

Luke's Story

I am a cradle Catholic as they say. I've received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, reconciliation and holy communion. Growing up, I went to Mass every Sunday but it was more out of obedience to my mum than obedience to Christ. By my teenage years the Mass had grown dull and boring and I eventually ceased going all together. That was three years ago, and as time went on I eventually became an agnostic heading towards atheism. However, God had other plans for me!

Just last year things began to change. My one ray of hope, I've got to say, was that I still wanted to believe in the existence of God, therefore I hadn't closed the door completely. About May 2001, my grandmother (a devout catholic) offered to pray over me with her prayer-group. I thought it was all a bit silly, but for some reason I agreed to it. Now there was no blinding flashes of light or anything like that, and I left not feeling any different, but I'm quite certain a seed was planted that night.

A few months later one of my friends (a devout born-again Christian) in the same study course I was doing, invited me to go to a youth night at his church. He had asked me to go many times but I had always managed to find a way to get out of going. This time though I was fresh out of excuses, so reluctantly, I went along. At the end of the night my guitar-teacher, Ray (also a born-again Christian at that church) had a big talk to me about my beliefs. At that time I didn't really know what I believed, and so when he dismissed the Catholic Church and its doctrines as unscriptural, I didn't (or couldn't) raise any objections. He invited me to say the Sinners Prayer to make Christ my personal Lord and Saviour, and so I did. Again, nothing dramatic happened, although I truly believe now that saying that prayer did do me the world of good. Afterwards, I began praying, not out of doubt as I used to, but more out of faith. With the prayers of others, and my own prayers, God was slowly pouring out His graces upon me, day by day.

Ray convinced me that a governing church structure was unnecessary, and that all one needed was the Bible and a personal relationship with Jesus. I took him at his word, after all, I had tried organized religion but had ended up leaving it, perhaps his method was the way to go? God, however, had something else in store for me...

A few months later, something fell into my path that has since altered my life in the most dramatic way possible. I read about how, on June 24, 1981, six children in the village of Medjugorje claimed that the Mother of God had appeared to them, and that allegedly she has been returning every day since. I was totally blown away! I vaguely knew about Fatima and Lourdes, but here was something that was happening not a hundred years ago but right now! I soon devoured everything I could on Medjugorje and I began to put its messages of Peace, Prayer, Fasting, Holy Scripture and Conversion into practice. As is the entire purpose of private

revelation, these messages of the Virgin Mary (although still under investigation) helped me to realize that the Catholic Church isn't the Whore Of Babylon that others claim it to be. These messages, which are really what the gospels have been saying for almost two thousand years, led me to embrace Jesus like I had never done before. Pre-Medjugorje, I was somewhat hesitant about putting Jesus in the first place in my life, afterwards, I had no such reservations. I am eternally grateful to Mary, for her pointing to her Son and saying, Do whatever He tells you.

To herald in 2002, I used the sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in three years. I used to be petrified of the thought of going into the little box to confess a shopping list of sins. Now, I was able to see it more as a beautiful encounter with Jesus, in which my soul is cleansed with the Blood of the Lamb, and the healing graces of God are poured out into my heart. And to top it all off, I got to receive Jesus physically in the Eucharist, accepting him into my body and soul as Lord and Saviour. The Mass, which for me used to take for ever, now flashed by all too fast. The Mass had come alive because God had brought me back from my spiritual dormition, and had sat me down as His guest at the Heavenly Feast, to celebrate the New Covenant with Him. And who could possibly throw a party better than God?

A little while later, I came across the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and was really enthralled and intrigued by it. I read numerous stories about people who had been baptized or released in the Holy Spirit, and how it had changed their lives for the better. I understood that I had received the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation, but that He could be released more fully in my life if I wanted. Yes, I did want that! My grandmothers prayer-group belongs to the Charismatic Renewal, and so they did the procedure for me. They prayed over me and then got me to read out a prayer, written by Father Peter Rookey, called The Miracle Prayer. I was perfectly fine for the first few lines, but then suddenly I began crying like a baby, and it wasn't until I had finished the prayer that my tears ceased just as suddenly. My tears were out of joy because I was so overwhelmed with Christs love; and yet they were also tears of sorrow for all the years I had spent rejecting that love. It was such an amazing experience. Afterwards, I gradually gained a great hunger for Holy Scripture, and began feasting on it everyday.

During that time, I also found out about Saint Faustina Kowalska and her message of Divine Mercy. Although only a private revelation and therefore not binding upon the faithful, I took this great grace of Jesus into my heart, all the same. Here was my chance to have the almost-equivalent of a second baptism, and I wasn't about to miss out. On Divine Mercy Sunday, after praying the novena chaplet and then receiving the Eucharist, I went to Reconciliation. When I came out, I knelt down in front of the Divine Mercy image and just kept repeating over and over again Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I thank you. I felt so wonderful and my heart was beating a thousand times a minute!

Over the next few months, I began studying Scripture and the teachings of the Church. Now that I was a born-again Catholic, so to speak, I realized that to be of use to God I'd have to know what I believed and why. Blind faith would not do me nor anyone else any good.

The first issue I tackled was Sola Fide because that was what Ray had professed. Now at first, I was really confused. To me, Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, seemed to be contradicting himself on how we are justified. I poured out my frustration to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and then that very same night my grandmother told me she had all these Bible commentary books I could borrow. Just what I needed!

These helped me a great deal, but I was also unsure of what to do about Sola Scriptura and other issues. Again I poured out my predicament to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and in his providence, Rome Sweet Rome by Scott and Kimberly Hahn ended up in my hands. I read it in a couple of nights, and I just cant thank them enough for how its helped me. Realizing that it was the Catholic Church at the Councils of Hippo and Carthage in 393 and 397AD, that decided which books of the New Testament were canonical, made it clear to me that Scripture and Tradition need each other to work effectively. It also helped me to better understand, from Scripture, such things as Purgatory, the Saints, Transubstantiation, Infant Baptism, and Mary. I suppose being a cradle Catholic was an advantage, in the sense that I never had any difficulty in accepting Mary as my spiritual mother, but explaining that teaching from Scripture was another thing altogether.

With the belief that an ignorant Catholic is of no use to anyone, Ive continued to study the Bible, the Catholic Catechism, Encyclopedias, and to discuss doctrine and dogma with various priests. Ive learnt more about the Church in the last few months than I have in my whole entire life, but Ive got so much more still to learn. I am so enthusiastic about the Roman Catholic Church, and I really do want to be as informed about it as much as I possibly can, in order to share the truth with others.

The best advice given to me, that I can give, is this: Know your faith, love your faith, and be ever ready to explain your faith in a spirit of patience and gentleness. The best thing you can do for others is to be a living example of a dedicated Catholic. So many non-Catholics have made the comment to me that most Catholics they know couldnt care less about their faith. I say the time for being a Catholic by name only, is over. We have a duty and a mission to be a shining example to the rest of the world. When non-Catholics begin to see the vast majority of Catholics truly living out their faith, with courage and determination, the light of Christ will shine so brightly that our separated brethren will be able to see for themselves the beautiful truth of Catholicism. We have the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, founded and sustained by Christ to this very day! Be on fire with the Holy Spirit, and get involved in setting your local parish on fire with the Holy Spirit. Proclaim the Risen Jesus; proclaim His Beloved Bride, the Church; and proclaim that you are proud to be Catholic!

In the love of Christ,
Luke

