

Matthew's Story

My journey to the Catholic Church began several years ago while I was an Associate Minister of a small church. I was just beginning in the ministry, and was very excited about learning all that I could about God, theology, and the ministry. But as I was studying and learning, there was something that always bothered me. That something was the question of how can I know that I believe the truth? After all, almost every passage in the Bible can have several interpretations, and many of these interpretations even totally contradict one another. How could I know if what I believed was the right and true interpretation? As time went on, my desire to know the truth grew more and more, until one day I remember crying out to God and asking Him to teach me what the Apostles believed. From that prayer onward my life has never been the same. I became almost obsessed with books on early Church history, and the writings of the early Church Fathers, such as Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp (among others). I knew that the more I learned about how the early Church believed and practiced, the closer I would get to the beliefs and teachings of the Apostles.

After all, Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp were taught by the Apostles themselves! I even discovered that many times learning how the early Church believed and practiced seemed to clear up many of those passages in the Bible that had more than one interpretation. But studying the writings of the early Church Fathers also made me realize how far away my beliefs as a Southern Baptist minister were from the beliefs of the early church and, many times, from Scripture itself. My desire grew more and more to return to the beliefs and practices of the early church. It was during this time that I resigned as the Associate Pastor from the church my wife and I were going. I resigned because through my studying I found that many of the beliefs that this particular church held were unbiblical, and thus, I did not feel like I could help lead a church that I disagreed with. So after much prayer my wife and I left that church and began attending an Independent Christian Church.

The Independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ held a very strong attraction for me. After all, they are part of a Restoration Movement that sought to restore the Church to how it was in the beginning, and this was my heart's desire. It was at this church that I have learned much about the doctrine and teachings of the early Church. From this church I learned the importance of baptism, and the relationship between faith and works and how they work together. I fully believe that being a part of this church is just one more step in God's answer to that prayer that I prayed several years before. But deep inside of me there was still a feeling that I wasn't where God wanted me to be. There were still many things that I had discovered about what the early church believed and practiced that the Independent Christian Churches did not do. One example is the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is known as confirmation in the Catholic Church. I saw this practiced in Scripture (Acts 8:14-17, 19:6), and I discovered that the early church continued this practice. But what bothered me was that the Restoration Movement churches did not practice this, yet they claimed to be exactly like the early church. I was beginning to wonder if the Restoration Movement truly was restoring the Church to how it

was in the beginning. I was also beginning to realize that there was only one church that still held to the beliefs of the early church, and that church was the Catholic Church. But, of course, I knew that that could not be right. After all, at this time I was still against the Catholic Church. I still considered Catholics to be Christians, but I was always taught that they had stray from the beliefs and teachings of the Apostles and the early Church. So I simply forced these thoughts to the back of my mind.

Then one day I was reading the Bible, and a verse that I had read many times before seemed to just leap off the page at me. The verse was 2 Thessalonians 2:15 which says, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our letter." I read that verse over and over again. It was as if a huge veil was being taken off of my eyes. For the first time I realized that in this verse the Apostle Paul was instructing the church to not only stand fast to the written traditions that he had given them in his letter (which we have recorded in the New Testament), but also to the oral traditions that he had given them. In other words, there were two sources of Apostolic teaching for the Church - oral and written! I just sat there in my chair in amazement. It was as if I was starting a new and exciting walk with God. This was the beginning of my look at the Catholic Church, for the Catholic Church claimed to follow both the oral and written teachings of the Apostles.

As I began to study the doctrines of the Catholic Church and comparing them to the Scriptures and the evidences of Church history, I discovered some interesting things that I never thought was possible. First, I discovered that the teachings of the Catholic Church are very Biblical. In fact, they are even more Biblical than non-Catholic churches! I also came to the reality that the early Church was the Catholic Church. It was Catholic in doctrine! For my whole life I had thought that the early church was Protestant, and that the Catholic Church had strayed from the beliefs of the Apostles. But when I truly looked at the facts and evidence from Church history and the Scriptures, I discovered that it was the other way around. It was the Protestants who had strayed - not the Catholics. Not only did I begin to see that the Catholic Church was Biblical and true, but I also now had the peace of knowing that I never had to wonder again if I had the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. For the Scriptures teach that Jesus gave the authority of interpretation (binding and loosing) to the Apostles and their successors, the bishops (Matthew 16:19, 18:18). This realization gave new meaning to John 8:32 in which Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Before, I would ask myself how a person could really know the truth with thousands of different churches each having their own version of the truth. Yet, Jesus said that I could know the truth. The question was, "How?". I have since discovered that it is through the Church that Jesus founded that we can know the truth. For it is the Church that is the "pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), and that Church is the Catholic Church. Finally, those words of Jesus have become real in my life. I can now know the truth, and this truth has set me free from a life of doubt and searching. I now truly feel free to follow Christ in His Church.

It is amazing when I look back and see how God has worked in my life these past several years. God knew that there was no way that I would ever accept the Catholic Church unless He led me

there one little step at a time. I could continue and share how coming to the Catholic faith has brought so much peace and joy to my heart. I could also share how it has made reading the Scriptures fresh and come alive to me in a way that I never thought possible. But to make a long story short, this is why I feel drawn to the Catholic Church. Ever since I prayed that prayer several years ago that God would show me how the Apostles believed, He has slowly led me, step by step, to the door of the Catholic Church. It is here where I have finally found what I have been searching for, which is the doctrine and faith of the Apostles.