
In Mary's Womb

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Let it be to me according to your word. ~ Luke 1:38

I felt like a kid, dragging my heels, as my heart was being tugged onward by God's hand. I didn't want to go, and it hurt. I had already learned the importance of obedience. Just as Jesus *"learned obedience through what he suffered"* (Heb 5:8), I had learned that, even though God's ways were not always my ways, his ways are always best. But as I sought God daily through prayer and Scripture reading, I found myself less and less able to pray. I was holding back, even though God was calling me to go to RCIA.

At the time, my husband was a graduate student studying theology at the Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. I had been exposed to enough of what he was learning to know that this would be a place where my questions about Catholicism would be answered. But I wasn't sure that I even wanted them answered. What if I found them to be true? Then what?

I knew my resistance was distancing me from God. I told myself, and everyone else, that I was going to RCIA in order to learn, not necessarily to become Catholic. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."* I knew that God was capable of leading me to places that I would have never dreamed of myself.

My RCIA experience turned out to be a wonderful one. I was surprised to find out how the teachings based on Tradition were rooted in Scripture. It was also a relief to find out that many of my fears about the Catholic Church were based on misunderstandings or misconceptions.

When I married a Catholic I knew that I could never



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become a Catholic simply for his sake. Nor did he want me to do so for any other reason than a desire to do God's will. I knew that, in order for me to become Catholic, God would have to make his will very clear to me and that I would have to be able to explain it and fully believe it in order to embrace it. As I began to learn more about the Catholic faith, I found myself explaining and defending it to my friends and family. This I never dreamed would happen.

My marriage was also richly blessed as a result of my openness to learn about the Catholic faith. What had once led to pain and defensiveness on both sides could now be discussed in a more reasonable manner. My husband attended RCIA with me. He never once told me of his desire for me to become Catholic, although I sensed an increase in his prayer life. He gave me all the space I needed to explore, question, and doubt. Consequently, I found it easier to approach him with my thoughts. This often led to long hours of discussion.

During the RCIA process I found out that I was pregnant. My husband and I were thrilled with the news. I remembered reflecting upon my sister-in-law's pregnancy, six years earlier, and recalled the insights I had received about Heaven at that time. My family had gathered to celebrate Christmas and my younger

sister played carols on her flute. My brother commented that the baby, still in his mother's womb, could probably hear the music. I thought at the time that, just as the baby could hear music from our world while still in the womb,

in a spiritual sense we can glimpse the worship of God in Heaven while yet in this world.

At about this time, one of the RCIA sessions closed, as it normally did, with a popular song of praise. Later that evening, while I was reading the Bible, I recognized that the words of the song that we had sung were taken directly out of Scripture. I was familiar with the songs and Psalms that we regularly sang or chanted, but the words of this particular song came from the book of Revelation: *“Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen”* (Rv 7:12). I kept reading and found the passage where the saints in Heaven sang, *“Holy, holy, holy”* (Rv 4:8) and realized that when Catholics sang these praises at Mass they were imitating the vision of Heaven that St. John described in the book of Revelation. *“This is what we will be doing in Heaven,”* I realized. I brought my discovery to my husband’s attention and he explained that Catholic worship is more than just an imitation, but an actual participation in the Heavenly worship of God. Just as my unborn baby hears the sound from a world that he has never experienced, God invites me, through the Mass, to glimpse a world that I have not yet experienced.

As my pregnancy continued, I began reading a book that a friend had given me describing the development of a child within the womb. I began to pray specifically for each member of my baby’s tiny body as God shaped him inside of me. As this miracle took place within me, sometimes I felt like a mere spectator, but I also sensed that God had invited me to participate in this miracle in a special way. It seemed that God was doing all the work, caring for this child that I had never even seen. I continued to pray and wondered sometimes if my baby did not perhaps know his Creator more intimately than he knew me. It seemed that this could be the case and, though I longed to hold my child, I found myself praying with deep desire that the intimate relationship that they now shared would continue throughout his life.

Our RCIA director had scheduled an extra weekend ses-

sion, as she often did when she wanted to give us more time to discuss important topics. Though I was coming to enjoy the sessions more and more, I found myself uncomfortable as the “Mary” weekend approached. Though I certainly had nothing against Mary, I felt that too many Catholics went overboard in their devotion to her. I felt that the love

Catholics have for Mary should be reserved for God alone. I didn’t understand what role Mary had in my life, since Jesus alone had died for my sins. However, during our discussions about Mary in RCIA, we learned that true devotion to Mary should always lead us closer to her Son, Jesus. This gave me a sense of peace about the Catholic Church, but I had known Jesus for many years and did not understand how Mary could help me know him better.

My sponsor suggested that I try spending some of my prayer time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and though I did not really understand how that could make a difference, I figured that it couldn’t hurt. One day while I was praying in the chapel, I felt the presence of Jesus with me as I brought to him my concerns and desires for my unborn child. As I prayed that my child would know him as I did, he made it clear to me that his mother had been praying the same for me all along, with that same sense of longing that I experienced for my own child. All of a sudden I understood that Mary loved me with the same motherly love that I as a mother was giving to my child. It was as if I had been in her womb all my life, being formed

by her Heavenly Father, but had never recognized the special role she was playing in my spiritual development.

Through these revelations, and many others, I felt that God was leading me to join the Catholic Church. Though most of the intellectual difficulties were overcome, the emotional struggle I experienced caused me to hesitate. My family had been very supportive, but my greatest difficulty was the separation I felt when I contemplated becoming a Catholic. However, I knew that I had to be obedient to God’s call, and respond as my newfound spiritual mother had done when she had said, *“[L]et it be to me according to your word”* Lk 1:38.



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