

I have always considered myself a Catholic. My extended family members in my grandmother's generation are wonderful examples of how to live your faith. I had two Sisters as great aunts and one great uncle that was a priest. Both my mother's mom and my father's dad went to Mass everyday.

Sadly, my family has not fared so well in my generation. Every single one of my cousins and my two siblings has fallen away from the faith. Most have not joined another church, but instead just do not practice their own. I grew up in the military, only seeing those good examples once a year. I went through all the CCD classes, but at some point my family stopped going to Mass together. We never prayed together unless we had family visiting and we never read the Bible. I was naïve and ignorant. I knew in general what the Church believed, but nothing in depth.

When I was fourteen, my grandfather called all his children and asked everyone to come back home. He was having heart surgery and didn't think he would make it. He wanted to say goodbye. My father was the only one who went back. He never made it out of the surgery. After the funeral, harsh words were said and fights broke out about who "deserved" my grandfather's possessions. My father told them to take it all, it didn't matter. That was the last time I have seen most of my father's family. We stopped going to Mass completely after that and we saw less and less of my father at home. Years later my father came home early from work when I was home from college and packed his bags. He told me goodbye and never came back home.

My mother was left alone and reached into her long lost faith to make it through the situation. She couldn't get me or my younger sister, then only thirteen to go back to Mass with her. Then she asked me to go with her to a speaker about prayer, saying how much she wanted to go, but not by herself. I agreed, but hardened my heart to whatever might happen there.

At one point, the speaker told everyone to close their eyes and listen. Just listen. In the darkness and silence of that moment, I saw Jesus as if he was right in front of me. He was in white and sitting on a rock. He reached his hand out to me with such a look of concern and love. I held back the flood of tears that overwhelmed me and told nobody what I had seen. But from that day forth, I prayed everyday and I started going back to Mass.

Just a few weeks later I found myself moving back to my mother's family. I knew she would follow me and that they would be able to help her find some peace. My grandmother and her children who stayed close to home held a rosary together every Sunday afternoon. They invited me to one. I was so moved by it that I started praying my rosary every night, but I needed more. Something was missing. So one weekend I picked up my Bible and started to read it for the first time in my life. I started at the beginning and read it all the way through. By the time I was done, I dropped to my knees and through tears I begged God to show me what He wanted me to do. I asked if I was called to follow my Great Aunt and become a sister. I laid down in bed to sleep when a few minutes later there was a knock at my door. I was in such shock that I couldn't move! Then I heard footprints walking away and I jumped up and ran to the door. I got there just

in time to see Isaac, who I just started dating, driving away. I laughed a little and said, "So I guess becoming a sister is a no?" I asked Isaac the next day why he came to my door so late, and he didn't know why. He just wanted to see me. Less than a year later, he asked me to marry him.

He was a Baptist with a very strong Anti-Catholic family. His grandfather was a missionary to Japan for over twenty years and was then a preacher. He had a sermon he tried to show Isaac that was specifically against the Pope! His uncle was also a preacher of his own church. His parents went to church at least three nights a week, staying very active. Isaac went to small Baptist schools his entire life. Everyone he knew was Baptist. They all knew I was Catholic, but they never said anything directly to me. They only commented to Isaac that he needed to "set me straight". He started going with me to Mass every Sunday morning and I went with him to his church service in the afternoon.

That Christmas was the first time I ever saw how Baptists take of the "Lord's Supper". I watched as they joked and acted with disregard while passing around little pieces of bread and grape juice. Seeing them then throw it in the trash made me completely realize that it was insignificant to them. I had to leave the room and just kept repeating "Please forgive them." I have never been back to their "Lord's Supper". I didn't understand how or why they believed as they did. Their notion of once saved, always saved seemed contrary to what I had just read in the Bible. Maybe they knew something I didn't? But every time I tried to ask Isaac anything about religion, he would just say "I don't want to fight about it."

We got married that summer. Through the first year we continued to go to both my Mass and his church. He started seeing the judgmental attitudes in his parents' church and hearing things he didn't agree with. So we soon started looking for a new "church home", while continuing to go to My Mass. After each Mass I would simply ask him if there was anything he didn't agree with, and he always said no. But whenever his friends or family would ask where he went to church, he would always say we were still looking for a church home.

He started suggesting that we pick a church that was "comfortable" for us both. At the time I didn't understand why he was so willing to try Lutheran, non-denominational Christian, and other protestant churches, but he wouldn't even consider making "My" church his own. We started trying other denominations, all the while continuing to go to Mass every Sunday morning. Discussions about doctrine or teachings or practices ended as quickly as I tried to start them. He still didn't want to fight about it and yet he still said he didn't disagree with anything after every Mass.

Our first daughter was born and I started the plans to have her Baptized Catholic. I told Isaac I would raise our children Catholic and asked him if he would at least go to the RCIA classes to learn what I would teach them. He refused. He "didn't need to know". Eventually we stopped church hopping and just went to Mass every Sunday. But whenever Isaac's friends or family asked where we went to church he still answered, "We're still looking for a church home." Our son was born a few years later and I also

had him Baptized Catholic and again I asked Isaac to take the RCIA classes to learn what that meant. But again, he refused.

About six months after Ian was born, Isaac had a vasectomy. We both agreed on two children and we didn't want anymore. Although I was now a practicing Catholic, I was very un-informed about what the church taught on many issues. That spring Isaac took a humanities class and his instructor took them to a Greek Orthodox church. He came home very excited and wanted to become Orthodox! Even his family seemed to think this was a wonderful compromise! I calmly explained to him that they believe the same things Catholics do. They just don't follow the Pope. He agreed to take RCIA the next year.

He had a wonderful sponsor who got him excited about the faith. Isaac spent the next year with his nose in books and on the internet. He was soaking in as much information as possible and sending responses to arguments from his family. He was able to respond to everything they said and each response only made him more sure that he was finally on the right path. His excitement has spread to those around him and I have learned more about the Catholic faith in the past year than I have my entire life. He converted just this past Easter.

At a family get together with my side, I told my aunt that Isaac was converting. She smiled a knowing smile as she announced it to her husband. Soon all nine of my aunts and uncles knew the news and I couldn't help notice the winks across the room. My aunt simply said to me, "That is the power of prayer. Only the Holy Spirit could have changed his heart." I prayed every night for five years for God to open his heart and mind to the truth and now I know I wasn't the only one. Isaac is still learning and excited about his new faith. He is a lector, gift bearer, transportation minister, and he will work with his sponsor this year on a religious education class to talk about his own objections and how he got past them last year.

We pray together as a family and we read the bible to our children every night. We talk about doctrine, teachings, and practices all the time. He is also scheduled to have a vasectomy-reversal later this fall. We are both ready to leave ourselves completely open to God's plan for us. We are both transformed people and I praise God for reaching out to us both.