

## **Becoming Catholic**

March 31, 2013 Easter Sunday

That last several days have been a blur. I hardly know where to begin. The two nights of Eucharistic Adoration in the main sanctuary of St. Teresa's this past Tuesday and Wednesday was beyond words for Jackie and I. I thought about this as we were going home, what if you combined that worship in front of the real presence of Jesus with some of the great praise music of the last twenty years much of it coming from the protestant world. I believe that could be life changing.

Thursday or Friday as we walked in our special place I could hear birds singing just as the sun was coming up. First I heard cardinals and I thought of the blood of Jesus. Then I heard mourning doves for the first time this year and I thought of the passion of Our Lord and the sadness we were feeling for Holy Thursday and Good Friday. That was followed by wood peckers echoing in the top of the trees...and the cross came to my heart and my mind. Then I heard sparrows with their simple song and thought of Jesus saying "are you not worth much more than they". Finally I heard turkeys off in the distance and thought of the "world" still strutting its stuff in all the world's greed and arrogance. It was quite a moment. On top of all of that Jackie and I saw ten deer that morning, ten being the number of completion from the Bible.

The Mass for the Lord's Supper was amazing. All three tabernacles in the sanctuary were open and empty signifying the beginning of the Lord's passion. Along with all of the statues and icons in the church being covered in dark purple cloth, the sadness in my heart was overwhelming. Father Nick during the Mass entered the sacristy and emerged with the Blessed Host covered up and held in his hands wrapped in a cope he wore just for this Mass. He then proceeded around the entire sanctuary with the Blessed Host and finished by placing the Presence of Our Lord Jesus in the tabernacle of St. Joseph's statue still covered in dark purple cloth. That was followed by Eucharistic Adoration. Powerful...touching spirit, soul, and body.

Friday was another body slam as this was Good Friday Mass and the veneration of the Cross. During this mass all of us had the privilege of kissing the feet of Jesus. we were all moved very deeply. By now Jackie and I are yearning for our first taste of Our Lord in the Eucharist. That somber Mass was followed by Eucharistic Adoration once again. The anticipation of Saturday night was building and building.

Friday morning and Saturday morning were prayers of Tenebrae. Solemn times of prayer as we remembered The Passion of Our Lord on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the day that our Lord was in the grave.

That was followed by our RCIA class rehearsing for the Easter Vigil Saturday afternoon and watching as Jackie broke down just in rehearsing the receiving of our first Eucharist. Now we can hardly wait for what we would experience that night.

Then came the Easter Vigil. The most physically demanding of all the Masses we had attended. We gathered at the church in a very cramped foyer. That is when things really began to happen. You could cut the excitement with a knife. We were there by 7:15p and were immediately confronted with one of the RCIA class members who was crying. She had lost the Rosary she had the Bishop bless at our initiation Sunday and was very upset. We tried to comfort her and let her know that God would get it back to her somehow. One of the older ladies in the church encouraged to get St. Anthony on the problem and that sounded good to her. We lined up in the foyer and had to stand for the next hour and fifteen minutes as we waited for the fire to be lit outside the church and the Mass to begin.

Father Nick had to deal a mentally disabled person that was trying to create a scene in front of the church before the lighting of the fire. At one point during that time of waiting I thought about the discomfort we were dealing with in standing and waiting so long, and then I thought about what Our Lord Jesus suffered on the Cross for our sins...and the pain I was feeling in my legs did seem too much to bear. All the RCIA people sang with me quietly

has I led them in the song, "Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary" and that seemed have a very calming effect on all of us.

Finally the Mass began, the fire was lit and the great candle of the Easter Vigil was lit from that fire, and the church went dark. Those being baptized were near the front of the procession with our candles lit, this was the beginning of the Liturgy of the lights. As we processed we began to light the candles of those that were in the pews all along the way. Soon the entire church was full of candle lights...what a beautiful expression of God's light pushing back the darkness.

Next came the Liturgy of the Word and the readers did an excellent job starting the story of creation in the Book of Genesis. Even though we had extinguished our candles at this point, the church remained in dark shadows with just a few necessary lights. Then the reading of the Gospel and the resurrection of Our Lord from the dead, and suddenly bells rang out and all the lights in the church came on in a burst of bright light driving away all the darkness. My Spirit jumped inside of me, and I knew that this is where God wanted to be, smack dab in the middle of the Catholic Church on this night of all nights.

Next came the Liturgy of Baptism and there were five of us to be baptized. The first was a precious nine year old girl dressed in a beautiful white dress. She was amazing and truly wanted to be the first one baptized on this night of all

nights. Two more young teenage ladies were baptized and then Gary and I were given "Conditional Baptism" because neither of us could verify that we had been baptized "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit", the Catholics want all to be exactly right. I am OK with that. Gary Cobb is older just as I am and we seemed to really become close friends during the last several days.

Then it was my turn to be baptized and as I bowed my head I heard the strong declaration by Father Nick, "Tim if you have not been baptized, be baptized now in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit and enter into the Holy Catholic Church". I was given a towel to dry my wet hair and then a pure white chasuble symbolizing that my sins were removed and that my spirit was free from all the bondage of sin and death, the church declared that I was white as snow from the inside out.

Next came the lighting of the candles for all the newly baptized and great applause from the entire congregation. There stood five very happy individuals, from a nine year old in a pretty white dress, to a couple of old broke down "sixty somethings" pleased to have been given the grace to become Catholic at our age. Next came those who were being accepted into the church who had verified a valid baptism, including Jackie. Each came up one at a time and repeated their initiation vows to Father Nick and the whole congregation.

That was followed by the eternal seal of Holy Oil put on the heads of each of us coming into the church. This was oil that had a beautiful aroma and was recently blessed by the Bishop at the Holy Chrism Mass earlier in the week. Each of us declared our patron Saint and Father called out the name of that saint as he smeared this wonderful oil all over our foreheads and sealed us in the Holy Spirit. Jackie chose St. Hildegard and I chose St. Joseph of the Old Covenant.

Liturgy of the Light, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of Baptism and Confirmation and finally Liturgy of the first Eucharist. That too became a moment in time to remember. Both Jackie and I were so excited to receive our first Eucharist we forgot to say, "Amen" when Father Nick offered us the Body and the Blood of Jesus. He kindly waited until we said amen, and we both received Our Lord in the Eucharist, this miracle we had been waiting for many years. My real moment came when I got back to my pew and knelt down to pray with the tintured host still in my mouth. I began to weep realizing what had just happened. The Gospel of St John chapter 6 came alive for me all over again.

Gary had the same experience and we cried together. And on top of all of that Father brought the Mass to conclusion as he led us in, of all songs, Lord Prepare Me...to be a sanctuary. That ended a Mass I will never forget. That was followed by hugs and congratulations and pictures to capture the moment.

But that was not all that God had planned for us this night. We went over to the Catholic Family Center for a small reception in our behalf. Over the last several months and years I have shared with a number of people, including Steven Ray and Marcus Grodi at the Catholic Family Conference last summer, about a teenage kid that came to the Father's House one Sunday just to visit. This was before Jackie and I became pastors over in Newton, Ks. I believe he came forward to give his heart to Jesus that day. After we took communion this same kid sought me out afterward, why me I don't know, and looked very concerned. He had found a host from the communion on the floor and was wanting to give this blessed host to me. I will never forget that day as he said, "Father I know you will know had to take care of this properly", and he carefully handed it to me. I will never forget what went through me. The reverence this young man showed for this blessed wafer was stunning to me...I remember thinking he knows something about this meal that I did not know at that time and that was some eight years ago. I never got his name but I have thought of that day and this young man many times and will never forget the look on his face.

As our journey progressed toward the Catholic Church I realized over time that day, and many others, were pivotal in Jackie and I becoming Catholic. As Jackie and I, and Pat and Cathy our sponsors, sat together basking in the glow of that Easter Vigil Mass a young man came up to

me, probably about mid twenties and wanted to welcome me into the church. I recognized him as one of the deacons or possibly an assistant to the deacons that participated in the Mass just concluded. We smiled at each other and he made the comment that I looked very familiar to him. I told him that I had just retired from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Ks and maybe that is how he knew me.

It was then that God dropped the mercy bomb...as only He can. He asked me if I was once a pastor with one of the other churches in town. I told him that I was a presbyter with the Father's House for many years. He said my name is Thomas and I gave my heart to Jesus about eight years ago at the Father's House and he was sure I was one of the pastors praying for people that day. He said I am now Catholic but I have never forgotten that day. Then it hit me...Thomas was that teenage kid that handed me that precious wafer that day some eight years ago. This is the very same kid that helped make me chart a path to become Catholic. And God by His mercy and grace had now delivered this same young man to me on this night of all nights, to cap the most important day of my life. I jumped up and hugged him, I must of scared him quite a bit and I know I startled everyone at that reception. I exploded with joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory. Only God could orchestrate such a thing. Thomas told me with startled eyes that he was in fact that teenager all those years ago. I was once again overwhelmed and even as I write this I get goose bumps.

Jackie and I talked about our blessed night all the way home. This morning we arose on Easter Sunday morning to a beautiful spring day in Kansas. We decided to celebrate Easter Mass in the small town of Halstead just 30 minutes drive from where we live. Father Edmond Kline had given Jackie and I private instruction for the last many months to prepare us to become Catholic. He was a very patient teacher and we grew very fond of Father Kline. We got very excited when he told us that Father Nick had invited him to be a co-concelebrant at the Easter Vigil at St. Teresa's with Father Nick. But suddenly he was reassigned by the Bishop to Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Halstead because their pastor suddenly passed away a few months ago. We got there just a few minutes before the beginning of the Easter Mass and quietly found a pew. The Mass was beautiful and boy was Father Kline ever surprised when we went forward to receive the Holy Eucharist for only the second time in our lives. Once again the grace and mercy of Our Lord was way over the top.

And...as we left that blessed Mass and got into our car, a bright red cardinal sat perched at the top of a tall tree blazing in the morning sun and sang an Alleluia song to all who would listen on this incredible Easter morning. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

