

## My Journey Home

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once wrote: “There are not over a hundred people in the United State who hate the Roman Catholic Church; there are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church.”

I was one of those who hated because of what I wrongly believed about the Catholic Church. The reason I had these beliefs was due to being told what to believe about the Catholic Church from those who were told what to believe about the Catholic Church. No one was willing to find out what the bottom line was concerning the Catholic Church. Everything said about the Church was taken as truth while it seemed no one was delving into what the truth really was.

What about these Catholics? They worshipped Mary. They had a religion but not a relationship with Jesus Christ. They said they believed in God but really their belief couldn't be the same, could it? The Bible says in James 2:19 KJV “Thou believest that there is one God; Thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble”.

So do Catholics have a belief such as the devils? When most Catholics are asked if they have been “born again” or “have accepted Christ as their Savior”, their main response is “I believe in God” or “I am a good person”, or “I'm Catholic”. Also, they have all these rituals, Saints, Statues and what about the Pope is he really standing in for God? Another big item, are they cannibals when they eat the bread and drink the wine during communion? Why do they leave Jesus on the cross, don't they realize Jesus has risen from the dead?

I recall Ian Paisley saying that he got into trouble when he said the Pope was in hell. He said “I did say it”. Then he continued saying “Westminster confessions” mentions all the Popes are in Hell, I only said one was in hell””. (BJU Bible Conference Spring of 1978.) That same year I had Ian Paisley sign my Bible. This Bible sits on a bookshelf in my apartment. So are these statements substantial?

How many times have I heard that the Catholic Church is the Whore of Babylon and the Pope was the anti-Christ; more times than I can count? These type of statements were heard most all my life while in the fundamental evangelical churches and universities I was familiar with. Now for nearly 45 years I have agreed with these statements, I was counted as one who hates what was wrongly believe about the Catholic Church.

Through unforeseeable circumstances nearly 6 years ago (in 2008) I found myself curious enough to attend a few Masses. Then in the summer of 2014, I was confronted with a statement, “Catholics are not Christian”. Well, I never believed that Catholics were a cult like some other religions. What I did know is Catholics believed in the trinity, the virgin birth of Jesus, his incarnation, and that Jesus is God. They were not like a Mormons or a Jehovah Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ. Catholics, also believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. So, when I was confronted with such a statement (Catholics are not Christian) I found myself defending the Catholic Faith not even being Catholic myself.

During the summer 2008 met someone on the internet from the country of Malta. I have never heard of this country so being curious I asked where Malta was. Since then, 2008, the person I met over the internet, Maria Vella, became my wife in Dec. 2010 after a period of courtship over the few years in between. Within this time Maria visited the US and I in turn visited Malta, and so the story goes. Back to my journey, I found that Malta is 97% Catholic. What I noticed was the Maltese were serious about their religion.

There were Catholic Churches on every corner as there are Baptist Churches on every corner in Greenville, SC. Malta had feasts to this Saint and that Saint; they had a feasts for a particular days commemorating events and days such as the Assumption of Mary. Malta has a feast to the shipwreck of St. Paul since this was the island he shipwrecked on. Their history was so rich filled with “things” which were so historical. I think of old history as being 200 years old such as the age of the United States. In Malta things were old as being 2000 years old in the making. There is no comparison between the two. Here in the US we have a great history but in Malta their history spans such a longer period of time.

Maria Vella, in a since, has been a catalyst for the journey I am on, but Maria is **not** the reason for my journey. I have asked the many questions such as, the question about the mother of Jesus, “why do Catholics pray to her”? Her answer went back to the Biblical account of the marriage at Cana. Matt2:3 the mother of Jesus interceded, Jesus mother said to Jesus; “they have no wine”. The comment suggests she was interceding and asking Jesus concerning the needs for the situation. I thought that was an interesting answer, never thought about it that way before. There were other questions I posed, some of which Mary had an answer to but then many she did not have the answers to.

In the meantime,

Maria had visited some evangelical churches with me here in the US. She found them interesting. She had many questions as well about these evangelical services like I had of those about the Catholic Churches. I recall one of her questions, how do the pastors become pastors? Well, I attended Bible College and I took courses on Church planting and so on. I thought I understood the process.

My points paled to those regarding how the priest or bishops took their positions. Then some of my other answers also paled to other questions. Maria posed questions concerning the authority of these churches. At the time I didn't know what she meant. Now having done some study on this, history explains the whole story. Many of the different denominational (the reformation) churches that now exist have only existed less than 100 years up to 500 years old.

The Catholics have a 2000 year history base on the fact that Christ said “I will build My church”. (More on this later if asked...) The authority comes from the Pope and Bishops besides from being around for so much longer. Another thing of interest which I didn't understand at first, was Mary pointed out that she felt like we had not really worshipped in the churches we had visited.

This stuck me funny as to why she felt this way. She said there was good entertainment in the churches but she didn't feel she had worshipped. She felt something was missing. This I didn't understand since I knew that in worship we were preparing our hearts through good music and the ministry of the Word through good preaching. This is what worship was. We worship in spirit and in truth. I must also point out that during the few years between 08' and 14' my mind set had changed about church and I was not attending church on a regular basis, though at the time I knew my course was wrong. During this time, it seemed that the "church" regardless of denomination was no different than joining a club of some sort or meeting for some social activity. So, I too didn't look at the service as worship but for different reasons.

During many conversations with Maria, I had mentioned all the churches I had been in. I told her we went to this Baptist church to another non-denominational church, a Fellowship Bible church then ended up in an Evangelical Free church. I mentioned to Maria some of the reasons we left these churches and joined others; some reasons were valid and some maybe not. For example, one time we were in a

Baptist Church in SC where I was very much involved in. I was actually in a pastoral internship. I was the Sunday School Superintendent of the grade school classes (nearly 300 children at a best guess). One Wednesday night, the Pastor had mentioned that Steve Green (a musician) was coming to Greenville, SC, the Pastor then made this statement, "if anyone who was in leadership attended this concert they would no longer be in leadership".

This church as well as many others, and the local Bible University in the area boycotted this concert. To say the least, this Wednesday night was the last time my family and I attended that church. We left and went to another Bible Church that wasn't so legalistic. Steve Green's ministry at this time meant a lot to me. His ministry helped me spiritually through some personal struggles I was facing.

I will not spend too much time here discussing the different churches with the whys we jumped from one to another. (Forgive me I kind of repeat a few things here I just left them in) The point was Maria didn't understand why there were so many are differences in these churches. She noticed that each preacher or church choose his own passage from the Bible to speak from. She did noticed the "entertainment" was different from one church to another.

At first I didn't quite understand about what she meant about worship and how she didn't feel as if we worshipped. I thought and was taught that worship included good singing and hearing a message from the Pastor. The Word of God expounded from the Pulpit was the most important aspect of the service. In fact, I had heard comments made in many of churches I attended, "the preaching of the Word was the most important part of the service".

It was also stated from the message from pulpits (or preaching) was the only counseling one needs. Another good point is, I would be amiss to leave out the fellowship amongst common believers. Fellowship among common believers is a very important part of worship in the evangelical churches too. This was an important part to me and one which I have missed. This fellowship and Bible study together helps one grow spiritually and is needed in ones life.

I want to stress again. Maria did not pull me in any direction toward the Catholic Church nor away. She never asked me or persuaded me to make a choice. In fact it was **me** trying to find the answers to the statement “Catholics aren’t Christian” which led me on my journey to find the truth. During the spring of 2014 I had taken a philosophy class which instilled in me the importance in asking questions and to find out the real source of the story- to find the answers to these questions. Then the importance of making citations for those answers, giving credit where due. During my study if there were no citations given I became very cautious of the answers since there is nothing backing the answers up.

What are those items that I found drawing me to the Catholic Church? One of the first things that I noticed during the Mass was the use of the scriptures throughout the whole service. There were times in the evangelical fundamental churches that a few verses are read then the preacher would take nearly 45 minutes talking trying to explain a topic or a point he wanted to get across. During the Mass, there is a passage read from the Old Testament, a passage from the Epistles then a passage from the Gospels.

In between these readings the congregation sing psalms from various passages found in the poetical books. After the priest reads the Gospel passage he speaks approximately 15 minutes how to apply the passage in our personal lives what was read. This is called the homily. What I found was, the Priest made many of the same applications which I had heard from the preaching in the fundamental churches I had attended.

I thought this was interesting as I was under the impression the Priest or Preacher commented on articles from the newspapers or from things other than the Bible. What I found was that there were many similarities in the call to Christian living or even the call to Salvation through Jesus from the Bible. I heard messages from the Priest which spoke to my heart. Many of the passages I heard in the evangelical churches were also heard during the Mass.

The Catholic Church is full of typology. There is a Biblical event or figure that is represented in different ways throughout the church from the stained-glass windows, to the Ark of the Covenant, or tabernacle in the front of the church, or the alter. It seemed there was this presence of Christ that I had not felt before in the fundamental churches. This was more than emotion but the real presence of Christ, (more on this later if asked),

When people come into the Catholic Church sanctuary, they are (normally) quiet, they make the sign of the cross, genuflect, and then kneel in prayer. Usually 15 minutes before the service (Mass) begins, one of our different choirs begins to sing in the church we attend. Others may have organ music playing. Sometimes there are lively tunes and then at other times there maybe solemn songs with a soloist. People are not visiting drinking coffee or eating donuts prior to the beginning of Mass.

Lately, I just found out that one should not eat within an hour or more prior to taking communion. This is not to say this kind of fellowship does not take place after the service (Mass). Many times there is a gathering after the service where there is coffee and donuts are

served in the kitchen hall. There may be a breakfast or lunch served in the kitchen area after a service. Usually there is a reason for this, such as a fund raising event for St. Vincent DePaul or some other need. When Maria mentioned that she didn't feel that she has worshiped after leaving a service from other churches I have come to understand what she meant.

Another thing that impressed me with the Catholic Church was the fact that much of what was being done during the Mass was being replicated across the world in each of the Catholic Churches. The passages being read from the Bible, the prayers being said, for example the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, etc. are being repeated in all the Catholic Churches around the globe. In the evangelical fundamental churches each one has different passages read and expounded upon according to the Pastors desire or a Bible book study at that moment.

I am not saying this is wrong though. The point is the unity of the Church is lost when every one of the some 30,000 different denominations are picking out their own passage to focus on during any given Sunday. And another thought is most of these denominations do not agree to the doctrines or ordinances they hold to. Not even from one Baptist church to another could agree on certain issues or scriptural texts. Example if I have 10 proof texts and you have only 5, I have a stronger argument, so to speak. I win.

These are many things which have caught my attention within the Catholic Church. These are things that I noticed without any prompting from any outside source for the most part. Sure I had questions. I still had misunderstandings of the Church. There were things I didn't understand and I found myself going back to my roots and comparing things I was seeing to those that I knew best from my upbringing.

There were hurdles that I could not get over from my past. What about, The Blessed Mother (Mary), the Eucharist, Conversion, Tradition, Baptism, the Sacraments, the Pope, etc. Why do they call the Priest, Father? Why do they make all these signs at this time or that? Why do they kneel at this time or that? Why does it seem there is so much pomp and circumstance with all the different garments the priest or bishops wear? Why don't they know for sure whether or not they will go to heaven?

The answer to these and more questions I was no longer willing to just accept from those who hate the Catholic Church just because they wrongly believe what the Catholic Church was all about. Learning from my resent studies caused me to find out the truth. What does the church really believe and what does the Bible say about all these things. As I had been taught, if it is not in the Bible it cannot be trusted. If there are additions made to the scriptures then surely these is wrong. More will be said about this later. Much has been learned about Sola Scriptura. More on this if asked.

What is this journey I say I am on? What is it about the crossing of the Tiber that has me following the course I am on? As mentioned before, I was posed with a statement that I must find the answers to.

Back in the early fall of 2014, I had taken Mary to Church and dropped her off. The following Sunday I attended with her, this particular Sunday, I went to the foyer to view a kiosk which had

CDs. I found a CD tape entitled “Why Be Catholic”, by Patrick Madrid. I purchased this CD and we took one of our Sunday drives while listening to the CD. I found it quite interesting but then I had more questions.

Much of what had been said I could relate to and found myself having these WOW moments. I could say, well that’s what I thought about the Catholic Church which caused me to hate the Church. There were things such as “why do Catholics worship Mary, have statues, etc”. Anyway, there were things mentioned which I believed about the Church and they were being answered. I heard for the first time of Sola Scriptura.

I began to hear history that I had never heard before. I didn’t want to take or believe what I was hearing even now until I then checked these out in more study. This is because I didn’t want to be in the same boat I was in prior meaning accepting something just because someone said so. I didn’t want to find myself believing again something wrong and making judgments which were not substantial. So I have continued on my study, listening to other authors, reading materials. I tried listening to those even negative to the Church to be sure I was getting a proper perspective.

For example, I listened to a message from John MacArthur which was quite negative about the Catholic Church. What I found was he had no substance or validities in his comments. What was seen though, John MacArthur was full of arrogance and hatred. I had read books he had written in the past. I took what he said as gospel. I had even quoted him. Can these negative statements he was making really be of Christ? This is what I mean, there are many who will take what MacArthur said as truth, then they come to believe what they wrongfully believe about the Catholic Church without checking it out for themselves. This may mean going to a Sunday Mass.

I then came other across CD’s explaining “The Lamb’s Supper” by Scott Hahn, “Discovering the Biblical Significance of Mary” by Scott Hahn, “Born Again? Faith Alone?” by Stephen Ray, “Following the Call of Christ”, by Fr. Robert Barron, as well as others. Who are these men, Scott Hahn and Stephen Ray. I listened to their testimonies. Dr. Scott Hahn is a Bible scholar and at one time was Presbyterian minister.

Stephen Ray had been a Baptist minister. Both of these men where antagonistic against the Catholic Church at one time. They themselves had taught against the church. I have listened to hours and hours of broadcast called “Journey Home”. Here I found many who were of the same background as I, and who eventually converted to Catholicism. I picked up books and began to read and reread about what the Church really believed. I found many of the answers which I posed earlier in this reading.

Now I have begun my own journey to become confirmed in the Catholic Church. I am enrolled in RCIA. This was one thing I had not heard of just a few months ago. One cannot just come forward and state they were baptized, express faith in Christ by having receiving Him as Lord and Savior and become a member as in a Baptist church. There are classes that needed to be taken, Sacraments to be explained, and all the questions that I had had, are being explained once again during this RCIA.

What is very interesting, with my Biblical background, everything I have learned is coming together. Oh, that is why they do this or that. I have had many wow moments with tears as the Bible has become alive to me. 2 Tim. 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. St. Paul has so much to say in regards to His Word and the word which Paul himself has spoken as to the traditions (teachings) given from Christ himself to the Apostles who have given these same to those who came after them.

I was hoping to be confirmed into the Catholic Church this coming Easter Vigil but there are a few hurdles that I must go over. God willing sometime in 2015, I will become a Catholic.

I know this will be a shock to many of you. Many may not or will not understand. By no means am I trying to persuade anyone to become Catholic. In fact I have left much out of this statement here. If anyone has questions and would like to ask, I will try to give answers and explain as best I can. There may be things I cannot answer but will try to find those who can explain better than myself.

The Baptist church/es, the Christian camps etc. have all been a catalyst to where I have come to this point. They have lead me to the Savior, I was baptized and came to know the Lord in a personal way in these fundamental evangelical churches. There are many good people in these churches, and I love them. Most all my family is part of these churches which teach the Gospel and point them to Christ.

They do teach good Christian living which is profitable to them as well as those around them. They love the Word of God and hold true to the faith. Some have even faced ridicule due to their faith and belief. The same can be said about Catholics as they too are persecuted for their faith. This statement of my faith is not to detract from my family. I have found it is hard to withstand any more against the truth I have found.

I like Paul found myself no longer able to kick against the truth I have seen. Acts.9:5-6"... Who art thou Lord? And the Lords said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutes: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do? ...."

The thing I most desire is respect. Although you may not understand I do hope this statement will help you in the end to continue to receive Mary and I as family and friends. I am sure there will be questions and I welcome good questions. As mentioned above. I will answer what I can.

Peace be with you,

Steve

Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.