

Innocence

Had I been asked in the summer of 2011 if I thought I would write a song inspired by the Eucharist, I'm not sure I would know what that even meant. I didn't know what was happening when I received my First Communion, and Confirmation felt like graduation. Growing up, God was a benevolent Creator, until, over time, He became more of a question who may or may not exist. I was raised "Catholic," which to my parents meant I received the Sacraments of initiation, and was expected to be a "good person." It really was by God's Grace that I am where I am now.

I was born with Muscular Dystrophy, which only became evident when I wasn't learning to crawl when I should have been. Initially, my diagnosis was terrible, and I was given five years to live. This did lead my mom to pray. When news continued to be bad, she decided to pray only to the Virgin Mary, and said she'd raise me as a "good Catholic girl" if my life was spared. Eventually, my diagnosis was changed, and I was expected to live a relatively normal life on wheels.

A normal life on wheels is basically an oxymoron. I wasn't exactly bullied in school, but I was ignored, and in some ways, I grew up fast. I had friends, but my friends had their own issues—some of them were directly bullied. I had a lot of time to think as a kid because I was alone a lot. I was agnostic by the time I was ten or so, ironically because I am a believer. I believed in things like Santa Clause for much longer than most kids, until my mom simply had to explain to me that it was made up. The trouble was that I wanted to run around with the other kids, and when this benevolent Creator God didn't heal my legs when I asked, I started to doubt. This wasn't helped by the fact that I developed epilepsy when I was eight. That was taken care of for many years by medication, until it was worsened in college.

By the time we got to high school, one of my friends had a girlfriend, and I realized boys could be more than friends. This friend was also involved in several sports, and I began to see him much less. My best friend, because of mental health problems transferred to a private school. She met new friends, and also began dating someone. At this time, Jesus was a distant historical figure to me, and I had no idea He even could be a friend.

To fill this empty space I was feeling, I turned to music. I have always loved music, ever since I was very young. It must have been for my brother's birthday in the Summer between middle and high school that we got the game Guitar Hero. When I was very young, I had taken piano lessons, but none of the music I loved was classical, or piano-based. I had liked the idea of learning to play guitar, but I can't turn my hands over, and assumed I wouldn't be able to. That was until I learned to play the game upside-down. I decided I'd try to learn to play a real guitar that way. I got a cheap guitar for Christmas, and started taking lessons in January. A significant part of my first lesson was trying to figure out a way for me to hold the guitar so that I might be able to play more or less normally. When that didn't work, my teacher, who owned and taught at Alpha Omega Music Studios, agreed to teach me upside-down.

My teacher was young, fun, really nice, and cool. After about a year of taking lessons with him, during which time I'd also started writing my own songs, I asked where he'd got the name for the studio. He said that the name honors God—Alpha Omega—and expresses that they do everything from teach beginners to produce professional artists. This confused me. My only experience of Christianity to that point was what I had got from my parish. Everyone there was old, boring, dorky, judgmental, or some combination of the four. My teacher and I didn't talk about God after that, but this stayed in the back of my mind.

Between my Junior and Senior year of high school, I spent time looking for a college I could commute to, and I began experiencing deep loneliness, that I think had been growing without my notice until then. When I realized that boys could be more than friends, I realized that as “the kid on wheels,” I had about a zero percent chance of ever having a boyfriend. As a kid, I had the notion that a woman was *supposed* to fall in love, and that she was a loser if she didn’t. I think at the time I somewhat idolized romantic love, and couldn’t have it. I even had an image of the boy I was supposed to fall in love with in my head, and the odd thing was, that when I thought about him, I saw him praying.

Like any teenager with a guitar, I wanted to be a “rock star,” but I also knew I needed a backup plan, so I applied to two schools—Berklee College of Music, and Gordon College. I had visited other schools, but none felt “right” to me somehow. When I visited Gordon, though, everyone I talked to was incredibly nice, and incredibly happy—a kind of happy I hadn’t seen before. I could tell they had something that I didn’t, and whatever it was, I wanted it. I knew Gordon was a Christian school, but that didn’t bother me. I had no problem with Christians. I just didn’t have any authentic relationship with any, with the exception of my guitar teacher, and he was awesome.

My audition at Berklee went terribly, so I ended up at Gordon, and it was there that I discovered contemporary Christian music, and I *liked* it. The only Christian music I’d heard to that point was badly performed hymns at church. With the help of Spotify and the witness of my teachers and classmates, I began to believe that God might actually be real, and that he might actually care. I was still terribly lonely, so I began tentatively praying that God would help me find the “One,” not realizing that I was actually looking for Him.

In October of 2011, I was miserable. I had been praying for around two months, and it seemed like nothing was happening, but God was working on my heart. I have heard that prayer is a response to God’s prompting, and that makes a lot more sense in regard to what I prayed that night in October. I said something along the lines of “Please, I need your help! I love you!” At the time, that didn’t make sense to me, but it also didn’t matter because when I said that, an overwhelming feeling of something inexplicably good came over me. In hindsight, I think what I meant was, “I love you, too,” but I didn’t know it until that moment.

I fell asleep immediately after that prayer, but the next day I realized what this meant. Jesus was a real, living person and was immediately accessible to me. He cared, and I could talk to Him. I realized this also meant I had to change *a lot*, but that was fine because God was real, and He cared. I realized that for the first time I could actually call myself Christian, but I didn’t know what kind of Christian I was. I decided to go to Mass as a “place holder,” until I figured that out, and in this case, it’s fortunate that I’m both curious and lazy. The priest at our parish kept mentioning something called Adoration, and I decided to see what it was. I was also spending a lot of time on YouTube on what I call Catholic Curiosity Quests, and I eventually came across a talk by Father Mike Schmitz about God’s presence in the Eucharist that changed everything.

I had more or less accepted the Catholic Church as “Home” since my Sophomore year of college, but it wasn’t until my Senior year that I completely came back. One night at Adoration, I was in a bad mood. I don’t even remember what the trouble was, but I asked the Lord, “Who am I to you?” I very clearly heard Him say, “My daughter. “That really struck me. He wanted me to be His. That was the first time in several years that I went to Confession.

My journey didn’t stop there, though. After some time I began feeling restless again, and that didn’t make sense to me. My curiosity questing hadn’t stopped, and I had been learning a lot about

religious life, as well as something called “consecrated virgins.” By that time I knew I wanted to be a saint, and I told this to my priest. He told me that because I was young, and because I had only really been practicing my faith for a few years, it would be better to look into a Secular Community. This is a Community of laypeople who belong in a special way to a religious order, In my case, the Discalced Carmelites. In 2017 I visited the Community I belong to now, and although a lot of what they did was foreign to me at the time, I immediately felt “Home” again, especially after learning that our motto is “With zeal, I have been zealous for the Lord God of hosts!”

It was also during this time that I had decided to commit myself to making music for the Lord. I had taken a break between 2015 and 2018 from making music because as someone with Muscular Dystrophy, and epilepsy, it didn’t seem practical. For three years I had tried to write a novel, but I had encountered severe writer’s block. I had a song “left over” that I had never done anything with, so I brought it to the studio, assuming I’d release it as a single and get back to the novel.

Two years and twelve songs later, I released my first official album, and I’ve accepted that as impractical as it is, music is what God wants me to do. In the two months of lockdown in 2020 when I couldn’t receive the Eucharist, I realized that I could have chosen an idol to distract myself, but even though it would hurt, I didn’t. I can’t explain how happy I was when I was able to come back to Mass on Pentecost. I realized what I had taken for granted, and how much the Eucharist mattered to me.

A lot happened in 2020, and I lost a friend; not from COVID, but from significant disagreements on a lot of things. I wrote a song about it, and realized it was the moodiest song I’d written so far. I decided to start on a project of intentionally hopeful, and joyful songs. One of those songs is *Innocence*. I wanted to write about exactly that—innocence—but I didn’t know how to. I struggled with it, and prayed about it, and I realized that the Eucharist is the epitome of innocence itself, and I was overjoyed. I didn’t quite know how to write about it, and the Lord really helped with this song. I’m really happy about this because in November of 2021 I will make my First Promise as a Secular Carmelite, and my devotional name will be Katie of the Eucharist.

For anyone interested, my music can be found on my personal Bandcamp page, as well as anywhere else where music is streamed (Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, etc).