

Why I Became A Catholic

By Alan Harris written 2008

Something life changing happened to me and people still don't know what to say about it. Without knowing all that they're really thinking, I have chosen to sum up my feelings and thoughts by sharing:

Why I became a Catholic

My wife and I began our marriage over twenty-five years ago at about the same place spiritually. We came from Protestant families. I was raised Methodist. Lori was raised Holiness. Both of us were bored with church and eventually came alive in the spirit as young adults. God saw that we each attended discipleship training schools before eventually meeting in the early 80's.

We'd spent twenty-five years attending church together. We liked some churches, merely visited some and joined a few. We were always missing something we couldn't place our finger on.

First of all, we must have been: "Lookin for God in all the wrong places."

We were kind of like Elijah, the prophet. Elijah was sent up the mountain and he was looking for the Lord. 1Kings 19:11-12 says,

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire....

We wondered if;

"the answer my friend (was) Blowing in the Wind?"

Would the ideal church have friendly members breezing up to meet us and wild noisy visiting breaks during the service? Surely we needed good, upbeat modern music from a loud, tight professional concert-type rock band. When the wind of God blew in the perfect church, would people be blown over in the spirit? Would that pleasant wind sweep your babies to children's church and your teenagers to youth group so you wouldn't have to fool with them? Now that's a God experience!

Perhaps, like Elijah, we looked for God where there was —

"A whole lotta shaking going on:"

an earthquake with evidence of humility and brokenness, members who let you see through the cracks in their outer "Hi, how are you" shell to the real struggling person underneath, humility that leads a pastor to want to come to your house to share a meal with your family and be with you. We looked for an earthquake under the pulpit that broke up those empty messages and instead brought daily living and discipleship. If a church had been affected by the Lord's earthquake, they would fall on their faces in prayer. You would see altar call salvations and deliverance from drugs and addictions. These shaken believers would have a heart for the nations and would be witnesses and missionaries. That's definitely God!

Maybe we needed God to —

"come and light my fire."

We needed the gifts of the Holy Ghost and fire. We needed a church so on fire you could feel it when you walked in the room. The joy of the Holy Spirit would be there with tongues of fire, prophesy and healing. Now that must be God!

If all the characteristics I mentioned are usually the signs of a happening church, then why can I stand in a contemporary service that's hitting on all eight cylinders but something is still missing?

So many churches we've been in we've felt out of place or more spiritually in tune than most of the people.

Lets go back to Elijah in verses 12-13

and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What do-est thou here, Elijah?

Second, we gathered the “courage to change.”

When we moved to Texas in 2004 our marriage was a wreck I had a very bitter and hurt wife who hated me. She says this drove her to investigate the Catholic church and I was puzzled. I've learned Catholics are big on the word “mystery.” My wife's journey toward Catholicism was a mystery in itself. It had such an immediate calming effect on her that when an old friend of ours said “Alan how can you allow your wife to be out of submission,” I responded with this. “She has to stand before God on her own. Besides, I might not care if she became Muslim if I thought it would improve our relationship.”

When Lori started attending Mass and classes to begin the confirmation process, called RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) I watched quietly and wondered. Next my family accompanied Mom to her Catholic Church. The people were kind and the priest was warm. There was a sincerity in him and a reverence I had not seen in a long time.

I was curious about this Mary stuff and praying the Rosary – so I got a thick book on the Rosary – and it began to make sense. I started praying it and I started to get it. Praying the Rosary pulled me into deep meditation and pondering of the mysteries of the Gospel. I looked at how Jesus could have come, lived and left the way he did. I pondered my own mortality and that of my earthly father – who died as I began my Catholic quest. Through the activities of including Christ in my life (that's what liturgy means), I have put myself in a more reverent place than I have ever been.

About six months into Lori's one year of preparation for confirmation, I joined her on Wednesday nights for RCIA class and admitted I longed for both of us to be Catholic. I could hear a voice say “What do-est thou here, Alan?”

What does the Catholic Church have that my other churches didn't?

1. Unified kneeling
2. The Lord's Prayer
3. Various creeds
4. Responsive reading
5. Special sung responses
6. A Priest that follows a long progression from Peter by the laying on of hands.
7. The acknowledging of unworthiness to take communion by the crossing of arms on the chest.

8. Greeting and saying good-bye to Jesus by crossing ourselves.
9. Holy water at the back to renew your baptismal vows
10. A charismatic priest saying don't you dare come up and ask Jesus to heal you if you have unconfessed sin.
11. Children are not sent away to "age appropriate activities"

But that is not where the voice came from.

Lastly, Finding the still small voice

It was from Christ's quiet presence in the Eucharist. It's the small tabernacle with the Holy Spirit in it. Jesus is in the building. Song of Solomon 2:14 says: "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff. Let me see you. Let me hear your voice."

Why did I become Catholic? I became Catholic because there's a deeper place to find here. There is a secret place that Protestants viewing only from the surface are unaware of and many Catholics (I wonder what percent) have never been to.

I want to be a Catholic because God has charged me to minister to cradle Catholics - including priests - as to what real Catholicism is - with knowing God in the middle of it. The Catholic Church does have the still small voice, if you'll listen for it. Once you're listening to the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist, I believe there's a place for the wind, the earthquake and the fire too. You just have to start with that presence.

I want to be a thinking Catholic, not a drone Catholic. Why do Catholic churches appear dead? There's a soberness based on the presence of the Holy Spirit. You don't go because of what's cool. I always have. My devotion to meditate on the mysteries of the Gospel drew me closer to the Holy Spirit and further from my flesh. It gave me a measured way to seek God and intensely focus my mind of the life of Christ from the moment of his conception. I simply ask Mary to pray for me. She is a pure woman. I believe God hears her prayers.

I became Catholic because of the intense humble devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ I experience myself. There is a sincerity that can be found here. I don't know how many have it. There's joyful fellowship, sure, but in the worship of the Lord there is a connection. There are declarations and oaths. We declare to one another that we come in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We commit all activities to the Triune God. When I'm walking in his ways and in His name I feel everything will be safe for me even if I run out of time or forget to do something.

The Catholic experience has unified my marriage. My wife hated me, I didn't know if she loved me and I never heard her pray anymore like the missionary I married. Hearing her pray now I see that wild YWAM girl all over again. It took the Catholic Church to do it. Who would have thought it?

We've been rebels of the faith for over twenty-five years since we dedicated our union to "run to the battle." Now there's a new strength in our relationship - we know we are both seeking the deep things of God. Through the sacraments we are re-presenting Christ into our lives.

Remember the wedding at Cana? When they ran out of wine and Jesus did his first miracle, the guests said "they saved the best wine for last." That's what the Catholic Church is for Lori and I. God saved the best stuff

to give us after we used up all the other bottles, but it's a private consumption. Being a Catholic is like the wine we keep in our closet for our movie nights. It's our private and intimate thrill.

I rejoice to see my marriage empowered by locking us in place in the Catholic Church. We feel like a clip of ammo being slid into a gun – we just snapped into the spot molded for us and waited for the “click.” And what a powerful click! Now we're ready for God to shoot us out of that Catholic Gun! Whooh!

My own prayer and devotion to God has become more regular and serious. I want my children to bleed with Christ, so I want to hemorrhage with Him for their sake. I see that happening through the Liturgy. This is the most focused I've ever been

- On the life of Christ and how it relates to me.
- On death and resurrection
- On heaven

It made the death of my father merely a wonder. I did not cry or grieve. I was filled with awe at the mystery of it.

After watching my final communion without the Eucharist – I sang in my heart:

“Lay hold, upon the good things of the Lord. And let your conversation be acceptable in the sight of the Lord. Let me be a minister of thy peace, that the world might see, the love of God in me.”

Lay Hold, by Mark Pendergrass

In Conclusion

Entering the Church makes me closer to God and pushes aside distractions. My heart and mind is more in tune with God – through prayer and meditation. I have completed my journey across the Tiber, at least across the shore. I have figured out what I've got myself into and am not ashamed to say it; I am a Catholic.

Ten year update 2018: My wife and I became full-time Youth With a Mission missionaries at the end of 2008 and now lead YWAM's Kerygma ministry in the United States. See our webpage at KerygmaUSA.com