

“Be strong and courageous...for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

Years ago, I adopted Joshua 1:9 as my “life verse.” You can find it in my voice mail greeting, in my e-mail address, and on my car license plate (JOS 1 9). Little did I know back then just how much strength and courage I would need for the journey ahead...and for the journey home.

I am thankful to have been raised by faithful Christian parents in a very loving family. From the time of my earliest memory, we attended a small Disciples of Christ church in rural Kentucky, where my Dad’s family have worshipped for generations. When the time came to venture off to college, I enrolled at Campbellsville College (now Campbellsville University), a Southern Baptist affiliate about two hours south of my hometown. There I met some of the finest Christians imaginable and discovered all sorts of opportunities for growing in faith.

Sometime in 1999 or 2000, while I was living in Nebraska, I bought a copy of Patrick Madrid’s book *Any Friend of God’s is a Friend of Mine*, which explains the Catholic doctrine of the communion of saints. (I think it was on a clearance rack at a bookstore.) I didn’t read it immediately, though. That came later after my wife Bonnie and I had moved to Iowa, and a devoutly Catholic young man moved in next door to us. Until that time, my exposure to Catholicism had been quite limited, and I wanted to know more about my neighbor’s religion.

I finished Patrick Madrid’s book, and then I began reading more Catholic material. I expected to disagree completely with their theology, but to my surprise, the writers made sense and affirmed much of what I already believed. Could it be that the Roman Catholic Church, with its mottled history and its mysterious rituals, was genuinely Christian?

After that, I discovered *Envoy* magazine, a journal of Catholic apologetics, and *Surprised by Truth*, a collection of stories of conversions to the Catholic faith. I knew many people who had left the Catholic Church for other denominations, but not the other way around. Did people really convert *to* Catholicism? Apparently so.

One evening after work, Bonnie slipped the next piece of the puzzle into place. The husband of a coworker had also become interested in Catholicism and was considering joining the Catholic Church. Eager to compare notes with someone, I called Mike, and we found that we had made some of the same discoveries. One Sunday afternoon we sat in the café at Barnes & Noble discussing theology, and before we realized it, four hours had passed.

By this time, I knew I was in deep trouble. If the Roman Catholic Church really was the living New Testament church established by Jesus and the apostles, how could I remain outside of it? But what about Mary, purgatory, the Pope, confession to a priest, prayers to saints, indulgences, the pedophilia scandal, and all those other obstacles? There had to be a fatal flaw somewhere in Catholicism, but though I searched diligently, I couldn’t find it. Instead, I found that some distinctively Catholic beliefs, particularly apostolic succession and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, dated back to the first century. My discoveries fascinated and scared me. Had the proverbial baby been thrown out with the bathwater during the Reformation? Had Luther gone too far? Gradually, our friends and family caught wind of my new interest. Some were intrigued; others were horrified.

In the summer of 2003, Mike and I heard about the Defending the Faith Conference at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. On a sunny Thursday afternoon, we climbed into Mike’s minivan and headed for Ohio. In Steubenville, the pieces of the Catholic puzzle really came together. I returned home knowing that I—of all people!—might one day become Catholic.

Then things really started to happen fast. There was a heated discussion one night at a friend’s home in Minneapolis, which prompted him to send me an intense eight-page letter explaining the errors in my thinking. (I responded with a 20-pager with 73 footnotes!) Then came some equally intense e-mails from another friend in Omaha. I had already heard rock-solid Catholic defenses for all the arguments they offered, even if I didn’t always present them well.

In every life-changing experience, there comes a moment when one can no longer turn back, a point of no return. All evidence indicated that the Catholic Church, in spite of the failings of its members on every level through the ages, was the most complete and authentic manifestation of Biblical Christianity. I also knew that delayed obedience was not obedience at all. I enrolled in an RCIA program and entered the Church at Easter Vigil Mass on April 10, 2004.

Throughout my time of search and discovery, Bonnie managed to maintain her sanity. Two years later, she came into the Church. We hope and pray that our journey will encourage other Christians, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, particularly our friends and family. And we won't stop praying until all have made the journey home.

Home...in my mind, that's the one word that best describes the Church. In the early stages of my journey, I drove past a Catholic church every day on my way to work, and I felt inexplicably drawn inside. I now know that it was the Eucharistic presence of Christ calling to me, "Come inside, Russell. Don't be afraid. You belong here. This is your home." I have not departed from the Christianity of my early life. Instead, I have found a deeper expression of my Christianity in what I once considered a most unlikely place, the Roman Catholic Church.

G. K. Chesterton said it best: "The moment men cease to pull against [the Catholic Church], they feel a tug towards it. The moment they cease to shout it down, they begin to listen to it with pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it, they begin to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point, it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair."

Not all of the moments of my journey have been joyful, of course. In 2005 I left a secure, good-paying job to work full-time on a Master's degree in religious studies at a Catholic university. Instead of being built up in the Catholic faith, I was chastised in my Old Testament Studies class for speaking of Original Sin, and in another class I was the only person willing to speak in support of *Humane Vitae*. (I might have been the only one who had actually read it.) Needless to say, I left the university. Thanks be to God for the Catholic friends who supported me during that time! I pray that God will somehow use that troubling experience for his glory.

To anyone reading this who is somewhere along the path, allow me to extend the invitation: come home. You belong here just as I do. Jesus has called us to one Church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Your brothers and sisters in the Lord are waiting to receive you with open arms. Come on home; supper is waiting on the table. "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Revelation 19:9)

Grace and peace,

Russell Yount
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