

Pete's Story

The Trentecostal Experience

Growing up in a Catholic household, Sunday Mass was something we regularly attended as a family. As a permanent deacon, my father would expect no less from my siblings and me. Yet like most young boys, I found church boring. I would spend most of my time at Mass either fidgeting in the pew, or daydreaming about my friends down at the hockey rink. Despite my protests, however, week after week my parents would force me to go to Mass with them.

When I hit the age of teenage rebellion, my protests against going to Mass grew much louder. After disrupting some parish function one Sunday, the pastor took my father aside, and said: "It is time to let your prodigal son go. He really does not want to be here, and you cannot force him to come to God. So let him go his own way, and God will come to him." Somewhat reluctantly, my father agreed to our pastor's demand. Not a word was ever spoken between my father and me on the subject, but he no longer required me to attend Sunday Mass.

Taking advantage of my newfound freedom, over the next couple years I would wander about aimlessly in a spiritual void. My life became like that of St. Augustine before his conversion. And like St. Monica, all through this time my father persevered in prayer, receiving consolation primarily through recitation of the Rosary and Eucharistic Adoration. Yet if my father longed to see me return to the Church's fold, I longed to fill a deep spiritual void that had entered my soul.

At first the occult and socialist politics filled this void, but they didn't silence my conscience, and its still inner voice only increased. As providence would have it, I switched high schools during my senior year and befriended a youth activist within Canada's Conservative Party. Through our mutual interest in politics, although from different sides of the political spectrum, we became close friends. I soon discovered that his conservative political ideology, particularly on moral issues, arose from his strong adherence to the Pentecostal church in which he was raised.

On our way to political debate during a municipal election, he asked me to stop by the local Pentecostal youth group so that he could deliver a birthday card. Not thinking much about it, I pulled into the parking lot and followed him to the room where the youth gathered every Friday night. I did not think I would encounter anything special -perhaps a half-dozen dour faces painted on our school's social misfits - but I learned that night Yahweh is the God of surprises.

Standing among the crowd of approximately 100 faces were some of the best students from our school, including a gifted mathematician and the football team's quarterback. Yet what intrigued

more than popularity or intellectual capacity was the sheer joy beaming across these faces. Jesus was not something they did on Sundays, but someone with whom they had entered into a personal relationship. And the excitement generated by this relationship with Jesus reflected in their lively liturgy.

I was awestruck. My friend nudged me to leave. But I asked him if he would mind foregoing the political debate so that we could stay for the rest of the prayer service. Smiling, he agreed, and this became the first in a two-year experience with the Pentecostal church. During this time I dedicated my life to Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, after which I came to know Christ, the Bible and God's deep love for me. For the first time in my life, the Holy Spirit became a real, breathing person of the Trinity, and not merely some obscure afterthought of my childhood catechesis. Praying in the Holy Spirit cleansed my soul of its former worldly distractions, giving rise to an emotional surrender to Christ's healing touch. Through this experience with the Pentecostal church, I became fully alive in my Christianity, and my former aspirations to political office faded.

Nevertheless, as my spiritual mentor St. Augustine writes in the opening of his "Confessions," "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in Thee." As the initial excitement of the Pentecostal experience wore off, I found myself once again searching. I knew Christ could be found among my Pentecostal brethren - I witnessed over a two-year period numerous lives changed through Christ's loving touch - yet, in my heart of hearts, I knew something was missing within the Pentecostal church. I knew I needed this something in order to come into a deeper relationship with Christ.

Although I did not realize it at the time, I had come across too much spiritual drifting and theological uncertainty among Protestantism. Therefore, I longed for something solid upon which to anchor my faith. In response to this longing, Our Lord placed an elderly woman in my path who loaned me a tape that told a man's conversion story. Immediately, I recognized what was missing from my spiritual life - a relationship with the Mother of God as well as with Christ's Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist. Also missing from my prayer life was doctrinal stability, which the Catholic Church offered through 2,000 years of unbroken Tradition.

My life as a Catholic revert - one who left the Church and came back - would have followed the same path as many others except for a small coincidence. You see, the woman who loaned me the tape was also an adherent of Archbishop Lefebvre and the Society of St. Pius X. In what became another detour in my spiritual journey back to the Catholic Church, for the next three years I followed this woman into Lefebvre's traditionalist schism.

I discovered within the traditionalist movement a love of the Catholic liturgy, particularly of the sacraments, as well as deep devotion to the Blessed Mother. Moreover, many of the theological issues I grappled with as a Pentecostal were resolved in discovering the writings of saints,

medieval popes and early Church Fathers. Yet in spite of this influx of new spiritual sources, my heart was again restless and my prayer life suffocated. For in practice, the Tradition I followed was frozen into various customs and devotions before the Second Vatican Council, and what lacked was any relationship with the Church today. I was following a dead tradition of the living, rather than the living tradition of the dead. So while Catholic Tradition provided great fuel for my spiritual life, the fuel was cold for it lacked the spark of new life in Christ.

Fortunately, in His great love for us, Our Lord will never leave us spiritually orphaned. As I pondered forsaking Christianity and returning to my former political interests, Christ opened the door for me to go and study canon law at Saint Paul University, a pontifical institution in Ottawa, Canada. This opportunity came on a whim, with less than a week to make a decision. Having received spiritual comfort from Sister Faustina and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, with less than a week to make a decision I simply reaffirmed the words, "Jesus, I trust in you." I resigned from my job, packed my belongings into boxes and bid farewell to friends and family with whom I grew up.

Over the next couple of years, the canon law program would prove to be an excellent intellectual formation, while helping me resolve many theological issues. Yet what proved more important was the various opportunities to reignite my spiritual life. In this new city I came into day-to-day contact with a priest of the Ecclesia Dei movement, which was founded after Archbishop Lefebvre's tragic 1988 schism by those priests and faithful wishing to preserve the Traditional Mass in full communion with Rome. This allowed me to continue exploring the depth and beauty of the old Latin Mass within the Church, free from the baggage of schism. I discovered that our liturgical tradition as Catholics can only come alive within the ecclesiological tradition of communion with the Holy Father and the diocesan bishop.

I also came into regular contact with a society of priests and seminarians who had grown out of the Catholic charismatic renewal, named the Companions of the Cross. They offered the Fire and the joy of my initial Pentecostal experience, but solidly rooted within the structures of the Catholic Church. Here I discovered that the charisms of the Holy Spirit are among God's gifts to the Church, and thus cannot replace the Church as Christ established it. The charisms of the Holy Spirit, therefore, must be fully experienced within the context of the Catholic Church.

How do I pray now? I pray, what a close friend jokingly dubs, the "Trentecostal experience." It is a harmonious blend of charismatic action and traditionalist contemplation. Through its emphasis on organic growth and the wisdom of our spiritual forefathers, especially in matters pertaining to the Faith and the liturgy, the old Latin Mass provides the fuel of my Catholic Faith. And through its emphasis upon personal relationship with Jesus Christ and openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic charismatic movement provides the fire which ignites my Catholic Faith into action. In short, Trentecostalism brings together the best of both worlds, traditionalist and charismatic, and unites them into one expression of Catholic prayer within the heart of the Catholic Church. This expression comes most strongly during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,

when the Tradition of my Catholic forefathers comes alive through the Real Presence of Jesus Christ.

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