

I'm not supposed to be here. I'm not supposed to be writing this. I'm not supposed to have the most beautiful wife in the world. I'm not supposed to have 2 little warrior boys who love me more than then life itself. I'm not supposed to be on speaking terms with my family. I'm not supposed to have the house, the cars, the business,, the family vacations, the vegetable garden, the 5 chickens, etc.. No, in fact I did everything in my power to bring destruction upon myself and the people around me. Supernatural Grace is the only possible explanation I have. By 'Grace Alone.'(Scott Hahn 101)

I come from polar opposite parents. My mother was born into a very authentic Irish Catholic family, with all the fixins that go along with that. If your Irish Catholic you'll understand. You see, Irish Catholics will feed the world and starve to death themselves. In one sense I admire and try to emulate that sense of self surrender, and in another sense there is a tremendous amount of self induced suffering. Ireland is second only to heaven in martyrs. We would rather die than tell you about any problems we may be going through. My mother and her family were tough, God fearing people. You pulled yourself up by your boots straps, you stuck together, and you thanked God for it. But whatever you did, you didn't talk about your feelings. Taboo.

My father was raised by wolves. When you shook his family tree nuts and drunks fell out everywhere. My dad's mother is, a prescription drug addict. His father had always been tripped up by mental health issues. His parents were the only people I ever met who got married and divorced twice. TO EACH OTHER. My father was lucky to survive his up bringing. I believe he loved Christ in his own way, but was never taught how to move beyond his own suffering. I suppose its heartbreaking when you realize Jesus isn't Santa Clause and He doesn't always give us what we want. Its unfortunate that he died that way. I hope and pray he snuck into purgatory. But he died with a belly full of booze, a heart full of unforgiveness and a ton of unconfessed sin.

I was born in Troy N.Y. in July 1973. I was 'born again,' in August 1973 at St. Augustine's parish in Lansingburgh N.Y. when my mother asked the priest to put that indelible mark on my soul. I was raised by my mother. My father was an infrequent guest in my life. We were nominally Catholic then. We were in and out of St Augustines Parish for the next 10 years. I have the absolute fondest memories of that Church. I now love to go back and attend Mass there. The thought comes to mind "this is where I got God." He, God, was formed in my mind sitting in these very pews, with these beautiful paintings of the saints, the amazing stained glass, the marble alter, and the golden tabernacle. It calls me back to that "child like faith," before all the bitterness, and jadedness of the world entered in. Nothing like these contemporary 'God barn's,' we have now. How does a building that looks like it should have a hockey rink in the center of it call a person to prayer?

I grew up having a very loving parish priest named Father Smith. Fr Smith was a great, holy man with such gentle eyes. I was very confused when the sex scandal broke out. It was as if they were talking about a different Church. I never new a bad priest growing up. I loved them and they loved me.

Now the sisters on the other hand, they meant business! I'll be straight with you, Sister Geraldine didn't give me anything I didn't have coming to me. If I wasn't doing something wrong at school, its because it was Saturday. They were tough, but they had to be. They taught a bunch a little hooligans like me. But sister Geraldine was also the woman who held me and wiped the blood from my head when I cut my face open on the playground.

Not having a father had a profound effect on me. My mother would eventually remarry, but the heart of every boy is to designed to connect with his father. Earthly as well as Heavenly. I felt an enormous void inside of me. Its this void that I would try fill the for the next 25 years. A little boy with no father, is a dead man (boy) walking. The Devil just sets to many snares to not have a guide. Thank God for mothers, and God only knows where I would be without mine, but a boy needs a man to show him how to be one. Without a father I looked up to older kids in the neighborhood. This is dangerous.

The devil took Jesus on a tour of what could be His after 40 days of fasting and He resisted with all His human and Divine strength and overcame all temptation. The Devil took me on the same tour and I asked Him, "could you super size that." It was like a sin shopping spree for the next 20 years. Father Larry Richard lays this all in his 'Confession' talk, how sin is us spitting in the face of Jesus, and that's exactly what I did. I began to stuff that void of my childhood with all the sin I could get my hands on. I like the way Christopher West, and Peter Kreeft explain it. How all hearts are called to joy and happiness, but how do we know the real from the counterfeit. I bought the counterfeit. As the song goes "we're lookin for love in all the wrong places." The real chemical reaction took place at 12 when I got my hands on 3 Genny Cream Ale's. Aaaahhh. They don't call that stuff 'Spirits' for nothing. That stuff was a god in a bottle for me. It all went away after the first sip. The pain, the fear, the incompleteness, the lack of confidence, etc. It also greatly enabled me to follow my real pursuit, women. This started me down a path that ended in a fiery blaze.

I had what I perceived as a lot fun for long time. But in 1992, I was almost 19 at the time, my father died from an alcohol and drug overdose. A few months later, my grandfather who raised me, died of cancer, and about a year after that my younger step brother shot himself in the head on a bad acid trip. It was official, I had checked out. If you brought up the word God around me you were using a dirty word. I had it with the God of my youth. I was going to find my own god. Relativism, Buddhism, Protestantism, hedonism, alcoholism. I had a bad case of the ism's you could say.

I lasted about 7 years. By this time, I was doing quite well for myself. I was homeless, living in San Diego California. I was smoking cocaine 7 days a week, drinking around the clock, shackled up with a woman de jour, stealing food from grocery stores so I could eat, selling cocaine, and any other felony activities I could get involved in. But one morning I woke up and something had happened. I had not eaten, showered, changed my clothes, or brushed my teeth in a week. I sat down on some steps, and I encountered hopelessness for the first time. I had never known it before. I had felt awful, pathetic, wretched, disgusted, anguish, agony, etc. thousands of times.

But this was the first time I had ever felt hopeless. It was as if there had always been a candle lit at the very end of a long, long tunnel and it had just gone out. I wasn't afraid of dying, but the pain of possibly living like this scared the HELL out of me. Literally!

Not long after that my uncle from New York, some how (GOD) found me in an apartment I had been breaking into to sleep in San Diego. He threw me on a plane, and thus began another journey of another prodigal son returning home. I know how badly that prodigal son wanted to eat the slop being fed to the swine. Literally and figuratively. I was starving in every sense of the word.

I got into rehab on June 21 of 1999. Which coincidentally is the Summer Solstice, which is the longest day of the year. And boy was it ever. I have not had a drink since. I wish I could say God threw his finest garments on me, and slaughtered the fattened calf. It was not my experience. I had really damaged myself. I had to claw my way back to Kingdom. That time was the most excruciatingly painful time of my life. The emotional, mental, and spiritual torture was almost unbearable. He wanted me to know that this is not some cheap grace, where you just simply ask Jesus into your heart and your saved and your free to move on with your life. It's a lifelong sanctification, route with trials, obstacles, and hurdles, and at times unbelievably painful. Its a marathon, not a sprint. He knew my heart, and if I felt to good to quick I would be like the seed planted in rocky soil, that sprouts up quickly and withers away.

I had not yet even begun to consider coming back to the Church at this point. But the only way I could sleep in the half way house I was in, was listening to EWTN for some reason. I used to take naps listening to Mother Angelica saying the Rosary. I think perhaps it was because my mother said a 5 year Novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe for me. I owed my life to my Mother's. Both of them.

Like I said I struggled my way back into the faith. I was coming around to Jesus slowly, but to the Church even more slowly. Then one day, for a reason I don't recall, I bought Thomas Merton's book "The Seven Story Mountain." I don't know why I bought it. It wasn't recommended, I didn't know anyone who had ever even read it. But regardless I read it. And coincidentally (God) about half way through the book, I was invited to go on a 12 step retreat to a Benedictine Monastery in Quebec, St. Benoit du lac Abbey. I was already falling in love with the Church Merton was so eloquently describing in his autobiography. With all the incense, candles, the bells, the saints, the holiness. So now I'm sitting in a place just like the place in Merton's book and I'm falling in love. I'm listening to these men sing the most beautiful songs I've ever heard to our Lord.

I was watching these men surrender there entire lives to Christ. I fell in love with God's Church. She was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. How could I have not noticed Her before? It was as if someone had hidden Her from me. Why didn't my family tell me about Her? Why had all the Catholics I knew never mentioned Her? Did they even know Her? They couldn't have. Everyone knew who Marilyn Monroe was. How come no one knew who She was? Even her own children didn't know Her. Why did I see her? How would I tell others of what I found? They'll

think I'm nuts. I heard Steve Ray put it best when he said "it takes an immigrant to tell you how beautiful America is." I did not see what the media told me She was. When I saw Her for the first time I finally found out why I had a heart. It was to Love. But Her love is different. You can feel it. Its not cheap, but eternal. Its not nervous. It doesn't run out a 2AM. Its not the health and wealth gospel of televangelists. It's like an Eternal Energizer Bunny, it just keeps going, and going, and going.

I got confirmed that Easter. I 'finally' married my wife (in the Church) and baptized our 1 year old. My wife got confirmed the following Easter. We conceived our second child at the World Wide Marriage Encounter the following year. We're expecting our 3 child in October. Who, by the way, was conceived the week we went to Washington DC for the March for Life. We held both of my wife's parents hands and said the Rosary while they died 2 years apart to the day.

I cried for the entire week of JP II's wake. I cried through my wedding. I cried through my entire Cursillo. I cried when my children were born. I cry daily since coming back into the Church. God has truly saved a wretch. An undeserving wretch at that. I wasn't even looking to be saved and he did it anyways. I've discovered God can never change his nature toward me regardless of what I have done. He is my father, and I am his son. And now that I'm a father I know what that means. Do my boys get a crack on the butt on occasion? You bet. Do I stop loving them? Not for a minute.

I have slowly come to believe in the infallibility of the Church's teaching. It was not an overnight matter, and it involved some serious lifestyle changes. But eventually, I have submitted to Her teaching authority. Christ founded **One**, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and who am I (a Kennedy, a Pelosi, a Kerry, a Biden) not obey Her. I have great sadness in my heart when I hear our ignorant seperated Christian brothers and sisters, ex-Catholics, and supposedly current Catholics, speak poorly of the Bride of Christ. Especially since moving down South. I'm grateful for the great Catholic apologists who have given me some Biblical literacy, and allowed me the opportunity to witness the truth about the Bride of Christ to my fellow Christians. I have joked with friends about starting a lay group called 'Catholic Offense.' 'For Catholics who are sick of playing defense and want the ball.'

I'm so grateful for the New Evangelization. My reconversion was started in part by a movement to put audio cd's in the back of Parish's by Lighthouse Catholic Media. If its not in your Parish, get in your Parish. I saw this cd called "The Conversion of Scott Hahn." I thought to myself, hmmm, I'll check it out. Wow, how that changed my life. I now have over 400 cds in a box in my car (I still do things to the extreme). I drive around looking for unsuspecting Protestants to give them to. Its funny to watch the look on there face when they hear a Catholic not only talk about scripture, but take them on an underwater adventure through the Bible.

I owe so much to so many. Catholic Answers, Scott Hahn, Tim Staples, Steve Ray, Brant Pitre, Karl Keating, Pat Madrid, Fr Groeschel, Fr Pacwa, Peter Kreeft, Jimmy Akins, Mark Shea, the hundreds of monks I've met in my journeying to different monasteries, my beautiful Parish

Priest Mnsr. Williams who feeds me with the sacraments. To my Mothers. To my wife who loves me for better and worse. To my little boys, who are hopefully priests in training. And most of all, to Jesus and his Bride, YOU.