

I was born the second child of a staunch Presbyterian family; father, mother, four sisters and me. From as early as I can remember our parents did not “send” their children to church, they “took” them. We did Sunday school and Church service almost every Sunday. We may have protested (more about protestation later) from time to time, but we understood we were going. It was a part of our lives. I thank God often for the father and mother he prepared for me. They were not perfect parents by the world’s standards, but they were **perfect for me**. God does not make mistakes. What does the world know?

I was baptized at the age of 13 months. Until I was about five years old, I have scant memories of life; a few places and events. When I was eight years old, we began attending St. Phillip Presbyterian Church in Hurst, TX. There were many families with children my age, but the ones that attended regularly only had girls my age. There I was in Sunday school surrounded by girls. Not the ideal situation for an eight or nine year old boy, especially a boy with four sisters! Still, I enjoyed the Bible stories, mostly from the Old Testament, that told the ancient history of the people of God. Great heroes like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and David were imperfect, yet God showed them great power and had mercy on them. Then too, we had stories from the New Testament of Jesus healing multitudes of people, teaching them to obey God and ultimately being crucified. Oh yes, He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven. Yet, the “full” meaning of all this escaped me.

When I was thirteen, it was time for Confirmation. Yes, the Presbyterians have, or had back then, a confirmation process. Eight or ten weeks meeting with the Minister to “learn” the tenets of the faith (Communicants Class), followed by a Confirmation Service. We made a profession of faith, were received into full membership and received our first Communion (sound sort of familiar to you Catholics?). I cannot tell you the complete affect first Communion had on me, but as I continued to take Communion over the years I experienced something special. I now know it was the Grace of God. I had wondered for many years why I could not “participate” in Communion and why my father, mother and others in the assembly would weep at the eating of flat bread and wine. (Yes, our Presbyterian church had WINE! It was not until much later that grape juice was offered as an alternate to wine.) I too would well-up during the Communion Service, but would be so at peace afterward.

At this point of the story I know many Catholics are screaming “What about examination of conscience? What about Reconciliation? What about receiving unworthily? What about crackers and juice? What about... What-up with dat?” Calm down already. We were taught to examine our conscience and confess our sin and sinfulness, before receiving. Did we confess to a Priest? Yes and no. We were more than welcome to approach our minister, Reverend James F. Garvin (a wonderful man of God, but not a Catholic Priest... more on this later), and discuss any manner of sin, fault or greivance.

He would assure us “in Jesus Christ you are forgiven.” Most of us confessed to *the High Priest forever of the order of Melchizedek*. You might know him as Jesus Christ.

As I transitioned from junior high to high school, my church attendance slowly declined. Eventually it was relegated to the level of holiday celebrations. There were basically two, Easter and Christmas. Two things occurred during this time that affected my attitude toward church attendance.

First, my dad had a “disagreement” with the church leadership. He was a Deacon willing to serve, but something upset him so much he resigned and rarely attended church the remainder of his life. I know nothing of the details and never asked.

Second, I became self absorbed. I focused on working, football, friends with little or no inclination toward spiritual development, smoking, drinking and girls. Imagine that, smoking and drinking coexisting with football. Sure, many players on my high school team smoked and drank their way through the season. Young bodies can take a lot of abuse and recover quickly. Probably still happens today with the added influence of drugs. Girls? Although I liked girls, I never had success in this department. I was terrified of them. I feared rejection and thought I had nothing to offer. I had three dates in three years of high school. One of those the girl asked me, but I thought she was motivated by her recent breakup with another guy. Enough about this. In my senior year I quit football half way through the season and worked (money was important to me) while moving on to a more “important” activity, experimenting with drugs.

I graduated from high school and began to work construction. I had plenty of money, but wanted more. What better way than to sell pot. I was not the prime North Texas Distributor, but sold it none the less. This was a dark period in my life. I lived for money and the next high. I worked all day, partied all night, got up the next day and repeated the cycle. This lasted for about three years.

Then it happened. The night I returned to my apartment after a 1,000 mile motorcycle trip, a beautiful young maiden entered my life. What a vision of loveliness. God had placed a **Jewel** (Julie) in front of me to bring some light to the darkness. I wanted desperately to ask her for a date, but was afraid of rejection. For weeks I asked our mutual friends how she felt about me and if she would accept a call from me (I thought she was “dating” one of them). They assured me she would like to hear from me. I gathered up the courage and made the call, and a date. From that point forward I spent as much time as I could with her. The unfortunate thing is I pulled her down to my level. After four months that included premarital sex and subsequent pregnancy, we were married. Lest you think we were “forced”, I actually decided to ask her and miracle of miracles she said yes.

The morning of the wedding I was extremely unsettled and spoke to my mother about it. She said, "Why don't you go to the church and pray." I do not know what I expected her to say, but pray about it was not it. Regardless, I went. I entered the sanctuary (this was before the now all too common auditorium), chose a pew close to the alter (yes we had an *altar table* in my Presbyterian church), and began to pray. Although I had not practiced prayer, other than the *Our Father*, I poured forth my heart to God. When I ran out of words, I sat there for some time wondering if I had even reached the ears of God. The Lord did hear me, and the most amazing peace came over me. Later that day we said our vows and began a new life as Mr. & Mrs.

Life came at us hard and fast. We had our first child Jeanine. She was baptized in St. Phillip Presbyterian and we continued the holiday tradition, Christmas and Easter. I changed jobs a few times and was focused on providing for my new family. Three years after Jeanine, Joshua came. Again, we had him baptized in St Phillip. I still had no desire to develop spiritually, nor was I concerned for my family's spiritual condition. But, things would soon change.

One day I noticed Jewels was watching one of those "TV preachers", Pat Robertson. She tried to explain to me the "encounter" she had with The Lord. Words like *born again* and *saved* were not foreign to me, but they were reserved for the "religious fanatics" not for the "Frozen Chosen" Presbyterians. Unfortunately, I allowed her to explore this new fangled religion on her own. I was a busy man. I had a full-time job and many other odd jobs to make extra money. *My God* demanded hard work. Then it happened again.

Jewels had been talking with an old family friend, Betty. She and her husband Dick had invited us to their house in Dallas for an overnight stay. We showed up with two kids, an appetite and a jug of wine. Jewels and Betty discussed all manner of religion, while Dick and I killed the jug and solved the world's problems. The next morning, Easter Sunday, Jewels, Betty, the kids and I went to church, a new mega-church in Farmer's Branch, TX. Dick had no time for this nonsense; you see, he was a cradle Catholic and rarely attended Mass. After a short drive, we entered the gigantic auditorium, found some seats, and settled in for the Easter service, or should I say entertainment. First, Pastor Bob Tilton, followed by "reformed and saved" Little Richard (yes, *the* Little Richard) and finally a man named Norvel Hayes. He presented the "Pentecostal" gospel of Jesus Christ. I listened intently. At the end Mr. Hayes announced the "altar call". Altar call? Where was the altar? The only thing I saw was a stage and some couches. Must be part of the new fangled religion. As some folks made their way forward I waited in silence thinking of how hungry I was. Then something happened. I apparently had received some sort of "enlightenment". Where did that come from? Should I stay, or should I go forward. The conflict raged in my mind. I was Frozen Chosen!

Then, a well placed elbow to my ribs had me in the aisle (I have this thing about aisle seats. They are a must for me.) The Jewels from God had forced me to confront God. I shuffled down the aisle to the stage, I mean "altar". There Mr. Hayes led us in the "sinner's prayer" and prayed over us. No magic. No bright light. After a while the hunger pangs returned and I had to find my way back to the family. There were high fives all around, but I was hungry. Let us go and be filled. In the parking lot Betty was explaining healing. For whatever reason I mentioned a knot on my wrist that would come and go throughout my life. It was painful when it appeared and it was present that morning. She slammed the car in park, grabbed my wrist and began to pray. I was appreciative, but I needed to eat. Jewels, the kids and I returned to our home later that afternoon.

The next morning I awoke and readied myself for work. As I went through my morning routine, I noticed the knot on the wrist was gone. I had full range of motion and no pain. This was not completely unusual; however, it had never disappeared that quickly. I was just happy the pain was gone and expected it to return some day. It never has returned. Praise God.

Within a few days Jewels purchased a pocket New Testament for me to read at work during lunch. The first day I opened it I devoured verse after verse. My coworkers were amazed that I could not put it down. The Scriptures came alive and I began the painfully slow process of conversion. I was starting to grasp a fuller meaning of crucifixion, death and resurrection.

We began attending an Assembly of God church in Cleburne, TX. There were some wonderful Christian people there. We did not concern ourselves with doctrinal issues and theology, we had Christ! The importance of doctrine and theology would be learned much later. Fellowship and worship with other professing Christians was comforting.

After two years, we believed the Lord was calling us into a vastly different phase of life. After much prayer and discussion, we sold all our worldly goods, save a few, and moved to south Texas, Kingsville that is. There I attended college working toward a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Jewels worked ten hours a day, 6 days a week. I carried a full load of classes year round and raised the kids. We had "no time" for church, although we did visit a few. God was put on the back burner after having called us to endure this phase; however, He never failed to provide our needs.

Three and a half years later we moved to Waco, TX where I was once again gainfully employed as a rocket motor designer. God had blessed us with a good job and we experienced the fruits of our labor during the college years. Again, we visited a few churches, but were not truly seeking fellowship with Christians. We wandered through life for three years in Waco and found ourselves dissatisfied and wanting a change.

I was offered a job in Huntsville, Alabama as a rocket motor Project Engineer. We purchased our first and only “new” house. We had owned others, but this one was built for us. Several new friends came into our lives. They were good people, but most of them were not regular church attendees. Jewels seriously desired spiritual development and I was content to ride what I call “the velvet lined rut.” She suggested we visit an Assembly of God church a few miles from our house and I agreed. We attended regularly for about a year. One Sunday morning during the opening praise & worship session, the Lord clearly spoke to my heart saying, “Join this church.” I told Jewels after the service and she said, if I was sure, we should speak to the pastor. We spoke. We joined and began an interesting phase of our spiritual journey.

We became very involved in many aspects of the church. Jeanine and Josh became involved in all youth activities. Jewels and I led Children’s Church and helped with other youth activities. I was elected to the Board of Trustees. It seemed we were at the church more than we were at home and we loved it. Then, it began to unravel. We discovered how mean and cruel some “Christians” can be. I will spare you the details, but bearing false witness and theft were involved. People accused me of using my position as a Trustee to take control of the church! I was astounded and resigned. We left the church and sought a short period of reflection. A few visits to a Presbyterian church did little to heal the wounds we suffered at the hands of “Christians.” Shortly after, we moved to a new job in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania was new and exciting, but from the very beginning we searched for a church. A few Assemblies of God were visited, but nothing clicked. Jewels had been reading about the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). After several visits we were encouraged to study “church history” with one of the Elders. The “history” basically started in 1500 AD. Imagine that? Well the more studying we did, the more confused we became. What is this Calvinist understanding of predestination? What was this Calvinist theology? I did not get this at St Phillip. Why was the minister so anti Catholic? Well, he had grown up in a Catholic family, but something had turned him against Catholicism. He was firmly convinced the Pope was the antichrist and all Roman Catholics were following him to hell. Imagine that? In all my years in the Presbyterian Church I had never experienced such a prejudice. Heck, my parents allowed me to occasionally attend Mass with the Catholic family that lived behind us. The only derogatory (if you can call it that) thing they ever said about Catholicism was “They are the people that have a lot of kids.” My parents said that? With five kids? Kind of funny, huh?

After two years attending that church we decided to leave. We just could not subscribe to the Calvinist theology. There were some good people there, but we just did not understand the teaching. I felt many of folks there thought they were the only ones having the “keys to the Kingdom” and unless we joined, our souls would be in serious jeopardy. The one thing the experience taught us was there is more to church history

than 1500 AD to 2000 AD. So, off we went searching for another Assemblies of God. Remember, that was the first church experience following our “real awakening” to the Gospel and we had spent several years in that environment. Two more years in two different Assemblies churches and my job ended. The search for another job landed us back in Texas in the small town of Bellville.

The search was on again. First, we visited a couple of Assemblies churches; one in Bellville and one 17 miles up the road in Brenham (home to Blue Bell Ice Cream). We stayed at the one in Brenham for quite some time, not because of the people, preaching or scenic drive, but because we could go to a real good Mexican buffet after church (that is my opinion). Next we moved on to a non denominational group meeting in a private residence. Again all were good Christian folks, but something was missing. I was struggling with how the “preacher”, a full time pest control man, got his credentials to preach. Where, and by whom, was he ordained? Don’t get me wrong, he was a good Christian man and preached within the orthodoxy of mainline Protestantism, but by what authority (more on this later)? Finally, we visited a Lutheran Church, Baptist Church, Cowboy Church and then a Bible Church. Guess what? We moved again.

Our next stop was, and still is, Magnolia, Arkansas. This is where it gets interesting. After 25 years of wandering in the desert, we were still searching for the “Promised Land”. Let me tell you, this is a Baptist town. There are no less than 25 Baptist Churches within a 20 minute drive of our house. Well, we ignored them for a couple of years and visited an Assemblies church (definitely a heavy spiritual struggle there) and a non denominational church. Finally, we gave the Baptists a chance. Everywhere we attended there were many good Christian people, but I just could not understand where some of the theology was developed, or by what authority it was delivered.

After a particularly interesting “Bible Study” on Sunday evening, I told Jewels, “I guess we should visit the Catholic Church. Maybe there we will be free from the ‘demon of alcohol’ syndrome.” Many folks at churches we visited here hold the opinion that someone who drinks alcohol, even in moderation, is on the fast track to hell. Well, I enjoy beer. I like to make beer. It tastes good with Bar-B-Q and Mexican food. I do not abuse alcohol and I can go for months without a beer, but I do not like others determining my eternal fate based on whether or not alcohol passes my lips.

For several years Jewels’ uncle and aunt had politely discussed with us the historical, theological and doctrinal background of the Catholic Church. Most of the time I listened, and then questioned certain positions or statements. The primary roadblock to going further into Catholicism was the “real presence” in the Communion bread and wine. The concept of transubstantiation was difficult for me to grasp. Also, I could not understand why we were restricted from participating in the “Communion” portion of the Mass.

After my statement about visiting the Catholic Church, Jewels began to investigate; service time, Sunday school, Bible Study, etc. I will leave that story to her. We finally had a Sunday morning set aside to attend the first Mass where we were going to “understand” what Catholics do. We were totally overwhelmed and lost! The Priest was from Nigeria and had an accent so thick you needed a chainsaw to cut it. A knife was out of the question. I had no idea what the Homily was supposed to tell me. Do not misunderstand. Father Pius was a wonderful man of God. He spoke 6 languages (I think), but he carried an accent when speaking English. From what I was told, his accent was almost nonexistent when he spoke Spanish. As I mentioned earlier, I had been allowed to attend Catholic Mass as a child, but I did not remember exactly how long Catholics were on their knees (I was younger with better knees). We did not kneel that day, but it still seemed like a long time. However, there were two things I understood; the Nicene Creed and the Our Father. Both were said every week at St. Phillip Presbyterian. My mother had taught her children “The Lord’s Prayer” as soon as we could speak, and we each said it every night before bedtime.

We discussed our first experience at Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHOM) with mixed emotions. Jewels was discouraged and I was confused, but we decided to continue attending. There are many stories of our early days at IHOM, but three key things happened. First, I trained my ears to cut through Father Pius’ Nigerian accent so as to understand the Homily and prayers, especially the Eucharistic Prayer. I discovered what a wonderful man of God he was and I love him to this day. I began to see the Liturgy as “soaked” in Scripture. Second, I began to participate, as fully as I could, in the Mass. I would kneel at the appropriate time, make the appropriate responses, and take in fully the new things. One new thing was the Gloria. What a wonderful expression of God and to God. (A side note here; I loved the older version as we sang it, but it has been slightly modified to a more “accurate” Latin-to-English translation. Still it is beautiful, but does not flow as well as the older version did for me.) Finally, we enrolled in The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). Our RCIA instructor was willing to discuss the Catechism of the Catholic Church with us, and I think it forced him to dig much deeper into the Catholic faith than he had gone before. He did his best with what few resources were available at our Parish. He was a cradle Catholic with the heart to serve, but was unable to answer some of the deep questions from us Protestants.

The second time we went through RCIA, a more comprehensive and structured lesson plan was available. About half way through the class Jewels and our daughter Jeanine decided to “join”, or “convert to”, the Catholic Faith. I remained committed to studying and discerning further. Most folks thought I was just dragging my feet, but I was still unsure of that sticking point of the “real presence” in the Eucharist. I finished year two of RCIA.

Our former instructor moved his family to Florida and a new instructor took the reins. He was always well prepared because the new Priest at our Parish brought with him an excellent RCIA program. This was much needed in our Parish and I thank Father Hart for the material and guidance it has made to all who attend. The new RCIA instructor, a cradle Catholic, was forced to dig deep into the Catechism and discovered more than he ever knew about Catholicism. An unexpected consequence of the RCIA instruction experience has changed his life. For four more years I read and listen too many of the Catholic world's premier apologists discuss all facets of the faith. I prayed during adoration. Sound funny? "What is Adoration", you ask? It is prayer and contemplation in front of the Blessed Sacrament, the Most Holy Sacrament, the Real Presence, Christ physically present. Yes, I attended adoration on several occasions; at the Catholic Charismatic Conference, at retreats and at church. I received no answer, whether God did not speak or I did not hear. This was a most frustrating time in my life. I truly sought an answer, but it escaped me. Sometimes we must rely on the measure of faith God has given us.

Then it happened. The Lord spoke to me during my morning drive to work. I listened to a talk radio show during those drives and the focus of the host is original intent of the US Constitution. To fully appreciate the Constitution's creation and purpose, one must read from the volumes of letters, notes and debate transcriptions of those who framed and ratified the document. These people are known as the founding fathers of our nation. Well, the Lord reminded me that the Church had founding fathers, and I should consider the volumes they wrote during its founding and development. I had read many things written by the Church fathers, but as many people do. I accepted what fit with *my* theology and ignored the rest. For the next several months I considered three basic things.

My Presbyterian Experience

I considered similarities between St. Phillip Presbyterian (from my childhood) and the Catholic Church. For 4-5 years I had heard the statement "Protestants do this or that" and I did not remember doing "this or that". At other times I heard "Protestants believe this or that". Again, I did not remember "this or that". As I thought back on the structure at St. Phillip, I realized some striking similarities. Hang on to your hat, it will be enlightening. Reverend Garvin (remember, I said he was not a Catholic Priest) wore vestments. Granted, they were not as elaborate as today's priest wears, but vestments none the less. He wore a black robe with collar and stole. The stole changed colors over the course of each year, and the cloths draped over the lectern and alter matched the minister's stole. Sound familiar? His daily attire was black shirt with clerical collar and black slacks. Sounds very much like a priest.

Sunday service was structured as follows:

Entrance Procession – The massive choir began at the rear of the sanctuary and proceeded up the center aisle. They continued back down the outer aisles and into the choir loft. The choir was followed by the acolytes with candle lighters in hand and Rev. Garvin last. Imagine that, candles in church! Can you find a Protestant church today that has candles burning during the worship service?

Greeting – Rev. Garvin greeted the congregation in the name of the Lord and offered up a prayer.

The Call to Worship – Rev. Garvin encouraged all to call to mind their sinful shortcomings and ask for forgiveness, in order to enter into worship. Sometimes this was a silent act and other times it was vocalized as written in the bulletin.

The Assurance of Forgiveness – Rev. Garvin would assure the faithful that in Jesus Christ we were forgiven and say “Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.” The congregation responded in kind after each.

A Reading from the Old Testament – A passage from one of the Old Testament Books was read by a Lector.

Responsorial Reading from the Psalms – A passage from one of the Psalms was read by a Lector with appropriate congregational response.

A Reading from the Epistles – A passage from one of the New Testament Epistles was read by a Lector.

A Reading from the Gospels – A passage from one of the New Testament Gospels was read by Rev. Garvin.

The Sermon – Rev. Garvin explained life application of the Scripture readings.

The Offering – Self explanatory

The Intercessory Prayer – Rev. Garvin prayed for the needs of the world.

The Benediction – Rev. Garvin pronounced a blessing (below) and sent the congregation out to live for Christ.

Jude 1:24-25(NKJV)

²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, ²⁵ To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *be* glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

The Recessional – The choir sang a song as the acolytes extinguished the candles, then the acolytes and Rev. Garvin exited down the center aisle.

All of this is a mirror of the Mass, save the Eucharistic Prayer and the receiving of Body and Blood. We did not celebrate Communion every Sunday, but when we did, it went something like this. The gifts were brought to the altar. The Rev. Garvin would position himself behind the altar and recite words eerily similar to the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass. The gifts were held aloft as the words were spoken. We were assured the Bread and Wine “representing” the Body and Blood of our Savior would give us life. We were encouraged to examine our conscience and partake in a worthy manner. The elements were distributed by Communion ministers.

As I continued to reflect on how closely the service followed the Mass, I could not help asking myself, “Where did that come from?” The answer is, before The Reformation. Originally, the reformers did not desire to wipe out all vestiges of the Catholic Church or the Mass. Rather, Martin Luther wanted the abuse of Indulgences to be addressed by the Bishops. His *Ninety-five Theses* were more of an academic challenge to doctrinal positions than an absolute challenge of authority. Whether the Bishops were too slow or Luther was too impatient, I do not know. What I do know is Pope Leo X, a dubious character at best, demanded Luther retract his writings. Nowhere do I find evidence Leo X attempted to address each academic challenge. Quite possibly he was too busy enjoying the fruits of indulgence sales where they were being accomplished and involving himself in the secular political affairs of Europe. Leo X was known for his own self-indulgence to the material good life. Luther refused to retract (rejected the Papal Authority) and Leo X excommunicated him. The unfortunate result was a sinful hardening of hearts on both sides, leading to a separation lasting 500 years. As the years have passed, more and more of the “Traditions” have been eradicated or replaced by the Protestant denominations. I am extremely thankful that Reverend Garvin was more “catholic” than anyone realized. Many of the Sacred Traditions handed down for 2,000 years were in effect outside of the Catholic Church and reflected at St Phillip Presbyterian. It afforded me the privilege of being brought up in a liturgy very close to the Church of antiquity.

The Apostolic Succession

This topic is a huge hindrance to Protestants accepting Catholicism. I think the biggest hurdle is the idea of being under “authority”. Humans, by nature, reject authority. It is at the root of our sinfulness. The first parents, Adam and Eve, rejected God’s authority and men and women have been rejecting it since that Original Sin. If we are prone to reject the authority of the Creator of the universe, how much more would we reject the

authority of another human being claiming to be the Vicar of Christ; Christ's representative on earth to guide the faithful. Why did Christ continually speak in terms of sheep and shepherds? We are like sheep! As salvation history will attest, humans need **real, present** authority to keep them from going astray. Read the Mosaic Law. Read about the Prophets and how the children of God (Israel) rejected their authority and killed them. Read about the Kings of Israel and how they rejected the Prophets and fell into great sin. Yes, God had Prophets to provide authority over the Kings! Without the presence of authority we wander into all manner of debauchery. As I see it, God left the following after the ascension of Christ:

- 1) Real, present Holy Spirit – available to all Baptized
- 2) Real, present human authority – Peter (as the first) with successors
- 3) Real Presence – Sacrament of Communion or Eucharist

Consider the following passage from Matthew:

Matthew 16:15-19 (NKJV)

¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give you the **keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth [£]will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**"

This passage has been explained by many a Protestant like this: Simon Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. And on that **confession** Christ would build His church. The keys to the Kingdom of Heaven were that believers can bind Satan and loose people from the bondage of demons. When viewed in light of Isaiah 22, there is clarity of **keys and binding and loosing**.

Isaiah 22:20-23 (NKJV)

²⁰Then it shall be in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; ²¹I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. ²²**The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open.** ²³I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.

In this passage God is promising to transfer authority (**key** of the house of David) to Eliakim. He can open and no one can shut. He can shut and no one can open. Sound like authority to you? Jesus was transferring authority to Peter to deal with sin. And how

was Peter to deal with sin? The Sacrament of Reconciliation or, as it is commonly known, Confession. It is appropriate to insert Confession here, since it is part of the “authority”. Before I entered into full communion with the Catholic Church, I was drawn to the idea Confession. Regular confessing one’s sins is a must throughout this life. Nobody is sin free for long. It is in our nature. God demands confession and repentance when we give in to our sinful nature. Without confession, one cannot be in “right standing” with God. John says:

1 John 1:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

When he says “we” he is including himself. If John needed to confess his sin, I certainly need to confess mine. Most Protestant folks would say, “I can go straight to Jesus and confess my sin.” This is very true, but I found something special in confessing to a priest. If you truly want to experience humility, confess your sins to a Catholic priest.

I was told by many that I could not participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation unless I was Catholic. I refused to accept this position. I asked our priest if he would hear my confession. He said he would ask the Bishop. Well, the Bishop said sure. I read a small pamphlet about examination of conscience and preparation for Reconciliation. I was nervous when I entered the confessional the first time. Would I remember the “word formula”? Would I chicken out? I found out there is no exact word formula. The “formula” is simply this: Examine conscience, approach in humility, admit your sins & sinfulness, perform an act of contrition (express true sorrow) and ask for forgiveness. When I was done, the priest pronounced absolution. He absolved me of my sin giving me a special peace. This is the loosing of sin on earth and loosing of sin in heaven. How can he do this? The priest has received the authority from Jesus, as in Matthew 16: 15-19, through apostolic succession; succession from Peter and the other Apostles. All bishops and priests receive the authority to act in “the person of Christ” when ordained, and loose the confessed sins of the faithful.

As I considered apostolic succession, wondered why there were so many theologies and doctrinal positions within the “Christian community”. Many years of reading Scripture brought to mind specific passages. One in particular kept returning; John 17: 20-23.

John 17:20-23 (NKJV)

²⁰“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their

word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Why did Jesus pray for unity, but there was little unity in the faithful? Unity was not meant to be unity of professed faith in Jesus Christ, as I had been taught and accepted. Unity of “profession” is a weak position when one considers the totality of Scripture. Take for instance Romans 12:4-5.

Romans 12:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Paul is leading into specific gifts given each member of the body, but the gist of these verses is many members of **one** body; **one** body in Christ. Again in I Corinthians 12:12-14 Paul speaks of many members of **one** body and **one** body in Christ. Not only that, but by **one** Spirit baptized into **one** body.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NKJV)

¹²For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? ¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*?

²⁰But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. ²¹And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, ²⁴but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, ²⁵that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Again, in Ephesians 4 oneness is the theme; **one** body, **one** Spirit, **one** hope, **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God. Christ is the head and has joined the whole body, according to His desire to effectively work and grow the body in love.

Ephesians 4:1-6 (NKJV)

¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all...¹¹And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

There is so much oneness in the New Testament, yet so much disunity in the Christian community. Why are there differing opinions concerning evil in the world within the Christian community? Why are there differing opinions about suffering in this life within the Christian community? Why are there differing opinions of the sanctity of life within the Christian community? Why are there tens of thousands of doctrinal positions and beliefs within the Christian community? Did God intend His prayer for unity to be disunity? Did God establish His **one** holy catholic and apostolic church (read the Nicene Creed accepted by many Protestant churches) to be separated? Obviously Jesus made a mistake in John 17, did he not? **No mistake was made** by the Lamb without blemish, the Perfect Sacrifice.

Finally, we have John 20:19-23 as a reinforcing of John 16:15-19.

John 20:19-23 (NKJV)

¹⁹Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." ²⁰When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²²And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

Jesus sent the disciples as the Father sent Him. He sends the disciples, with the authority to forgive or retain sins. These disciples were the very ones being used by Jesus to build his church. These were ordinary sinful (as we all are) men, but with the power to forgive or not forgive sins of the people. What an awesome responsibility, and I have no doubt that along with this power, Jesus expected the apostles to establish His church in unity. He left them with no particular or specific “structure”, but with the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and righteousness. In John 21, three times Jesus commands Peter to feed His sheep. How does one feed sheep? By leading them to green pastures. By using a rod and staff to nudge and comfort them. By watching for the predators that seek to devour them (a dead sheep cannot be fed). There is definitely an indication of Jesus’ desire to form a leadership structure in the unified church.

History is littered with facts of popes being less than holy in their duties. I pointed out one earlier in this document. The same can be said of many Protestant leaders. I will not play the game of “your leader was worst than mine”. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; me, you and all leaders secular and religious. But, the interesting fact is God has preserved the Catholic Church with unchanging doctrinal positions throughout 2,000 years. Do not think the Church will one day acquiesce and approve of sacrificing children on the altar of convenience (abortion). No, the sanctity of life will be preserved regardless of the pressure from godless heathen rulers of any stripe!

The Eucharist

Now I come to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. This was my biggest stumbling block to entering into full communion with the Catholic Church. Once the issue of apostolic succession was settled, it was *somewhat* easier to accept the “real presence” in the Eucharist. If I accepted apostolic succession, I should be able to accept the teaching and Tradition the apostles and their successors (Magisterial Office) preserved for 2,000 years.

For more than six years I sorely missed the partaking of Communion. It was a special participation in the Lord’s grace each time I received as a wandering “Presbyterian”. Many times I would contemplate attending the Presbyterian Church in order to receive Communion, but something kept me from it.

All Catholic apologists continually refer to John 6: 22 & following for the roots of the real presence.

John 6:22-31 (NKJV)

²²On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one [£]which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had

gone away alone—²³however, other boats came from Tiberius, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks—²⁴when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, “Rabbi, when did You come here?” ²⁶Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” ²⁸Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” ²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” ³⁰Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?” ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’*”

The previous day Jesus performed the miracle of loaves and fishes. Several thousand “sheep” were fed from 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fish. Jesus blessed and broke the loaves and likewise the fishes. The bread and fishes were distributed to thousands of people and when they had been satisfied, there were twelve full baskets of leftovers. After crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus launches into the “Bread of Life Discourse” of John 6: 32-58. Why did the “sheep” follow Him to the other side of the sea? They wanted more bread and fish. Jesus knew they did not come because of the miracle they witnessed, but because they wanted full bellies. He told them the bread eaten the previous day perishes, but they should work for the bread that “endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you”. Interestingly enough they asked what works they should do for God. And Jesus says the work of God is to believe in Jesus. Well, they must have a sign to believe in Him! The sign their fathers witnessed to believe in Moses was the manna from Heaven. The crowd thought Moses provided the manna. Jesus quickly sets them straight:

John 6:32-41 (NKJV)

³²Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” ³⁴Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” ³⁵And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

God gives the true bread, He (Jesus) who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world. Whoever comes to Jesus will never hunger, and believes in Him will never thirst. If you see him and believe in Him you will have everlasting life. Sounds pretty straightforward, right? Read on.

John 6:41-42 (NKJV)

⁴¹The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." ⁴²And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

The Jews complained. How could this guy claim to be from Heaven? We know Him. He is just the old carpenter's son. We know that family! He certainly is not from Heaven. As you read further, notice how Jesus points to the prophets. The prophets of the Old Testament clearly taught that those who heard and learned from God would recognize Jesus, the Messiah, when He appeared. In fact, Jews would be **drawn** by God to Jesus, if they knew the prophet's teachings.

John 6:43-58 (NKJV)

⁴³Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, '*And they shall all be taught by God.*' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." ⁵²The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us *His* flesh to eat?" ⁵³Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

Jesus goes on to say he is the bread from Heaven. The fathers ate manna and are dead, but anyone who eats of the true bread will live forever, and this true bread is His flesh! Say what? There was a quarrel. He is going to give us His flesh to eat? How can He do that? This is hard to swallow! (pun intended) I count no less than the following:

- 1) **Jesus is the Bread of Life – 4 times**
- 2) **Manna did not provide eternal life (as the Jews thought) – 3 times**
- 3) **Eat the Flesh – 5 times**

The discourse continues:

John 6:59-66 (NKJV)

⁵⁹These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. ⁶⁰Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” ⁶¹When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²*What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” ⁶⁶From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

This is a hard saying. Who can believe it? I was previously under the impression the closing words spoken by Jesus were indicating symbolic meaning – “the Spirit gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” But just now as I write this, I see a more perfect meaning in context. Jesus says the words he speaks are spirit and life, but some do not believe. Jesus knew from the beginning those who would betray Him, then once more said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” Those who are seeking Jesus, the Father will grant him to believe. Fast forward to John 13:

John 13:15-20(NKJV)

¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸“I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, *‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’* ¹⁹Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*. ²⁰Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” ²¹When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” ²²Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. ²³Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. ²⁵Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped *it*.” And having dipped the bread, He gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. ²⁷Now after the

piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."²⁸But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. ²⁹For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy *those things* we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

It is unclear whether or not Judas actually ate the "dipped" bread/morsel, or just took it and left the room. Theologians (Catholic included) are divided over this, but regardless of whether Judas ate it or took it and left, I see it like this:

- 1) Judas took it and left – he did not believe and as a result he betrayed Jesus, and then hanged himself.
- 2) Judas took, ate ***unworthily*** and then hanged himself.

Either way there is unbelief and the end result was the same. However, Peter and nine others took, ate ***worthily*** and when they betrayed Jesus (yes, they did by denial), they repented and were restored because they believed. Do not think I have miscounted. John did not deny the Christ. We can know from Scripture John was at the foot of the cross with The Blessed Virgin! (She is *the new Mother of all the living in Christ*. Suffice it to say, there is not enough space in this document to expand, but Eve was the mother of all creation and Mary is the mother of all the new born in Christ. I leave it to you to study further. Think in terms of: the **Divinity** of Christ, Mary as **Divinity's** mother and **Divinity's** purpose.)

Lest you think this is a symbolic action and worthiness is not required, I refer you to Paul's words in I Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 11:23-30 (NKJV)

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. ²⁷Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

If you eat and drink unworthily by not **discerning** the Lord's body, you eat and drink judgment upon yourself. Paul says some are weak, some are sick and some are dead because of unworthy participation!

I came to the point of decision. There are times when reason must yield to faith. This is not to say reason is unimportant. Faith and reason are in harmony. All doctrinal positions were developed using faith AND reason. Scripture admonishes us to give reasons for the hope that is in us.

1 Peter 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

From the earliest days of the Church, there are preserved various writings composed by what are termed *The Fathers of the Church*. Many Protestant theologians refer to these men and their documents. Developed in the writings are basics of the Christian faith; the Trinity, Deity of Christ, sacramental worship, real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For example, one of the very earliest, Didache, was written about 100 A.D. and contains the basic structure of the Mass, instruction on faith & morals, basic church government, baptism and the resurrection. These writings formed the basis of Catholic doctrine. Other writings detail how the Romans held a negative view of Christianity because of the Eucharist. Early Christians professed consuming the **Body, Blood, Soul & Divinity** of our Lord. Romans considered them cannibals, part of the reason Christians were martyred. Rather than deny the real presence in the Eucharist, they were willing to die! Later writings develop the doctrine of Transubstantiation – how the elements of bread and wine are changed into the actual substance of the flesh & blood of Christ, but “hidden” by remaining bread & wine to the partaker's senses. This is a mystery of the Faith, the central mystery. Not all the fathers were in total agreement in everything they wrote, but from that body of work, produced over hundreds of years, the Magisterial Teaching Body of the church has defined, confirmed and preserved the doctrinal positions/beliefs of Christ's Church. This is referred to as the “Deposit of Faith”. Where the fathers had differences among themselves, or the Church, they yielded to the Magisterium. By the way, the Magisterium is not just the current Pope Francis and College of Cardinals. It is to sum total of all popes, cardinals and bishops throughout the past 2,000 years. Then the Great Schism of the eleventh century divided the Catholic Church into East & West (actually this was brewing for 600-700 years). There was no debate over Eucharistic real presence, but basically a disagreement over where the “authority” resided; Rome or Constantinople. By the way, another Leo, the IX, was involved. His legacy fared better than Leo X, because he was canonized a Saint.

There were good popes and bad popes. There were good cardinals and bad cardinals. There were good Bishops and bad bishops. There were good priests and bad priests. Christ established His Church using fallible humans and gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth and righteousness. Dissension and struggle have been a part of the 2,000 year history, but Christ has protected the Deposit of Faith throughout that time. The Reformation produced two strains of Christianity – the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism. The Catholic Church has remained essentially the same since antiquity, save some corrections of abuse existing at the time of the Reformation. Protestantism had produced 30,000 – 40,000 “denominational” and “non-denominational” sects. Each has its own method of arriving at doctrinal positions as the cultures, people, leaders or governments may demand. If changes are not made, they divide again. Is that unity?

I worked through history, Scripture and Tradition of the Catholic Church and moved forward in faith to enter into full communion. I had worked through the three areas described above, yet there was a lingering hesitancy. I wanted to have a discussion with our new priest, Father Tony. Jewels suggested we invite him to the Chicken Coop for supper and I could have a discussion with him after we ate. We ate and Jewels excused herself so Father and I could do our business.

I began with a plan prepared over the preceding weeks. I knew where I would end up and the final two or three questions I would present to Father Tony. I **was not** planning to say I want to enter the Church. Well, you know what they say: If you want to make God laugh, make your own plans. As I spoke of issues religious, I found myself saying things I had not prepared to say. Needless to say, God had thwarted my plan and inserted His. After what seemed to be an eternity, Father Tony said, “Sounds to me like you are Catholic and ready to enter the Church.” That is the amazing thing – I was more Catholic than I thought! I still hesitated in committing to Confirmation. I asked if I could **enter** as soon as possible and not wait until the Easter Vigil, as is customary for the Catechumens. He said the Bishop would need to approve entrance apart from the Easter Vigil. Bishop Taylor needed to know I had completed RCIA. I left my fate in the hands of the Bishop and we went to tell Jewels. Now, Jewels was quite upset that she was not the first to be told. I tried to explain my plan vs. God’s plan to no avail (over the following weeks she understood, I think).

Bishop Taylor was out of the country on a mission trip, but Father emailed the request, assuring the Bishop I had in fact completed at least six years of RCIA. Bishop Taylor consented, but I envision him laughing to himself first (six years??). I was surprised and thankful. Jewels was happy, but not satisfied. She desired I wait until Easter Vigil so our daughter Jeanine could witness the event. She had entered The Holy Angels Convent in Jonesboro, AR and was discerning a life consecrated to our Lord. She would not be able to leave the Convent until after Easter. I could not wait to receive communion.

Jewels' brain went into high gear and she devised a plan to have my Confirmation and First Communion at the Holy Angels Chapel. The problem with this plan was twofold. First, Bishop Taylor would once again have to approve of this venue. Second, the sisters at Holy Angels would have to approve. They were in the midst of celebrating 125 years in Arkansas. Visitors were coming and going and the sisters were very busy. They also had a feast day planned, Feast of The Holy Angels.

Bishop Taylor provided his approval, but Jewels had not completed "negotiations" with the sisters. She had begun the process by contacting Sister Ann Marie the Novitiate Mistress. Sister Ann Marie was out of town, but the sister on the phone suggested Jewels speak with the committee chair planning the feast day activities. That sister was thrilled at the possibility, but she could not make the decision. Jewels was then referred to the Convent Prioress, Sister Lillian Marie, who thought it was a great idea and approved, but she did not commit without the celebration committee chair's concurrence. Back to the chair Jewels went, but she said she could not make that decision. The committee members would need to approve! Well, finally the sisters were in one accord. We desired to surprise Jeanine with the "real" reason for attending the Feast of The Holy Angels. We said we were just coming to help celebrate. The day was set.

Early (5:00) on the morning of October 2, 2012, we set out for Jonesboro. Two cars; one containing me, Father Tony and David my sponsor, the other containing Jewels, Susana, and Dalene. Just over five hours later we were in Holy Angels Convent, about 45 minutes prior to the start of Mass for the Feast of The Holy Angels. Jeanine was excited to see us, but unaware of what would transpire at the Mass.

The celebration of Holy Angels sisters being in Arkansas for 125 years was continuous goings-on throughout the fall and many visitors were in and out to help celebrate. We were unaware of just who was visiting that particular day. We expected to have the sisters, a few visitors from the area and us six sojourners at Mass.

There was a Bishop from India on sabbatical and travelling around the states. Bishop Moses had heard of the Convent's celebration and decided to visit. How fortuitous for me. I would have a Bishop concelebrating with Father Tony as I entered into "full communion" with the Catholic Church, and from India at that. Bishop Moses had another priest travelling with him. Imagine that, three priests celebrating at my Confirmation. A few minutes before the beginning of Mass we found out there were three other priests visiting, and of course the Chaplain at Holy Angels – 7 priests at my confirmation, a perfect number. The perfect starting lineup:

Bishop Moses, Father Tony, Father Sammy, Father Leonard, Father Udo, Father Mike, Father Vu.

The chapel was full of visitors and I was amazed at such a cloud of witnesses for my entrance. I was overwhelmed when all seven priests prayed for my continued formation and evoked guidance of the Holy Spirit. The moment came for my first full **Eucharistic** communion. It was all I had hoped for and I have no reservations about my decision. It is good to be Home.