

THANK GOD, I MADE IT HOME by Kathleen Laplante

I remember it clearly. My husband and I decided to leave the Church, and we invited his Catholic parents over to justify ourselves. It was 1990 and we recently had our first son. With him on my hip, I stood in front of my mother-in-law and addressed the topic of abortion. Acerbic and ignorant, I asked, "Who does the Catholic Church think they are, telling me I can't have an abortion if I want one?" *"Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me."*

My in-laws were terror-stricken. They tried to explain the Faith and thought we should talk to a priest, but our minds were made up. The Devil had won. How else could I have held the life from my own womb, and argue that I should be able to abort "it" if I wanted to? And why else would I have been glad that my son would not have to bear the burdens of being female? (I did not know the dignity and joy of being a woman.)

The dichotomy of that scene alarms me now, but from our misinformed view of the world, our thinking could not have been different. We were enslaved by the insidious messages of the secular world. We hit all the hot-button topics of our generation, fulminating that "Women should be allowed to be priests. Gay couples should be able to live together and raise children. Confession is unnecessary. The idea that the Pope 'is king,' is archaic and ridiculous, and by the way, "Who is he to say we can't have premarital sex or use birth control?" *"Oh, God, forgive us our trespasses."*

My in-laws were disheartened to see us leave the Catholic Church for a Protestant one, but we were in "heaven." This Protestant congregation allowed women to preach, gay couples to live together, and anyone to receive "communion" any time, i.e. there was no confession. They did not (overtly) oppose abortion, and they were more hospitable. Our vagrant souls could not have wanted anything more – until that routine became too inconvenient and we stopped going to church again.

After my second son, I had an unexpected revolt against contraception. I knew something was wrong. Perhaps my pregnancies and births awakened the womanhood within me. My husband wanted a vasectomy, but I would not agree. Nor would I agree to go back on the pill. The strain in our relationship loomed with oppression. Simultaneously, my struggle with postpartum depression lingered on into major depression.

With serious illness at our relatively young age, disagreement about our sex life, and no conjugal faith to draw upon, our nine-year marriage ended in divorce. I was resentful about being a mother who lacked emotional stamina and know-how for fulfilling that role. I was also limited in my caretaking abilities due to my depression. So we agreed our sons should live with their father.

I was deeply torn about being the non-custodial parent. How could I, the mother, "give my children away?" Logically, I could, because they were going to their father, who loved them deeply and could take care of them better than I could. Emotionally however, I could not come to terms with it. Like my own father, I eventually felt that life was not worth living.

I ruminated about suicide many times. I made different plans. I even acted on one of them. Contrary to my father though, I overcame that ultimate act of escapism. I finally took God's hand, and when I did, He poured graces upon me. Along with leading me to outstanding medical help, he led me back to the Catholic Church. My life has never been the same. *"Come Holy Spirit; renew the face of the earth."*

Ironically, my Unitarian friend was God's first catalyst in my return. Seeing how distraught I was after my divorce, she suggested I regroup at the Guest House of a local Abbey. I had no idea what an Abbey was, but I did know this one had affordable rates in a serene location.

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While I was there, the few-but-oh-so-precious seeds, planted during my barren Catholic upbringing, came out of dormancy. They began to grow when I realized I was on Catholic ground. I had a sudden panic to get information on annulments. For the first time, I realized my part in my marriage was not right in the eyes of God. Somehow I knew the annulment process was the key to my healing.

I asked one of the priests about it. That led to in-depth catechesis where we unraveled the ignorance, sinfulness, and confusion I had about contraception, freedom to marry, abortion, the value and dignity of life, motherhood, the dignity of being a woman, and more. I experienced a tremendous release of guilt, shame and confusion - I was coming home.

On October 7, 1997, the Feast of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, I was formally received back into the Catholic Church. It was the foundation of my conversion, but not the end of it. The seeds of faith from my childhood continued to grow as I was catechized, spiritually directed, and guided in the practice of the Faith.

I no longer support the use of contraception – and now I know why. I no longer approve of abortion, and my sons clearly know my views on premarital sex and practicing purity in preparation for marriage. I defend the Church's teaching about the priesthood being reserved for men only. (My Unitarian friend even came to see the light on that topic.) The act of gay couples living together and raising families is no longer acceptable in my eyes.

I have been blessed to have my irreverent attitudes removed. I no longer say "I can connect with God any time, so I don't have to go to Mass." Instead, I draw upon the advice of my spiritual director -- "Don't say 'I *have* to go to Mass;' say 'I *get* to go to Mass." And that I do. I now go to Sunday and daily Mass.

I am the founder and coordinator of an annual walkathon for expectant mothers in need of support for giving birth to their children. This year, we reached the grand total mark of \$13,000. My relationships with my family, friends, and God, are strong. The rosary is one of the most important tools I have, and I pray it almost every day. I am a Benedictine Oblate at the Abbey where it all began. I no longer work in the corporate world, where I found it difficult to act morally. I work at the Abbey as a baker and I do some publicity work for them.

I no longer see depression as a sign of failure. Instead, I view it as a manageable medical condition that has redemptive value when I unite it to Christ on the Cross. Suicide is never on my mind, and the Memorial Bible my family received when my Dad died on my birthday, has become another important tool. The process to obtain a Decree of Nullity brought the healing and growth I anticipated. The Magisterium's wisdom shined through in that area. My sons and I are emotionally close, and I love being their mother.

I am a Roman Catholic woman with no desire to be anything else. Christ replaced my hopelessness and disconnects with His joy and spiritual integration. The life I literally thought was hell, has become a foretaste of heaven. *"Thanks be to God. He brought me home."*

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