

Following God's Voice

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My conversion story actually begins in my mother's womb. I do not know if I was conceived from the love of my parents, but I do know that I came from God's love. My mother attempted seven ways to Sunday to abort me. She used every possible means, within reason, to make it appear as if the loss of my life was an "act of God," that "the pregnancy wasn't meant to be." I know the details because my mother informed me of them when I was not yet even a teenager.

Though she did not succeed in ending my life, she was sadly successful with the sibling I never had a chance to know. Why I am here and not my sibling, is not for me to know, but maybe God, in His providence, will one day reveal it in this life or the next. Either way, I am at peace, and every day I offer up all of my past, present, future thoughts, words, deeds, pains, sufferings, sorrows, joys, and prayers to be made into acceptable sacrifices for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of my soul.

I was born with congenital hip dysplasia, so roughly the first two years of my life were spent in and out of a body cast. I found out as a teen that while I was in the body cast I was abused—physically and sexually. I, of course, did not know this at the time, but this individual continued to abuse me for some years, and when I was older, just as my mother had done, admitted to first abusing me in my body cast when I was a baby. God shined His light into these very dark situations by revealing the truth, but He did it with His perfect timing. What good

would it have done me and more importantly, Him, if I had been too young to understand what was being revealed to me? It was only when I was a teen and young adult that many of these truths were revealed.

Long before the grace of these revelations, though, I heard the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit

When I was 8 years old, I accompanied my grandfather to the village five and dime store to visit with his buddy. In this particular store, there were toys everywhere, wall-to-wall! Since I was behaving, my grandfather said I could choose any toy I wanted—what kid wouldn't love that reward! Except, I didn't choose a toy. "The Voice," who I later realized was (and is) the Holy Spirit, instructed me, invited me, and pulled me to choose a plaque—not just any plaque, though. No. This was a special plaque. It had prayer hands and said, "The family that prays together, stays together." *That* is what I chose in 1977 inside a small village dollar store in Margaretville, New York. Did you know that an Irish man who immigrated to America and later became a Catholic priest in New York, Fr. Patrick Peyton, coined that phrase!? I had no awareness of the Catholic Church, priests, nuns, or now, Venerable Patrick Peyton, when I was 8, though!

I took the plaque home, and sadly, I was mercilessly mocked by several of my family members. I recall thinking how sad it was for them that they did not know the love of God. As an adult I understand why I was mocked, but at the

time I did not. Their hearts were hardened. The glory of God is that I said “yes” to the Holy Spirit that day in the shop and it set me on a trajectory to one day, unknown to me but known to God, becoming Catholic. My conversion of heart began in that little shop.

Survivor

The abuse and maltreatment I survived as a child extended into my teenage years. I was surviving an alcoholic father, a mother who lived in denial of all things that did not fit into her perception of reality, and bullying at school. The bullying began around 6th grade, ramped up in 7th grade, and fluctuated throughout high school, finally coming to an end mid-way through my senior year. During these tumultuous years, God sprinkled my life with adults who brought me under their wings. Some of these adults were associated with our church, some were school teachers, and others were at times “random” strangers, like the “pinball wizard” from the KOA, and still others were the elderly whom I would help serve lunch to when I spent time with my grandparents at the Senior Center.

One of my favorite memories was wrapping the silverware for lunch at the Senior Center, which was a promotion from cleaning tables. Receiving the “promotion” and the affirmations of doing a good job meant that I had earned their trust; it meant that someone “saw me”—saw my worth—and that I was loved. I stored all these graces from God deep within my heart. God knew I would need those graces to ride the coming storms, and He was right. I used the

love I had received from God, through others, on days when the abuse was intense and to face another day of school and whatever it brought with it. The kids would say I was “weird” or “different”—they were correct. I was strange, weird, different to them because of what I was surviving at home. They did not know I had first survived failed abortion attempts, abuse, an alcoholic father, and a mother who, upon later admission in life, knew I was being abused and chose to look the other way.

The Pinball Wizard

The moment I met this guy, I knew he was someone special. I was 9 years old, and for a summer I lived in a KOA. In the midst of the insanity leading me to live in a KOA, I met this man, who was much older than me—he did not smell good and his hands were greasy. The gift God gave me through this momentary friendship was feeling like the apple of his eye because he taught me how to play pinball! After this man would play a few games, he was so skilled that he would win more games, and then he’d give the free games to me. (Touching the buttons to play is how I learned he had greasy hands but that didn’t matter because he was my friend.)

I didn’t know his name. I didn’t know where he was from. I didn’t know where he lived. All I knew was this guy, who was a bit grungy, demonstrated a simple yet profound act of love. I don’t know if he was even aware of what he

was truly doing to my life. I have often thought that maybe he was Jesus or God or my guardian angel in disguise! He was an angel to me.

That summer, as bad as it was, was a reprieve from previous summers of being shuffled around to adult parties to perform and witness drug and alcohol use along with other adult activities that no child should ever witness. If I performed well, I was rewarded with food or adulation—I preferred the food because what came with the adulation was not good.

This was also the summer I turned 10 and got to celebrate my birthday at one of the most upscale restaurants I knew of...Denny's! I was given the 5-Star treatment from the waitress—she gave me a birthday hat *and* birthday pancakes! I was so excited to eat pancakes for my birthday dinner and be the star of the show!

Not long after my birthday, I moved out of the KOA into a normal home with my parents and was registered for 5th grade. This meant I had to say goodbye to my pinball buddy. He was not around that day when I left. I didn't know where he was. I still find myself thinking of that "pinball wizard" at times, thanking God for him and praying for his soul because in countless ways, he saved my life that summer.

New School

Beginning 5th grade was not so bad. I did make a few friends, and during that year, my father stopped drinking. It was a peaceful year, and the individuals

who had been abusing me for so long were no longer around. Every once in a while one of them would come to our home for a visit, but I made sure to hide or be over at a friend's house to protect myself. One of the many gifts God gave me during these years was the ability to read people and situations, which were valuable gifts in order to survive and have come in handy throughout my life.

Sixth grade to senior year came with tough moments of continued abuse and bullying at school along with my father returning to his ways of drinking and succumbing to alcoholism. Throughout these years I would question God, asking Him what the purpose for all of this was. I did not understand, and I had to come to accept that He was not giving me answers, but trust that in time He would.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit placed a desire on my heart to be baptized, which was not something my parents had ever discussed with me previously. Living in the situation I did, it was a survival situation—every man for himself, so to speak. So, I said yes to the Holy Spirit, and when I was 12, I approached my parents asking to be baptized. I had no idea what it even meant to be baptized, but I knew I had to do it. I didn't want to say no to the Holy Spirit! To my amazement, my parents moved forward by enrolling me in baptism sessions with other kids at our church.

These classes were not a pleasant experience. One of the kids in these classes I was taking just so happened to be one of the students at school who bullied me. He was very hateful and unkind, to say the least. While managing this bully, the pastor would often visit our baptism classes and teach us things about

Jesus, the Bible, and such matters, and one day he said that if any of us had a question, we could ask anytime. So, I took his invitation and raised my hand to ask: “What would this world be like without God?” His face tightened and his lips pursed and he said with an angry tone, “What kind of question is that? Don’t ever ask anything like that again!” and I didn’t.

High School and Beyond!

I made it through high school with a good friend and yes, bullying followed me to senior year, but I finally found reprieve from it as kids began to mature and not engage in hurtful behaviors. After graduating high school, I began college. I had it all planned! I was going to go to college, get a career, then marry, and have a family. Simple. Unbeknownst to me was God’s plan, which involved me meeting a wonderful man named Eric—it was love at first sight. By the end of our first date, we knew we were going to marry one another.

In the midst of my relationship with Eric—dating, engagement, then marriage—I was managing the healing from the deep wounds of my childhood. In some ways, the healing journey did affect our relationship, but thanks be to God, He brought me a kind, patient, and loving man.

My entire life I believed in God, I never ceased especially amidst all of the abuse and my father’s alcoholism. I never doubted God was real. I knew He was with me always. But I was angry with God. Why would He allow such horrible things to happen to me from people who were supposed to keep me safe—who

were supposed to love me, nurture me, teach me good things, and all the things that come from parenting?

I say above that “I” was managing because I always kept God at arm’s length and I would tell Him, “I got this! You just sit back and relax.” That is now laughable, but it wasn’t funny then because I sincerely meant it. I did have it...until we decided it was the right time to have a child. It took 3 years for us to conceive because I had health issues which made it challenging to have a child. It was during this time that Eric and I began to turn to God, seeking His help and solace. God eventually gave us a little girl, Natalie, and we were beyond grateful with deep joy. She was the only child we could have but we were thankful nonetheless.

Working in the corporate world, finishing grad-school, and doing my part with Eric to raise Natalie, eventually the bottom broke and the flood came. I realized that “I don’t got it,” and that I *never* had it. God had carried me all along. He was always in control. He was always loving me, and I kept Him at arm’s length because I questioned why I would ever be deserving of His love. I hated myself. I was deeply wounded, and though my practice and education was in psychology, that only got me so far. One night, I left work from my place of employment in Orlando, and as I was driving home, I told God I couldn’t do it anymore, that I needed His help. I said to Him, “I surrender myself to You. Come into my heart and show me what You want me to do because I’m lost and I’ll do whatever it is You’re asking me to do.”

While driving I heard the “Voice”; the same “Voice” I heard throughout my whole life. The “Voice” instructed me to take a right turn instead of left when I took my normal exit to go home, so when I got to my exit, I took a right at the light. The “Voice” said to keep going and take another right, which took me past Walmart and a mall, and then eventually to St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church. I pulled into the parking lot and said, “Okay. Now what?” The “Voice” instructed me to get out and go to the room emanating light. So I did as the Voice instructed, and wouldn’t you know there was a sign outside the door that read, “RCIA Inquiry Night” (or something to that effect)?! I walked in, and they welcomed me, asking how they could help. I said, “I want to be Catholic...now.” They chuckled, and I did too, but I meant it. That was 2008.

I didn’t stay at St. John’s because Holy Name of Jesus parish was closer to where we lived, but I attended RCIA at Holy Name and came into the Church in 2009. My daughter, after witnessing me come into the Church said she wanted to do so as well. She was 11 years old at the time and entered the following year, though at yet a different parish. Eric had retired from the military, so we moved from off base housing into a civilian neighborhood. We were then closer to Ascension Catholic Church and that is where Natalie was baptized, confirmed, and received Holy Communion.

Then, in God’s awesome mercy, my husband was led to come into the Church as well! In 2011 he was baptized, confirmed, received Holy Communion. We were also given a special gift at that time – the *Sacrament* of Marriage!

Fr. Eamon, the priest who presided over that Easter Vigil, asked those in attendance if they would like to attend a wedding that night. There were about 600 people in the church that evening, and they erupted into thunderous cheers and applause! He then had Eric and I come up, and he blessed our marriage and we received the Sacrament of Marriage! Many people after that Easter Vigil Mass later approached Fr. Eamon about returning to the Catholic Church, and some felt drawn to become Catholic. Much spiritual fruit came from that Easter.

Now it is 2026 and much has occurred in our lives since all those years ago. Through God, His Divine Mercy has healed my heart and soul. He has shown me that He made me to be a suffering servant, like His Son. I survived horrific childhood abuse, 14 surgeries, and multiple major health conditions, one of which is reportedly terminal, but we'll see what God has in store! Through all of my sorrows and suffering, I was so close to Jesus my entire life but didn't know or understand it. Since coming into the Catholic Church and learning about the Sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, the Divine Mercy, Our Immaculate Mother, the Saints, and devotional prayer, I do now.

To experience suffering and sorrow with Jesus through Mary is to be invited into the depths of God's love and mercy. The gifts of understanding pain and suffering, compassion, mercy, and love for humanity would never have come to me, nor been realized, had I not surrendered to God. Suffering is a joy because it draws me close to Jesus. Pain and sorrow are joys because, again, it draws me into Jesus through Mary. I am now the Prayer Life Coordinator at St.

Benedict Catholic Church in Shawnee, Oklahoma. God allows me, helps me, guides me to bring others to Him—Catholic and non-Catholic—through prayer hours, pilgrimages, and talks I give on Jesus and Mary. Currently I am teaching others about joy amid suffering, dying, and death. All praise and all glory to God that He brought me to this point and this position to walk with others on the daily pilgrimage with Jesus and Mary to Him.

My conversion is daily, second by second, inviting God to turn my prism so I may see where He wants me to go, what He wants me to do, and who He wants me to be. I have become a “To Jesus Through Mary” person. I have a deep devotion to Our Lady, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy, and to many saints such as St Therese of Lisieux, St. Faustina, St. John of God, St. Bridget of Sweden and her 21 Promises/15 Prayers, St. Bernadette, St. Padre Pio and the list goes on. I pray several rosaries a day and many of those days include the 7 Sorrows of Mary rosary. I never sought out these saints, prayers, or devotions to Jesus and Mary—the Holy Spirit brought them to me. I love the Holy Spirit and what He has done for my whole life, but especially my prayer life and helping others deepen their prayer lives. My favorite Act of Contrition that teaches me much about humility and one I say daily and often throughout the day is: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner. Amen.* Another prayer I say which reminds me to surrender to Jesus comes from the Surrender Novena: – *Jesus, I surrender myself to You. Take care of everything. Amen.* Whenever I am asked how to grow deeper in love with Jesus and Mary, I say pray, go to

Reconciliation, receive the Eucharist, listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit because He will always speak to the heart, and pray the Rosary because when you hold the rosary you are holding the stories of Jesus and Mary and you are entering into the joys, sorrows, and sufferings of Our Blessed Immaculate Mother and her Son, the Divine Mercy.

My hope for anyone who reads my testimony is that they see it as a story that completely and totally glorifies God and speaks to His mercy and love. I pray people will see the gifts and graces in suffering and come to know a closeness with Christ they have not previously experienced. Suffering is a great act of love from God because it sanctifies the soul. God's Divine Mercy has allowed me to experience the unkindness of others; a hint and whisper of the suffering of Jesus and Mary—the profanity, the blaspheming, hatred, the abuses. And God's infinite Mercy has also allowed me to see when I was unkind, not loving... it's the double-whammy of not seeing Jesus in those people who committed those abuses nor loving Jesus within those persons. God's Mercy shines light into all of the darkest corners so that I and hopefully all people will see our own wounds, unite them to His Son, and become a better lover of Christ in every aspect of our lives, better than we were in the moments before.