

## My Journey of Faith

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My Father is a Southern Baptist Minister. He came from a good Southern Baptist Family, as did my mother. They both met at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas and got married.

My Mother had been raised in Salt Lake City, UT surrounded by the Mormon culture, and my grandparents wanted to send her and her brothers to a “good Baptist school”. My Father had been born and raised in Dickens, TX a wide spot in the road about an hour East of Lubbock. After my parents were married they moved back to Salt Lake City, and my Dad began his ministering career. For a time they drove to Evanston, Wyoming every weekend where he filled in at a church, and then he was eventually called to go to Sidney, Nebraska where he took over a church and where I was born.

After a few years we moved on to St. Francis, Kansas (a good Catholic name!), and then again to Satanta, Kansas. It was in Satanta, when I was about 6 years old that I accepted the Lord at an altar call after a revival service. Looking back, I’m not sure that I really understood why or what I was doing, but I knew that I wanted to be part of the church, and wanted to have Christ within me. A few months later we had a “joint Baptism” with another church in town. If my memory serves correctly it was the Methodist church (how’s that for ecumenism?). My Baptism was really a life-changing moment. I never felt that this was just a “symbol”, but I felt that a true change had been made inside of me, and that I was truly born again into Christ. I really felt as though I could feel Christ lifting me back out of the Baptismal font. Our church had a 6 week “catechetical” program in which we learned about the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, etc. I enjoyed this time, and the time spent at home questioning my Father about the issues, and hearing all about our Faith.

When I was 8 years old my parent’s got divorced. It was a big surprise; there really wasn’t any warning at all for us kids. This was a trying time in all of our lives. I felt very confused at the time, and just didn’t understand how this could be happening.

What was initially confusing became utterly incomprehensible a short time later. Just as we were adjusting to a new life, the church asked my Dad to step down as the minister. I was too young at the time to be in on all the “politics” and my read on the situation could be wrong, but, my feeling was that the main reason was the divorce. I couldn’t understand how a church could just “fire” its leader because of this. I mean, either he was a good teacher or he wasn’t. Surely, a divorce didn’t change the Word of God that he taught, did it? Shoot, half of them had already been divorced, and/or re-married themselves.

This was my first introduction to the splintering that occurs in Protestant churches. I had heard before of people leaving a church to start their own, but had never really seen anything like this before. Needless to say, I became a bit disillusioned with organized

religion at this point. I came to the conclusion that you really didn't need a church. You could follow the Word of Christ in the Bible, and that was really all you needed. Churches were just full of hypocrites.

After the divorce we generally spent the weekends at my Mom's house, and after a time we quit going to church on Sunday's. I'm sure that she was experiencing the same confusion that I was. I even remember a time when we visited just about every other church in town, as though we were shopping for a new church (although we did not go to the Catholic Church). I can remember my Dad seeming upset at this, but he said it didn't matter much what the name on the outside of the church is, as long as it is a Christian church. Not too long after we quit going to church altogether, and I really didn't miss it. From this point on, I would only occasionally get "caught" at church, usually when my Dad would take us along, and I really did not care to be there.

During this period, however there were times when I felt very near to our Lord, and I never faltered in belief. I can remember going to a summer camp in Glorieta, New Mexico outside of Santa Fe with our Church's youth group. This is a beautiful Baptist retreat up in the New Mexico Rockies. The camp we went to was one of the "Centrifuge" camps that are very popular for Baptists. Until my conversion, I'm not sure that I ever felt closer to God then when I was at Centrifuge. I spent a lot of time reading scripture, and studying during this trip. It was a great experience.

After I graduated from High School and went on to College, church moved further and further down the list. I almost got to a point where I didn't really ever think about my Faith or church. I was invited by a friend of mine to attend a Church of Christ Bible study once. I just remember feeling really uncomfortable because it had been so long away from any organized religion. Then I was really turned off as I was approached by nearly every member of this group over the next few days to attend another, and another evening Bible study. It seemed that their whole lives revolved around their student group, and I felt very uncomfortable there. I wasn't ready for my life to become "Christ-centered". Their behavior only seemed to reinforce my view that I didn't need to be part of a church to be close to God. My friend that invited me to come to the group, would go to a Bible Study, and lead the Bible Study along with his steady girlfriend; then come back to his dormitory room and "hook up" with another girl that he would proceed to parade around the dormitory to show off to the rest of us how much of a lady's man he was. This type of behavior did not seem to be very "Christian".

While away at college I met my future Wife. We had a whirl-wind type romance story, and it seemed before I knew it I was madly in love with her and we were engaged. I knew that she was Catholic, but that really didn't matter to me, I was in love!

To my Dad's credit he had never denigrated other Faith Traditions. He is probably a little "liberal" for most Baptists. He even freely uses the term "Tradition" to describe the Baptist Tradition. Therefore, I didn't have some of the negative connotations to overcome when I met Catholics.

However, as soon as we decided to get engaged, my Wife immediately started finding out what it would take to have a “Catholic” wedding recognized by the Church. This was a little bewildering to me. I didn’t see how it mattered which “building” we got married in. Of course, it made a big difference to my Wife! After sharing our plans with our parents, my Mother became very concerned that if we got married in the Catholic church that I would have to promise to raise our children as Catholics. This really concerned my Mother as she had grown up with some biases toward Catholics that my Dad never seemed to have. I also had a hard time understanding why the church was so important to my Wife. I think that most Protestants associate more with their local church and Pastor than they do with the larger denomination. It makes little difference to them how their marriage is recognized. Of course, it is not a Sacrament for the majority of Protestants.

My Wife, Ruthye, had never been confirmed in the Catholic Faith. One requirement for us to receive a dispensation for marriage was that she had to be confirmed, so she began going to RCIA classes. She invited me to come along, but of course, I was not interested in “church”. She began going to Mass every week, and every once in a while I would go with her, but she had to twist my arm. There were so many differences from my Baptist upbringing that I had a hard time really understanding what was going on. I also felt very much like an outsider. I could not partake in the “Lord’s Supper” (my terminology at the time), and I was never sure if I should kneel with everyone else, or what the responses were. It just didn’t “click” for me.

However, a few things really moved me. The first was at the Easter Vigil where Ruthye was Confirmed. I was amazed at the reverence that was displayed in that Mass for the Easter Miracle. It was obvious to me that the Catholics really “got” Easter. I had never seen anything like it. From the lighting of the fire and candle outside, to the candle-lit vigil inside, to the Baptism of the converts, to the confirmations, and finally to communion, I was amazed. Partly, I was surprised by the length of the service so late at night. Most Baptists have sat through some long sermons, but this was something else entirely. There were no “short-cuts”. The Mass to celebrate Easter received everything that it deserved.

After our marriage, I was next moved by the first mid-night Mass for Christmas that I attended. During our engagement, we had not made this due to our schedules, but Ruthye made sure I came for this the first chance we got. It was indeed the best “Christmas service” (my term again) that I had ever been too. I realized that the Catholics “got” this too.

Of course, I still had my reservations. I can remember Ruthye coming home from RCIA classes and telling me of the discussions that they had. Most of the time I caught myself agreeing with what she was telling me, but sometimes the issues really went against my Baptist Tradition. Ruthye came home once talking about a discussion about the Eucharist. A gentleman that was considering conversion was having trouble with the Church’s teaching on Transubstantiation. He had not yet accepted it, and still thought of it as symbolic. He shared with the group that he was having trouble with it, and understood that he really couldn’t be Catholic if he didn’t believe this. I immediately

took up his defense, and can remember saying “of course it’s a symbol. It’s silly to think that the bread and wine become Body and Blood.”

Thank goodness my Wife is a patient lady!

We received a dispensation from the Bishop to get married, and attended an “engaged encounter weekend” retreat that was required by the Diocese. Again, I caught myself thinking that they had this right too. What a wonderful weekend it was. You could see immediately how important Marriage was to the Church.

I kept catching these things that the Church did right, but I really couldn’t bring myself to convert. In reality, it was because I wasn’t ready to make a commitment to any organized Faith. I was being selfish, and was “more comfortable” being left alone.

For several years after we got married I only attended Mass infrequently. My wife would always ask me to go, but I would rather watch NFL countdown, or sleep in. Besides, I would tell myself “I’m not really welcome there; I can’t really participate because I’m not Catholic”.

As I look back, I see what a selfish point of view that was. At the same time, I feel that this is something that all Catholics and Parishes can learn from. Please make an extra attempt to welcome those who are “separated brethren”. Although we all profess to welcome visitors, do we really? Most of us go to Mass, and maybe say hello to a few folks on the way in, and maybe those sitting near us, but we don’t make a point to welcome visitors. I guarantee you that our “separated brethren” do a much better job of this. They understand that this is a very good point of contact, and a good time to add another to the flock.

After several years of this, God finally got my attention. My marriage was failing, and I had nothing to hold on to. It seemed as though my world was upside down. I decided that I needed God’s help. I decided that it would be silly for me to join a different church than what my wife and daughter were going to, so I decided to “dip my foot in the water” at our parishes RCIA classes. I really figured that if I didn’t like it, at least I would understand better the Churches teachings, and would just attend with my Family without converting.

Boy was I in for a surprise! The more I learned, the more I began investigating, and digging. The more I dug, the more I learned. One of the leaders of the class lent me “Crossing the Tiber” and that just blew the roof off. All the teaching I had ever had ignored the History of the Church. As Cardinal Newman has said, “To be deep in History, is to cease to be Protestant.” I quickly ceased to be a Protestant. I still had a lot to learn, but found myself knocking down one objection after another. Any time a new objection came up, I quickly did some research and obliterated it.

I even went so far as to look up several anti-Catholic web-sites and found even more objections than I could come up with. With the help of Catholic Answers,

Catholicconvert.com, and Dave Armstrong's web-site I was able to overcome each and every one. Of course, I found that most of the anti-Catholic objections were the most farcical. I was appalled at what I found, and it only strengthened my Faith and my knowledge of the truth. It is disconcerting to see what some of our "Christian Brothers" will say about Catholics. I can't imagine someone calling themselves Christian and then saying these types of things.

As for the Eucharist? By January, I could hardly contain my zeal for it. I couldn't wait to be able to partake in the Eucharist a couple of months later at Easter Vigil. It was a wonderful blessing to see that it truly is the body, blood, and divinity of Christ. Early on, I prayed several times for the grace to understand this concept of Transubstantiation, and I received it. It is truly one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

As you can imagine, the closer I moved toward the Church and Christ, the quicker our marital problems were resolved. It would be wrong to say that the Church resolved these problems, but the Grace of God did, and I might not have sought that out without the Church. Our marriage is back on track, and I have only missed Mass once that I can think of in about two years!

Used to be, you couldn't hardly drag me to church, now I yearn for Mass, and feel that if I miss it, I would have a hole left empty inside of me. Being able to partake in the ever-present re-creation of Christ's sacrifice is a beautiful, wonderful thing.

I am saddened that I missed so much before I was exposed to Catholicism. It's funny too. None of it is really hidden. You can find kernels of all of it in scripture, but Protestants have a Tradition that hides it from them.

I know that I have found my Home because it all flows together so well. The Catholic Tradition does not contradict Scripture in any way, instead, it complements it. Before there were complex theological issues (i.e. eternal security) that seemed contradictory to me. For example, if I have eternal security, why follow the commandments? Why follow Jesus' teaching to love your neighbor, or to love God above all else? It seemed like a license to do whatever I feel like. Believe it or not, I always had trouble with this issue and others, even though it is an easy doctrine to accept. Under this doctrine, there is really no burden at all! No need to be an example to others. No need to share Christ's Love. No need to do anything (I'm already safe)!

I could not really reconcile this with Scripture. If God intended to give us eternal security just for reading a sinner's prayer, then why wouldn't God just save everyone? Surely there are some people that aren't "saved" that behave better than many that are. What's the point then? Gandhi said it best when he said the Christianity was a great idea, except no-one ever tried it!

From the Catholic perspective it all falls in place. Why is that? Because it is the True Faith handed down from the Apostles to the Early Fathers, and preserved today in the Catholic Church. Christ meant for everything to fall together. Christ did not leave any

confusion or doubt among His apostles, and He does not leave any confusion or doubt today in His Church. Christ did not intend for His everlasting Truth to be decided by majority vote. He did not intend for there to be 30,000 competing sects all espousing to be the True church.

I am glad that I have found my Home.