



February 2024 CHNewsletter

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THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

Journeys Home

Into the Half-Way House: The Story of an Episcopal Priest

By Fr. Michael Rennie

I wrote this essay over a decade ago when I was in a very different phase of life. I'd given up my position as the pastor of a lovely little church on Cape Cod and relocated with my wife and three children to St. Louis. Here, we were received into the Church, and I began the process of being ordained to the priesthood. Even then, I was still feeling my way into the Catholic Church. At the time this essay was published at the website *Called To Communion*, it garnered a number of responses, one of which was the question of how I might feel in the future about the words I had written. Would I still feel happy to be Catholic?



I have to say, I feel the exact same today. I still find myself, even if I'm older and wearier in some ways, standing in wonder and awe before Christ and his Church. If anything, the enchantment has only increased. I've fallen even more in love with Christ. The only explanation for this spiritual growth is that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has pried open a door in my heart. I peer through and the world beyond is timeless and wide, filled with the glory of God. In some way, even though I'm still lingering somewhere between,

as it were, the porch and the altar; and even though none of us will be home until we finally meet God face to face, at the Mass, embraced by the communion of saints, I am somehow, nevertheless, home.

*"Hear yet my paradox: Love, when all is given,
To see Thee I must see Thee, to love, love;
I must o'ertake Thee at once and under heaven.
If I shall overtake Thee at last above.
You have your wish; enter these walls, one said:
He is with you in the breaking of the bread."*

– From *The Half-Way House* by Gerard Manley Hopkins

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...Journeys Home Continued...

At Yale, there used to be an auxiliary library buried underneath the green in front of the Sterling Memorial Library. One fine fall day, I happened to find myself not out amongst the foliage but rather tucked away below the sunshine and the sod, reading a book. I suppose it was an odd choice. This was the ugliest space I know of on an otherwise beautiful campus. So ugly, in fact, that it was targeted for a remodel and is now gone. But there I was, and perhaps even more odd, I, a good Anglican-priest-in-training, was reading Cardinal Newman. Not the good parts that we Anglicans agreed with; the parts about the Oxford movement and the Church Fathers. No, I was reading the *Apologia*; the story of his conversion to the Catholic Church. I was particularly bothered by one specific bit. I was at the part where Newman makes his point that, fundamentally, there is no difference whatsoever between Arianism and Anglicanism. One is reviled and discredited, the other respectable and vital. But look closer, Newman argued, look underneath. What is there? Rebellion. There, buried beneath the sartorial splendor, the monarchy, the gorgeous liturgy, the incense, the polyphonic chant, and the prestige of Oxford was a group of Christians steeped in the bitter throes of willfulness. Yes, it is wrapped up in the respectable sounding doctrine of the *Via Media*, but of course, the *Via Media* is the last refuge of all theological scoundrels. Newman got to me that day, blinking in the fluorescent lights of a now disappeared world. My own world, comfortable as it had been, began to slip away as well.

Or perhaps it really slipped away the day I read the story of another convert, Gerard Manley Hopkins. This is the Hopkins who I am convinced could convert the world through his poetry if only we gave him our attention. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," indeed. But for Hopkins, this only became the case through his own

participation in the mystical life of the Church. His poetry before his conversion he came to consider vain; worthy only of being burned (yes, he actually did burn all of his poetry). While still at Oxford, Hopkins saw the beauty of the Catholic Church and became determined to convert. In the intervening period, as all his friends and sometime prospective employers tried to talk him out of it, he wrote in his journal that he felt "like an exile." I read those words and the Holy Spirit did His work and I understood that until I converted, I too would feel the pain of exile.

It had taken me a good bit of time to work my way to this point. I grew up a free-church Pentecostal of sorts. I never thought of myself as anti-Catholic. But in retrospect, goodness, was I anti-Catholic! The problem with Catholics, everybody knew, was that they worshiped statues. Nothing could be more clear. As a child, I simply assumed this to be the case. There were statues in their churches, none in mine, *prima facie* idolatry.

Sadly, this manner of thinking is implicit in Protestantism. I suppose it is the blindness that comes with rebellion; like Adam hiding from God in the garden because he had lost sight of the true Good. It isn't necessarily our place to blame our separated brethren. After all, most didn't choose to be born Protestants and be indoctrinated in the habit of divisiveness; but it certainly is our place to be patient with them and to pray for them, and when the occasion calls for it, to attest steadfastly to the truth of the teachings of the ancient Church.

I bring all this up because this was the position in which I found myself as a young college student. Dissatisfied with my own brand of the Christian religion which denied it was a religion and my own inherited tradition which denied it was a tradition, I thought briefly about Catholicism. I even went to Mass a few times. It was fascinating. I was attracted to it. I felt something solid about it, comforting, and yet, I

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

FIRE WITHIN: ON PRAYER

FR. THOMAS DUBAY, S.M.

Fr. Thomas Dubay synthesizes the teachings on prayer of two of the greatest Doctors of the Church on prayer – St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila – and the witness of Sacred Scripture, and looks at how those principles of prayer can be applied in the life of the average Christian.

#3171 - \$19.95 (Limited quantity)



SHAKESPEARE AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

AVAILABLE ON DVD

Was Shakespeare a Catholic? In this DVD from our 2006 Deep in History conference, Joseph Pearce looks at the English Reformation and the life of the Shakespeare family, and makes the case that they were among those recusant Catholics who stayed loyal to Catholicism while under Anglican rule.

#1225 - \$15.00

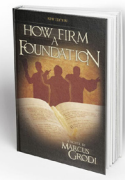


HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

BY MARCUS GRODI

Marcus Grodi's first novel tells the story of a Protestant minister striving to serve Jesus under the weight of an escalating crisis: How can he be certain that what he is preaching is eternally true and not just his opinion? The story continues in his second novel, *Pillar and Bulwark*.

#3137 - \$14.95



knew for a fact that these people worshiped statues! Okay, with age, my critique became a bit more subtle. But in the long run, aren't all our arguments against the Church just as silly and vain? She outlasts us all. We can kick and scream and throw tantrums; legislate against her, slander her, outlaw her priests and persecute her children: the Church still prevails. She fears nothing. And because of this, she is able to be generous and patient.

The greatest novel of all time (no one argue with me on this) is *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh. In it, Waugh describes a family who keep their country seat at Brideshead in the ancestral home. The family itself is a mixed lot—a father living abroad in sin, a domineering mother, a son who is a flamboyant dandy, a worldly daughter, and an overly-childlike daughter. Waugh describes the slow decline of Brideshead as the family disintegrates and scatters. This dissipation works itself out universally in the advent of the Great War, which finally swallows up all of England and turns Brideshead into quarters for Army command. In the end, though, we are left with a scene in the house's private chapel, where the altar lamp is still lit and a lone priest says Mass for an old woman. I am a lot like that family. Many of us probably are.

You see, conversion is a gift. Mother Mary holds her Son for us, patiently suffering at the foot of the Cross. We can ignore her, go our own way, rebel—it doesn't matter. Hanging on the Cross, Christ says to each and every one of us, "Behold your Mother." She is here still. Waiting. We may be elsewhere, doing God knows what, but above the altar the candle still flickers. This is the light by which, in time, we find our way home.

As a young Pentecostal, I wasn't yet ready for the Church, but She is patient. And so my story continues.

I became an Anglican. This was a place that seemed to have it all: dignity, beauty, wonderful music, good order, tradition, and of course, they didn't worship statues. I don't like the idea of tearing into the Anglican tradition as far as specifics go, so let's be content with Newman's fundamental insight. As nice as my sojourn in Anglicanism was, I began to feel a lack. It was like the Nothingness from *Never-Ending Story* (the scariest movie of all time, don't fight me on this). It's hard to explain; I just know that after a while my heart wasn't in it. I was still wrestling every single, little belief I held. There was never any rest.

What was worse, having been taught that a good follower of Jesus always goes to His Holy Word for life-giving truth, I could not help but notice that the word of God speaks of something called "The Body of Christ." This Body is identifiable; it consists of those who have been united with Christ through Baptism and have received the Holy Spirit

for purposes of holiness and witness. It is ordered by the governance of Bishops, thus allowing orthodoxy to flourish and the ancient Gospel truth to be defended; as Paul advises Timothy, the Church is the "pillar and foundation of the faith." (1Tim 3:15 NIV) The Body of Christ is the Church, visibly united, gathered around the crucified and risen Lord, and fed by Him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the way in which Christ is present to His people. He is, of course, not confined to simply being present in the Communion feast but this is His chosen way, a marked moment, if you will, by which all other moments are defined. If Christ is potentially present in this world in any place, it is because He is first present in the Eucharist. This is why He says "unless you eat of my flesh and drink of my blood, you have no life in you." He is our sustenance. He is our all. So, as Church, we are called to visibly gather around the Lord's altar to give thanks and to be fed. This is not just a mysterious, ancient rite. It is the redemption of the world.

You can see the problem here, right? I was on the outside looking in.

In a real sense the Church has become fractured. We no longer gather around the table as the One Body. To me, this means much more than an organizational difficulty. This means that we have presented to the world a scandal. We have divided up the Body of Christ. We have protested against each other, separated ourselves, held our own judgment up against that of the Spirit-inspired Church. A close reader of the Bible will come to the conclusion that Christ and his Church, the Head and the Body, are inseparable. And yet, in our practice, we pretend that this is not the case.

It is a big deal, a really big deal, for Christians to hold themselves apart from visible communion. We might all protest from our various theological kingdoms that we aren't the ones who have gotten it wrong. We are not to blame. Perhaps not. Or perhaps all of us in every corner of Christendom are to blame. No one gets off easy with this one.

Ultimately, my goal is not to point the finger at others but to examine my own conscience. Had I held myself apart from visible communion with the Catholic Church because I thought I knew better? The answer is, yes, I had. My journey towards the Catholic faith has not, at its core, been a journey of personal enlightenment or one in which I have held up the Church to my own opinions and finally found it acceptable. This would be to make the Church too small, and as G.K. Chesterton reminds us, the Church is ever so much larger on the inside than it seems from the outside. Mine has been a journey towards faith. I have learned to believe first so that I might later begin to understand, rather than understand so that I might then believe. My intellect

“
**We may
be elsewhere,
doing God knows
what, but above
the altar the candle
still flickers. This is
the light by which,
in time, we find
our way
home.**”



A Note from Jon Marc

Dear Friends of the Coming Home Network,

God uses a variety of means to wake people up, capture their hearts, and turn them toward Himself in a moment of conversion. We know this better than most here at the Coming Home Network, having helped people on their journeys into the Catholic Church

for over 30 years. We have been witness to thousands of testimonies describing the mysterious and unexpected ways God works such changes in the hearts of His children. For some people the journey is primarily an intellectual matter of reading, arguments, and evidence. For others, the journey is a moral impulse—the conviction of a need to repent of sins and receive the forgiveness and healing that can only be found in Jesus Christ. For others still, what attracts them to Christ and His Church and drives them to persevere through obstacles until they are finally *home* is a glimpse of God's transcendent beauty.

The Beauty of Conversion

Beauty is, of course, a mysterious thing. Beauty is a real property of being—not a mere subjectivity in the eye of the beholder. Yet even among the other transcendentals (truth and goodness), beauty is more elusive in definition and nature. While it is difficult to say precisely what it *is*, as Christians we can say confidently that we know its *source* and the meaning and purpose it has in our human experience. Beauty is a glimpse of the creator in His creation—a glimpse intended to melt our hearts and set them to seek the fullness of God for which they were created. God fills creation with these glimpses of His transcendent beauty, and ever so often, He pulls back the curtain even further than usual in order to catch our eye, break our hearts, and remind us of the meaning and purpose of our lives—to persevere in our pilgrimage back to the source of all truth, goodness, and beauty, and to be forever changed by the journey.

One of the great things about the penitential season of Lent we'll be entering this month is that it is a time for us to be re-sensitized to higher forms of beauty. Already, by virtue of the natural season, many of us are experiencing the gray days, early nights, and bitter cold of winter. During Lent, in a special way, we are invited by the Church to *intentional* detachment—from some of our free time (through extra prayer), comfort (through fasting and abstinence), and money (through almsgiving) as acts of penance. These are all good and beautiful things, but it is in making a sacrifice of them

to God that we have the opportunity to receive back from Him a renewed outpouring of and appreciation for these and even greater beauties:

- The beauty of the gifts of life and time, the meaning and purpose of which are to come to know, love, and serve the almighty God;
- The beauty of the many comforts (minor and major) we take for granted every day although they too are gifts from God;
- The beauty of the treasures and talents God entrusts to us for the performing of works of mercy; and
- The infinitely greater beauty of our neighbor, made in the image of God, whom we are called and privileged to serve.

Perhaps most of all, as it is a season of penance, Lent is a time to be re-sensitized to the greatest and most costly beauty—that of God's great love and mercy, shown and enacted on the cross toward which we journey this Lenten season.

CHNetwork and Your Parish

On a practical note, let me take a moment to express our gratitude and make an invitation to the many priests and lay members of the CHNetwork—converts as well as lifelong Catholic supporters—who work tirelessly for the kingdom at the local parish level.

Dear friends, know that we at the Coming Home Network think a lot about the Catholic parish. When we are assisting those on the journey home to the Catholic Church—answering their theological questions, talking them through difficult relationship or professional issues, and praying for and with them through their struggles—we know the trajectory of their journey will always, eventually, be *YOUR* parish. In God's good time and providence, the people we work with will eventually be reaching out to a priest or catechist; inquiring about Baptism, the Eucharist, and/or Confirmation; signing up for OCIA classes; and trying to navigate and explore a new community, whose teaching, practice, and language is foreign to them.

Because of this, we are immensely grateful and continually praying for our priests and lay ministers who work at the parish level to provide the sacraments, share the faith, and build up their Christian community. We see ourselves as "partners in mission" with local Catholic parishes, together helping Protestants (and others) to *come home* and then *be at home* in the Catholic Church.

With that in mind, let me add to that note of gratitude one of invitation: we would like to invite and encourage priests, catechists, and others involved in local parishes to find ways to bring the Coming Home

Network into their ministries and to make use of our (free!) services and resources as they help people come home to the Church. For example, we would highly encourage OCIA directors to invite their participants to sign up for this free CHNewsletter so they can be reading powerful conversion stories before, during, and after they enter the Church. We have also designed a new “Thinking of Becoming Catholic?” brochure that can be placed in vestibules, directing inquirers to free CHNetwork videos and resources. Additionally, we have found that the CHNetwork Online Community and our in-person retreats can be a huge help to inquirers and recent converts who are still finding their footing. Perhaps most importantly, our pastoral care team is always available to connect personally with inquirers who are struggling with doctrinal issues or other obstacles on the journey as an added support to the work already being done at the parish level.

Once again, we’re grateful for your partnership in sharing the truth and beauty of the Catholic faith and helping people make the journey home. If you’d like to help connect the CHNetwork to your parish, visit CHNetwork.org/parish for more information.

Pray & Fast for Those Sojourning

On a final note, please don’t forget to take a look at the names on our “Prayer Requests” page in this CHNewsletter and to pray for them and for all members of the CHNetwork, whatever stage of the journey they may be on right now. Offer up your Lenten prayers and sacrifices especially for those pastors (and others) who are facing true loneliness, loss, or discouragement on their journey toward the Catholic Church, that they may find fellowship, consolation, and the path forward in Jesus Christ.

As always, know of our prayers for you as you take the next steps in your own journey with Christ and our gratitude for your support and participation in this apostolate of conversion and reunion.

In Christ,



JonMarc Grodi, Executive Director

Grandma’s Gumbo & The New Testament Canon

By Deacon Randy Ory

No doubt, as Catholics, we’ve had conversations with our Protestant sisters and brothers about how the New Testament Canon of Scripture came to be. We can run the risk of falling prey to a strawman argument when, as Catholics, we think of our Protestant friends as merely asserting that the Bible “just dropped out of the sky.” While no one literally believes that, we think it is a light-hearted (even if hyperbolic) description of how our Protestant friends think the New Testament Canon materialized.

We all recognize that the literary device of the analogy can be a powerful means to communicate a point. Oftentimes an analogy can make clear in a conversation what has been obscure and confusing. In a conversation once with a Protestant friend, this analogy of my grandma’s gumbo came to my imagination in an attempt to explain how the New Testament Canon was developed.

I described this story to my friend:

Imagine telling someone that your grandma’s gumbo is absolutely incredible. The friend replies, “Where can I get some?” You respond, “It can be found at that large grocery store on 3rd & Main.” Days later, after returning from multiple trips to the grocery store without finding it, the friend says to you, “I searched high and low for something called ‘Grandma’s Gumbo’ but I couldn’t find it—can you tell me the product name and in which aisle I can find it?”

You tell them, “It is not in a single aisle or in a single package, but you can find her gumbo in the Meat Department (for the chicken and sausage) and in the Seafood Department (for the crabmeat or shrimp). You will find the vegetables (bell peppers, onions and celery) in Produce. And of course, in about 8 other aisles, you’ll find the flour (for the roux) and tons of other culinary elements of her gumbo. Indeed, her gumbo is “truly in the store,” you confidently affirm.

Your friend replies with some impatience. “Wait a minute, I thought Grandma’s Gumbo was going to be an already pre-packaged product, found on a single aisle!” You quip, “I never said that; I merely said that my Grandma’s Gumbo can be found at the large grocery on 3rd & Main St., and indeed it can be found there—in about 11 different locations in the store.”



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Grandma's Gumbo continued

The analogy does not conclude until the point is made: Grandma's Gumbo does not just materialize out of thin air into one place, but it is indeed true that it can be found in the midst of that large grocery store, surrounded by thousands of products not used for the recipe.

This is analogous to the truth that in the early Church, for the first 400 years, the 27 Books that would become known as the "New Testament Scriptures" were indeed "there," intermixed with many other writings. So, it is true that the 27 Books of the eventual New Testament were indeed among all the other writings—just as my grandma's gumbo ingredients could be found in the midst of all other ingredients.

However, it took rationality, intentionality, and indeed the love of my grandmother to bring the gumbo to its full and delicious reality. More importantly, regarding the Scriptures, it was the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church which led intentionally and lovingly to the identification and proclamation of the true, authentic, and inspired 27 Book Canon of the New Testament.

This Lenten Season, let's enjoy a warm bowl of Seafood Gumbo, while we prayerfully consider the wonderful Sacred Scriptures of Lent—given to us by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Catholic Church.



Deacon Randy Ory is a deacon assigned to the Catholic Church of St. Ann in Marietta, Georgia. You can find his newly launched YouTube Channel "Ordinary Time Catholic" at www.youtube.com/@ordinarytimecatholic—consider subscribing.



From Gerald G.

I am doing well in my reversion to Catholicism. My priest has been outstanding! He heard my first confession in 30 years and to my surprise it was quite painless. (I had told him he may want to bring a six pack with him. He laughed.) I was done, absolved, and ready for communion in about 5 minutes—just a little penance and I was good to go! So in a period of approximately 45 minutes, I returned to the Catholic Church.

Again I want to thank everyone there for guiding me along the path of reverting. Was it easy? Not always. I have had trouble with the changes to the wording in the liturgy, but I'm getting there. Thank you for sending me a prayer book and missal; they have been great at explaining the changes. (I have enjoyed listening to On The Journey with Matt, Ken, and Kenny as well!) So again, THANK YOU!

From Houston C.

After years of serving as a United Methodist lay supply preacher and then four years as a local pastor, I am joyfully now a Catholic in full communion. I was received and confirmed on the first Sunday in Advent at Saint Patrick's parish in Fayetteville, NC. Christ is truly and substantially present with me in the most holy Eucharist—body, blood, soul and divinity. I will never look back. Christ's holy Catholic Church is my home. ■

Do you have an update on your journey to share with us? Send it to info@chnetwork.org.

EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by JonMarc Grodi, CHNetwork Executive Director



TELEVISION

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Tues. 1AM ET, Thurs. 2PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Sat. 6PM ET

RADIO

Mon. 8PM ET—Encores: Sat. 7 AM ET, Sun. 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET
The Best of The Journey Home: Mon.–Fri. 1 AM ET

Monday, Feb. 5

Justin Hibbard

Former Evangelical Minister

Monday, Feb. 12

Fr. Corwin Low

Former Nominal Christian

Monday, Feb. 19

Santonio Hill

Lifelong Catholic

Monday, Feb. 26

Courtney Comstock

Former Pentecostal

Monday, Mar. 4

Jeremy McLellan

Former Presbyterian

Schedule is subject to change.

To access the full archive of past *Journey Home* programs go to chnetwork.org/journey-home



Robert & Madeline Lombaerde Compass Donors since 2016—7 Years

PARTNERS IN *Mission*

Raised in the Russian Orthodox tradition, but not really practicing the faith, Robert became Catholic when he fell in love with Madeline. Her strong Catholic faith inspired him to join her in the Church so they could foster their marriage and be united in raising their children by sharing one faith in their married life. Robert listened to Catholic radio during his work commute and enjoyed listening to Mother Angelica. One day, when Madeline was flipping channels on the television, she happened to land on EWTN with Mother Angelica on the TV, which instantly made Robert tell her to stop and watch with him. Subsequent watching of EWTN introduced them to many other shows, including *The Journey Home*, which became their favorite. They share:

“We learned so much about our Catholic faith watching *The Journey Home* episodes—more so than we had learned being involved in various ministries. The stories told by the guests on the show were very heartwarming, but also informative of the Catholic faith. While we had been very involved in the Church through religious education, Marriage Encounter, lecturing, premarital formation, and more, we still did not have a deep awareness of the history and beauty of the Church. Through *The Journey Home*,

we both loved hearing about the treasures found in the Church, especially when shared by devout converts from many Protestant (and other) backgrounds. Especially moving were the sacrifices made by those who were pastors, ministers, Anglican/Episcopal priests, and clergy of all kinds, from different faith backgrounds. They gave up their livelihoods and more to become Catholic.

Not surprisingly, the Coming Home Network provides fellowship and support to those ‘on the journey’. We wanted to contribute to those efforts so we started as monthly donors and moved to annual donations from our retirement savings. We continue to love and learn from *The Journey Home* program and also gain so much from the *On the Journey* podcast and other videos and books from CHNetwork.org. These programs have helped us understand the faith and become better Catholics; we have seen the effect on *The Journey Home* participants too!

We believe in supporting CHN to further produce and provide a way for all others wishing to come home to the Catholic faith. Lord willing, we hope to share these resources at our parish so others can learn and be inspired by these stories and be thankful for the treasures found in our wondrous Catholic Church. Praise and all Thanksgiving be to God!” ■

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The Coming Home
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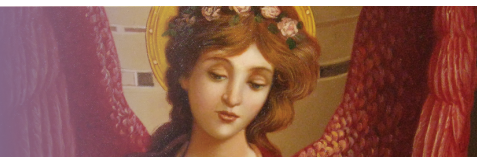
CHNetwork was founded to help men and women, clergy and laity, from every background imaginable, discover the truth and beauty of the Catholic Church.

Robert and Madeline Lombaerde have been faithfully supporting the mission of CHNetwork since their first gift in March of 2016 through monthly giving, help with special campaigns, and annual gifts. If you would like to join them in becoming a partner in our mission, make your gift by returning the enclosed envelope, or donate online at chnetwork.org/donate.

TAX LETTERS

Tax letters for 2023 contributions will be e-mailed to donors who have email addresses on file. If you would like to receive your tax letter by postal mail, please contact **Ann Moore** at ann@chnetwork.org or 740.450.1175 x101.

Prayer List



Clergy

■ **For Glen, a Methodist pastor** deeply troubled by what he sees happening in his denomination, who finds himself drawn to explore the Catholic Church but fearful of what this would mean for his ability to find employment.

■ **For Houston, a Methodist pastor** who resigned his ministry last year, began working in another field, and has entered into full communion with the Catholic Church by receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Communion in December of 2023.

■ **For David, a Methodist pastor** who is meeting regularly with a priest, working now to enter OCIA, and preparing to resign his pastoral ministry in July of 2024.

■ **For Tim, a Lutheran pastor** who finds himself drawn to the Church and wonders how he will make a living if he were to become Catholic, especially since his wife is not on the same journey as him.

■ **For Ralph, an Evangelical pastor** who is beginning to explore the teachings of the Catholic Church and seeking instruction through the Coming Home Network.

■ **For Nathan, an Assemblies of God pastor** who is convinced that he will need to become Catholic at some point and struggles with the potential effect this will have on his family and his ability to support them.

■ **For Andrew, a Baptist seminary graduate** who has begun studying Catholic teaching and finds himself drawn toward the Church and wanting to learn more.

■ **For Roger, a Baptist pastor** who has resigned his Protestant ministry and is now leading his family toward full communion with the Catholic Church.

■ **For Ignacio, an Episcopal priest** who is seeking to learn how he might

enter the Church and the Catholic priesthood through the Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.

■ **For Mark, a Church of Christ pastor** who has finally made the decision to look for a new job so that he can resign from his ministry.

■ **For Kelvin, a former Baptist minister** who is drawn toward the Church, reading widely in Catholic theology and apologetics, and seeking answers to his remaining questions.

■ **For Thomas, a former Episcopal priest** recently welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church and discerning his future as a Catholic.

Laity

■ **For Larissa, a Baptist**, that she will receive the grace needed to share the news of her conversion with her parents, that they will receive the news well, and that she and her husband are able to be blessed with children.

■ **For Sarah, an Orthodox Christian**, that she may have perseverance in her continued journey to the Church, and that there may be marital and family unity in the faith.

■ **For Angela, a Baptist**, that she may have wisdom about timing to move forward on her journey, and for her family and friends to receive the news well.

■ **For Sasha, an Evangelical**, that she may receive acceptance and love from her friends and family as she moves forward in her journey to the Church.

■ **For Brenda, a Baptist**, that she finds courage and peace as she moves closer to being confirmed, and for good health.

■ **For Diane, a Catholic**, in thanksgiving for being brought into full communion with the Church, and for good health and healing.

■ **For Larry, a former member of the Disciples of Christ**, that he would be granted the grace to respond to the call he feels to join the Catholic Church.

■ **For Aleem, an Anglo-Catholic in the United Kingdom**, that he may be drawn to full-communion to the successor of St. Peter.

■ **For Abdul, a Messianic Jew**, that he may find the proper guidance that will assist him to fully enter the Church founded by his Lord and Messiah.

■ **For Asafe, an Evangelical Presbyterian in Brazil**, that he may be able to progress beyond the philosophical obstacles he finds to the Catholic faith.

■ **For Robert, a former New Ager in Virginia**, that he might find acceptance and healing through the holy sacraments of the Catholic Church.

■ **For Stuart, a Jewish brother in New York**, that he may soon find his true home in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

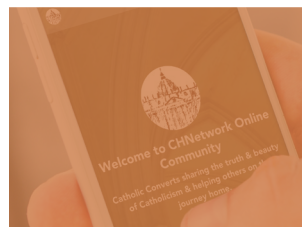
■ **For Corey in Ohio**, who is on the journey, that he may find grace and healing from the things in his life that cause him to be angry.

■ **For James, a Lutheran in Indiana**, that as he continues to study and pray, the Holy Spirit would guide him home to the Catholic Church.

■ **For Marc, an Anglican in England**, that his wife would become open to his journey to the altar of Christ in the Catholic Church.

CHN ONLINE COMMUNITY

Our Online Community is a great place for converts and those on the journey to connect with one another and our CHNetwork staff. We invite you to join us if you haven't already! Visit CHNetwork.org to sign up.





WHY DO WE *Pray, Fast, & Give* DURING LENT?

As we enter the Lenten season, Catholics are asked to more intentionally take up the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as a way to experience a further conversion of our hearts and minds as followers of Christ. These three pillars of Lent are solidly rooted in Scripture, encouraging us to deepen our reliance on the Lord and grow in relationship with Him, so we may more fully rejoice in His resurrection. The proclamation of Matthew's Gospel at the liturgy on Ash Wednesday helps properly orient our efforts toward that interior transformation rather than mere external demonstrations of piety.

PRAYER

Many of us who come from backgrounds of faith, whether Christian or otherwise, already know the importance of prayer. The season of Lent provides a fresh opportunity to examine not only our personal prayer lives, but how we can better unite our prayers with the prayers of the entire Church as we journey toward Easter together. As Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (Mt 6:5–6)

FASTING

Fasting is clearly both modeled and encouraged by Jesus during his earthly ministry. But depending upon how we were formed in faith, the practice of fasting may be new to some of us. Our fasting not only assists us in detaching ourselves from our worldly affections, but also helps us to identify more closely with Christ, who, before entering into his public ministry, went into the desert to fast and pray.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you. (Mt. 6:17–18)

ALMSGIVING

Lent is an opportunity to not only pray and fast, but to shift our attention from ourselves to those in need, with whom Jesus spent so much of his earthly ministry. We pray to draw closer to him; we fast to deny ourselves of our selfish and prideful impulses; and we give to share the fruit of that prayer and fasting with those who need it most. As Our Lord concludes in his discussion of prayer, fasting and almsgiving in the Sermon on the Mount:

Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them... But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (Mt 6:1, 3–4)

“The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others.”



GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

CONVERT, POET, PRIEST

by Matt Swaim

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God...”

So begins *God’s Grandeur*, one of the most famous poems from 19th century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose works did not begin to gain wide notoriety until after his death. And while his work is regarded as highly influential in the history of the Western literary tradition, his conversion to Catholicism and his vocation to the priesthood as a member of the Society of Jesus are not as widely known.

Hopkins was born into a prominent Anglican family in 1844, and several of his relatives were involved in various artistic pursuits, from the visual arts to music and poetry, as well as the study of languages. All of these interests were instilled in Hopkins from a young age and led him to pursue an education at Oxford. While there, he developed a friendship with Robert Bridges, who would go on to later become Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. It was also during this time that he became more engaged with both ascetic practices and the pursuit of beauty. These questions began to lead him beyond his Anglican roots and deeper into the Catholic tradition.

He became more engaged with both ascetic practices and the pursuit of beauty. These questions began to lead him beyond his Anglican roots and deeper into the Catholic tradition.

This search for his true spiritual home finally came to a head when Hopkins decided to reach out to one of England’s most famous Catholic converts: St. John Henry Newman. Newman had entered the Catholic Church in 1845, a year after Hopkins was born, and was well known in England among Anglicans and Catholics alike by the time Hopkins was studying at Oxford. Hopkins was able to meet with Newman in person in 1866, and it was Newman himself who received Hopkins into the Church in October of that year.

Like many 19th century Anglican converts, the decision to become Catholic caused conflict and estrangement between Hopkins and his family, and also had an impact on his academic and professional trajectory. The employment question was initially resolved when Hopkins was offered a job at the Birmingham Oratory by Newman, and it was not long after taking that position that Gerard felt a strong call to religious life as a Jesuit. Having written poetry for years, he initially perceived there to be a conflict between his poetic interests and his religious vocation; in a moment of passion, he burned most of his poems, and didn’t write again for another seven years. This mix of artistic fervor, ascetic impulse, and melancholic swings would mark the trajectory of Hopkins’ entire adult life.

Over time, however, Hopkins began to see that there need be no conflict between his love of poetry and his priesthood, and he began to write poetry again. Only a few of these poems made it to print during his lifetime, as his innovative use of meter and imagery from nature were not always understood by editors and publishers. Unfortunately, by the time he had reached his 40’s, Hopkins found it more and more difficult to write, due to increasing difficulties with his health, and a nagging worry that pursuing publication of his poetry might lead to pride, which he constantly feared would be an impediment to his vocation as a Jesuit priest.

Hopkins died in 1889 at only 44 years of age, and it wasn’t until 1918 that his work received wider distribution and acclaim. His old friend Robert Bridges, who had been named Poet Laureate in 1913, decided to use his own influence to get some anthologies of Hopkins’ work published. In those years following World War I, the uniqueness of Hopkins’ style and the insights of his writing finally took hold with a wider audience, going on to influence such major 20th century poets as W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot.

Hopkins was a complex and interesting figure; his struggles with both physical and mental health, especially toward the end of his life, reveal swings between wonder at God’s creation, and melancholy over the state of the world and his own soul. But through all of his poetry, a distinct sacramental worldview shines through. God is the Father of all, by whose hand all things are made, and whatever causes wonder ultimately points to him. As Hopkins writes in the closing line of his poem *Pied Beauty*:

“He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.”

...Journeys Home Continued...

simply isn't up to the challenge that the latter option presents. I trust that when Jesus breathed His Holy Spirit into His disciples He was anointing His Church to be, among other things, the guardian of the sacred and simple truth of the Gospel.

I have learned to rest in the truth that the Church teaches. I do not make my own salvation through knowledge or emotional experiences, through following this teacher or that. Whether I realize it or not, God is doing a great work in me. It was begun at the Cross, is sustained by the Holy Spirit, and will be completed at the final judgment.

I borrow this analogy from the English poet and convert John Dryden, but it fits me. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil writes about an encounter that Aeneas has in the forest outside of Carthage. He has wandered there after losing many of his men at sea during a storm. In the forest, a woman approaches him, falls into conversation with him, and comforts him in the midst of his troubles. It is only after she turns and walks away that he recognizes her. It is his mother. He recognizes her by the way that she walks.

I am sure that I could put up a good fight on all of the various theological and biblical reasons why I believe in the Catholic Church, but I would really prefer to say simply that the visible, undivided Church, the Church that Jesus prayed for in His last moments with His disciples, the Church that is the Mother of us all not on her own merits but because she holds Christ within her womb; this I have recognized by the way that she walks.

Even though I'm making a bit of an attempt, this is not the kind of thing that one explains between the soup and dessert course while at dinner. At least this is what Newman once said when asked "why become Catholic?" It is a deeply personal and intimate spiritual journey. It is the search for one's mother. In this case, she has been here all along.

I can say this—in turning to the Catholic Church I do not turn to something foreign and alien to Anglicans or Evangelicals. I turned, rather, to the Catholic Church in order to become more fully what I already was. I have been raised to expect joyfully the activity of the Holy Spirit in my life; I expect Him all the more. I have come to understand the beauty of the English liturgy, the patterns that are formed

through Common Prayer, the primacy of Scripture, and salvation through Christ alone apart from my own efforts; I believe in those all the more.

I have decided to give what I am to God, which means to take my place in his Body here on earth. My hope in Christ is that my gift given and carried along by the work of the Cross will be acceptable and pleasing to God, and that the promise to those who die to the old life is that they will have new life more abundantly.

I would like to quote from the late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, also a convert to the Church, who spoke these words to his parishioners. I too spoke these words to my parishioners during a tearful farewell. I wish I had written them, but I will make these words mine: "To those of you with whom I have traveled in the past, know that we travel together still. In the mystery of Christ and His Church nothing is lost, and the broken will be mended. If, as I am persuaded, my communion with Christ's Church is now the fuller, then it follows that my unity with all who are in Christ is now the stronger. We travel together still."

This wouldn't be a conversion narrative if I didn't make note of the fact that on October 16th, 2011, my wife and I publicly professed our faith to be that of the Catholic Church and were given the sacrament of confirmation by the Most Rev. Robert Carlson, Archbishop of St. Louis. This was the best day of our lives. ■

This conversion story first appeared on the website Called to Communion on October 26, 2011. Reprinted with permission.

*Fr. Michael Rennie lives in St. Louis, Missouri with his wife and six children. He is an ordained Catholic priest through the Pastoral Provision for former Anglican clergymen that was created by Pope St. John Paul II. He's the Web Editor at Dappled Things Magazine, writes a regular column for Aleteia, and the story of his conversion is told in greater detail in his book *The Forgotten Language—How Recovering the Poetics of the Mass Will Change Our Lives* published by Sophia Institute Press.*

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

PSALM 51:10-12

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*“Seeing the sun, the moon
and the stars, I said to
myself, ‘Who could be the
Master of these beautiful
things?’ I felt a great desire
to see him, to know him
and to pay him homage.”*

St. Josephine Bakhita
Feast Day: February 8

