



~ KRISTYN HALL ~

*This is a “bird’s eye view” of the beautiful way God has worked in an individual life. I believe if anyone looks back, he or she will see the same gold thread winding its way through the tangles that make up a lifetime: God has a plan for each person.*

### **I. CHILDHOOD**

(1975) I was born in Pontiac, Michigan, the first of two daughters. My parents were basically agnostics at the time, though I don’t think they would have used that word. God existed, of course, but was not a priority in our home.

(1979) I woke up from a dream I didn’t remember but went right into the kitchen and asked my mother, “What does God look like?” What I most remember about this little vignette is her startled expression, though it was thirty years ago.

(1980) My family moved from the northwest suburbs of Detroit into the “thumb” area, way out in the country, to my grandparents’ old place. I remember going to a Mass at my great-aunt’s Catholic Church some time during Lent. It may have been Palm Sunday or Good Friday because I remember a long reading during which the congregation did a responsive reading, including the phrase, “Crucify Him!” which troubled me.

(1983) During the summer our family was invited to Vacation Bible School at the local Missionary Church. My mother, for reasons still unknown to her, accepted the invitation. My sister and I went with my mother that week.

Since starting school I had inwardly cringed every time one of my little friends mentioned church. I wanted to go to church. I knew it was good and I so wanted to be good. I was drawn to pictures of Jesus and crucifixes, even though I didn’t understand Who He was or what it all meant. I remember staring at the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at my grandparents’ house when I was still a young child. I have always had a type of “infatuation” with His Heart. Somehow I intuitively knew it was good and right to love Him. The only explanation I have is that someone was praying for me, perhaps my great-aunt or one of my grandmothers. Naturally, I was thrilled at the prospect of going to church, any church. I had no idea there was more than one kind anyway.

I learned my first memory verse that night, Psalm 27:1.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

Being a fearful child, these words thrilled me. They still do.

For months I mistakenly thought this was the first verse in the Bible, since I had learned it first. It was rather embarrassing to be corrected by a six-year-old. “The first verse starts with, ‘In the beginning,’” he told me. “That’s how you know it’s first.”

Thus began my church career. I loved it all. I loved saying the “Sinner’s Prayer” on a weekly basis, just to be safe. I loved singing the songs and learning the verses. I loved the elderly ladies who gave us candy (to my mother’s chagrin) and seeing children from school.

My father did not come to church with us at this time, but many people were praying for him and God was at work. One night at church I told one of the deacons that my dad was a very good man and if anyone would go to Heaven, it would be him. He patted my shoulder kindly and said, “Well, I’ll keep praying anyway.”

(1985) We moved back to the Metro Detroit area because of my father’s job. The man who came to hook up one of the utilities invited us to church and so we began attending a Congregational Church. This time we went as a family.

There was a little more “liturgy” at the Congregational Church than there had been at the Holiness Missionary Church. I loved the responsive readings and the special events during Advent. A family who will always be dear to me started a children’s choir which was the highlight of my fifth and sixth grade years.

## II. YOUTH

(1988) There were issues with mishandling of church finances and other “grown up” problems I didn’t understand as a twelve-year-old. We left that church and visited an Assembly of God (A/G) congregation, to which my friend’s family belonged. My parents knew I wanted to go to my friend’s church but warned me they would give it a one-month trial. That was to be my home church for more than ten years.

This was a big change. The A/G is a Pentecostal denomination and there was some culture shock involved after the structure of the Congregationalists. Structure, in general, was now out, and the Holy Spirit was in.

This is a tongue-in-cheek statement because often the pastor’s whim or an overly-emotional song leader’s feelings were confused with the leading of the Holy Spirit. I loved the music, the “thrills and chills,” the excitement and general attitude of “expect the unexpected.” In hindsight, however, I see that I spent some very important years (13-18 years old) mistaking every goose bump and coincidence with the Holy Spirit’s guidance. I have since learned that the Spirit does not send mixed signals or send us on a roller coaster ride. Still, my church experience was a good one, and I spent too much time involved with good things there that I had no time to get into trouble anywhere else.

I grew up, then, with a fervent desire to find God’s will and do it. Just as when I was a young child, it was natural for my soul to desire to show Jesus I loved Him by being good.

Being human, I failed regularly, and my prayer was regular as well: “Jesus, I’m so sorry. Please forgive me. I promise to try to do better.”

(1990) When I was fifteen I had a life-changing experience with the Lord while working during the summer at an outreach ministry in Detroit. I prayed that if it was God’s will He would send me into “full-time Christian service.”

Over the next couple of years I charted a course. I figured I wouldn't be getting married for a long time. I didn't date and could not connect the dots between being dateless and married, so I planned on being single. The children's ministries in the inner city needed full-time workers, so I made plans to go to Bible college (my pastors' *alma mater*) and major in Home Missions with a minor in Communications (I always did love to write). The summer before my senior year I was accepted to the school and began my final year of high school with a lot of starry-eyed plans.

(1992) That fall my church youth group was scheduled to help another A/G church develop their music ministry in their youth group. I was singing and doing the sound with our youth worship band so I went along to the other church.

It is said if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans. I imagine He got a chuckle in October of '92 when He sent Tim across my path. He was the pastor's older son at the church we were visiting, and was the one working on the youth group music ministry.

Sometimes when I need to get one of my children's full attention I will take his or her face in my hands and say, "Look and listen." That day God took my face and pointed it at Tim and gave me a temporarily photographic memory by which to remember that important moment. I can still see exactly what Tim looked like that first time I saw him. I literally thought to myself that all my plans of saving the inner city had just been screwed up.

A week or two after we met I went on a retreat. During an extended prayer time, I gave all my confusion to God and asked Him to guide me. I remember praying, "I don't want to decide all these hard things on my own. I want You to decide where I live, who I'll marry, how many kids I have..." I just went on and on, going through a box of Kleenex. I shared all of this with a good friend, who looked at me seriously and said, "One day they're going to stuff you and put you in a museum."

My mother met Tim shortly thereafter and made me solemnly promise that I would still go away to school for a year. I agreed. We dated during my senior year, got engaged right before I graduated and after that long year at college in Missouri, where I learned to love theology, we were married.

### **III. EARLY MARRIAGE**

(1994) Our first year of marriage was very tumultuous. We moved three times, out of state and back a few months later. I had wanted to get married because I wanted to be a wife and mother and homemaker, but we quickly found that many people had the expectation that we would be perpetual college students, delaying any plans to have a family. We tried that briefly but we were miserable. The birth control issue made me a nervous, guilty wreck. Everyone was telling me it was right, reasonable, responsible and wise, but I somehow knew I was doing something wrong and could barely live with myself.

Before that first year was over, we settled back in my home church and got very involved with the youth, music and children's ministries. The pastor I had worked with in Detroit had come up to the suburbs to help our church begin an outreach in a rough part of town. It fulfilled that old dream I had to work with him in children's ministry, only with the "underprivileged" children in my own city.

(1996) Our first baby was born three weeks before Christmas. I quit my job at the church daycare center and stayed home. I felt like I had it all. A husband, a beautiful baby girl, ministry. She came along with me when I worked with the kids' ministry and sat in my lap at choir practice.

(1998) Our second daughter was born. Now I had two little girls, just like my mom. Our church situation was crumbling, however. A lot went wrong quickly and after discussing the issues with our pastor and having no confidence of things changing, we went looking for a church.

We settled in the Church of God, a denomination whose beliefs mirrored the A/G, but had a family rather than corporate feeling. (This statement only refers to the congregations, not the denominations in general.) Once again we were involved with the music ministry and I began teaching the children on Wednesday nights. It was a warm, loving congregation---“salt of the earth” type of folks.

#### **IV. CRISIS**

(2000) Tim had gone through a few job changes and attempts to go back to school. This resulted in his ending up in restaurant management, which he was great at. He loved the fast-paced atmosphere and camaraderie. I had a hard time adjusting to it all. The hours were long, I was home with the little ones all day, and unfortunately I nagged a lot, we pulled away from each other, and things were not good.

I was also expecting our third child, which had not been in Tim's plans. A major conflict with a relative drove a deeper wedge between us. There was a lot separating us and we were not trying to overcome any of it. We talked less because when we did talk we ended up arguing.

Our first son was born that November. He was the bright spot in a very troubled year; however, it was a traumatic birth for me (though the baby was just fine) and all of the stresses just boiled over. The baby was not yet a month old and our marriage was in serious trouble.

I had nowhere to turn but God. Thank God my parents had taught me right, or I don't know what else I would have done. One thing had changed, however. No longer would I pray that I would try to do better. There was no chance of that. I told God, “You will have to take me how I am because I can't do any better. I have tried and tried and I just can't do it.” I thought I was asking Him to bend the rules for me. Somehow after going to church for over fifteen years I had missed the fact that God takes sinners, not those who are good on their own.

Tim and I had the sense to look around us and decided what we had together was worth saving. It was several months before there was real improvement, but God had truly taken me up as a lost sheep. I was the wayward sheep whom the Shepherd loved enough to break its leg so it couldn't stray and had to rely on Him. I spent my time close to His Heart. That I had finally truly repented of my sin was enough for Him and He did the rest.

#### **V. SECOND CHANCE**

(2001) So our marriage began again after seven years. Tim had left restaurants, was selling real estate, and later took an unpaid position as the Music Ministry Coordinator at an A/G church a friend of ours was pastoring, the very church we had met at almost ten years before. (Tim's father had left the church to pastor in another state shortly after we were married.)

This was an interesting period. I realized, back in my old environment, how much God had changed me and that He had eliminated my tendency toward, "I feel, therefore I am." I no longer needed to be busy doing so much; I had an understanding that my "full-time Christian service" was to be played out, for the most part, in my home. It was hard to sit Sunday after Sunday and listen to sermons that stirred people's emotions but did little to give them the foundation they would need in times of crisis. Everything was changeable and up for grabs.

Tim had changed a lot too, and this made for trouble in his work at the church. He wasn't willing to go with the fads in the "contemporary Christian music" scene and wanted to think things through more. This wasn't popular. Also, we had begun homeschooling, which was viewed as counter-cultural and weird by many people. It was a bittersweet moment when Tim made the decision to resign his position and take us elsewhere.

So it was me, Tim and the Bible. Really, it wasn't so bad. But we needed a church. One afternoon I sat at the table with my Bible and Charles Wesley's poem "[Primitive Christianity](#)" in front of me and sent up a flare. "Jesus, just help us find the Church You started, wherever it is. Help us to know it when we see it, and we'll do whatever You say."

## VI. "SIMPLE" CHRISTIANITY

(2002) A friend told us about a "weird" church. "They all just sit around and study the Bible. No programs or anything."

That piqued our interest. It sounded so New Testament. Might this be the answer? This particular fellowship rented space from another church (no mortgage), had a couple of unpaid elders rather than a pastor, and kept things as simple as possible. This appealed to us, still feeling bruised by our past experiences.

(2003) During this time, while I quietly prayed and left everything in God's hands, a miracle occurred. Tim's heart changed completely in regard to having more children. That is a story in itself!

We were at this "simple" fellowship for one-and-a-half years. The leaders were involved in a controversial charismatic movement and things began to unravel for us. We didn't want to leave and Tim met with the elders many times. There was no resolution and we left sadly. A short time later the church dissolved.

(2004) We looked for a few months and found another similar group that was quite a drive away. I was expecting our fourth baby and we were welcomed with open arms into this more conservative fellowship. This was a pro-family, pro-baby, pro-homeschooling group with many similar values as ours. It was called a "Bible Church" which seemed safe to me. We were all for the Bible, weren't we?

While we were still deciding whether we would commit to making a long drive each week, God shined a light on our path that we noticed but didn't follow, unfortunately. About a month before the baby was born we met a faithful, authentic Catholic family through our midwife. "You've got to meet them," she would say. "You have so much in common." When I met them I agreed until I heard the phrase "Our Lady." What? There was something we didn't share. *I don't have a "Lady,"* I thought to myself.

I admit this meeting rocked my little Protestant world. How did we have so much in common? I did a brief study of what the Catholic Church taught on various subjects and can concur with what Bishop Fulton Sheen said:

*"There are not over a hundred people...who hate the Roman Catholic Church. There are millions, however, who hate what they wrongly believe to be the Catholic Church."*

However, we were settling into the new church, the wonderful Catholic family moved out of state, and I was highly distracted by this new baby boy that I never thought I would have. But I had an appreciation for the Church that wouldn't go away.

(2005) We moved closer to the church, sort of half-way between Tim's office and the fellowship's building. It was still a bit of a drive, but we had a goal of moving to the country for years and it was great to finally reach it. We now had two girls, two boys, over an acre of land and a second car. Life was good.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the house...

Before we moved into our house it needed a lot of work to become fit for human habitation. We spent Wednesdays and our weekends working on it. Tim had to replace all the plumbing, the gas lines needed rerouted, the foot-and-a-half of water under the house needed taken care of. Paying a house payment plus rent was not something we wanted to do forever, so we tried to get what had to be done as efficiently as possible to get us into the house. It was an hour away, so Tim worked on finding the quickest route.

That route took us past a little brick church on a corner in the middle of nowhere (at least it seemed that way at the time). The road passed between the church building and the cemetery, which was flanked by an almost-life-sized crucifix, with a strange contraption in front of it (which would prove to be a wooden kneeler). The church was named for St. Philip Neri. Like the kneeler, I was completely unfamiliar with him.

But I was drawn to that church. Every time we drove past it (up to a half-dozen times a week) I felt like a magnet was pulling me to that little brick church with the statue of St. Philip What's-his-name on top. I loved just looking at the building as we drove by, spying on the cemetery with all the little statues of Mary everywhere. It felt like it was *mine*. This was an incredibly strange and scary feeling. It was just like that first meeting with Tim. What on earth was going on? Hadn't we found our "New Testament" church?

Over time, however, it became clear that, where we had been too conservative for our last two churches, we were now too liberal. There was a narrowness and legalism that seemed to creep in and expand with intensity. Sunday morning became a celebration of all we were against, all we didn't believe in. New sins were being invented. There was talk of compiling a "rule book" to tell everyone what to wear and how to think. Some of the leaders were experiencing problems with their older children and I think it

was their attempt to prevent further problems in their younger children. I could understand the pain they felt, but more rules weren't the answer.

(2006) We were expecting our fifth baby, a wonderful blessing in the midst of a difficult year. The real estate market in Michigan had fallen apart, our income was at an all-time low, and things at church were adding to the stress in a big way. It was hard for me to haul my pregnant body into the van to go to church, only to sit in the nursery with a noisy toddler and listen over the speaker to things being preached that I completely disagreed with. The baby was born in the summer, our third boy. He was the highlight of the year!

That fall the girls were baptized at their requests, and shortly after we left the church. It was a decision that still hurts to this day, but we felt there was nothing else we could do. Tim was offered a new position with a real estate software company, a good job that would require travel, and we just needed a clean start. Out with the old, and all that. It was a sort of scary but exciting time. God provided a good job for Tim and peace returned to our home. Shortly after we left, the church dissolved. (Yes, again.)

## VII. DESERT

We began looking for a church (again), only this time we studied. We decided that no "flavor" of Christianity was out, and that we would look until we could make a permanent decision. I foolishly expected this to be a minor "parenthesis" in our lives and that the right decision would become obvious quickly. There was one thing we had learned well. For all that's said against "organized religion" there is one thing much worse: disorganized religion. We had been given a crash course in that subject.

(2007) The first half of 2007 was a whirlwind tour of the mishmash that is Protestantism. I was fond of telling people, when they asked how the church search was going, "We've visited everything from high church to home church." It was true. It was interesting and educational. But it wasn't getting us anywhere.

Tim observed that everywhere we went we found two things: genuine believers in Jesus, and a pet doctrine. There is a definite "either/or" bias. In our last church, for example, there had been a time of intense debate: are we Calvinist or Arminian? (Calvinism teaches salvation by God's predetermined will, while Arminianism purports salvation by the free will of man responding to God's invitation.) Tim stated in a men's meeting that in our home, we are both. We believe in the complete sovereignty of God, and the free will of man to choose or reject God. This position was not popular. It was acceptable to be one or the other, but somehow unacceptable to refuse to pick a side. (The church split at that time. The Calvinists left to form their own group and we stayed on with the Arminians.)

Though we were not passing judgment on anyone's salvation or sincerity, there were holes in the theology and of every church we visited that we couldn't get past. During that period every book I had that even referenced Catholicism was in a box in the back of an unused closet. That box was a specter that haunted me. The arguments made too much sense and I had to keep myself on track to work with Tim to find a church for our family. I had come to a place where I could appreciate the Catholic Church but I had to keep it all at arm's length, lest I get sucked right in and make things even more difficult for Tim.

G.K. Chesterton got it right when he wrote,  
*“It is impossible to be just to the Catholic Church. The moment a man ceases to pull against it he feels a tug towards it. The moment he ceases to shout it down he begins to listen to it with pleasure. The moment he tries to be fair to it he begins to be fond of it.”*

What I didn't put away was my trusty King James Bible. I began to jot down verses that I felt I needed to study further because they were just not very Protestant-friendly. While I never came up with 95 like Dave Armstrong, I had a page full and it bothered me.

In addition to this, the historicity of the Catholic Church seemed impossible, but it was simple fact. It *was* the Church Jesus started. The bishops of today can trace their succession back to the Apostles. Wasn't that what we were looking for?

### VIII. FIRST MASS

During the summer of 2007 we mustered up the courage to go to Mass. We went to a parish far away from home---anonymous to everyone, except for the parish secretary, whom I had emailed with a few questions. I cannot express in words what I experienced that day. I knew two things: Jesus was there, and I had been very wrong for a long time.

How I begged God's forgiveness that day! I had thought what attracted me to Catholicism was the “smells and bells,” the beauty and history and tradition, all the “pomp and ceremony”---it was like an elaborately decorated box that takes your breath away but when you open it you find it empty. How wrong I was! Christ is the Heart of the Catholic Church. He fills it, permeates it... present there in the Tabernacle. I felt just like doubting Thomas. There was nothing to say but, “My Lord and my God!”

After that visit the parish secretary mailed us a copy of one of the priest's homilies. We were providentially filled in on St. Philip Neri by that homily and greatly admired his love and zeal for God. His heart literally burst with love for Jesus.

Later that summer while we were on vacation we visited with that first Catholic family that caught our attention. They showed us remarkable hospitality and offered unconditional friendship. We met with two priests and another family in our area. We made pests of ourselves with questions. There were, of course a lot of issues to work through. You can't grow up as Protestant as we did and not have serious questions.

After visiting every Catholic Church around, we began going to Mass at St. Philip Neri and its “sister” parish (many parishes in our Archdiocese were being “clustered” into groups of two or three) and I understood why I had been drawn to the place. Jesus was there. The Holy Spirit was there. The love of God was there. To this day my heart skips a beat when I walk into the sanctuary. God gave us special grace to get five children to 8 a.m. Mass, not to mention the first month or so I never had to leave the sanctuary once with a noisy child. (Parents of young children will recognize what a miracle that is!)

However, it was a year and a half of more study, more doubt, more education, more attending Mass “anonymously,” before we finally made a decision to do this thing. I laughed when I read Hilaire Belloc's anecdote of a man's inquiry into the Catholic Church:



*“He studied the Catholic Church with extreme interest. He watched High Mass at several places (hoping it would be different). He thought it was what it was not, and then contrariwise, he thought it was not what it was.”*

But there came a time when we began thinking in terms of “us” and “we” when we thought of the Church, rather than “them” and “they.” We spent time in a strange state of Limbo (pun certainly intended) when we did not consider ourselves Catholic, and yet emailed each other articles about the Church and told our children to hush if the Pope happened to be on the evening news.

Again I quote G.K. Chesterton:

*“It’s one thing to conclude that Catholicism is good and another to conclude that it is right. It is one thing to conclude that is right and another to conclude that it is always right.”*

Chesterton goes on to warn the “cradle” Catholic of the place the would-be convert finds himself:

*“Only the word of a Catholic can keep him from Catholicism. One foolish word from inside does more harm than a hundred thousand foolish words from outside.”*

How true this is! The combination of “Is it possible for any church to be *The Church?*” and the host of dissenting Catholics caused me to go back and forth on this issue for so long. I would think to myself, “I am going to alienate so many people I care about with this one decision. How can it possibly be worth it when the Catholics don’t even believe half the stuff they’re supposed to?”

In addition to this, during this time I was also expecting a baby which takes my already phlegmatic temperament and makes me a wreck. I confess I was a stumbling block to my family. I worried and felt no matter what decision we made it would be wrong. So Tim let the church stuff fall to the background for a time, and we welcomed our fourth son into the world. He was still a wee little thing when Tim began mentioning going back to Mass.

I for one had a guilty conscience. Conversion was no longer an option or a possibility, or an idea to toy with when I didn’t have anything else to do. It was what God was calling me to and I had that old familiar feeling of conviction as I purposely hung back outside the Will of God. Any time in my life that I have purposely decided in opposition to God’s plan I have experienced extreme interior misery. Driving past St. Philip Neri was no longer something I looked forward to. It made me feel guilty just to see the spire of the church in the distance. I can honestly say I have never found sin to be “pleasurable.” It has always caused terrible stress and taken any peace I had away. I was in that place for certain. The first Sunday we went back, after all that time, it felt like a homecoming.

## **IX. DECISION**

The parish God had chosen for us was rather unique. I have read so many convert stories where the one thing the convert misses about Protestantism is the warmth and fellowship. That was something that did concern me. The church was always an extended family to Tim and me. Thankfully, we found that at this parish that we quickly grew to love. The traditions that I was told, “No one does anymore” were still observed. It was full at Mass in a day of rumors of empty sanctuaries. I had always loved listening

to good preaching, and was delighted that the pastor could preach, teach, tell a great story and was not afraid to speak the truth---and his homilies were longer than five minutes too. "He's a preacher of righteousness, just like Noah," I told my husband.

It was near the end of 2008 when Tim first approached Father about RCIA and being "reconciled" to the Church. We had already been through it all. We loved the saints, the liturgical year, the traditions. We had read and studied so long that there were no surprises. What a blessing that the DRE viewed RCIA as a process rather than a program! Though we were ready to jump through any hoops necessary, we were given the date of Pentecost 2009 for our reception into the Church.

The Lenten season of 2009 was a remarkable period. It is difficult to explain what happened to me during Passion Week, the Triduum, and the Easter Vigil in particular. Some of the things that stood out to me include:

- The suppression of the Gloria, complete with procession
- The Scrutinies of the catechumen
- The covering of the statues two weeks before Easter
- The Palm Sunday procession
- The foot-washing at Maundy Thursday Mass
- The Stations of the Cross
- Veneration of the Cross
- Following Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar of Repose
- The special singing: The Tenebrae service, the Litany of Saints, and especially the Gloria when the bells were ringing wildly at the Vigil
- The special readings at the Vigil which are sort of a "bird's-eye view" of the Bible
- The heart-felt "AMEN!" as each of the catechumen were baptized

Many of these things are no longer observed in many parishes. I am inexpressibly grateful for the beauty of these traditions. God has guided us to a wonderful place. I am often reminded at Mass of what St. Peter said on the Mount of Transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

In preparation for that the reception of the Eucharist for the first time, I had my first Confession. This was also a beautiful experience, much more wonderful than I had imagined. The short version of my first Confession was that Jesus was there, on "both sides of the screen," as it were. I expected to leave feeling very burdened by listening to myself speak of all my sins, but instead I left feeling like I could fly. The confessional is a beautiful little room, and it is a beautiful Sacrament.

That being done, all we had left to do was wait. I made a novena to the Holy Spirit in preparation for Pentecost, and worked on getting our celebration organized.

## **X. "WELCOME HOME"**

Pentecost Sunday arrived much like my wedding day. It seemed it would never come and then suddenly, here it is. We did all we could the day before to get the house clean, the food prepared, and then we went to bed so I could lie awake with that familiar "Christmas Eve insomnia" that you are supposed to grow out of, but I never did. I prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, for my parents, my grandparents... well, I got a couple of hours of sleep and then was up at 5.

The Mass was lengthy and it was just beautiful. The congregation blessed the boys during the opening hymn, Father explained the rites of anointing and baptism, and then we listened to the glorious readings about the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the homily, the rite began and Tim and I and the girls (already baptized) professed our faith: "I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches and proclaims to be revealed by God." Our children's wonderful Godparents came forward with us, and the boys were baptized. It was beautiful to watch each boy's little face. The two older boys were immersed (though not submerged), and the two little boys were poured.

After the older boys returned from changing into their suits, their faces just glowing, Father anointed them with the oil of chrism. When Father anoints, he *anoints*. He doesn't just smear a little oil on the forehead, he pours it and rubs it into the hair. That wonderful smell of balsam, the "odor of sanctity," was like incense.

When the baptisms were finished and the offering was collected, our family then went up to present the gifts. We had not had much of a chance to figure out who would carry what, so I just carried the baby and held the 2-year-old's hand. The girls carried the bread, our oldest son the water and Tim carried the wine. That left the offering basket for our four year old. He was so proud to carry it, he just came right out in front of the altar servers as they processed ahead of us and gave it right to Father. We made a sloppy genuflection and sat back down.

And before I knew it, I was there in front of altar and receiving Christ! My heart just fluttered inside me, very similarly to when Father spoke the words, "I absolve you," only it was much stronger. When I knelt down I immediately remembered that my dear Catholic friend, that first lady whose faith played such a role in starting all of this, had asked me to pray for her at that special moment, as she was near to her due date with her seventh baby, and so I did. I was so happy, so much at peace.

There was one thing I had felt concerned about in advance of that First Holy Communion. Would I receive Jesus Himself and then have the feeling that I had never really known Him at all before? He had been the most important part of my life for all these years. Thankfully, it was not the case. The only thing I can compare it to would be meeting a pen pal after many years of faithful letters. I had known Him before, but now it was in person---previously it was a spiritual relationship, now it was spiritual and physical. Truly He was with me, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

Father asked Tim to say a few words at the end of Mass. Unfortunately I had to take the baby out to feed him so I missed the very beginning. He shared some of this path God had lead us down and ended with "I've waited a long time to eat this meal with you."

It was a wonderful, wonderful day. We had 40 guests for lunch afterward. God gave us a beautiful sunny day and so we had a cookout. My parents and grandmother were there, along with my sister, my cousin and her family. Most of the RCIA catechists came to celebrate with us, along with other special friends from the parish. We were honored that Father came out as well, despite having three Masses on Sunday. The children's godparents gave all of us exquisite rosaries and handmade cards. The parish presented us with a very lovely crucifix (and we needed one!). Another couple gave us a family heirloom Bible. It was a day of great celebration and anticipation of what the future holds.

## CONCLUSION

When we left the Assemblies of God in 2002, I distinctly remember feeling lost and wondering where we would end up. If not there, where, and how would we know what was right? The day I sent up that “flare” prayer, I really didn’t know what I was asking, but God did, and that’s what matters. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus says,

*If [your son] asks for a fish, will you give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

I asked for a ‘fish’ that day. We were asking for something that was certainly within the Will of God. But it took some time. For the next four years, it seemed that we asked for a fish but were given a serpent. Every so often we were bitten, causing us to stop, rethink, and go in yet another direction. As I look back, it seems Jesus wanted us to first see what His Church was **not** in order to prepare us to recognize it.

Eventually we changed our strategy. Rather than going off in the direction that seemed best to us and hoping God would bless us, we waited for Him to guide us first. We were afraid that all of our church problems were going to give our children the impression that going to church just isn’t worth the hassle. We studied, waited and prayed. There were times I thought maybe we weren’t getting an answer because there was no answer. But I had known from my childhood that God is good, He has a plan, and He can be trusted.

And so I find myself here, received with great love into the Holy Catholic Church, after all these years of waiting for God to answer that prayer. One thought continues to pass through my mind:

**I asked God for a fish and He gave me the ocean.**