

Fr. Tom Smith, Mormon Who'd Roots Go Back to Joseph Smith, Tells Why He is Now A Catholic Priest

It's impossible to communicate all the mounting evidence and experiences that led me to abandon the faith of my fathers, but let me relate a few examples. One day, while knocking on doors in a very poor area of Alabama, my companion and I came upon a sagging shack badly in need of repairs. We knocked on the door and were greeted by the bright eyes of an older African-American woman in her 70s or 80s. We told her we had a message about Jesus that we would like to share with her. As someone who loved Christ, she welcomed us into her humble home. As was our practice, we asked if she would like us to begin with prayer or if she may like to pray. As you can imagine, 99% of the time, people would agree to let us offer that prayer. This time it was different. She quietly bowed her head and began to pray.

I remember distinctly, as I heard her praying to God, I thought if I looked up I would see Him sitting next to her on her worn couch. This was not just her God, but also her best friend. Her dearest companion who had seen her through a lifetime of suffering and prejudice. As her intimate conversation continued, I grew afraid, because I knew when she finished, I was expected to share with her a message about Jesus, but I knew that she really "knew" him, while I may only know about him. I wanted that kind of intimacy she shared with her Creator, but for me God was distant and demanding.

This simple experience didn't square with what I had been taught. Here was a non-Mormon who knew God in a way I could only imagine. It opened the door for me to begin a conscious and careful re-examination of my faith. In other equally important moments, Christians shared with me how Jesus Christ has changed their lives, healed their marriages, and delivered them from drug addictions. I could have argued how to interpret a particular New Testament verse for hours, but I could never argue with them about how the Lord had touched and transformed their lives. Thirdly, Christians took the time to point out verses in the Bible that seemed to clearly contradict Mormon teaching.

For example, Mormons believe in the existence of many gods in the universe, the god of this world being one among many. But the Word of God clearly proclaims there are no gods but the

God revealed in Divine Revelation, He is the first and the last (Isa 44:6, 24; 45:5, 18). I heard the scriptural maneuverings that fellow Mormons used to deny the meaning of these verses, but for me they were clearly confirming monotheism.

I remember now these and dozens of moments culminated in me falling to my knees one night in our little missionary apartment and crying out to God, "Heavenly Father, all I want is the truth. If the truth is in Mormonism, I will serve you until my dying day here. If the truth is somewhere else, give me the courage to face what that will mean for me." That prayer fundamentally changed the trajectory of my life. I was ready to accept wherever truth would lead me.

Ultimately, I left the Mormon Church, but like many fellow Mormons who have ceased to believe the claims of the LDS Church, I floundered. Was there a God at all? Is there an objective truth or is it all subjective? When you have been deceived for so many years, it is hard to trust anyone. Again, I prayed that God would help me find someone to talk to about my crisis of faith.

I was in Provo, Utah (one of the most densely populated Mormon cities in the U.S.), and opened the paper that day to find a little ad about a Christian bookstore. I felt God's peace and decided to visit it that day. It was staffed by a smiling bearded little man behind the counter. I wandered around for a few minutes, and then promptly vomited my story on this unsuspecting little store manager. It felt like such a burdened lifted to tell someone of my journey. His response was unexpected. He practically did cartwheels across the bookstore. You see, he was a missionary too. A missionary to Mormons.

He had left a lucrative job in New York to answer God's call on his life to staff a Christian bookstore in the heart of Mormonism and provide a "safe place" for them to come and explore their doubts, and the truth about God. He was there for someone just like me. Tony led me to the Christ of Sacred Scripture, disciplined me in Christian growth, and baptized me a Christian in a little lake south of town. I eventually became very involved as a new Christian, and to make a long story short was ordained a minister in the Missionary Baptist denomination, a largely African-American sect.

It was that same community in the south, that had so faithfully witnessed Christ to me, and I was welcomed with open arms into several faith families. As you can imagine, as a former Mormon, I

had a heart to help other Mormons, especially missionaries, to share in my discoveries. I began to actively seek them out, and would simply engage them in respectful dialogues that encouraged them to use their reason and explore the Word of God. I knew the Sacred Scriptures were a living reality, and had the power, along with clear Christian witness, to lead them to the truth if they were disposed to God's grace.

Many of these discussions led to often-heated discussions about the doctrine of the Trinity, a teaching as I mentioned above, is rejected by Mormons. They have what I call a "Dan Brown approach" to Church History that believes that Catholics "invented" the Trinity at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. I wanted to show them that not only was the Trinity revealed in Sacred Scripture but believed and taught by the earliest Christians from the very beginning up to that fourth century council. To do that, I scoured libraries and electronic sources for early Christian writings, and discovered as so many Catholic converts before and after me, the Church Fathers. Not only did I find a clear and constant witness to the central truth of the Trinity, but a whole series of eye-opening teachings: Marian devotion, prayers to saints, the reservation of relics, a Church hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons, and most importantly, the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

I was overwhelmed, always believing that these distinctly Catholic teachings were medieval developments. Now I stood at another crossroad. I questioned whether I had the courage and resolve to follow through on what I was learning. By God's grace, I committed myself to that prayer for truth I had prayed while a Mormon missionary.

I worked with a Catholic man who lived his faith openly, a person of virtue and infectious joy, so I began to pepper him with questions and concerns. Kelly didn't always have the answers for me, but he always found them and returned to me with a book, brochure or cassette tape. He told me about RCIA, a way of systematically learning about the Catholic faith, and invited me to my first Mass.

Again, like many converts, I was struck in my first Mass how I was being transported to the banks of the Jordan and confessing with John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," I was joining the triple-cry of God's holiness from Isaiah 6, I was

confessing with the centurion the Lord's power to heal me if he would only speak the word. I was ushered into the heavenly liturgy of Revelation chapters 4, 5 and 8.

In a word, I was home.

I remember on the night of Easter Vigil, 1996 standing in my white robe, candle in hand by the Vigil fire in joyful anticipation of what would soon occur, my full welcoming into a new spiritual home and the reception of Christ in the Eucharist. God carried my heart and mind back to that little missionary apartment so many years before where I had prayed that desperate prayer. I would have never imagined that my cry for Truth would have led me to this moment. But God also whispered to my soul that ultimately Truth was not just correct theology, Truth was a Person (John 14:6). And if that's true, there is no place to experience Truth more profoundly and intimately than when we receive the Eucharist.

In a burst of love, on altars all over the world, Truth steps out of heaven's courts, humbles himself in a host and chalice. He displays his love for us, not simply in inviting us to a meal, but becoming our food, so that he might enter us and change us from the inside out. I can't begin to thank God for his faithfulness to me in my journey, but I can express my gratitude by telling everyone I can about this Gift, and being ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks me of the Hope that is within me! (1 Peter 3:15).

Thomas is a repeat guest on [EWTN](#) and Catholic radio as well as a sought after parish mission and conference speaker. He is the co-author of "Adventures in Revelation: The Kingdom Yet to Come" and an international presenter for the [Great Adventure Bible Timeline](#). He has taught as an adjunct professor at the St. Francis School of Theology in Denver, and is the former Director of the Denver Catholic Biblical School and the Denver Catechetical School. You can learn more about Thomas and his apostolate at www.gen215.org.

If you have found this story helpful in your spiritual journey we hope you will consider sharing it. Have feedback or would like to share your story? Email us at info@whyimcatholic.com