

Brought Home and Called Forth The testimony of Ryan Schmidt

Becoming Lost:

I was born, baptized and raised in a Catholic family. We went to Church nearly every Sunday, missing only when I had hockey games. I was certainly raised with faith, and my belief in Jesus and the Catholic faith never faltered but at the same time my attention to Jesus didn't go too far beyond Sunday mass. It was around the age of sixteen when I started to run into trouble. At this age, though I still believed in Christ, I began to turn away from Him without realizing it, I started into the party scene, and my life essentially began to revolve around two things, partying and hockey. Later my focus in life became everything that the world and society had been telling me. Party, drink, meet girls, get a high-paying job, get rich, get cool toys. And I went after all these things, in fact I went after them quite successfully, I moved into the computers field, taking a one year college course and then graduating with a job in computer networking offered to me. I moved forward again to a new computer firm that provided more money and more benefits, and this time I was at a firm where I was able to travel all over the world for my work. I went to places like Beijing, Singapore and Switzerland. During this period I also bought a house at the ripe old age of 21. I also met a girl and was dating her exclusively. There was no shortage of fun in my life, I still had my hockey going on the side, and went to parties or the bar often. I was on my way, I had accomplished nearly everything on the checklist that the world had given me, and it looked like I was going to be a big success. Throughout this entire period I hadn't stopped going to mass, but I was living a double life. I called myself a Christian but the rest of the week; I lived essentially like there was no God. The whole process seemed to work out great, I was a fake Christian without even really thinking about it, and I was achieving all sorts of goals. There was only one problem. I could feel a gaping hole in my soul. I had been trying to fill this hole for years and always thought that it would be just around the corner. "I'll be happy when I buy the house," I would say, or "I'll feel complete when I get a girlfriend". What I couldn't see was that what I needed was to surrender my life to Jesus Christ.

Wandering Back:

It was also during this period that I came to learn my faith for the first time, and through learning the actual teachings of the Church I was slowly turning towards home. I have a best friend Chris. We grew up together in Oakbank and followed similar paths except that he was a protestant and I was a catholic. We both fell into the same traps growing up, but he was the first to snap out of it. When I was around 21 years old, he decided he wanted to make a change in his life, and went off to a missionary school called YWAM, but before leaving, he asked me some questions about my faith. I think his intentions were to challenge it, perhaps even to convince me that Catholicism was in error on some issues. He was acting out of complete sincerity, only wanting to help me. At any rate he asked me why we pray to Mary and why we go to confession, and other similar questions. I remember distinctly, sitting there having no idea what to say. I made up some terribly foolish answers that probably convinced him more than ever that the Catholic Church didn't have much going for it. But, at the same time, the Lord had used this as a way to prompt me into action. Later that week I decided that I should check into these questions because I had begun to doubt the truth of my faith. I mean I had been raised a Catholic, gone to Catechism, and mass all the time, if there were answers to these questions I figured I would already know them! So I began a search on the Internet in an attempt to see if by some miracle, the Church had decent answers for these queries. Well the first site that I landed on was www.catholic-convert.com, a site run by Steve Ray who was a protestant that had become Catholic. Unheard of! I knew that people left the Church but I didn't know people joined it from protestant Churches. So I listened on-line to his conversion story and then other recordings of him at Catholic Answers that were available on-line. I was amazed by the research he put in before converting. There were others who had joined the Church. I discovered the story of Scott Hahn and hundreds of other protestant ministers in North America who had become Catholic in the last two decades. Most importantly, for the first time in my life I was really beginning to learn my faith. I found out

that Jesus himself initiated the sacrament of confession and that it could be found in John chapter 20, that he had picked the first pope in Mathew 16 and that Mary is seen crowned as queen of heaven in Revelations 12. I was totally amazed, I had nearly given up hope, and yet all the answers were right there in the bible all along, and they were very convincing. I remember yelling out loud one night "It's all true, I can't believe it, it's all true!" I stayed up on a couple of different nights until 3 or 4 in the morning, searching and reading on the Internet. I ordered books on-line, I studied and I read for months. I also went to anti-catholic sites and read all their arguments against the Church, but found them lacking in both their understanding of the Church and in the strength of their arguments. I learned that all the Church's teachings were supported by scripture, apostolic tradition and the teachings of the early Church fathers, beyond that they were grounded in solid logic. As I discovered one truth after another, I was also discovering the Church in all its majesty. Up until this point I had really only understood the human side of the Church, now I was encountering the divinity of the Church, the mystery of the Church, the treasures of the Church. It was a never ending treasure, every time I would lift up one piece of treasure and examine it, I would see a new one underneath to look at and study as well. This continued on and on, until I came to understand that the Church was an infinite treasure. I went to mass and confession now with renewed enthusiasm, through all this studying, something else had changed...the way that I saw and experienced the Eucharist. Now that I truly understood it, I couldn't look at mass the same way. I was beginning to have encounters with Jesus in his Eucharistic presence. And he began to do things to me, to change me. I was feeling remorse like never before for the way I was living my life, I was falling in love with Jesus and I was realizing that my life needed some radical change. Finally I couldn't take it anymore so I broke up with my girlfriend because she was a source of temptation for me, and I committed to never getting drunk again. I began a long walk back to my crucified Savior, and it was a long walk, because the further you walk away from Him the further you have to walk back. But something edifying was happening to me, the gaping hole in my soul was finally being filled. What I realized was that the longing that each of us has, and often try to fill with material things, is really the longing for God. It is an infinite yearning that can only be filled by the infinite.

Being Called:

I still had some holdouts from my Savior. I clearly remember praying to Christ and saying "Lord I'll do whatever you want in my life just let me know what it is...except Lord I won't do this, or this, and I won't give up this sin or that one." I was putting restrictions on my surrender to His will, and I didn't get any answers. Finally, one night I received a special grace from God. I remember I had been to the pub in Oakbank and had had a few beers, when I got home to my place 5 miles outside of town, I collapsed before the crucifix in my room and began to cry. Yes I had come a long way in my journey back to God, but I couldn't hold out anymore, I knew that God was calling me to something beyond goofing around with my friends at the pub, that he wanted more from me. And then I surrendered. Through my tears I said these words "Lord I'll do whatever you want me to do with my life, no matter what it is", I then prayed to the Holy Spirit, asking him to guide me, to guide my thoughts, my actions and my speech. I finally made a total surrender to the All Holy God. I began to pray these prayers every day, sometimes stopping several times a day to repeat them, and something fantastic happened. In this period I received a courage to turn from sin like nothing that I could have ever have done alone, God was giving me the power to tidy out some cobwebs from my soul. Beyond this newfound disdain for sin, and courage to avoid it, I remember one special day. I was standing in my living room, it had been about three months of praying surrender, and suddenly I knew. God was calling me to be a priest. And not only did I know that he wanted me to be a priest, but I wanted to be a priest! And this was a major shock to me, because what I haven't told you is that growing up I wanted nothing to do with becoming a priest, I had plans of getting married and raising kids. I wanted nothing to do with celibacy. In fact, one of the things I used to tell God I would never do was become a priest. I mean this was on the list of WILL NOT DO's! So you can imagine my surprise as I stood there realizing that not only was I called to be a priest, but also I wanted to be one. God had changed my heart 180 degrees; it was a true miracle. This experience left me energized and excited to start out on the trek to the priesthood. Now, when I look back I find my call to the priesthood both ironic and

amusing. I can remember betting my grandfather a fine bottle of wine that I would be a millionaire by the time I was 23. And instead, by the time I reached 23 I had entered the seminary, committed to living a life of simplicity! Thankfully he let me off the bet!

On to the Seminary

In the next few months I cleared the way for my entrance into the seminary, with the help of the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, I quickly sold my house, gave notice at my job, and applied to the seminary. I had attended a retreat at the Catholic School of Evangelization where one of the staff, Anita, gave me a book called "We are called to be Companions of the Cross" by Father Bob Bedard. It was all about the new religious community The Companions of the Cross. As I read the book I fell in love with their vision because it included all the things that I felt that I wanted to do with my priesthood. Especially attractive to me was their dedication to the New Evangelization called for by Pope John Paul II, their loyalty to the magisterium, their love of the Eucharist, the Blessed Mother, and finally their openness to the Holy Spirit. I have just begun my second year with the companions and am loving it. I have a great group of brothers, with many being added every year. My brothers challenge me to grow, and support me when I need it. The Companions challenge us to develop a strong prayer life, which includes an hour personal prayer time, liturgy of the hours, rosary, mass and Eucharistic adoration each and every day. I have also been introduced to the writings of St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila, which have changed the way I view prayer entirely.

I feel completely at peace with my decision to become a priest, and am immensely happy that Jesus chose me for this ministry. To do so he first brought me home to Himself, and then gave me the grace to surrender to Him. I have never been happier in my life and day by day the longing of my soul is being filled by the all Holy God, while at the same time my desire for Him grows as well.

The Point:

In reflecting upon my call to the priesthood, I now realize that Christ had been calling me to this vocation at least since I was 16 years old, but I wouldn't listen. I pushed that voice into the closet, because I didn't want to hear it.. The point that I would like to make then is to encourage everyone, young men and women especially, to listen for the voice of God. Don't be afraid to answer His call, because when He calls you to something, He'll equip you to do it, and if necessary He'll even help you want it! He will lead you to whatever plan he has personally chosen for your life. Once your listening, the next thing to remember is to surrender, tell the Lord that you will do whatever He wants. If you do this, I'm confident that you will find out what vocation he has in mind for you.

As far as the priesthood goes there is no shortage of men being called to it in our time. God is calling as many men as always. What we have is a shortage of men who are willing to listen for the call and respond. So for all the young men who feel a little nudge from the Lord about being a priest, remember: listen and surrender, you will not regret it!

Thank you.