve! Yes! Therefore she is indeed the Mother of God.

It might be useful to point out as well that Martin Luther, the primary architect of the Protestant movement, spoke often of Mary as the "Mother of God." He affirmed the decision of the Council of Ephesus and noted that it summed up all the reasons for honoring her:

[S]he became the Mother of God, in which work so many and such great good things are bestowed on her as pass man's understanding. For on this there follows all honor, all blessedness, and her unique place in the whole of mankind, among which she has no equal, namely, that she had a child by the Father in heaven, and such a Child. ... Hence men have crowded all her glory into a single word [*Theotokos*], calling her the Mother of God. ... None can say of her nor announce to her greater things, even though he had as many tongues as the earth possesses flowers and blades of grass; the sky, stars; and the sea, grains of sand. It needs to be pondered in the heart what it means to be the Mother of God. (*"Commentary on the Magnificat,"* found in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Jaroslav J.

Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, eds.; CPH & Fortress Press, 1955–1986; 21:326)

Throughout the centuries since the Protestant movement began, a number of other Protestant theologians have also affirmed the title of Our Lady as "Mother of God," accepting the ancient declaration at Ephesus and noting its importance to our understanding of Christ Himself. In doing so, they join Catholics in echoing the teaching of St. Paul, who described this reality succinctly: "God sent His Son, born of a woman" (Gal 4:4).

No wonder, then, that a week after every Christmas, on January 1, the Church calls us to celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. What better way to begin the new year than to recall this great mystery of our faith?

**Paul Thigpen, Ph.D.**, a former Evangelical pastor, is director of CHResources for the Coming Home Network International.



**Mother of God Enthroned** by Andreas Ritzos



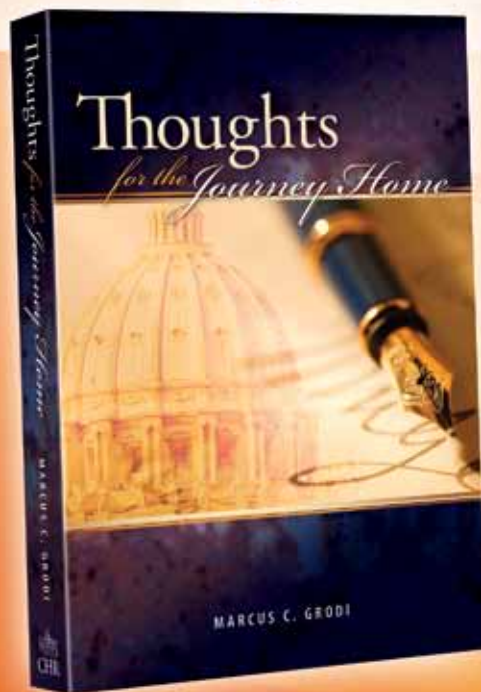
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