

June 25, 2013

## You Have the Words of Eternal Life

by Chris LaRose

I was born in 1950 and attended the Congregational Church in Massena, New York with my mom; my dad was a non-practicing Catholic. Going to church with my mom seemed to just be the “proper” thing to do and actual faith in God was never discussed at home. What was “discussed” was my dad’s drinking (a conversation which usually resulted in my parents fighting). This was not an environment to nurture “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in [Christ Jesus](#)” (Phil 4:7), but one of turmoil and foreboding.

Following in the footsteps of my brother and father, drinking was the lord of my life for the next 20 years. I did well in high school and received a Bachelor of Science from Clarkson University in 1972 (majoring in “good times”). After many restless years and two failed marriages, I ended up in Connecticut where I married again in 1983. Our first daughter Kira was born in 1984 in New Hampshire, where I worked for the Digital Equipment Corporation. God was not on my mind and I was restless. “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our [hearts](#) are restless until they rest in you” (*Confessions*, St. Augustine, 1.1, A.D. 379).

Since my dad was dying from cancer in 1987, we moved back to my home to be near my family and allow dad to spend some time with Kira. He lived just over a year. With my dad’s death, I spiraled down into a major depression, even thinking of suicide; I cried out to God for help. Unbeknownst to us, God was already working as He guided us to enroll our daughter in a summer Vacation Bible School at a small United Methodist church nearby. The pastor, Rev. Gregor Dike, began visiting us, praying for us, and we soon began attending his small church. Rev. Dike showed us Jesus! Like a sprouting seed, our faith grew. We asked him how to live as Christians and he gave us books on John Wesley, St. Francis of Assisi, and *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.

### Service

In April of 1990, I attended a Methodist “Walk to Emmaus” weekend retreat (based on the Catholic Cursillo). Included in this was my first experience of the Stations of the Cross using *Everyman’s Way of the Cross* booklet by Clarence Enzler. Speaking at the weekend’s closing, with tears flowing, I felt unconditional love from total strangers; I fell off my horse like Paul and fell in love with Jesus! I quit smoking and drinking at the same time, began praying, and devoured holy Scripture and many spiritual classics, especially works of the saints. My pastor gave me a double CD by John Michael Talbot, which I used as a tool to help me meditate on Scripture nightly. Also, I read a lot of Talbot’s books including, *Simplicity*, which hit very close to home.

We recently bought a large old farmhouse, which had become like a huge anchor weighing us down; we felt that God was calling us to gospel poverty and to serve the poor. We sold the house to the first offer and rented a small house within walking distance of our church in the middle of an extremely poor neighborhood. Our house became like a mission: advocating for those in need, helping where we could, and witnessing our faith.

I became lay leader — the pastor’s right hand man — and ran our church food pantry. Our pastor was very ecumenical, even leading a study on St. Teresa of Avila’s *Interior Castle*. In conjunction with the local Catholic parish, we brought Fr. Matthew Swizdor, a charismatic Franciscan priest with a healing ministry, to our area for a week-long retreat at both



churches. Propelled by this event, we traveled to Pittsburgh to work at the National Catholic Charismatic Conference in 1992. There we met some Catholics from our area who were in a “community” led by John Michael Talbot, the Brothers and Sisters of Charity (BSC). It is amazing how God orchestrates!

I continued to pray, to lead Bible studies, prayer groups, and Life in the Spirit seminars, became a Stephen Ministries leader, prepared for ordination, and became a Methodist pastor — all in just three years! While I was living in the church parsonage, I was watching TV one day and I happened upon a Catholic nun (Mother Angelica) who was teaching from the Bible on her own network, EWTN! This station was all our family watched from that day on. We began praying the [Rosary](#), the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and the Liturgy of the Hours — as Protestants!

Wanting our daughter to receive a Christian education, we enrolled her in a Catholic school. We continued to grow in our faith and follow where Jesus led. When she was in second grade, we asked our daughter if she wanted to make her First Communion and become Catholic. Her reply caught us by surprise, “No, Mommy and Daddy, I’ll wait for you.” We told her that we had no plans to become Catholic, but she was adamant — “a little child shall lead them” (Isa 11:6).

## **Mary**

Many questions about Catholicism were answered through personal prayer and study in this short time, but I still could not understand the whole “Mary thing.” It seemed as though Catholics put her on a par with Jesus. One day at a seniors’ Bible study, a Methodist lady unexpectedly gave me a book to read, [Medjugorje the Message](#), by Wayne Weible. It spoke of miraculous happenings in Croatia where the Virgin Mary had allegedly been appearing since June 24, 1981 to 6 young people. I began reading it and couldn’t put it down!

One night we went to be with our BSC community to attend a John Michael Talbot concert at the [Immaculate Conception Cathedral](#) in Syracuse. I spotted a large statue of Mary inside and felt called to pray before it. I asked Mary out loud, “I don’t understand, what is your role?” To my utter amazement I heard her reply interiorly, “Chris, I am your mother” (Jn 19:27). Tears of joy flowed spontaneously. I now understood!

One thing we really loved to do was go on pilgrimage to a holy place where we could pray. On a trip to Saint Anne’s Shrine at Isle la Motte, Vermont, we happened on the Missionary Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which was there that day. On another trip, we visited the “home” of the Missionary Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in St. Albans, VT and found that she was actually there and not traveling somewhere else in the world. As I knelt in prayer before the image, I reached out and touched “pregnant” Mary’s belly and I actually felt “the baby kick.” I thought I was going crazy — this *couldn’t be!*

Even though it took us many, many hours of prayer and study, ultimately the issue of Mary is not that complicated. Mary says “yes” to the Father, embraces the Holy Spirit, and brings forth to us Jesus the Son of God and our Savior. Obviously, all paths were leading to Christ’s Holy Church (Mt 16:18).

## **The Eucharist**

Unlike Mary’s profound, faithful *fiat* to the Father (Luke 1:38), our *fiat* to the Catholic Church was not quite as quick. After all, I was a Methodist pastor who had a ministry, a home, and many friends and family members who were opposed to the Catholic Church. No matter what issues we had with the Church, it was the Holy Eucharist that brought us home. “So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? *You have the words of eternal life*’” (Jn 6: 67-69). “While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; *this is my body*.... Do *this* in remembrance of me’” (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24).

When the priest pronounces these words of Christ over the bread and wine at Mass, Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist and will remain with us always (Mt 28:20).

*"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6: 51-54).*

*And this food is called among us Εὐχαριστία [the [Eucharist](#)], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are [true](#) and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of [sins](#) and unto regeneration and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our [salvation](#), so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the [prayer](#) of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that [Jesus](#) who was made flesh (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, chapter 66, A.D. 100-165).*

## Marriage

Besides understanding the place of Mary and the Eucharist in Catholicism, grasping the truth about marriage now complicated entering the Church. Although Janine had never been married before, our marriage was not valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church because of my prior marriages. This is where the Church teaches that an annulment is required for those marriages:

*For this reason (or for other reasons that render the marriage null and void) the Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage, i.e., that the marriage never existed. In this case the contracting parties are free to marry, provided the natural obligations of a previous union are discharged....the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the [divorced](#) are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot [exercise](#) certain ecclesial responsibilities. Reconciliation through the Sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ and who are committed to living in complete continence (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1629, 1650).*

Knowing our anxiety over this matter, which separated us from the Church, the priest carrying out our catechetical formation informed us of the internal forum solution to resolve the issue if the annulment was delayed or failed. Basically, this internal forum is:

*Reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist [internal forum solution], can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on*

*themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples” (Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, 1982, 84 and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by the [Divorced](#) and Remarried Members of the Faithful, 14 Sept 1994).*

The diocesan Tribunal never gave us a decision, thus we “lived as brother and sister” for the next 15 years! We just could not live without receiving our Eucharistic Lord.

## **The Cross**

Finally, after receiving six months of instruction, we stepped out in faith and in the presence of our BSC community and entered the Roman Catholic Church at the Hope House of Prayer in Peru, NY on August 2, 1993. Praise be to God!

Contrary to what some believe, being a true follower of Christ (a Christian) is not easy or devoid of trials, difficulties, and afflictions. Jesus Himself said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). Taking up one’s cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance (CCC # 1435). Receiving Him in my heart is an indescribable joy and has completely turned my life around.

Led by the Holy Spirit, I followed Christ straight into His Catholic Church. However, it was not easy to find a job serving God’s people with a technical degree from an engineering university. I applied to dozens of positions within the Church, but couldn’t get one. I was devastated! I worked for places like HeadStart, ARC, Hospice, and social services. In 1999, though, Janine and I had the opportunity to share our conversion on the *Journey Home* program with our dear friend Marcus Grodi on our 16<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Then, from 2000 to 2002, I worked from my home as the Assistant Director of the Coming Home Network International, working primarily with clergy converts and the website discussion group.

My darkest hour came in 2006 when Janine left me and moved to Florida. I fell back into depression. For the first time as a Catholic, I stopped going to Mass. It is hard to see the Light of Christ when darkness is all around (and we all know who thrives in the darkness — the Prince of Darkness, Satan). My life had no meaning anymore (or so I thought); I wanted to end it. I even had a plan and came extremely close to ending my life, but one thing saved my life: faith, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

In a year I got an excellent job and began coming out of my deep funk. I made a solemn vow to be a Lay Missionary of the Gospel of Life (MEV), which is associated with the Priests for Life.

In 2011, I was diagnosed with Idiopathic Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension (IPAH), which is an incurable and potentially fatal disease that accompanied by severe shortness of breath and constant fatigue. O Lord, what next?

*Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt (CCC 157, Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, 1878).*

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God....For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead; he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to many prayers (2 Cor. 1:3-4, 8-11).*

Finally, it seems that I am getting it. Blessed Pope John Paul II and Christ Himself proclaim, "Be not afraid" and "lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). The message of St. Faustina buoys my soul, "Jesus, I trust in you" (*Divine Mercy Diary*, 327). Trust means that I agree to let God be God, instead of trying to be Him myself. It means that even in moments of agony, I echo the cry of Jesus in the garden, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Lk 22:42). My personal prayer echoes 1 Cor 15:54-58 and 1 John 5:4. My life is in your hands, I surrender all to you; my worldly life is over, it is You who now lives in me. Victory has been won. You have overcome the world on the cross.

*I told you at the start, my other self, my life was not complete until I crowned it by my death. Your "way" is not complete unless you crown it by your life. Accept each moment as it comes to you, with faith and trust that all that happens has my mark on it. A simple "fiat", this is all it takes; a breathing in your heart, "I will it, Lord." So seek me not in far-off places. I am close at hand. Your workbench, office, kitchen, these are altars where you offer love. And I am with you there. Go now! Take up your cross and with your life complete your way (the conclusion of Everyman's Way of the Cross).*

Help me to bear my cross, Lord, and to do the Father's will, whatever it may be. Help me to go forth loving You all the more and reaching out in humility to love all people with Your divine love every day. Amen.

Press on fellow pilgrims. *Fiat voluntas tua*(Thy will be done).

Finally, I would ask readers to please keep Janine in your prayers as she battles cancer.

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