

# LOVE TRIUMPHANT

+ My journey to the Catholic Church +

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*"...They are the most complete Church of all.  
And you know what? I cannot deny what I learnt so...  
I am going to convert to Catholicism!  
...Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*

This I wrote in my journal on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007AD, after so many years of sad longing and doubt. Now my journey could *really* begin! The journey to what I called "The Church of my Dreams".

***I never knew just how hard it would be...***

What a long journey it was to eventually fulfill my heart's increasing fascination and desire – of at least a decade – to be a Catholic. When I started on my Christian journey, I wanted to be a Roman Catholic. Why? It is a long story...

## FIRST AWAKENINGS

I come from a South African family who are wonderful, loving Christians. There is my mother, father, and four of us siblings. I have a sister, and two brothers, all married, and much older than me. I was born in 1984, and grew up rather alone as I was so much younger than my siblings – the youngest is 10 years older than me – but in a loving Christian environment. None of my family is Catholic though, and this led to awkward tensions at my outset of love for the Catholic faith. I almost gave up on it as the faith was so different to what I was raised up on - Pentecostal Protestant teachings.

I gave my heart to the Lord at the age of 12, and between that and 21, I went to church very rarely; I was lukewarm. The churches my mom went to were modern Pentecostal ones, and to be honest, I thought all churches were like that (at that time). And that fact made me sad, because, although they were warm, and friendly, I felt nothing inside when I went. I didn't feel my heart touched, and I didn't get excited *at all*. So I stopped going.

At the same time, I had a friend I love dearly, who I still sometimes contact through writing. She is a Catholic, and so are her mom and brother. Many a time I visited her house, and saw the pictures, statues, Rosaries, and crucifixes, and I was fascinated. She had a book of Saints; I was interested, and thought: "This is new, why do we not have this at home?" One memory that I fondly recall, was one day when her mother made pancakes. I asked why, and my friend said it was Shrove Tuesday. I wondered: "What was that?" So I learned about Lent and was fascinated. All my life, I had loved tradition and order. And again I wondered: "why did my own family not teach me about Lent? And the Saints?" When I went to sleepover, she, and her mother and brother got together for evening Bible readings, which I thought was a special tradition. And then she invited me to her church...

Well, I can only say, I was amazed. It was like a breath of fresh air, so beautiful inside, that is one thing I will never forget – it was *beautiful* inside, quite different to the plain, modern churches I had been to. I can still see it vividly in my mind. Later (when we were 21) she would say that I appeared bored when I went. But even though I could have been, I was *fascinated!* My heart was touched in the deepest way, subconscious at first, and it was the start of a lifelong fascination and love for the Catholics.

The incident that started all the problems I have had for so many years, was when my friend gave me a (brown) scapular to wear, and I was quite willing to. Then when I brought it home, I was told

I must give it back as “we mustn’t worship Mary”. I didn’t know any better, but I gave it back, as I feared God would be upset if I kept it. And at that time, I felt my family’s opinion was God’s. But I was sad. Very sad.

(I was probably around 13 years old or so, when all this occurred, and I was awakened to this fascination, although I was friends with her since I was 9, so maybe it was earlier.)

From then, until I was 21, I was dormant in the faith, as I was stuck. I was often worried about my salvation and asked my mom continuously: “Am I saved?” I didn’t feel secure. It was like an instinctive belief in having to maintain salvation, which is not secure unless we maintain it by continual faith proven by acts of love. Also I was not baptized at the time. I couldn’t explore as I was stopped by misconceptions (about their Mary “worship”, and that the Pope put her on the same level as Jesus, which they certainly do not!), and I didn’t have any interest in Mom’s church, so I stayed home, and studied other things like astronomy. But I loved going to my friend’s house, and I had a great love for her devout mother as well (who I recently found out, was also a convert!).

Then we went our separate ways, I moved away to another suburb. At this time I was ill with severe depression and anxiety, which lasted for about three years. This was the darkest part of my life in which my mother was *heroic* in her support.

### THE SEARCH FOR THE CHURCH BEGINS

In March 2005 I was reawakened to my Lord by His mysterious and amazing grace after my mother and her intercession group at church (God bless them all!) prayed persistently and patiently, and after a few months, wanted to go to church. At that time, I went to Mom’s church again, one similar to the one where we had previously lived, and frankly, I was on edge, I can only say, I was ‘freaked out’. They were too intense for me, I didn’t find peace, they emphasized spiritual experience, and I felt like there was no structure. I felt confused, unmoved and unsatisfied. I remember feeling that there was almost an obligation to be emotionally stirred up, and I didn’t always feel excitable in my worship as I am naturally a quiet person. Also at that time, I was still fairly depressed, and I didn’t feel joy - yet.

So I decided to go to a Methodist church. Dad came with me, and I was there from June to about November 2005. I at first considered joining. They were quieter, and I felt more at peace, but they weren’t enough for me.

At this time, my love for the Catholics was still there, but my faith was very weak after hearing the prejudices about their doctrines. We often drove down a road near our home, passing a sign which pointed down another road. It read “Catholic Church”. I wondered longingly what it would be like there... But I wasn’t ready to investigate – yet!

My “true conversion’s conception”, as I call it, came in September 2005, when I asked not only Jesus, but also the Comforter (Holy Spirit) to live in me. This was after my mother highly encouraged me to get “baptized in the Holy Spirit”. I felt pressured, and to admit, I was scared of the Holy Spirit after going to churches where people fell down when hands were laid on them, and a bad spiritual experience I had when I was 15 (this was not caused by the Holy Spirit). I didn’t have any interest in speaking in tongues either. But I asked Him to come live in me and guide me, and it was the start of something beautiful. From then on, I grew in faith. This was a grace of conversion.

Shortly after this time, in October, I thought (not for the first time, but this time it was serious), of becoming a nun – I liked the idea of being apart from the world in solitude and silence - but I was too scared to tell Mom. But I did. She said if I wanted to become Roman Catholic I could, but she would be disappointed in me.

So I became Anglican. A ‘via media’ Church would do. In it, I could experience Catholic liturgy, but stay with Protestant teachings. I was not strong enough to dare - yet. (And I could be a nun!) But I had a deep sense of regret, not enough to not enjoy being Anglican, but to me, it was my

second choice. One thing I remember was I didn't defend my own Anglican faith, but the Catholics! If people criticized them, I got real upset! I fought constantly about the Catholics, me fiercely defending a faith I somehow loved, but never fully knew. I never remembered a time when I ever *truly* criticized them.

### CHRISTIAN LIFE AS AN ANGLICAN

I got baptized in the Anglican Church in April 2006 – I found out much later it was Divine Mercy Sunday! I had previously never been baptized, as Pentecostals didn't believe in baptizing infants, but I was dedicated as a baby. It actually shocked me, when learning the importance of Baptism as Christian initiation, *that I had only been an official member of the Christian Church since 2006!* I became a sacristan, a job I greatly loved and desire to continue whenever and wherever I can, and I fell in love with the Blessed Sacrament, and got confirmed in the Anglican Church, as I didn't expect to become Catholic, because of my fears.

And my call to Religious Life had been confirmed clear as daylight in June 2006. I looked for convents I could join, and was drawn to the contemplative ones, but was encouraged to visit an active Anglican convent, so I did in September 2006. I thoroughly enjoyed my brief stay there – for 5 days, and was even thinking of joining them, but then the superior said I was not called to their convent, but was **“more called to a community that just focus on prayer”**. I was so happy! That was *just* what I wanted! So I phoned the only (Anglican) one in Southern Africa, just to hear that I was welcome to visit, but due to me still taking prescription medication (for my depression) I couldn't come, because of the remote location far from medical services. I was devastated, but soon my mother made a plan, and I saw a psychiatrist, who said she would try gradually taking me off the pills, as she was pleased with my progress, and since February 2007, I was free, and totally healed. This boosted my faith immensely!

This was the cause for my growing adoration of my Lord and Saviour.

Meanwhile, I had read some books on saints that I got out the church library at Transfiguration – one was St. Teresa's *“Life”*, and another St. Thérèse of Lisieux's *“Story of a Soul”*. Others on St. Francis's life I highly enjoyed as well. By December 2006, I grew deeper in my prayer life. By then I had grown more towards the Catholic expression, and had a great interest in the Carmelite Order. I had also discovered the Communion of Saints, and started talking to Mother Mary and St. Thérèse. I by this time sought advice at my church as I wanted to convert to Catholicism, but I felt my future would be better as an Anglican. Not so, it seemed...

The desires to be Catholic had resurfaced and bit at me. They were constantly there, but became stronger. In that December, I had phoned the local Catholic Church, and spoke to the priest two nights consecutively. The last night I concluded that I will wait until the end of Jan/Feb. He said it will be wise of me. At this time I told Mom after agonizing for a few weeks, and she surprised me and said she will accept it and that I am an adult and can make my own decisions. My heart warmed to her.

Then in that December, the desire subsided. From then I was happy with being in the Anglican Church, even though I still went on Catholic websites, and in January I nervously started praying the Hail Mary for the first time. I was nervous when I prayed it, because I was still stuck in my old way of thinking which I wanted to discard – that I was “worshipping Mary”. I still heard the myths about Catholicism, and despite that, I loved Catholicism more and more.

### THE JOURNEY TO ROME BEGINS IN EARNEST

And, then the desires came back, with a huge bang! This was in early March 2007 (the day they came back happened to be my Catholic friend's birthday!)

I had in December, prayed 5 times for the Lord's will to be done, I asked Him “Lord, if you don't want me to be Roman Catholic, please let these desires go away, and stay away...” but it seemed that was not to be (fortunately for me!). I spoke to the Anglican priest and he said I must rest in it. So I did. But he did say there might be something in those desires as they return.

Oh my heart *yearned* for becoming a Catholic!!! I discovered something I already knew - ***I had become Anglican to please others, not God.*** And it stifled me until I reached this restless point.

I had a talk with my mom (hard!) and we expressed our hurts and made peace. She said if I wanted to be Catholic, I could! And she said she would be willing to hear the faith from a Catholic view. In that early March period I went online and researched incessantly, read amazing conversion stories, went to bed at midnight, one night 1am! And you know what I found? **Truths. Good, beautiful truths.** On the 7 March, by the wonderful grace of God, I had a **BREAKTHROUGH**; I finally put my fears to rest about things like Prayer to Saints, Purgatory, Indulgences, Honour to Mary, the Assumption, and even the hardest one - The Immaculate Conception. The earliest Church Fathers believed in these! And they are biblical! All the doctrines I was scared about, I started believing in! And I have not turned back. Also, now, I was even more scared to stay Protestant than to become Catholic! The Protestant teachings of *Sola Scriptura* (Authority of the Bible Alone) and *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone justifies us) which I believed in all my life until then, lost their grip, and I felt like I was set free. The Truth had set me free from myths taught by (well-meaning) loved ones about the Catholics, which had bound me for so many years! What an eye-opener! I must give credit to, among others, Catholic Answers, whose website ([www.catholic.com](http://www.catholic.com)) I used often. They are MARVELLOUS! And those conversion stories were so edifying to my spirit. And don't forget Scott and Kimberly Hahn... What an amazing couple!

I found that in all my time as an Anglican, I didn't know what on earth they believed in – there were many opinions on beliefs, and endless debates. I was very grateful to the Anglicans though; they were, to me, marvelously non-judgmental about the Catholics. They have also been a great stepping stone for me, a place to develop my Catholic beliefs, in a neutral environment that worships in a style similarly liturgical like the Catholics. But I felt I wanted to move on after all I had learnt recently.

I spoke to the Anglican priest nervously about my decision. He took it well, but he said his greatest fear was that I may regret my conversion. But I assured him, I would prepare well. And I did. I went to the Catholic bookshop in town, and got a full Bible - with the Deuterocanonical books (which the Protestant Bible does not contain; they call these books the Apocryphal books), and I bought a Rosary too! I also at a later stage, around Easter, ordered Scott Hahn's books *Rome Sweet Home*, and *Hail Holy Queen*. These books I could not put down. *Rome Sweet Home* for instance, I read until 3am on Good Friday, and completed it in about two or three days. *Hail Holy Queen* taught me to think typologically, figuratively, and symbolically about Scripture, and Mary popped up more in the Bible than ever before.

Meanwhile I started enquiring and visiting the local Catholic Church All Saints – that very church that the sign down the road pointed to!

It started with me phoning the priest there, on the evening of 10<sup>th</sup> March, and my! I was nervous! What would he say? I asked my Lord to have mercy on me, and asked my spiritual Mother and Sister to keep me in their prayers. And WOW! It was the best phone call in a long time! I told him everything as shortly as I could, and grew more at ease, I told him of my immense defense and enduring love for the Catholic Church, and told him I wanted to explore. And do you know what he said? (Not exact words) ***"I don't want to sound arrogant, but I think the Lord is calling you to the True Mother Church."*** I said I agree, and he is not arrogant in saying that. Oh my heart SANG! I said I want to read a Catechism. He was once again humble, when he said he doesn't want to sound arrogant, but the Holy Father (he meant the Pope) we have now is a holy man with immense humility. I thought: Good! He said next Sunday, he will be there again, and invited me to attend Mass. I was very excited as I had not been in a Catholic church for years! After I put the phone down, I wept, oh! I was SO happy! My dream was finally going to come true!

I continued my research. Statistically there are 33% Christians in the world; in South Africa 80% of the population are Christians (7.1% are Catholic and 3.8% Anglican, among others). In the world 55% Christians are Catholic and Anglicans only 4% (Anglo-Catholics 0.4% and shrinking).

Pentecostal Protestant - is 6% of Christians. I was stunned at how many denominations there were in the Protestant category, it is estimated there are 33000! And 270 are added every year! I found that sad! Because there is no unity of belief, and no main leader. Catholics are 23 churches all in communion with the Pope (present leader - Pope Benedict XVI) in Rome - 22 are Eastern Rite, and the western Latin Church is just 1. I am impressed by their unity. They all share the same beliefs, though their liturgical rites are different.

I wanted to see if there were any conversion stories about people going to the Anglican Church, so I typed in Google: "Anglican conversion stories". I couldn't find one! The first site suggested said: Catholic conversion stories, and mentioned people going from the Anglican Church! I was stunned. I thought: Rome is worth it!

The big day - 18 March 2007: I arrived just before 07h30 at All Saints (nice and close to home). Mom dropped me - I just wondered: What is going through her mind as she drops me off there? I was nervous and real excited! My first Catholic Church visit in years! I sat at the back, and then I saw the priest come in. He introduced me to two friendly parishioners, whom I ended up sitting with. I then got a Catechism from him - over 680 pages long! I expected it to be big! But I looked forward to studying it. He said: "Look after it, study it slowly and prayerfully." By this time more people of all ages came in, until it was full. It was lovely to see children signing themselves devoutly. And an older man doing his rosary - oh it was lovely!

The homily that day (I remember it was the 4th Sunday of Lent) was all about the gospel - the Prodigal Son. I felt like the "Prodigal Daughter" that day! The priest spoke of love, peace, the value of our souls, and the immense importance of parents looking after their children and teaching them the Faith. He said to us: "You are beautiful", but I noticed - as he said that, his eyes rested where I sat. It was special, and affirming.

The time finally came - Eucharist. The priest celebrated Mass with calm quietness and reverence. I knew I couldn't receive yet, but it was still very special. He mentioned souls in Purgatory and the prayers of the Saints, and I felt: I'm home, I'm agreeing with what you say! When he consecrated the elements, and elevated the Host and Chalice, oh, I just wept! I thought: "This is **real**, that is *really* Jesus there! His *actual body and blood*! WOW! I was in adoration.

I went there on average three times a week since then. I have never had such a profound peace and joy before! And I have never wept so much in church before. My heart had found its true home. I had settled with what others wanted for me, and not what my heart wanted. What God wanted. And I listened to Him in my heart now. Finally!

My mother was afraid I'd get "lost" going to the Catholic Church, but I have "found" myself! I love her very much, and she loves me lots too. She believed from when I was very young, that I have a special calling on my life. She is very concerned for me and my happiness, and although she was not happy about it in the beginning, she accepts it, and is now fine with it "as long as I am happy".

And I can reassure her, I am more than happy, I am **ECSTATIC**.

I went to Transfiguration to say farewell in early May and have my last service as a member. The Eucharist was emotional, as I knew I wouldn't be able to receive for a long time – until I become Catholic. After the Eucharist, the priest announced my departure and I stood up while he said I'm leaving, and:

***"...pursuing a calling as a Religious in the Roman Catholic Church. She believes it is what God wants her to do, but she will remember us."***

I nodded to him in love and respect as if to say, "Indeed I will!"

Everybody who spoke to me afterwards was decent about it, even though they were sad to see me go. They wished me well, and me them.

## **THE CROSS-OVER**

I started RCIA catechism classes in late April, and then the trials started coming. ***I never knew just how severe they would be...***

I attended RCIA class on Tuesday evenings, but I found them unsatisfying. The catechist was loving, lively and full of fun, told lovely stories to give examples of the topic, made us laugh, put us at ease, but didn't explain things in enough detail for me. I learnt things I knew already (mostly). But it provided a good framework summary, which I studied around at home with the Catechism I borrowed. But I was not stimulated enough, so I told another catechist in our parish when she asked about how it went, and she sympathized and said she would take me in the school holidays when she was more free (she taught the children that year). And she did one day in July – for 4 hours! I was so blessed!

From then on, I didn't have much time sitting down with her or my priest, but over the months I managed to speak to them every now and then after Mass, continued with classes, which were fun and relaxing, if not stimulating, and I made three friends, whom I traveled with to class. I also studied every now and then, my Condensed Catechism which I bought, alongside the complete one my priest lent me. I bought popular Catholic prayer books, and a Breviary to pray the Divine Office. One prayer that got me through a lot of torturous impatient longing was the Spiritual Communion prayer, which I made daily, and treated as if I was receiving Holy Communion.

I had never had so much interior trials before. My mother asked what I learnt at class one night, and I said after a long pause: "The Way of the Cross" (Not the Stations, but patience and trials). And what was worse was that quite a few times I was asked by sympathetic regulars at weekday Mass: "When are they going to let you make your First Holy Communion?"

The waiting was **AGONY**. I had reached the point of languishing for that most Precious Body and Blood, and thought of It day and night, I repeatedly begged my Lord for mercy. In August, I entered a time; sometimes dry, sometimes dark, sometimes both. I remained there and my eager, desperate longing to receive the Eucharist for the first time, was being stretched to the limit. One day in Mass, like three weeks prior to that day, I stood in front of Father to receive a blessing and when he waved the Host so close to my face, about 3-5 cm away from my mouth, and signed my forehead with the Host still in his hand, I almost thought It was going to touch my forehead – well, I hardly got back to my pew before the tears came, and a wail almost escaped my lips. I shook like a leaf, and struggled with all my strength to compose myself, but it was impossible to stop the tears and shaking. I felt like I would faint.

Meanwhile I found a patron for my life – Our Lady of Sorrows – and decided to have the confirmation name ***Dolores***. I have loved that name since May and so I chose it. It was truly and deeply imbedded in my heart, with me not knowing why, just that I *yearned* for it. In all these trials, Our Sorrowful Mother had been a great comfort, and I drew very close to her and feel a tender love and spiritual kinship for her. In general, I grew very close to Our Blessed Mother and I couldn't imagine that within a year I went from not talking to her at all or having any devotion to her, to now believing that she is essential to the Christian faith. Now, I cannot imagine Christianity without devotion to Mary. She is the best example of faithfulness and discipleship, and completes the picture. I once thought she would draw me away from Jesus (one of the BIGGEST myths out), but she has taken me to Him, my heart filled overflowing with **LOVE**.

I continued studying spiritual works by St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, which I really benefited from. My love for the Carmelite order and spirituality led me to another great fulfillment – **I got that brown scapular that I had to give back all those years ago!** I found it ironic that it was a ***Carmelite*** scapular that my friend offered me. And now here I was drawn to the Carmelite order before I even knew that scapular was the Carmelite one! WOW! And not only that, but the superior of that Anglican convent that I visited *actually suggested I try Carmel!*

In September, I was at the end of my limit, and Our Lord granted me the most WONDERFUL graces to cope with the trials of waiting. They strengthened me immensely, and I survived for a longer time.

In early October, I was in RCIA class with the other candidates, when they also asked our instructor about when we would be confirmed. She said she would find out.

Meanwhile I was also told "***It won't be long***" – (until I would be received into the Church). I was overcome with joy. What a *wonderful* promise! Now the waiting was nearly over, oh I cried from relief!

***It won't be long...***

This played in my mind over and over again. It seemed that it was a test, oh what a difficult one! I know it was not because of my priest, or any other reason that everything took so long, but my Lord's testing me. He drew me nearer to Him, a Spouse, Whom I love **so** deeply, playing hide and seek with me.

During this time, I had read *Rome Sweet Home* for the second time, and I saw how the authors (Scott and Kimberly Hahn) were each received into the Church soon after deciding to convert for sure. I decided to convert for sure on the 7 March. At that time it was 8 months later, and I was still waiting. And I thought to myself: "Why Lord, did You make me have to wait so long? **Why?**" But when I looked back, and wondered at the reason why the RCIA was so tediously easy, I saw another major grace my Jesus granted me...

He knows I was ready to enter the Church from a doctrinal point of view. But He shaped my **character**. And what a blessing that was!!! It was a blessing that converts who waited only a month or two could not know.

Then the next **and most severe** test came.

I don't know if I had heard correctly at the time, but I was told to prepare myself in the first week in November, because I would soon after get received into the Church! **ALLELUIA!**

***I was never prepared for what would happen next...***

### **THE PURIFYING DARK LIGHT**

I got to Mass on the Tuesday the following week (in mid-November), and nobody was there. I went to my priest's house, and I was informed he had had a severe fall, and was lying in hospital with a broken pelvic bone and other terrible problems.

He would celebrate no Masses for a number of weeks to come.

This led to intense trials; is purgatory worse? I wondered. I prayed. I worried. After three days of intense agony worse than September's I finally mustered up the courage to phone the catechist, the thorough and firm one. And having come back that morning from Mass in a neighbouring parish – and almost an hour of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament afterwards, in which I prayed intensely – I finally picked up the phone.

The catechist did not think I could be received into the Church with the young confirmands in December. I asked why, and she said it would be unfair on the others in my RCIA class and that I am impatient and must wait until Easter. I said has 8 months not been enough? For a convert? That if I had to wait much longer I would die of longing for the Body and Blood of my Spouse. She said if I cannot wait then I cannot become Catholic!

I was shocked when she said this. Was I really to blame? And wasn't the conversion process and length different for each individual?

I said no, I am determined to become Catholic, I have a call, and I am not going to go back to the Protestant churches. I would wait if I had to.

*"Lord, WHY, WHY, OH WHY did this turn so bad???" I thought.*

When I talked with her on the phone, I was amazed I was so forward; this is not one of my strong points as I am naturally a reserved person, and firm people like her I respected a lot.

Frankly, when I put the phone down, even before that, I knew it wasn't the end of this issue  
*But oh how foolish I ended up acting!*

I went to see a priest at a neighbouring parish, who was there while the parish priest was away. He came from Germany, so he didn't have much knowledge of how long the conversion process takes in South Africa. But he was very glad to help me, and offered to contact the Archdiocesan office.

Things didn't turn out well however, and after seeing him twice, I had approached a dead end. I thought to myself: "Every time hope rises, then there is a delay afterwards. When will I EVER see that day of reception???" By this time, my confidence took a blow, but I still felt there was that hope. After all, why would I be told that I would soon get received into the Church? After all that happened, I just had to hope in order to survive...

*The day that I saw the dead end, I also woke up.*

I woke up to the fact that I was impatient and very selfish. That my desire was inordinate, not purely centered on God's will alone. I relinquished my will to the Lord that day (the 23 November) and afterwards had a more beautiful peace, full of certainty, and faith, instead of that impatient restless "faith". I learnt an important lesson, and it was crushing to my selfish ego, but I knew it was the best thing that I needed to have. I would wait for God in silence and hope...

Soon after that, I was invited to the first Communion Mass for the children at my parish, and I asked my Lord: "WHY do You want to put me through this as well on top of my longing to receive You? Now I have to fight against envy as well! Grant me the grace I need, have *mercy* on me!" and I asked Our Lady of Sorrows to pray for me, she the ultimate faithful and holy disciple, martyred within, yet composed without. And I enjoyed the Mass.

The peace was short-lived, and the last week of November I underwent the most severe inner trials I ever had in my whole journey – *thus far*. They were so bad I could not do my usual schedule, and I was aching and physically exhausted. But after a phone call to my priest on the 29<sup>th</sup> Nov, I finally found rest.

I asked Our Lord to give me a new perspective on the Eucharist, and I have believed for a while already that there are two sides to the Eucharist – the celebration of Mass and actual **reception** of Holy Communion; and the **living** out of the Eucharist in daily life, *living* the Mass. The way I see it, is that to live out the Body is to live the way Christ would in His flesh – mortify the passions of impatience, indulgence and selfish desires; and to live out the Blood would be to desire the life of the Holy Spirit, and the holiness He brings through constant faith, hope and charity. Like Christ, the Body torn, the self mortified with the Blood of Life flowing out of Him. The more mortified we are, the more Life we have flowing out of us, and the more we glorify God!

I had been kept in the dark about the day I would be received into the Church for a long time; it was only at the end of November that I was told it would be at Easter, probably on the Easter Vigil – the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2008. It seemed so far away, but of course, excitement does not come easy! But as my priest had said: "It will come!"

My parents and I were invited to attend a Mass on the 8<sup>th</sup> December (feast of Immaculate Conception) at the Parish church where the Carmelite Order in my area is, to see a Carmelite novice make her first vows. It was beautiful! When she walked to the front, I wanted to weep with sudden joy, as if it was me making the vows!

I stood at the foot of – and inside – the much more progressed, and really beautifully styled chapel they are having built, and I fingered my rosary in my pocket and I said to Our Lord: "*will I make my vows in this chapel one day...?*" ☺

It was lovely being among so many priests and religious there; I felt quite in my element! How I so wish to be more among them, more involved in Church life! I introduced myself to our Archbishop as well. It was grand to meet him in person!

When the prioress greeted me and my parents before the Mass, she said to me: “Are you still wearing your veil?” I said: “Always!” (I wear a veil on my head; a practice I began after I got that call to Religious Life, and had made a vow). She joked with me and asked what order I am from. I smiled, but I might have added: “Sr. Dolores of the Order of the Hopefuls!”

I had first visited the Discalced Carmelites back in early July, and got under the direction of their prioress, who is guiding me. She advised me to work in the community a little (to learn relationship skills) and to see her more often, and to learn to drive a car. I was also under the direction of my priest, who, also very contemplative and learned, was spiritually a very dear father to me. Unfortunately, it was hard to find time to talk to him, as the shortage of priests meant he had to work twice or three times as hard. But I did whatever I could.

The biggest cross I had to bear in my conversion journey was this longing for the Eucharist and full membership of the Catholic Church. But it was not the only one. There was another just as painful – *I was so terribly lonely*. Not that I didn’t like being alone – quite the contrary, I am a loner. But being the only Catholic in my family, I had nobody around me to talk to about the faith and to share the treasure I discovered, and my attempts were often met with silence. And I was not one to go and start a conversation with just anyone, unless I thought of a topic or wanted to ask a question. My heart and vocation was in the Church. When I went to Mass or classes, I was so overjoyed to have Catholic company. But at home, I was silent. I so eagerly wanted to talk about Catholicism, but I never knew if it was welcomed or if my family was interested. So I just loved them as my family, and tried not to talk so much on the Catholic Faith. I practised my faith alone, reading and praying alone. I yearned still so eagerly to go to the convent and be involved in Church life every day, praying, studying, writing, glorifying God.

I **NEVER** knew what a **goldmine** the Catholic faith is! I studied the complete Catechism, and Scripture has come so alive – more than ever before! My favourite Catholic teacher of the faith is St. John of the Cross. And I really enjoy reading Scott Hahn’s books! The Lord has helped me to see Scripture in a new way through St. John’s teachings. And Scott Hahn showed me the amazing depth to theology. I would love to write books on the faith so that people could be drawn to it. It is my love and desire to write.

Despite the difficult times in my journey, I have **never** been so blessed before! 95% of my preparation for becoming Catholic has been on my character and not so much on catechesis! I was put through this purgatory on earth, but it was a grace, and has strengthened me. I was aware of the term “faith formation”, and thought it meant catechetical formation. *Never did I realize how wrong I was*. Conversion is a real test of faith. But in the end, and even during the journey, it is so rewarding!

I discovered that **Life is a Mass**. And if I had been received into the Church sooner, I would not have discovered the full truth of it. It has been so rewarding and worth all the terrible pain; and to have experience of this truth strengthens one’s faith immensely. We are able to be so more effective in our lives, and the suffering we endure becomes sweet, because we can then begin to see Jesus everywhere in our lives. What is more, is that we are more united to Him and are able to draw others to Him as well!

### PASCHAL MYSTERY

The time to be received into the Church came nearer and nearer, and the nearer it came, the more excited I grew. January 2008 was a “month of the Passion” for me, and in mid-February (it was now the Lent before “*THE* Easter”); I experienced trials like the ones I had in the last week of November. I thought November was agony, but in mid-February, I felt as if I would die of longing. I grew feverish at times, and my heart physically ached and felt as heavy as lead. I grew numb, and in one Mass, I said to Our Lord, that I don’t know what to say or think anymore. It felt like I was in a tunnel so low that I had to crawl, and so narrow, that I could not turn back – and I didn’t want to, as I saw more and more treasures in the Catholic Faith. The journey was painfully slow,

but I knew its length was near, and I kept on pressing on and on. I knew that if I kept on labouring in the mine, I would sooner than later get to the gold! I also knew that the last leg of the journey was usually the most intense. I worried about my health, but Our Lord gave me the strength to keep on.

I was being “un-SELF-ed”, that is the Lord was increasing and I was decreasing. It was a really desolate experience, an emptying of self. I learned something else beautiful, this time about contemplation and Union with God. ***I saw that contemplation is “living Christ”. When words are too weak; when we cannot find words to express our love for God, we live this love in our lives – that is contemplation (in action).*** What we profess (our faith) gets so deeply imbedded in us by discovering it in Scripture and Mass that it becomes our way of life. This “becoming” gets gradually more easier the more we love God – and the more we love God, the more speechless we get!

On the night of February 26<sup>th</sup>, I had come back from class, and luckily no one was at home, because I was in such anguish and exhaustion that I wailed aloud in agony to my Lord, and said I cannot do this on my own anymore – I was so, so tired. The nailing of Our Lord to the Cross came to my mind at that time, and I was in a cloud of numbness once more. *I felt I had reached the end of my strength.* Then I remembered that a fellow-convert, Grace, had given me a medal in class that evening; it was the Miraculous Medal. The next day I started wearing it; I thought it may help, as it was said that there were such wonderful graces that came to those who wore it devoutly. Like the Scapular story, I found this ironic too – this medal was one which highlighted the Immaculate Conception of Mary – *and the Immaculate Conception was the hardest doctrine, and the last, for me to accept!* And when I did accept it, then everything fell into place. God works in strange and wonderful ways! What a wonderful conception of my faith!

That day I started wearing the medal, I felt the first lightness and joy, since October, coming back. My mind alternated between dryness and detached hibernation, to excitement and tears of ecstatic joy at the thought of Easter, which was now just over three weeks away. What a miracle! My Heavenly Mother had come to my help...

I wrote in my journal not long afterwards, that I was in a desert traveling towards a Universal City, and whereas on Ash Wednesday I said I could not see it yet, now I could for the first time. Finally it was in view, and the Son was rising. Soon it would be day...

I knew that Holy Week would not be easy, due to the end being near. It felt like the longest week of my life – and the most tiring! I knew the excitement would be intense. But I was met with other last-moment trials, oh there were so many! I knew once more, that it was a test. The frustrations were due to the arrangements and preparations for the big day. We were told that we would be received into the Church, then confirmed only at a later stage – this after we believed it would all be on one night. Then we were told that we would also be confirmed, but on Easter Sunday morning... I was quite muddled! It was a frustrating time, and I was SO tired, to the point of tears! But when I knew we would be confirmed as well, I was overjoyed once more. There being two churches in my parish, cared for by one very hard-working, but loving and fatherly priest, it was difficult to arrange things. But eventually it would come right! We really had to trust in God!

### **HOME – AT LAST!**

God came through with such **wonderful** blessings! Me and my 6 fellow-converts were received into the Church and confirmed on Easter Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2008AD at St. Kevin’s Catholic Church (the other church in our parish, where we went for our instructions). It was such a **beautiful** service and it went so well! AT LAST I could receive my Lord in the most BEAUTIFUL Sacrament I have ever known – the Eucharist. It is a foretaste of HEAVEN, that is all I can say...! AT LAST the day came! My life starts here. ALLELUIA! The parish was so welcoming and supportive; AT LAST I am part of the wonderful Catholic family! At last, my heart is whole, and at rest!

**GLORY BE TO GOD!**

I plan to visit my friend's church where it all started, and attend a Mass there. It will be a very special pilgrimage for me! I found it ironic, that her church's name is The Church of the Resurrection, and I was received into the Church on this, the feast of Our Lord's Resurrection! Wow!

The Church of my Dreams became at last the Church of my Reality. As my favourite proverb puts it: ***All roads lead to Rome***. All I can say is: **AMEN! ALLELUIA!**

***This is a new day, let us rejoice and be glad...***

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