

I was born into a Christian family and baptized in a Methodist church. I am grateful for growing up in the faith and can never remember a time where I did not have faith in Christianity. I had some troubles in elementary school and my parents were advised to send me to a private school. I was sent to a Christian school. Although it was a strange school, it did me a lot of good. In my 7th or 8th grade year I was first told about the idea of asking Jesus to be in your heart and your personal savior and did this after a scary end times type movie they showed us. Granted this method is not a favorite of mine now, but at the time it helped me be sure I wanted to be a Christian. I was later confirmed into the Methodist church my 8th grade year. I knew I loved God but did not really strive to make him first in everything. Still, there was a somewhat good relationship between us. I remember walking to high school my first day and praying to God that I would stay faithful to him and not give in to temptations that would be new to me.

Things were very normal for a few years. I did not live strongly for or against God but simply wanted to fit in. At some point I discovered that I enjoyed drinking alcohol but this never became a big problem because I didn't really get into more than a half dozen situations where it was made available to me. I wasn't very popular I guess. Toward the latter half of my school years I noticed that so many of my friends were smoking pot. Smart kids too. It didn't seem to effect them to negatively either. I was a musician and many people told me that this drug could enhance my ability to hear music and be creative. I eventually tried it and convinced myself that it wasn't that bad a thing to do. I reasoned that people just falsely disapproved in ignorance, and that God could accept my doing this. I rationalized it. But what started out as a once in a while thing for me in my junior year became a daily routine and lifestyle for me by graduation. At first this was fun and I was enjoying it, but eventually I was just cold and dull and losing my personality and being a terrible witness for God.

While I was in high school, my family switched from the Methodist church to a more upbeat entertaining Baptist church with like 40 minute messages. I saw radical change in my mother's life also. However, as I got more into drugs, I wanted to avoid church and God entirely even though I was telling myself I was in no spiritual danger. My mom stopped forcing me to go to church when I was 17 or so and I did indeed make use of this freedom. I do believe her prayers for me helped a lot during this time. I was constantly avoiding religious discussions or references and denying my conscience from speaking clearly to me. I would lie in bed at night and wonder if I would go to heaven or hell if I died while living this way. I kept saying to myself nothing was wrong with me, yet the question would not stop bothering me. Was I a Christian?

So this brings us to an extremely significant moment in God reclaiming my life for His kingdom. My family had just gotten what is now a part of everyone's life. The internet. It was slow and hooked up to our TV. So one night after coming home I decided to research my favorite bands. I loved reading about them and their influences. Music is a huge part of my life and the main reason I started smoking pot. I wanted to know all I could and be the best musician I could. Well I somehow stumbled onto a page about the jazz legend John Coltrane. It was about an album of worship to God that he made called "A Love Supreme." It is very powerful, though at the time I had never heard of it. Even though I was in a phase of avoiding all religious material, something softened my heart to want to know what this was all about.

As I read, I was clearly aware of God's presence in a powerful way. The story of his life and musical pursuits was so similar to mine. I felt so much love and inspiration in a way that maybe I never had before or since. I felt the call to do what this man did. I knew I had to give up drugs and regain my earlier dependence and love for God and offer all that I was and all my musical pursuits to Him. I realized that God was the creator of music and it was for His glory and I loved Him for making it possible. I saw that John Coltrane (though not necessarily a Christian I found out later) made some of the most inspiring music out of wanting to love God. I realized that I was terribly sinning by using drugs to do what God could teach me. I realized that I had truly known deep in my heart that I had been sinning for months. I repented and felt the heaviest burden lifted from my soul. I was free and I was changed and I sensed purpose in my life. This was just after high school.

I started falling in love with God and the Bible. I greatly enjoyed our Baptist church. I had very many good years of learning to follow God in this church. However, a lot of unanswered questions mounted over time about the bible. I was also feeling more and more displeased with the format of the services. I did not know what was missing, but church seemed incomplete or too dependent on style of music, entertainment, emotional worship, quality of technology, or dynamic teaching. Some things just seemed off to me. But the one thing I always knew was that the Catholic Church was not an option. I did not hate the Catholic church or think its members were beyond salvation, but I did think that they would have to be saved despite all their unnecessary Catholic beliefs and practices.

Well one day I found out my good friend Paul was converting to the Catholic church. I was shocked. Catholics converted to our church to really find Jesus. So I figured I could convince him that he was making a mistake. Through our conversations I was still confident that he was wrong, but I gained a lot of respect for some of his defenses of the Catholic church. I realized it was not an open and shut case. I was scared. Maybe I would become Catholic....no. He gave me some apologetic books and then moved away to seminary.

Shortly after this I went to go see my protestant roommate play in a band. This was a Catholic contemporary worship band that he had somehow gotten involved with. It was a unique situation and place for me to go to. I left in the middle of one of the sets to find a Catholic bookstore in the building. I picked up some booklets, not sure if I wanted to believe or disbelieve them. A part of me wanted the Catholic church to be right though I was very afraid of it. Well a nice man started telling me about the Catechism. I wanted it but I did not want to buy it. I did something that I normally never would do. I prayed "God if you want me to become Catholic I pray this man will give me his copy of the catechism so I wont have to buy it." I do not suggest praying like that, but for some reason I prayed it and without asking for his catechism the man seeing my interest gave me his personal copy. I was like...shoot, do I have to follow through on my prayer now?

Well, I wrestled with the faith of the church and through some research and anti catholic websites and testimonies eventually decided I could not convert to it. I was glad to have survived the scare and went back to my evangelical life feeling confident that the Catholic church was not safe, but at least respecting it more than I previously did.

More time goes by with no changes until a few years later many of my friends were falling in love with more traditional approaches to Christianity. I met a few converts to the Orthodox Church and some great Orthodox Christians. Many of my closest friends from college were attending this wonderful charismatic Anglican church under African bishops. They were showing me all the beauty and life to liturgical and sacramental worship. Things I thought that hindered personal relationship with God in my previous experience as a Methodist. I was amazed and moved away from my Baptist thought and practice and started feeling at home in the Anglican church. I never had seriously considered consulting early church thought to help me know what the bible and apostles really taught or what to believe about sacraments and worship style. I had just assumed that the early church believed like evangelicals and that the Catholic Church eventually corrupted Christian teaching until the reformation finally set things back in the right direction away from a gospel of works and superstitious practices

So I loved this church and saw great spiritual growth here. I even noticed my views on baptism and other things changing. I realized that earlier Christian sources were not to be ignored. I learned that the Eucharist from the earliest times was the very essence of Christian worship, and that the real presence was the first and only existing view of it since the earliest days and how the bible can support this. I was so happy that I started considering the Orthodox church because if the Anglican church was good, I wondered if maybe I could go even deeper and belong to an unbroken apostolic church. I knew I was unable to get past many Catholic doctrines so I was not looking that direction, though I was now more aware of my unity to the Catholic church and happy that I could be more catholic without actually being Catholic. It felt great to be able to understand the beauty in all denominational traditions and take the strengths from the Evangelical, Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican churches. I felt more complete and able to make friends on all sides, though I was increasingly affirming orthodox theology in my mind.

I really wanted to stay Anglican or become Orthodox. I greatly admired the Orthodox and considered them as potentially being a more faithful apostolic church than the Catholic Church. I still love the Orthodox church. I learned a lot from them am appreciative of their witness, but I could not become convinced that I should be an Orthodox Christian. Still I felt more open to the Catholic teaching as a result of living as an Anglican and embracing Orthodox thought.

In the summer of 2005 I was becoming more and more aware of my theological differences with the Baptist church where I was still a youth group leader. I loved serving with them even though I had not been attending church there. Every summer we would go to camp in Wisconsin at a place called Silver Birch Ranch. Every year I greatly enjoy this getaway and consistently see many wonderful things happen in my life and the students' lives. Still I was scared of what to do about my more orthodox/catholic beliefs.

The first night the speaker mentioned the book of James and how he was one of the many children Joseph and Mary had after Jesus was born. I noticed that I was offended by this. I guess I had accepted the Catholic view that Mary was ever-virgin. I was uncomfortable with what I considered Mary worship, but I believed in honoring her and even half considered praying to her once in a while and kissing icons she was in. I was slowly opening up to her. So while I was afraid of Marian devotion and avoided it, I was more willing to defend those who practiced it due to the faithful Christian witness they had provided. So I prayed that God might enable me to

meet and minister to any Catholic students at the camp (there are not many Catholics in a place like that, but some come with friends) who may have been offended by what the speaker said. The next day I randomly met two Catholic girls who would become good friends, and throughout the week I encouraged them in their Catholic faith and defended Mary. One girl just so happened to belong to the same parish my old best friend and college roommate went to. I recognized it just by the description she gave me of the community there and the city it was in. I forgot the name and had never myself been there, but was curious about it from what my friend had told me. In fact when I was first considering becoming Catholic, I went over to his family's house for dinner to seek advice from his Father.

So at this time my stance was one of affirming the strengths of all denominations (something I still like to do) but I was in no way really open to the Catholic Church. However, from this point on a lot started happening in a short period. So many things that I hope to know in what order and which ones to speak of in retelling this. I had begun watching EWTN (Catholic television network) because I was really drawn to it for some reason. I found a show that really interested me. It is called The Journey Home. There is a new guest each week sharing his or her testimony on entering the Catholic Church. These stories were very compelling. I could not deny that these were good people seeking the Lord passionately and often coming in to the church despite the fact that they were very opposed to the Catholic Church earlier in life. They, like me, were sure that God would not lead them to be Catholic. There were great stories and even amazing events in their lives that were powerful and thought provoking. I had seen many Catholics convert to the Baptist church and I do not judge why that happens (though I have some ideas) but I heard little from the opposite camp aside from my friend Paul many years ago. Personally those coming to the Catholic faith impressed me more due to their opposition to it, intense research, and often amazing experiences. All things I was about to experience.

So one day, I went into my storage space and dug out the Catholic apologetic books Paul had lent me that I never really read before. The timing was funny. One was a short 90 page book by Thomas Howard called Lead Kindly Light. Now if I had read this before it would have made little sense to me, but at this time several years later it spoke loud and clear. Basically this guy's journey was like mine. He was an anti-Catholic fundamentalist Christian, then he discovered the beauty of traditional Christian thought and practice in the Anglican church, and eventually he was drawn into the Catholic church. I was scared but I prayed the prayer that started him toward the Catholic Church. It was simply, "lead kindly light." I told God that I would consider taking small steps in investigating the Catholic Church but that I wanted Him to put roadblocks in my path if this offended Him in any way. Still, I was thinking that I would more likely become an Orthodox Christian.

I decided I would like to go to a mass. I had not ever been to a Catholic mass in any serious effort to understand it. I decided maybe I should visit my friend from camp and go to the interesting Catholic parish her family went to. This was a beautiful time and service. I really was at peace there. Also this was the first time I heard a litany of asking the saints to pray for us. It was set to music and it was so beautiful that I sort of understood that saints were part of my family and praying for us. I still was not comfortable praying to any saints personally, but this softened me a little to the idea. It was a good day and good for me to meet more Catholics who loved Jesus. Some evangelicals assume this is rare (like I did), but I think it is not as rare as they

assume. Still, I never believed anyone could remove all the doubts I had about the Catholic church.

I kept reading and asking questions. One book Paul gave me was making a lot of sense. It was called "Upon This Rock" by Stephen K. Ray. It is an in depth defense of the papacy. The pope was one thing I thought the orthodox were right about. I was opposed to the Catholic notion of a pope. This book showed me very quickly through early church History and biblical texts that the notion of a pope makes perfect sense. I also had read a Catholic commentary on the gospel of John by Raymond Brown and I loved it. I was starting to see that Catholics really did love scripture and used it to defend their teachings. I saw that tradition and scripture do not go against each other but help clarify one another. I saw the bible was possibly a Catholic book, though as a protestant I believed that the bible clearly disproved Catholicism. I observed Matthew 16 mixed with Isaiah 22 to show Peter as the rock and leader of the church. First Timothy 3:15 says that the church is the pillar of truth. I never read that before. The bible nowhere says that the bible is the pillar of truth. It says to those who take its writings as authoritative and inspired that the church is the pillar of truth. Jesus prays in John for us to be one and promises to lead us into all truth. I think that only the Catholic Church can make these prayers and statements of Jesus seen as being actually fulfilled. How can Protestants be one and lead into all truth when they do not agree on many key doctrines and split the church more and more over time. Acts mentions being devoted to the apostles' teaching long before scripture even existed. I became aware that scripture itself came from the church. The church predates scripture and without an authoritative church the very bible so many use to disprove the Catholic Church would not have existed. I was affirming that perhaps the views of scripture by those who canonized it were possibly better than my or my favorite pastor's personal views. Many of the Fathers knew or were a generation away from the apostles. I believe that those closest to the source might know more about the bible than I would. I also realized that the idea of Scripture alone as authority has failed. Without help in interpreting scripture people can not agree on many elements essential to salvation and church authority, and have split thousands of times. Without someone to guard the scriptures many cults and dangerous teachings manipulate people to this day using the bible. Can the bible teach clearly without a higher authority to protect us from our personal weaknesses? I admire my Baptist background and their love of scripture, and I think they are faithful and diligent in learning and obeying the word, but I realized that their opinions, although well researched, are indeed far different than the earliest interpretations of many passages. I am no apologist, so I will stop this from going deeper, but the point is that I was increasingly seeing reasonable arguments from scripture and history for a catholic church. I was most impressed by the fact that the church was essentially one for 1500 plus years (though the schism of 1054 happened both sides are close in practice and theology). If a fundamentalist position is correct that means that there were essentially no correct practicing Christians all that time. That God only allowed the true faith to be discovered 1500+ years after the book of Acts. This does not seem possible to me.

So I was getting real scared. I longed to belong to an unbroken apostolic church. Still I had many questions so I sought help from Catholic websites and discussion boards. The Journey Home has a great site (chnetwork.org) with testimonies and discussion groups for those interested in Catholicism. I eventually read every single testimony on this page and was amazed at how much I was seeing God draw these men and women to the Catholic Church from ever possible background. I was asking my tough questions and getting closer to accepting the

doctrines and practices I thought were unacceptable. All the while, I was running into amazingly coincidental things. Much of what I read or researched would in very unique ways speak to me. One story was of a charismatic Anglican who went to a church with the exact same name as mine. I would see something in another story that answered a specific question. Another time my Baptist friend told me the name of his seminary professor who was challenging his views. This professor is named Robert Webber. He is an early church enthusiast but not Catholic. I learned his name, went home and read a testimony on the web page that specifically mentioned one of Robert Webber's books. I was in no way looking for this. Robert Webber is not a commonly referenced person yet within an hour or so of learning his name I saw a reference to him in an unlikely place. Now I know this is not convincing evidence, but things like this started happening constantly. I have written down more than 30 such experiences. I know a lot of common phrases and ideas get passed around, so it might seem merely coincidental, but many of these "coincidences" were involved rare sentences or bible verses and were happening left and right. Still, I base my faith on truth not experience but I do not doubt that God was leading and encouraging me because I was so afraid of the Catholic church. I was afraid it was idolatrous and that I could never genuflect or pray to Mary, so I think God really wanted to show me He was with me and with the Catholic Church.

Then the advent season of 2005 came. I lived too far from my Anglican church to go there regularly, but I longed to experience my first advent season. The only thing I could think of that would be similar would be going to mass. So I found a friend who I could go to mass with, who also was a good support in my journey. I was amazed at how much I loved these masses. I truly felt God's presence and loved being there. It was the first time I was regularly attending mass. In fact, after the first mass Adam and I were driving home and we heard this radio program seeking to disprove the Catholic mass and its sacrifice. We sat in silence and listened and said nothing afterward. At first I thought this was a sign against my journey. Instead it made me get our my catechism which ended up strengthening my beliefs about what the mass really was. I also needed that catechism I mysteriously received so long ago to clear up the most important issue to me. Faith and works. Every protestant should seek to know what they mistakenly believe is the Catholic teaching of salvation. Even if they do not want to become Catholic, they should at least know what the doctrine is so they can encourage the many Catholics who are mistaken of what the official Catholic teaching is and avoid spreading so much of the false teachings about Catholicism that you often hear from evangelicals. The teaching is different than evangelical teaching, and I will not get into it here, but there is greater common ground than realized by many, and in my mind the Catholic view is simply more faithful to all scripture texts one would read regarding salvation, including the book of Romans, Matthew 25, and James 2. Catholics know and defend scripture very well.

So towards the end of advent I was looking for a church to go to on Christmas eve. I had no idea where it would be but I wanted something close to my house. In one of my guitar lessons a student of mine mentioned that he was in CCD and I noticed that he was actually taking it serious. I asked him what parish he went to so I could possibly go to midnight mass there on Christmas eve. It was right by my apartment and I decided to attend. The priest gave a great homily and the service was great. I was impressed. On the way out of the sanctuary my student's mother mentioned to me that the priest was a charismatic. Now, this was interesting. You see, months ago I had been researching about charismatic Catholics and was really interested in

seeing what their worship would be like. I was sad not to find any parishes near me when I went on the internet to see which parishes had such services. The closest ones I found out about were downtown and I had hoped that I would someday visit one. Well all along this priest and parish were one mile from my apartment and had one charismatic service the first Friday night of every month! And how funny that over the course of a 3 minute conversation with a jr. high students mother would she even mention this to me. I left church excited and thinking that I could possibly be Catholic someday. On the way home I had a strong desire to turn around and go back to the church and meet the priest. I did not know if it was from God and I often ignore ideas like this but I felt a strong urge in my soul to go back and meet him. I knew he might be able to help me. I drove back and saw him finishing one last conversation and then I told him a quick synopsis of my situation. I was hoping he would ask to personally meet with me, because I did not want to be so bold as to ask. He indeed invited me to make an appointment with him and has been very much of a good example and help to me. He really loves Jesus and was a great encourager without ever putting pressure on me.

During this time I was fighting many battles about doctrine and hurting my brain with arguments for and against the Catholic Church. Still many coincidences were happening and more and more people were coming into my life to help me. One day I was really despairing. I was reading arguments against Catholicism and my mind was troubled thinking I could never decide what I really believed. There is an overwhelming amount of ideas to take in and consider out there and I am just one person. I was telling God as I went to sleep that I just need to get away from this for a while. I was really upset. The idea came to me to just go read one more testimony. I was comfortably in bed and did not want to get out but the thought wouldn't leave me alone until I did it. I felt that God might want to encourage me. Well the next testimony I read really made me laugh and spoke loudly to me. It was a story of an Anglican interested in the Orthodox Church who became catholic. I sensed God trying to encourage me. This story actually also mentioned the name of my favorite jazz piano player Keith Jarrett! I was laughing so hard because of my earlier experience with John Coltrane and the weird sense I had to get out of bed and read a story. Now I will confess this Keith Jarrett was not the piano player but a bishop with the same name, but I was still very amused and believe that God was indeed comforting and encouraging me to keep going.

Many times going to mass there would be readings or homilies about exact verses or ideas that were in my mind earlier in the week or even day. One time after a mass I felt compelled to go volunteer at a nursing home. I felt like I had to force myself to do it. Not because I did not want to, but because I am uncomfortable doing new things alone. I parked my car at the nursing home and almost did not get out and wanted to turn around. Still I made myself get out of the car because I sensed that God really wanted me to do it. I later called my Catholic friend I met at camp and what had she done that day but volunteered at a nursing home.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle in my faith was Catholic devotion to Mary. Though I was open to respecting her, I was still uncomfortable with her. I will now tell how that obstacle melted. I really believe it started while interested in Orthodoxy and seeing icons and being open minded to their teaching. I simply would pray that God would help me to know if it was ok to speak with and love Mary. I was scared but saw the possible benefits of her powerful intercessions. So the experience at camp was one thing that helped me. Also many biblical texts

helped me as well. The bible indeed does not explicitly teach things about Mary but there are a lot of interesting references in scripture that the Church teaches that really made me think. I saw that she is seen as not only John's mother but mother to us all at the foot of the cross. We are all the beloved disciple. I saw she is seen as the woman clothed in the sun in revelation 12. I saw that she is the new Eve who through obedience to God brought the salvation of Christ into the world reversing the effect of Eve's disobedience. I saw her intercession at Cana with the water and the wine showing her intercession to Christ for others. I saw her pictured as the ark of the covenant where God was present. Indeed as David danced for joy before the ark, so John the Baptist leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb. I saw that the queen in the Jewish kingdom was not the king's wife but his mother and that people would approach the queen to ask the king for favors. Mary is in the bible if one is willing to look for it with an open mind listening to what God had revealed to the early church. Also the catechism makes it clear that her goodness is from God and she is not to be worshiped. We do look to her for prayer and support but never to worship her. I worry about some things people say and do but as a Catholic I am taught to avoid worshipping Mary while loving and honoring my Mother like Jesus would want. I saw her role is not to distract from God but that her soul "magnifies the Lord" and enables those who seek her help to love and worship God all the more.

Still I was uncomfortable for a long time. One night I was testing out the "hail mary" and asking God to please help me know if this was a good prayer for me. I quickly got an answer. Right after praying this I went online at 3 in the morning and started chatting with a friend about what is known as prosperity theology. He had just read a book and was trying to share with me some beliefs people have about how God wants to prosper us. Nothing to do with Mary. I am not in favor of this prosperity type of teaching and was encouraging him to be careful and realize that we often are called to suffer for our faith. So I was tired but he begged me to look up a passage to show his point. I was reluctant but looked it up. It was a passage I may have never again read in my life if he had not asked me to look it up, and anyone who has read Deuteronomy might understand why it is not one of the more read books of the bible. I was amazed at what I saw.

Deuteronomy 28 1 If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

1. 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

7 The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

8 The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.

I knew this passage was answering my prayer about Mary and the hail Mary prayer. Deep in my soul I knew it. Mary is most famous because she obeyed God. Her seed is what genesis 3 says will crush our enemy. The words sound exactly like phrases and the feel of the hail mary prayer. "Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." To be brought to this rarely read passage minutes after debating the merits of praying this prayer and see the light go on was amazing for me. I love old testament pictures of new testament realities such as Melchizadek in genesis coming out with bread and wine prefiguring Jesus and the Eucharist. I encourage people to learn these things. I think it really shows Christianity to be the completion of the Jewish faith. This was something God led me to that I had not seen on any website from a rare discussion. I looked up to see if any Catholics had ever used this passage to speak about Mary, and found that indeed this has been done. I did not invent the teaching but was brought to it in a unique way.

Still I wrestled with myself. A person does not just change over night. One day while in a Eucharistic adoration prayer chapel I saw a person who stood out to me. I was dying to meet him. I sensed in my heart that I just had to meet him. He looked so devout and sincere and was my age. He stayed longer than I did and I felt I missed a chance to meet a great person. This was on a Sunday morning. Next Friday night I was really troubled again by the whole Mary thing. I am a bit obsessive and worry a lot so it is amazing I ever get pst anything sometimes and even though I had been pretty convinced I am quite a doubter unfortunately and I was begging God for more clarity. I had to go to my old Baptist church Sunday morning so I decided to go to a Saturday evening mass. I saw the same guy again. This time I made sure to meet him. He is indeed a great person who was growing a lot in his Catholic faith from a former life of partying and depression. So one day after begging God for help with Mary, I meet this person who I feel compelled to meet, and during the course of our visit he gives me a booklet he just happens to have in his pocket about learning to pray the rosary. I was amazed. I went home and later found a letter someone wrote to me on a discussion board encouraging me to start praying the rosary.

Here is the last one I will mention. Many years before I even first considered the Catholic church, I had a dream that I have never forgotten. I have not before or since made much of dreams or their meaning, but this stuck with me. In the dream, I was in a crowd somewhere and I was in terrible emotional pain while on the ground unable to move or get up. Then someone stood over me and looked down at me with a smile and it immediately strengthened me and I was comforted in a way I can not explain. I thought it was (and maybe in appearance it was) my friend Shea who was a dear friend and very pure person. I thought at the time it may have meant that Shea would comfort me a lot and indeed sometimes she did. I remember this dream maybe a few times every year, but not too often. So many years later while praying the rosary and on one the fourth sorrowful mystery of Jesus carrying the cross while thinking nothing at all related to college or Shea or anything, the thought comes to me to remember the dream and that perhaps it was Mary and her comfort given to me and that what I thought was Shea represented or was Mary. This seemed totally foreign to any thought process I was having. I was amazed. So I later told the girl I met at camp about this experience and how I thought it was Mary. I was worried she would think it was weird. Incidentally, I had told her of the dream many months ago

too. I am not really sure why I ever would have told her but somehow it came up. I had not mentioned this to many people, maybe only a couple. So after I tell her this she told me that when I told her this dream the first time that she thought it was probably Mary (even though I told her it was Shea) but she didn't tell me at the time because she did not know what I would think about that. I am so glad she didn't say anything at the time about it because then I would not think that God showed me this directly through prayer confirming it later. So I took her telling me this and my experience to really be something real. The best part is that when I had the dream I had no concept or thought of Mary whatsoever, and if I did it was negative, as far as people praying with her goes. I was amazed to see God may have planted a Catholic seed in my mind long before I could know about it, and it made all the other events make even more sense. It really helped me understand what Mary means to people.

Going to spend time in the adoration chapel also helped a lot. They have books underneath each individual seat and on three separate occasions I would pick up a book that mentioned an exact author, statement or story that someone had just told me the night before or that I had seen on tv. Very specific and rare quotes that I had never heard before. Plus just going regularly enabled me to focus and pray on a deeper level. So now it is April of 2006 and I am ready for RCIA in the fall. I see a lot of good things happening in the Catholic Church. Also I feel the prayers and disciplines and calendar are helping me so much in my relationship with Jesus. I have much gratitude and respect to my evangelical background and realize that the time spent there taught me much invaluable information. I do not regret it. Sometimes I struggle with not knowing what to talk about with my old friends, but for the most part friends and family have been supportive and I am so happy for that. I in no way want this account to be seen as an attempt to convert anyone, but I am proud of what God has done and I want to be able to share it with anyone who would be interested. I did not think it would even be possible for me to be Catholic. I was so against the idea. I am amazed at God enabling me to jump over the difficult and confusing questions. I never thought I would know what I believed as far as specifics go. I hope all sides will learn more to respect and learn from each other. My hope with non-Catholics is that they will at least learn what the church really teaches before attempting to discredit it. The Church makes claims that need to at least be considered. The other question I would ask non-Catholics is why they have confidence in doctrines that did not exist for hundreds of years or why previously understood practices and doctrine are subject to change. Of course, all are free to decide what seems right to them, but I would pray that all people at least think through the issues thoroughly. I will always love and respect anyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and seek to learn from and assist all my brothers and sisters in any way I can. I am where I am because through my research prayer and life experiences I am very confident that God does indeed lead people to the Catholic church to learn to love Him more and more. I think one can be a Catholic and completely faithful to the Bible and am in no way throwing out my love for Holy Scripture. I am sharing this so that people who disagree with my decision can at least respect how I got here and think it may very well be God's will for me. I respect anyone's opinion and know I am not a leading scholar or theologian but always open to discuss or learn from a civil loving dialogue.

I had to go to work today before I finished the last paragraph and at work I have a really nice 7 year old student whose legs can not even reach the floor when he sits. He was telling me that his new baby brother was born yesterday on Easter. I asked what his name was. He told me John Paul. I asked him (though I knew it) if he was named after anyone and he told that he was named after the late pope. It was funny after finishing up this story to learn that today! I love the Catholic church and long for my first Eucharist.

