

## February 2015 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## An English Catholic Faith

by Joyce Schaeffer

*“The more real the English Church has been to you, and all your past experience in it, the more terrible the wrench.” — Fr. Basil Maturin*

I am thankful to have spent thirty-three years of my life as a member of the Episcopal Church. Since age ten, when my parents decided to attend the pretty stone church with the red doors, the centerpiece of an idyllic little Connecticut village, I felt very much at home. My Dad made it clear to us that, “We are not Protestant. We are English Catholic.”

### New things and those left behind

My parents made the difficult decision to leave the Roman Catholic Church in 1969. Dad would occasionally describe their reasons: Vatican II changes seemed like a betrayal of the Church they loved; priests started telling little old ladies (like my Memere) they were stupid to fast on Fridays; the church interior was whitewashed; most of the statues were removed. He would recall one old Catholic chum saying of these changes, “If I wanted to go to a Protestant church, I coulda gone down the street!” They felt strongly that the Catholic Church had left them, and believed they had found a “more Catholic” church in the Episcopal Church.

The second reason given for this decision was Mom’s close scrape with death on the birth of their fourth child. Clearly, the Catholic Church didn’t understand about things like “birth control.”

Shortly after our becoming Episcopalians, Dad followed a call to the priesthood. My parents sold our little house they had just had built to help pay

for nearly a decade of schooling ahead. Dad began collecting mysterious letters (GED, BA, MDiv) through constant study, while Mom took on various jobs to keep us all fed. It was a turbulent time for our family.

In spite of the craziness, I have many treasured memories of our Episcopal parish. The stone church building itself was beautiful in its traditional architecture and stained glass windows. There was beauty and dignity in all the details. The music of organ, choir, and hymns was prayerful and engaging. I still cherish many old hymns I learned there as a child. (Sometimes even now I find myself wishing to step inside and join in with the energetic singing among Episcopal laity.) Some of the reasons why Dad considered us “Catholic” rather than “Protestant” had to do with an appreciation of the importance and beauty of the liturgy, a sacramental understanding of things, and, most important, our belief in Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist.

*Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I had lived my first ten years of childhood in the Catholic Church, receiving Baptism and First Communion. My only childhood experience of Confession was as a terrified child unable to recall the necessary words to say to the mysterious priest in the dark recesses of the confessional. I mumbled something about “forgetting words” and “stealing cookies,” and was greatly relieved to have escaped with my life and a few Hail Mary’s. From those earlier days I retained a sense of the holiness and deep reverence for God in the Catholic Mass.

I trusted my parents had very good reasons for leaving all this behind. Our new church home had many similar traditions, so it did not feel completely foreign. When we first joined, I received a swift Confirmation with no instruction whatsoever as it was assumed I “already knew everything” as I had been raised Catholic!

At twelve, I experienced God’s Spirit of Love in a powerful way after receiving the laying on of hands by our priest. Scripture seemed to open up for me as if it were a personal love letter from God. This experience is one I still return to as the most palpable experience of the reality of God’s particular love for me.

### A restless heart

Sadly, there was inadequate support for this new life in Christ. My adolescence was a bumpy one. My parents were maxed out. The social chaos of the 70s added to the chaos at home left me especially vulnerable. For a while, “Christian truth” was largely drowned out by the much louder voices of the toxic culture of public schooling and peers, even within our church community.

Dad graduated from seminary the same spring I graduated from high school. When he was assigned to a city parish, I went along for the ride. Though I found work and made “friends,” it proved to be another toxic environment, and I became intensely lonely. I was “looking for love in all the wrong places,” and my

resulting depression deepened. I started asking, “What is love, really?” My friends didn’t have any meaningful answers. More and more I realized I was not finding love where I had been looking for it. I started looking at college as a way out of this bad situation.

Flipping through a college catalog, I noticed “Gordon College, a Christian college.” I got excited. I had never imagined that such a thing existed. I can’t say that I even understood that a Christian way of life would be much different from the one I was currently living. Weren’t my old friends in the Episcopal Church Christian? It didn’t seem to make a difference for how they lived their lives. In that moment, I had a glimmer of hope that at Gordon College “Christian” might mean there was at least a desire to seek God’s will for your life, for God to make a difference in how you lived — somehow.

### Needing to seek the will of God

Soon after applying to Gordon, I hit bottom. I finally cried out to God in my loneliness and despair. A poster Dad had brought back from seminary years earlier had hung on my wall throughout my turbulent teen years. It was an abstract face of a man. After I cried out to God, I noticed that this poster had fallen off the wall and was lying face up on my chaos-strewn floor. I picked it up and, through my tears, looked at it carefully for the first time. It was the face of Jesus. Looking even closer, I noticed it was a poster for Gordon College! By this small sign, God seemed to be showing me that Jesus had been with me all those years when I had thought myself so alone — that He knew my pain and loneliness. I understood that now I needed to continue to seek His will for my life. He had given me an unexpected gift in confirming my choice to seek a better life by attending Gordon College.

*Continued on page 5* ►

## FEATURED RESOURCES



### Deep in Scripture CD

— With Dr. Thomas Howard

Dr. Thomas Howard joins Marcus Grodi in this exceptional classic *Deep in Scripture* radio program as they discuss a Scripture passage that has played an important role in Dr. Howard’s life as a convert to the Catholic Church.



### On Being Catholic — By Thomas Howard

Thomas Howard presents his wonderful, refreshing insights on the “glad tidings” of the deeper meaning of Catholic piety, dogma, spirituality, vision, and practice, rendered in his unique style of prose for which he is well-known. The book’s chapters take the form of lay meditations on Catholic teaching and practice, opening up in practical and simple terms the richness at work in virtually every detail of Catholic prayer, liturgy, and experience. A wonderful read for Lent!

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *On Being Catholic* for a donation of \$50.

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Join in our **February Challenge** and order a DVD of Steve Ray’s talk *Peter, the Rock, the Keys and the Chair* for just \$5. (USA addresses only)

# Two Misunderstood Holidays

By Marcus Grodi

In the space of just a few days in February, the world will be celebrating two minor holidays. They're minor in the sense that no one gets the day off from work or school, yet especially with the first one, if you forget it, you're in deep trouble!



Like many similar holidays, our free-market capitalism has claimed these days for the sake of profit, especially in feeding the guilt that drives our obligations to spend and spend. But sadly, the majority of people who celebrate these feasts have no idea to the origin or the true meaning of these feasts. Again, this could be said of most of our holidays, but with these two staring us in the face in February, it seemed appropriate to consider them. (In this short article, I will be quoting from two entries in the 1917 edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia, as provided online by New Advent, [newadvent.org/cathen/15254a.htm](http://newadvent.org/cathen/15254a.htm). Both of these entries were written by Fr. Herbert Thurston, SJ (1856-1939), an English Catholic priest who was a prolific writer and a well-respected apologist and defender of the Catholic Faith.)

February 14 is the feast day of Saint Valentine. Fr. Thurston reports: "At least three different Saint Valentines, all of them martyrs, are mentioned in the early martyrologies under the date of 14 February. One is described as a priest at Rome, another as bishop of Interamna (modern Terni), and these two seem both to have suffered in the second half of the third century and to have been buried on the Flaminian Way, but at different distances from the city.... Of both these St. Valentines, some sort of Acta are preserved but they are of relatively late date and of no historical value. Of the third Saint Valentine, who suffered in Africa with a number of companions, nothing further is known."

In other words, the original purpose of the feast day of St. Valentine was to honor one or more Christians who gave up their lives in defense of their faith in Jesus Christ. The third century persecutions in Rome and Africa were brutal and terrifying. These Valentines were willing to die rather than deny their faith in Jesus Christ. Like the feast days of all our martyrs, we are called to pause in humble respect for those who gave their lives so that we today might still have our faith. They gave us models to imitate as we, too, are called to stand for Jesus Christ in a culture that is increasingly driven to deny Him.

But this is generally not what Saint Valentine's Day brings to mind. Fr. Thurston explains: "The popular customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day undoubtedly had their origin in a conventional belief generally received in England and France during the Middle Ages, that on 14 February, i.e. half way through the second month of the year, the birds began to

pair. Thus, in Chaucer's Parliament of Fowles we read: '*For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day; Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.*' For this reason the day was looked upon as specially consecrated to lovers and as a proper occasion for writing love letters and sending lovers' tokens. Both the French and English literatures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contain allusions to the practice.... Those who chose each other under these circumstances seem to have been called by each other their Valentines." The customs that transformed St. Valentine's Day into a day for lovers, for buying and giving sweets and cards, therefore, unfortunately had nothing to do with religious martyrs.

As St. Augustine wrote, "We, the Christian community, assemble to celebrate the memory of the martyrs with ritual solemnity because we want to be inspired to follow their example, share in their merits, and be helped by their prayers." So, let us try to keep in mind the original reason why Valentine's Day is commemorated as we pray:

*Lord, on this feast day, may we be moved by the life-giving love of the three St. Valentine martyrs, that our gifts of love — chocolates, cards, flowers, etc. — may be genuine expressions of our love for one another.*

Three days later, this year, is Shrove Tuesday, or as mostly known in our culture, Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday." As Fr. Thurston explains: "Shrovetide is the English equivalent of what is known in the greater part of Southern Europe as the 'Carnival,' a word which, in spite of wild suggestions to the contrary, is undoubtedly to be derived from the 'taking away of flesh' (*carne levare*) which marked the beginning of Lent." (This is fascinating! How many of us realized that a "carnival" had anything to do with the religious fasting from meat?)

Thurston continues: "The English term 'shrovetide' (from 'to shrive', or hear confessions) is sufficiently explained by a sentence in the Anglo-Saxon 'Ecclesiastical Institutes', translated from Theodulphus by Abbot Aelfric about A.D. 1000: 'In the week immediately before Lent everyone shall go to his confessor and confess his deeds and the confessor shall so shrive him as he then may hear by his deeds what he is to do [in the way of penance]. In this name shrovetide the religious idea is uppermost, and the same is true of the German Fastnacht (the eve of the fast)."

In other words, the days leading up to Lent were not about "stuffing ourselves," as the cook beckons *Continued on page 4* ➤

MARTYRS  
Saint Valentines  
THREE

in the opening of the feast in the classic movie Robin Hood. Rather, it is about being “shrove” or purged from sin and its affects, so that we can enter, with clean slates, into the forty days of fasting in preparation for the sacrifice of Our Lord on the Cross.

But Fr. Thurston explains: “It is intelligible enough that before a long period of deprivations human nature should allow itself some exceptional license in the way of frolic and good cheer. No appeal to vague and often inconsistent traces of earlier pagan customs seems needed to explain the general observance of a carnival celebration.... The English custom of eating pancakes was undoubtedly suggested by the need of using up the eggs and fat which were, originally at least, prohibited articles of diet during the forty days of Lent. The same prohibition is, of course, mainly responsible for the association of eggs with the Easter festival at the other end of Lent.

“Although the observance of Shrovetide in England never ran to the wild excesses which often marked this period of license in southern climes, still various sports and especially games of football were common in almost all parts of the country, and in the households of the great it was customary to celebrate the evening of Shrove Tuesday by the performance of plays and masques....

“The Church repeatedly made efforts to check the excesses of the carnival, especially in Italy. During the sixteenth century in particular a special form of the Forty Hours Prayer was instituted in many places on the Monday and Tuesday of Shrovetide, partly to draw the people away from these dangerous occasions of sin, partly to make expiation for the excesses committed. By a special constitution addressed by Benedict XIV to the archbishops and bishops of the Papal States, and headed “Super Bacchanalibus”, a plenary indulgence was granted in 1747 to those who took part in the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament which was to be carried out daily for three days during the carnival season.”

Considering the normal customs of most of us on “Fat Tuesday,” it’s fairly apparent that the efforts of the Church centuries

# SHROVE TUESDAY



ago to “check the excesses of the carnival” have mostly gone unheeded. A plenary indulgence meant that the Church believed that the remedy of prayer and devotion to Jesus Christ before the Blessed Sacrament was of great spiritual value! ■

*Lord, may we, on this feast day, be more concerned about the state of our soul than stuffing our already over-consumed bodies. May our focus be on You as we enter into forty days of imitating your martyrdom for the sake of our salvation.*

## STAY CONNECTED BY EMAIL!



We have a number of email lists that may be helpful and spiritually edifying to you: Conversion Story Email Club, The Journey Home Program, Deep in Scripture Radio, Deep in History Videos, and more.

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stay connected with your favorite CHNetwork content.

## MARCUS GRODI'S SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS



**March 14, 2015**

Toledo Men's Conference  
SeaGate Convention Centre - Toledo, Ohio  
[toledomensconference.com](http://toledomensconference.com)

## Pope Francis' General Audience Catechesis

The following is from Pope Francis' General Audience Catechesis on October 8, 2014.<sup>1</sup> We think Pope Francis' insightful reflections on the wounds of unity among Christians and how we are called to respond are particularly relevant to our ministry at the Coming Home Network International. We wanted to share Pope Francis' thoughts for our members' edification and to challenge us all to take more seriously Jesus' call "that they may be one."

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

In recent catecheses, we have tried to highlight the nature and the beauty of the Church and we have asked ourselves what it means for each of us to belong to this people, the People of God, which is the Church. We must not forget, however, that there are so many brothers and sisters who share with us the faith in Christ, but who belong to other confessions or to traditions different from ours. Many have resigned themselves to this division — even within our Catholic Church many are resigned — which, in the course of history, has often been the cause of conflict and of suffering, also of war and this is a disgrace! Today too, relations are not always characterized by respect and courtesy.... But, I wonder: we, how do we feel about all this? Are we too, resigned, if not actually indifferent, to this division? Or do we firmly believe that one can and must walk in the direction of reconciliation and of full communion? Full communion, that is, for everyone to be able to partake together in the Body and Blood of Christ.

Divisions among Christians, while they wound the Church, wound Christ; and divided, we cause a wound to Christ: the Church is indeed the body of which Christ is the Head. We know well how much Jesus had at heart that his disciples should remain united in his love. It suffices to consider his words, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel according to John, in Jesus' prayer to the Father when his passion was imminent: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn 17:11). This unity was already threatened while Jesus was still among them: in the Gospel, in fact, it is recorded that the Apostles argued among themselves about who was the greatest, the most important (cf. Lk 9:46). The Lord, however, emphatically insisted on unity in the name of the Father, allowing us to understand how much more credible our proclamation and our witness will be if we are first able to live in communion and to love each other. That is what his Apostles, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, would then

deeply understand and take to heart, so much so that St Paul would reach the point of imploring the community of Corinth with these words: "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).

During her journey in history, the Church has been tempted by the Evil One, who seeks to divide her, and unfortunately it has been marked by deep and painful schisms. They are divisions that at times have been long and drawn out in time, up until today, which is why it is now difficult to reconstruct all the motivations and especially to find possible solutions. The reasons which have led to the fractures and schisms may be the most diverse: from disagreement on dogmatic and moral principles and on theological concepts and pastoral differences, to political motives and convenience, to disputes caused by dislikes and personal ambition.... What is certain is that, in one way or another, arrogance and selfishness have always been behind these lacerations, rendering us intolerant, incapable of listening and accepting one with a vision or a position different from ours.

Now, faced by all of this, is there something that every one of us, as members of the Holy Mother Church, can and must do? Certainly, there must never be a shortage of prayer, in continuity and in communion with that of Jesus, prayer for the unity of Christians. And together with prayer, the Lord asks us for renewed openness: He asks us not to be closed to dialogue and to encounter, but to welcome all that is valid and positive which is offered even by someone who thinks differently from us or who takes a different stand. He asks us not to fix our gaze on what divides us, but rather on what unites us, seeking to know and love Jesus better and to share the richness of his love. And this means a concrete adherence to the Truth, together with the capacity for reciprocal forgiveness, to feel a part of the same Christian *Continued on page B* ➤

<sup>1</sup> Accessed from and available online at <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/let-us-not-give-division>.

family, to consider oneself a gift for the other and together to do many good things and works of charity.

It is grievous but there are divisions, there are many divided Christians, we have split amongst ourselves. But we all have something in common: we all believe in Jesus Christ, the Lord. We all believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and we all walk together, we are on the journey. Let us help one another! You think this way, you think that way... In all communities there are good theologians: let them debate, let them seek theological truth because it is a duty, but let us walk together, praying for one another and doing works of charity. And like this, we are in communion on the journey. This is called spiritual ecumenism: to journey on the path of life, everyone together in our faith, in Jesus Christ the Lord. They say that one should not talk about personal things, but I cannot resist the temptation. We are speaking about communion... communion among us. And today, I am so thankful to the Lord because 70 years ago today, I made my First

Communion. To make our First Communion we must know what it means to enter into communion with others, in communion with the brothers and sisters of our Church, but also in communion with those who belong to different communities but who believe in Jesus. Let us thank the Lord for our Baptism, let us thank the Lord for our communion, in order that this communion become joint communion with everyone, together.

Dear friends, let us therefore proceed toward full unity! History has separated us, but we are on the path toward reconciliation and communion! And this is true! And we must defend it! We are all on the path toward communion. And when the goal seems too distant, almost unreachable, and we feel gripped by despair, let us be comforted by the idea that God cannot close his ears to the voice of his Son Jesus or fail to grant his and our prayer: that all Christians may truly be one. ■

## EWTN'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

#### February 2

Dr. Robin Pierucci\*  
*Convert from Judaism*

#### February 9

Dr. Ian Murphy\*  
*Former Agnostic and Baptist*

#### February 16

April Bright\*  
*Former United Pentecostal*

#### February 23

Charlotte Ostermann\*  
*Former Nazarene and Presbyterian*

*\*Schedule is subject to change.*

## SUPPORT CHNETWORK

For your convenience, CHNetwork is able to automatically deduct monthly donations directly from your credit card, checking, or savings account. If you would like to set up an automatic monthly donation, please go to [chnetwork.org/donate/](http://chnetwork.org/donate/) or complete this form and mail to:

**CHNetwork**  
 Attention: Ann Moore  
 PO Box 8290  
 Zanesville, OH 43702

Please contact Ann at 740-450-1175 or [ann@chnetwork.org](mailto:ann@chnetwork.org) if you have any questions or concerns.

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# February Evangelization Challenge

By JonMarc Grodi

How many of your non-Catholic friends and family don't understand why we have a Pope? How many still think we Catholics are slaves to the Pope? How many think the Pope usurps the place of Jesus? How many still think the Pope is the anti-Christ! This talk by Steve Ray will help clear up all this confusion!

In the recent CHNewsletters, we challenged you to send for and give away copies of my dad's novel, *How Firm a Foundation*. We are very grateful for your enthusiastic response. So far, over 250 copies have been distributed and we're awaiting news as to the response.

For February, we have a new resource ready for the Evangelization Challenge: A DVD of Steve Ray's talk *Peter, the Rock, the Keys, and the Chair*. We have over 900 DVD copies of this extremely insightful, challenging, and entertaining talk from the 2009 *Deep in History* conference. Steve is an Evangelical

Protestant convert who is on fire for the Faith. You probably have seen him on EWTN. Steve does an amazing job bringing out the scriptural foundations and biblical context of the commissioning of Peter as the first Pope. This would be a great talk to get people thinking (and talking!) about the roots of the papacy, the need for authority, and the historical continuity of belief from the earliest Apostles to the present day.

Evangelization is simply giving your faith away! And an easy way to do this is by giving them a tremendous resource!

By the end of February, we are hoping that at least 50 of you will give this DVD to a non-Catholic family member, friend, or co-worker, and then tell us how they responded. That is our February challenge. As before, we are only asking for a small donation of \$5 to cover the shipping/handling. To get the \$5 DVD, use the return envelope or visit [CHNetwork.org/premiums](http://CHNetwork.org/premiums). ■

## An Intentional Lent



By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | [LittlePortionHermitage.org](http://LittlePortionHermitage.org)

The beginning of Lent (Ash Wednesday) is February 18. During Lent Catholics around the globe make an effort to engage more intentionally and intensely in the Christian spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The discipline of prayer will often include active participation in daily Mass whereas Holy Mother Church only requires her children to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation (which I like to call holy days of opportunity).

Prayer during the Lenten season might also include frequent visits to a local church to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament. Catholic parishes usually provide more numerous opportunities throughout Lent for individuals to participate in the Sacrament of Confession. Whatever form the discipline of prayer takes in a person's life, ultimately the goal is everywhere and always the same: to deepen one's conversion and commitment to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

Fasting, too, has as its goal deeper union with Jesus Christ. Giving up coffee, potato chips, or TV have little spiritual value unless such fasting is used as an opportunity to refrain from the comfort of worldly pleasures so as to allow the Holy Spirit to conform one's life and will to the will of the God. Rather than fasting for its own sake, we give up in order to take up the other spiritual disciplines of prayer and almsgiving.

Almsgiving can take the form of sharing our time, talents, and treasures with God and neighbor to the end that what we have been given as pure gift (Hint: all that we have been given

is pure gift.) can be used by God for His glory, the good of His Church, and the salvation of souls.

How you choose to engage in the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent is less important than *that* you choose to engage in them. Ask Our Father in heaven what you can do during the Lenten season in the way of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and perhaps bring others "home" to the Catholic Church. I pray you a blessed Lenten journey. ■

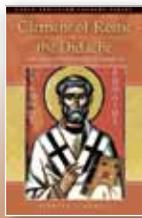
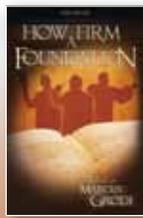
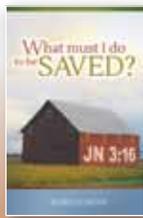
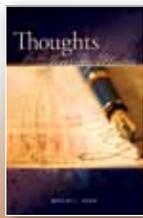
### TAX LETTERS

If you need a record of your 2014 contributions for tax purposes, please contact Wendy Hart.

[wendy@chnetwork.org](mailto:wendy@chnetwork.org) or 740-450-1175 ext 100

### NEWSLETTER DONATION

The CHNewsletter is our primary means of outreach and communication. We request a yearly tax-deductible gift in the amount of \$35 or more to continue receiving the newsletter and remain a supporting member of the CHNetwork.



Visit [www.chresources.com](http://www.chresources.com)  
or call 740-450-1175 for these and other great resources to learn more about the Catholic Faith.

# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Robert, a minister in Iowa, that our Lord Jesus would guide his journey.
- For a professor in a Southern Baptist college, that his journey to the Catholic Church would not jeopardize his career.
- For Pat, a former Non-denominational minister, that she and her husband would be given the grace to receive the Easter Sacraments with joy.
- For Mark, a minister in the United Kingdom, as he seeks a deeper understanding of the Catholic Faith.
- For a Lutheran minister in California, that he may be able to overcome all obstacles blocking his path home to the Catholic Church.
- For Chris, a former Methodist minister, that the Lord Jesus would heal him of his health problem.
- For Tom, a clergy convert from the Anglican faith, as he prepares for ordination to the Catholic priesthood.
- For Scott, a former Anglican, as he begins the discernment process for the Catholic priesthood.

- For an Anglican priest in the United Kingdom, that he may find a faithful, orthodox Catholic priest willing to assist him on his journey home to the Catholic Church.
- For Mark, an Assemblies of God pastor, as he seeks employment that will enable him to provide for his family, resign his pastorate, and enter into full communion with the See of Peter.

## Laitiy

- For a Presbyterian in Canada, that the Holy Spirit guide her as she steps away from some of her responsibilities in the Protestant environment.
- For a man who left the Catholic Faith but is now open to the witness of the early Church Fathers in considering Catholicism again.
- For Amber who is troubled with the divisions within the Body of Christ and is considering how best to follow our Lord.
- For a woman in Tennessee, that her husband be able to obtain an annulment and thus allow her to proceed with her desire to be Catholic.
- For Pamela who is seriously investigating the Catholic Church and better understanding Catholic teaching.

- For Ken, that he will find the answers he needs to his questions about the Faith.
- For Ruth, that she be able to move forward with her desire to learn about the Catholic Church.
- For Christine, who is considering returning to the Catholic Church but doesn't have clear direction as to how she should proceed.
- For a Pentecostal who has dropped out of RCIA on account of some theological struggles with Catholic teaching, that the Holy Spirit illumine his heart and mind.
- For Barney, that he will be able to find a way to join a parish and receive instruction about the Catholic Faith.
- For Pam, that she find a welcome in her local Catholic community as she seeks to join the Church.
- For Mark, that he will be able to move forward with his interest in the Catholic Church.

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](mailto: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)

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

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I remember the day Dad dropped me off at Gordon my freshman year, he a newly ordained Episcopal priest. Soon after, I met my future husband, Alan, also raised in the Episcopal Church. Since our courtship, Alan and I have been on this journey of conversion together. We were married in 1982. My father both walked me down the aisle and performed the wedding ceremony in our old beloved Connecticut church. A year earlier, Dad had been asked to serve as pastor of this parish where we had worshipped since I was ten. It seemed like a miraculous answer to my prayer for my family, as this was truly our spiritual home.

### Shook up

The remaining years at Gordon built on Alan’s and my understanding of the differences between our liturgical sacramental traditions and various Protestant traditions. The major influence came through my favorite teacher and English Advisor, Professor Thomas Howard. In 1984, Howard’s newly published *Evangelical Is Not Enough* suddenly appeared on Gordon College Bookstore’s shelves, creating quite a stir at the college — and making a lot of sense to us.

Howard became our champion of the “English Catholic” Faith. Alan and I felt privileged to be invited, along with a small group of peers, to the Howard home to learn more about our traditions. It was all stimulating and encouraged us greatly in the belief that we were indeed in a good place in the Episcopal Church.

However, in 1985, the year after our graduation from Gordon, Tom Howard shook up our world — along with the very Protestant Gordon College world — by announcing his conversion to the Catholic Church.

At the time, I was working as a graphic artist in the Gordon College Print Shop. I was required to typeset critical responses to my hero, Dr. Howard. Some were even from fellow Episcopalians who were on the Gordon staff. I was stunned. Gordon had recently invited Dr. Peter Kreeft as a visiting professor, who was also a convert to Catholicism. I was shocked by the caustic reactions, the necessity of Dr. Howard’s resignation from Gordon, and the reality that Peter Kreeft, my philosophy major husband’s personal hero, would now not be allowed to return to Gordon. He was viewed as a dangerous element, it seemed.

Alan and I puzzled over it all, devouring everything we could get our hands on written by either of these two fine men. We began to gain a much clearer understanding of the differences between “Catholic” and “Protestant.” It started to look as if the Episcopal “Via Media” might be more like a “Lack of Clarity.” And wasn’t it Newman who came up with that Via Media idea, only to abandon it for the Catholic Church? We were realizing more and more that the Episcopal and Anglican churches could only with great difficulty not be considered Protestant, in essence. Though many of its members believe some basic Catholic truths, these same truths often seemed optional.

### Born on the Wrong Island

The following year we decided to settle in Connecticut, as we felt a strong desire to be near family before starting out on our own. We wanted to be part of my Dad’s parish. I was never much of an adventurer, and I was ready to start looking for ways to become a thorough homebody.

Alan and I were blessed to be able to buy a tiny antique cape on a hill, surrounded by lovely woods, meadow, and old stone walls. I was quite happy to leave my new graphic artist job behind to stay home after the birth of our first child, Ben. We learned about home birth and so our second child, Sarah was born in that house. My Dad, our priest, came to our home after the birth to say special prayers, including the Magnificat. That beautiful memory still brings tears to my eyes!

We were blessed to be within easy driving distance of my parents, my brother and sisters, and their families. All were part of the same cozy little parish in our rural town. On sunny warm days, we could walk the mile from our doorstep to the church with the bright red doors. Dad was thrilled to be serving as pastor there. We were thrilled to be part of his flock. He baptized our children. He gave good counsel in homilies and personal visits. He was a faithful shepherd of his small flock. And we, the children and grandchildren, felt like members of the “royal family, often wondering if today one of us would be featured in Dad’s homily. My father taught us to love God above all things, and Jesus in the Eucharist. Here was reverence for God. Here was family. Here was home.

It was an idyllic life in so many ways.

But Alan and I continued to feel the shadow of Tom Howard’s conversion. He had been our primary hero of the Faith, other than my own father. Other heroes gained on our journey were mysteriously all from the Roman Catholic world. Even my Dad would hand along books on Catholic saints, like St. Thérèse of Lisieux and the Curé of Ars. We were growing ever more uncomfortable with this reality; but we consoled ourselves with the thought that, like C.S. Lewis, we must have been “born on the wrong island.” We figured God must want us to “bloom where we are planted.” From where we stood, we just could not imagine it possible for God to want us to abandon the good life, and people, we had found here.

### God was watching over

As Ben approached school age, we excitedly embarked on home educating (i.e. learning together with) our small family.

We planned on another homebirth for our third baby. Things didn’t go as planned. I had just time enough to wake my sleeping husband before losing the ability to communicate. Our third child, Marc, was born shortly after our arrival in the ER. I was largely unconscious. While the doctors were fussing over the baby, the midwife noticed I was bleeding heavily. She got their attention transferred to the mother in distress. I ended up needing many blood transfusions.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

I was Life Flight-ed to a major hospital for shock resulting in renal failure. In the first twenty-four hours I was in ICU where they didn't think I was going to pull through. Over the next two weeks my kidneys slowly resumed function. Our new baby boy was healthy and able to be with me in the hospital after the third day.

All evidence pointed to the likelihood that I had experienced an Amniotic Fluid Embolism, a breach in the placenta allowing amniotic fluid into my bloodstream, poisoning my system. Apparently, a full diagnosis can only be confirmed by autopsy. In nine out of ten cases, death follows. God had saved me from a tragic death.

Clearly, God was watching over us.

### Giving generously to God

While staying with me in the hospital for nearly two weeks, Alan diligently studied the literature on Amniotic Fluid Embolism. He came up with strong evidence that the likelihood of a recurrence in subsequent pregnancies was like "getting struck by lightning twice." He made his case to our insurance company after they informed us they'd no longer be able to cover maternity needs and convinced them to reinstate maternity coverage.

Shortly after the birth of our first child, I read in *Newsweek* about the Pope's support of something called "Natural Family Planning". Dissatisfied with our earlier efforts using contraception, the idea of a "natural" way to space babies was definitely appealing. I eventually contacted Couple to Couple League to order a book and sign up for their newsletter. I also found a local course to help us better understand implementation of this amazing natural aid for married couples. Over the next few years, I was amazed at the depth of wisdom about human sexuality, especially as it related to male and female differences, and the spiritual significance of the marital embrace. Beautiful! Over time, the concept of being "open to life" made more and more sense to us.

We were so exceedingly thankful to God for preserving my life and returning me to full health that it seemed only a natural response of praise and thanksgiving to trust fully and give generously to God. We gave much thought and prayer to our decision to conceive again.

Our Episcopalian family and friends thought us crazy to even consider the possibility of another pregnancy after all I had been through. My mother suggested, deeply concerned for my welfare, that we consider the solution they had resorted to earlier, after my mom's brush with death. We understood her concern. But steeping ourselves in an entirely different perspective — one which felt much more trusting of God and His will for our married life — made us desire to be fruitful in our married love in praise and thanksgiving for all God had done for us. To decide that we had given enough, and risked enough, that God was no longer to be trusted made less and less sense to us.

So, prayerfully, joyfully, we conceived our fourth child. Our Episcopal family did not understand.

### New Catholic heroes

Our fourth child, Lydia, was born at home. Mom and baby were both healthy. During this time, I turned more and more to Catholic writers for spiritual support, and felt a growing thirst for the spiritual truths only found in Catholic writings. Our search for Catholic truth was increasing in fervency.

The old line to "bloom where we were planted" seemed to grow ever thinner, especially as marital fruitfulness was discouraged in this environment. When Alan and I again considered prayerfully the decision to be open to life, I believed we needed to seek out other Catholics locally to help us gain perspective against the anti-life attitudes that surrounded us. Alan found a Men's Bible Study at a Catholic church in another town. These men understood our struggle!

We began to discover a multitude of new Catholic heroes, many of them English: John Henry Newman, G.K. Chesterton, and some of the many "literary converts" described by Joseph Pearce in his book of that title. We realized that St. Thomas More and the other English martyrs were more truly English Catholic than any member of the Church of England or her American offshoot. God was making it ever more clear to us that we needed to be with Him in the Catholic Church.

Yet the decision to convert appeared an impossibly difficult one. How could we turn our backs on my father's church, on his priesthood? How could we live here in this small community and not attend Dad's church?

In February of 2003 I dared to speak to my father of my heart's desire to return to the Catholic Church. Dad's Mediterranean temperament got the better of him: "How could you think it was God leading you in this direction? God could not want you to destroy me, and my parish! I might as well retire right now! You must be listening to 'the other guy'!" I crumbled and promised I would not leave. I agreed that God could not wish to destroy my Dad and his devout little parish. I felt crushed.

Several months later, Alan's men's group invited him to join them at a Catholic Men's Conference at Franciscan University, Steubenville. He figured he couldn't go because of work and that we couldn't spare the cash. However, one of the men told him someone else had dropped out and offered Alan his ticket as a gift. Alan's assistant said he could cover the shop. Alan was thrilled to go.

At Steubenville, Alan was awed by the spectacle of a thousand devout Catholic men on their knees in worship. The moment of the procession with the Blessed Sacrament was the turning point in his journey home. He watched, stunned, as students responsible for keeping the aisles clear for the procession fell to their knees in Adoration of Jesus in the Sacrament, then proceeded backwards still on their knees worshipping their Lord in the Host. To this day, telling this tale brings tears to Alan's eyes. "This was Jesus. I had to go."

The following Sunday Alan and I attended Mass together several towns away out of respect for my father as small town news travels fast. Alan was clear that he must convert, no matter what

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

the cost. I still felt torn. Above the altar of this little Catholic church was a stained glass window of Mary and Joseph's wedding; beneath was my highly unusual maiden name. By this sign, I knew God's will for me. I needed to be with my husband on his journey into the Church.

### The Terrible Wrench

My Dad's explosion when Alan gave him the news came as no surprise. Alan insisted we would not convert without my father's blessing. Miraculously, Dad was given grace to give his blessing in the end. Greatly shaken by our decision, he asked that we remain silent on the subject. For the entire year of transition, Alan and I both kept this promise in honor of my father.

On September 22, 2003, Alan and I were to be received into the Church. I asked Dad to read from Scripture at our Reception. We knew it would be extremely painful for him, but he said he would, "If you let me read the next verse, too." I took a look. Phillipians 4:8. "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." The following verse was a beautiful gift to Dad and to me. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you." I keep these words ever before me as a reminder of the great gift of faith I received from my father.

In the months that followed, we bent over backwards to minimize upset to my Dad and his parish. Every Sunday we attended two churches; early Mass several towns away, then our "home parish" 10 a.m. service. Alan and I no longer partook of my Dad's Eucharist, though we would kneel at the altar rail with our children as always, and receive Dad's blessing. Such a painful moment every week!

We knew we would have to move. There was no possible way to stay one mile from Dad's church and attend elsewhere without creating scandal. We had no idea where we would go. No clue where Alan would find work. We trusted that God would provide for us somehow.

### A new adventure

It seemed as though Alan would get work in Rochester, NY, with the Catholic Education Foundation. We had gone house hunting once already, but a homework assignment to "familiarize yourself with the culture of Catholic Education" revealed the sad truth that all too often Catholic schools provide "sex ed" classes as toxic as any provided by public schools.

On the long snowy drive home from Rochester after Alan turned down this job opportunity, he was feeling pretty low, with no prospects for our future in sight. Just then, a friend called from Fresno, CA. "Did you get the job? No? I'm glad. Would you come to Fresno and work with me?"

When Alan called me a few minutes later with the news, I wasn't exactly thrilled. Remember, I am not the adventurous type. When musing about where in the world God would take

us, I spouted out, "I'd never move to California! It's too far!" Well, guess what God had in mind?

Our four children were received into the Catholic Church in August of 2004. Our two oldest, Ben and Sarah, had each approached us about this, as they could see much of the truth and beauty of their parents' new Church.

Finally, in September of 2004 we said goodbye to our family, church friends (old and new), and our beloved little house and embarked on the adventure of our lives across the country in a big RV. I was five months pregnant. Many tears were shed at this parting. We enjoyed seeing many amazing and beautiful parts of our great country, but by the time we reached California, I was thoroughly exhausted. By God's grace, we survived the grueling ordeal of house hunting, while living on various Fresno streets in our RV. We even had time to find a midwife for the homebirth of our fifth child, Joseph. We had quite a good adventure in CA, in spite of my particularly intense homesickness.

We returned to Connecticut, but since our conversion we have moved three times. It has been difficult to feel the connection of parish community with all this moving, but we have met many beautiful Catholic souls along the way. Jesus is always present in the Eucharist and we always know that the Catholic Church is home, no matter where we travel. His amazing truth is available to us through the *Catechism* and the writings of Popes and saints. We are surrounded by a multitude of heroes of the Faith. It can be a real problem to not be overwhelmed by this wealth of good witnesses!

God has blessed our family in innumerable ways.

One night after supper, I asked Lydia and Joseph, "Do you realize that you probably would not exist if not for the Catholic Church?" No, they hadn't. I explained, in simple terms, why this was so.

It has been good for me to attempt writing our story — to take stock, to remember where we came from. It gives perspective. Relations with my parents are still strained whenever topics touching on faith are mentioned, but I am slowly learning the message of the Cross, best understood within the Catholic Church, to "consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds" and to "Always and everywhere give thanks!"

Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb! ■



JOYCE SHAEFFER and her husband, Alan, home educate their two youngest children (of five) in eastern Connecticut. Of the three oldest, two are graduates of The College of Saint Mary Magdalen, in Warner, NH, where the third is currently a sophomore. Two grandchildren add to their list of blessings.

### BLOG

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