

Paul F.'s Story

I am not a convert, and not a revert. I never really left, which I think was because I had a couple of parents who had real Catholic faith. They weren't scholars, and they were realistic enough about their faith that I can spot a "holy roller" when I see one. Anyway, here goes:

I grew up in a Catholic household with 1 sister and two brothers and both parents. We went to Catholic school, Sunday church, and prayed the Rosary regularly. I was an altar boy and even considered being a priest, though I decided against it when I decided that I wanted to have a family. I prayed the Rosary on my own on occasion, for example when driving to and from work. I had protestant friends, but we never talked about any differences between our religions. Even in high school, however, I was interested in non-Christian religions and what you might call pagan philosophy. I still think the Tao Te Ching is a great book, and used to read it what you might call "religiously," basically every night, often between prayers and reading the Bible. I also had no problem with guys like Voltaire, whose stuff I would probably still read if I had a chance. When I got to college (I went to a little Methodist college, MacMurray, in Jacksonville, Illinois) I continued to read the "extra-Christian" stuff, but it never really caused me to question my faith. The biggest "obstacle" I encountered was a long-time girl friend who had become an agnostic because her parents' fundamentalist pastor had stated that Ghandi (sp?) would not be in heaven. However, I saw her as opportunity and actually "worked" on converting her (funny, she said she'd become Catholic if I wanted her to, and I wound up marrying a protestant who has not yet entered the Church). I took a fair number of philosophy and theology classes. They were taught by a variety of professors, but all from a protestant perspective. The school's "core" curriculum also discussed religion, but without advocating any particular position. While in college I began occasionally visiting protestant churches, both on my own and as part of the college choir. I remember being impressed with what seemed like a lot of enthusiasm. However, I never could have imagined leaving the Church, even though I really had very little deep education about it (we learned not a whole lot of specifically Catholic theology in Catholic school, and when we did there was really no "counter-point.")

I began attending daily Mass and saying the Rosary more regularly during my junior year. I was also in the local Newman Club, where we prayed and maybe talked a little about religion, but really were more involved in social activities. The only thing that made me really begin learning more about the Church was meeting, falling in love with, and marrying a committed protestant. I really desired her conversion, but have to admit it was mainly for the sake of any future children -- I would have agreed with Catholics who say "we're right, but protestants do just fine where they are." I do remember almost crying once when she said that she wouldn't want here kids to be altar servers. However, getting married (with a priest celebrating in a Methodist Church, and no Mass) and having a daughter (who was baptized Catholic) made me begin to think even more. My wife and I would occasionally have arguments about whether Clare would attend Catholic school and whether my wife could tell her that, for example, praying to Mary was wrong. At the same time, I was attending daily Mass, praying, but alternating Sunday church.

These discussions with my wife and getting to feel more desperate about our daughter, however, made me want to really get to know 1) why the Church taught what it taught (which I personally don't think should be a very big issue in the average Catholic's life) and 2) why this should matter to my wife. I really don't know when I began to "study" things, but when I did I began to be better able to discuss issues with my wife. At some point I discovered Catholic Radio, Catholic Answers, and the wealth of material on the Internet. Through these and then digging deeper on my library shelves I have gotten a much deeper appreciation of the faith. Gaudete, gaudete Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine! Gaudete! Paschal nostrum immolatus est Christus, Alleluia! Regina Coeli laudate, Alleluia, quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia, resurrexit sicut dixit! Alleluia!