

Kathy Gavlas (Della)'s Story

I was brought up Episcopalian, but we weren't regular churchgoers until after I had been attending (at age 10) on my own a local nondenominational fundamentalist church. My brother and I had been introduced to it through their vacation Bible school. My parents had no misgivings about my attending that church until members of it came to our home to proselytize them away from the Episcopal Church. Their doing so had one good effect--we returned to weekly attendance at our Episcopal church and my parents never said one church was just like another again. That was my early introduction to fundamentalism.

When I was about 13 my father died. A neighbor friend of my mother's talked her into going to her Baptist church. So, for a time we went there. At this same time my mother began going to an interdenominational Bible study/prayer group hosted by a member of the Assemblies of God. The "gifts of the Spirit" fascinated my mother, as did the idea that we can be assured of our salvation by having a "personal relationship" with Jesus. She began teaching her Episcopalian Sunday school classes this teaching, and when our Episcopal priest told her she'd have to stop teaching these things to her class, she left the Church in which she'd been reared for the Assemblies of God. Naturally, we (my brothers and sister and I) went with her.

At first, I didn't like the Assemblies of God. There was no form of worship, and all that shouting and speaking in tongues and general air of casualness offended my sense of reverence and propriety. But, their emphasis on Bible study attracted me; I drank in everything they taught me. And I am still grateful for learning so much about the Bible from them.

For about 20 years I was an active member of the Assemblies of God. We referred to ourselves as "the movement", and were proud of our independence and lack of defined dogmas. I went to North Central Bible College (now University), graduating with a B. A. in Bible and Religious Education. This took me about 10 years to accomplish due to money concerns and my own fluctuating interest in earning my degree from the Assemblies of God. Indeed, during my last few years in the movement I had become more and more discontent with their limited theology and spiritual practice. There are just so many times a person can "get revived" with nothing more to look forward to than the same old attempts to "get something from God", as the expression went. The readings of C. S. Lewis became the vogue among us and I devoured his writings. From his writings I realized two essential things:

1. That reason is not a bad thing; faith and reason are compatible.
2. That members of Liturgical churches could be just as spiritual as those in the Assemblies of God.

After much soul searching and prayer I returned to the Episcopal Church before I had finished earning my B. A. at North Central. For a time I considered becoming an Anglican nun, but I married a wonderful man who God brought into my life. While I had been considering the

religious life I had been counseled by my High Anglican priest. He introduced me to the concept of praying for Mary's intercession--something I had been taught was idolatry. He reminded me that Anglicans believed in the Communion of Saints--that those in heaven are alive in Christ. A crack opened in my understanding. Then I went on a Cursillo at a Lutheran church. During the weekend we prayed the Stations of the Cross. When we prayed the one that remembers Mary at the foot of the Cross, my heart and mind opened even more. I saw that she suffered that day too; that she brings us to her Son not separates us from him. I began to read about devotion to Mary, especially about the apparitions at Lourdes, for which I had a personal attraction.

Soon after that my husband and I moved to another town and another Episcopal church. Separated from childhood memories of my home parish and the High Anglican influence, I began to see the ECUSA in a new light. As close as it was to the ancient Church, it wasn't quite there. And I wanted to be completely at one with the Church Christ founded. I had read some Catholic books from apologetics to spiritual works and liked the consistency of the Church's teachings as well as its spirituality. I realized that I was being drawn to the Catholic Church. My husband was a cradle Catholic who had secretly been longing to return to the Church. So, when I said: "Let's go to the Catholic church just for the summer--to see if we like it" he eagerly agreed.

After attending Mass that summer I knew that the Catholic Church was where I belonged. I went through RCIA and was received Easter Vigil, 1987 with my husband as my sponsor. During the RCIA classes I learned two things of great importance to me: Firstly, that I had nothing to fear by exploring my interest in the Catholic Church because no one was going to pressure me into joining if I decided it wasn't what God wanted me to do. And secondly, I learned a side of Church history I'd never heard before, which gave me a better perspective of what the Faith was all about.

Becoming Catholic fulfilled my longing for truth, beauty, faith and reason. It reflects the reality of who God is and what man's position in relation to him is, and to what the depths that relationship can deepen. I don't consider myself a former Episcopalian or a former member of the Assemblies of God. I am, and hope to remain for the rest of my life, a Catholic in full union with the Body of Christ, which is his Church.