

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Matt Gibson. I am a 33 year old. I am married to Melanie Magoto from Russia, Ohio. We have two little girls, Ava & Therese. We are expecting our third child in April. Melanie is actually due on Good Friday. If it is a boy, his name will be Joseph Gerard or if it is a girl Catherine Faustina. I grew up in the little town of Yorkshire, OH, which is about 15 minutes away from Russia. I graduated from Versailles High School in 1996. I went to Wright State University for a while and then eventually graduated from Sinclair Community College, with an associates degree. I moved to Russia about 9 years right before I got married in July of 2003.

I am a member of the St. Remy Catholic Church in Russia. I am religion teacher for juniors. I am a 4th Degree member of the Knights of Columbus, and I currently am Grand Knight of the St. Remy Knights of Columbus council. I also help the parish by being a mass server on Saturday mornings. Most importantly, I am here today to talk to you about my journey with God over these last 33 years and how I found myself in the Catholic Church.

I was raised up in a family of Lutheran faith. My family and I would attend Sunday school and worship almost every Sunday. I participated in the kid's choir, I was a server. I also was president of our youth group at St. Paul Lutheran Church just outside North Star, Ohio. My grandpa was a faithful man, and actually two of his brother (my great-uncles) were Lutheran Pastors. I believe my mom thought I would grow up and one day follow in their footsteps.

I was very proud of my Lutheran faith. I would argue with my Catholic friends till I was blue in the face. I remember being invited to go to Mass with one of my Catholic friends. I went and remember sitting there thinking what am I doing here. What is this "Hail Mary" that they kept repeating in prayer before Mass started. I sat during the whole Mass, not saying a word, with this big chip on my shoulder thinking they got it all wrong.

During my high school years, I thought I was a good kid. I didn't go out and party. I didn't drink. I didn't do any drugs. I was co-captain of the baseball team. I was on the National Honor Society. I studied hard and just didn't get into any trouble. I wanted to save my virginity for marriage. The future was bright.

I started dating. I had a steady girlfriend. I really thought I loved her. We did everything together. As our relationship started to get deeper, the temptation for us to engage in pre-marital sex got stronger. So strong that we got to the point that we just gave in. Throughout the next eight years this became a major problem for me. I started to live a very unchaste life. Looking back, I realize now that I really didn't love her, but I was enslaved to the sin of premarital sex and an unchaste lifestyle. This downward spiral led me to living a lifestyle that was very destructive. When I was in college, and my girlfriend and I went separate ways, I started to drink alcohol heavily. Every day.

I started to smoke pot, and experiment in other drugs as well. I decided that I wanted to be the party animal, to be the cool guy. I partied so much that after 2 years of college at Wright State, I quit and went to work full time so that I had more money to party on. I jumped from relationship to relationship, from girl to girl, not caring if I hurt them. All I cared about was taking care of my wants and desires. I spent most of my nights in bars, and I was several thousands of dollars in debt.

During this time, my parents got divorced, which added to the misery. I got to the point where I was unemployed for two months because I was in such a deep depression, and I started to have suicidal thoughts. I knew this downward spiral would come to an end, but I was afraid it would be at the cost of my life. There were many nights of rage and sorrow, and a lot of soul searching because I felt like I lost mine. All I can say is that I was getting close to hitting rock bottom face first.

When you are at the bottom, only one person can go deeper and lift you up. The Good Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ was waiting for me. Waiting for me to reach for him. He sent into my life at that time an angel, and that angel is my wife Melanie. For me it was love at first sight. She was beautiful, kind, friendly. She listened to me and all my troubles. She was from a good family. I just felt better when I was around her. I wanted to be a better man for her. After 3 years of dating, we got married at St. Remy's. We talked many times about our different faiths, and I just told her not to push me to become Catholic, it would have to be something that would have to be in my heart to do. To be honest, I had no intentions of becoming Catholic. On the other hand, I really didn't feel like I was filling the void in my heart in the Lutheran faith. I kept trying to fill that void with worldly things, and that wasn't working. Since the Lutheran church I grew up in was 20 some minutes away, I would go get my "God" time with my wife at Mass. It was closer and I could spend more time with wife.

As I sat there in the pews for the next month or so, I started to feel something changing in my heart. Even though I still sat there and really didn't participate in the Mass, I started to pay attention during Consecration and Holy Communion. I would watch my wife go up and receive Our Lord, and I started to feel this desire, this pull at my heart, to want to join her. Something in my soul desired to receive the Eucharist. God was calling me. And like a great grace from heaven, I started my journey home, my journey into the Catholic Church.

I decided to tell Melanie and her family that I wanted to become Catholic. When I told them, I think their mouths about hit the floor. Here is a man a few years back would have said that he was anti-Catholic, didn't want anything to do with it. Now I was ready to learn what the Catholic Church was all about. I didn't find out till later that her family was praying for me to become Catholic. I met with Father Amberger about this and he had me attend a Catechism class that was being taught by an actual theologian who now teaches in a seminary, Dr. Mike Therrian.

I went into that class with an open mind and an open heart. I learned so many new and wonderful things about life, myself, and most importantly, my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Never in my life did anything make more sense to me than the Catholic Faith. All my misconceptions about Catholicism were thrown out the window. I realized that I grew up knowing nothing about the saints, the Sacraments like Confession, Mary our dear mother whom I love very much. I never knew anything about the Pope and Church History. The martyrs, the rosary. There is so much more I didn't know about. I realized that The Catholic Church is our Lord's Church and it is so very beautiful. And the most beautiful part is that I get to adore and worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the True Presence of the Eucharist.

I would have never called myself a spiritual or prophetic in anyway before I became Catholic. The only thing is that I always had this thought in the back of my head that I wouldn't make it to the age of 25. I didn't know why, I just did. I just felt like something was going to happen. Well, at the age of 25, I did die. I died to the world and the way I was living my life, and I decided to live it the way the Lord wants me to live it. I made Jesus the center of my life. My sponsor during Confirmation, Dave Borchers, gave me some really good advice. He told me that there comes a time when you must stop living your life the way you want to and the way the world wants you to, and start living it the way the Lord wants you to. God wants you to be happy not just in this life, but most importantly in the life to come.

On April 10th, 2004, I was confirmed into the Catholic Church. That day, the day I was confirmed, I consider the greatest day of my life. I received the Eucharist for the first time in my life. I can't emphasize enough how awesome it is to me to receive the Eucharist. I had my first confession, and boy was it a long one. But man, the weight of sin just fell off. As I look back on that day, I realized that like the Prodigal Son, I have finally come home. The Good Shepherd went out and found his lost sheep.

My heavenly Father was waiting for me with a feast at the Altar, his very own son, Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. I stand before you today a humbled man, I am a sinner, and I am not worthy to stand in the presence of God, but he welcomes me with open arms. I find my refuge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I find my comfort in the arms of his mother and my mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary (if any human knew the fruits of the Holy Spirit it would be our blessed mother), and today I am consecrated to her through the MI or Militia Immaculata consecration by St. Maximillian Kolbe. I look back and I see that the day I was confirmed was the start of a whole new life, a new life in the spirit. I didn't do this all on my own. I had the Holy Spirit doing great things in my life.

I have been Catholic for about 8 years now. I have seen so many good things happen in my life. I have seen my marriage get better because of my wife and I trying to keep God at the center of our marriage. I have been blessed with beautiful children. They teach me so much about myself and really how God loves me. I remember one time thinking about my daughters and how much I love them and would do anything for them, and then hearing that small voice tell me that Matt, that is how I look at you. I have been blessed with great friends that care about their faith also, and they help me stay accountable for my own faith.

I remember partaking in my first Life in the Spirit Seminar. I really experience some great things in that retreat, but the thing that stuck out most to me was experiencing the great awesome power of God and the peace it brought to my soul. I have had my share of crosses to pair. It took us three years of trying to get pregnant before we had our first child, but the great blessing we receive in our children, I would do it all over again. We found out that we were pregnant on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and that is why we name our first child Ava Maria (like Ave Maria) after our blessed Mother. I try to soak up any opportunity I can to grow deeper in my faith and maybe help others do the same and that is why I am here tonight.

I hope that my story will help you realize how very important your Catholic Faith is, and how blessed you are to be Catholic. You belong to a Church that is the spouse of our Lord. You belong to the Church that our Lord started some 2000 years ago, and is still the same today. You get to adore and worship and receive our Lord True Presence in the Eucharist. No other religion or Christian denomination can say that. With the Holy Spirit as your guide, the saints as your companions, Mary as your mother, and Jesus as our savior and King, how can we go wrong