

*Why I Am Still a Catholic
From Battered Wife
to Beloved of Jesus*

by
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ABOUT THE WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC!

A SERIES OF BOOKLETS

by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor



In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

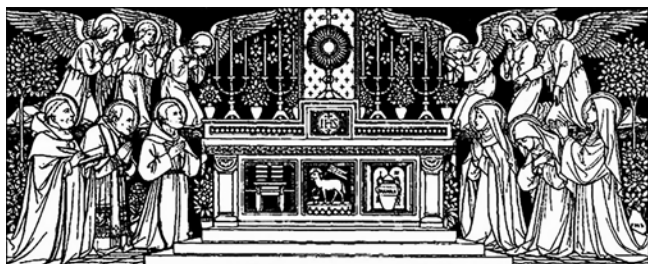
How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

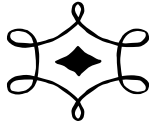
Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!



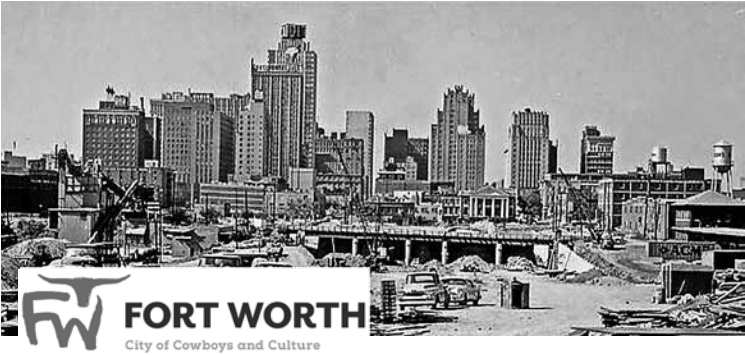




Childhood



I was born in Fort Worth, Texas in 1960.



I had four brothers and one sister. My parents were Catholics, but not strong ones. As a young child, I remember going to Mass on special occasions. The only time I was going to Mass often was when I was preparing for Holy Communion



and Confirmation. This was because the Church insists that before receiving these sacraments the children have to be going to Mass every Sunday. But we did have pictures of Jesus: His Face, the Last Supper, and a crucifix. When bringing me to these



Masses my mother received Holy Communion though she didn't attend regularly otherwise.

I never asked my mother why she didn't always go to Church on Sundays because I, myself, was just going through the motions. I remember we would sit towards the back of the Church.



The remarkable thing was that when we would sing during Mass, I would get choked up. I didn't understand why. I didn't like the feeling because I didn't understand it. What is this? Looking back, I realize it was Jesus!

After Confirmation, I never went back to Church except at Christmas or when a visiting aunt insisted that we go every Sunday to Mass. Just the same, whenever I did go to Mass, I would choke up and cry and not like it because I didn't understand. I never told anyone about this feeling because I was embarrassed. Yet when visiting my aunt in the summer, I looked forward to going to Mass with her.

To understand more of my story, it is important to know that my father was an alcoholic,



womanizer, and that he beat my mom. Because of his battering my mom, I was frightened of him. I didn't really have a relationship with him. All the other children left home as soon as they could get out of there.

The relationship of my parents was so unhealthy that by the time I was a teen, I was so depressed that I would walk across the street without looking. I would sometimes skip my high school classes and go to an older friend's house. There I would smoke pot, and drink cheap wine. Looking back, I think I was trying to escape from family problems. However, I retained my virginity.

After High School, Mama said I had to go to work. Already during high school by age sixteen, I started cleaning offices in downtown Fort Worth. When I could work full time, I became a receptionist in different businesses.

Wasn't I dating during this time? No, because my dad didn't want me to. In fact, I was a super-shy wall-flower.



Young Adult



At the age of twenty-five, I got hired at one of the city newspapers. My first job there was taking complaints from customers about their deliveries. Over a twenty-nine year period I worked in circulation, accounting, advertising, and as a cashier.



LA DAMA women employees. This was partly because my parents, with whom I was still living, were pressuring me not to become an old maid. I continued drinking and smoking cigarettes and became curious about the opposite sex.

When I was twenty-six I started going out to night clubs with other young



Soon I lost my virginity. I didn't become pregnant, because the men I dated used condoms. My first relationship with a man didn't last more than three months. Since I was in love, I felt deeply rejected.

Enter Carlos! The man I would co-habitat with and eventually marry civilly was 6' tall with big shoulders. He didn't want to have children. I did. We were together for fourteen years.



Like my father, Carlos, was an abuser—physically and verbally. Unlike my mother with my father, I would fight back when Carlos hit me.

Carlos was a sweetheart with everyone in my family. It was only behind closed doors that he would get enraged and become cruel.



Jesus Draws Me Nearer to Himself



During this time, I could sense that Jesus was talking to me in my heart. I had been a smoker for fifteen years: a half pack a day. One morning as I was picking up the newspaper on the sidewalk, I felt Jesus tell me: “You are not going to smoke any more.”

I completely lost all desire for nicotine and threw out the pack I still had in the house. I was never tempted again.

Another experience of Jesus had to do with cancer. At thirty-eight years old, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My husband was scheduled to work out of the country. I begged him to stay and comfort me during the lumpectomy. He said that his job was more important.

After the biopsy I was asleep. My bed was against a wall. I woke up feeling the hand of Jesus go through the wall. He placed His hand over my

breast. I felt great peace. I hoped that this meant He had taken the cancer away. But when the results came, they gave me a quick surgery. I was angry with God. I was in a state of terror. Chemo and radiation followed. The blessing turned out to be that the cancer hadn't spread to the lymph nodes.

The chemo and radiation brought with it early menopause and a full hysterectomy. There went my chances for having biological children!

However, at different times during this process, I felt the hand of Jesus around my shoulders.



MY MARRIAGE BECOMES INTOLERABLE



All the time of our living together and marriage, my husband had other sexual partners. I didn't know this for a long time, but eventually I did.



At one point I left him because of this. I moved to my own place and started reading the Bible daily.

Once when I was reading the Bible, a light shone behind me. I looked up, but it was just a wall. An interior voice told me, "He's coming. He's going to knock and come in and go on his knees and ask you to forgive him."

Not five minutes later he knocked and asked for forgiveness on one knee.

I forgave him. I was in awe of the Holy Spirit who had spoken to me.





But when I moved back in with him, whenever we had a disagreement, especially about money, he continued to hit me, and drag me around by the hair.

My large family of brothers, sisters, and cousins, finding out how badly Carlos treated me, were always urging me to leave him.



THE FINAL BREAK-UP WITH CARLOS



I really hit bottom when I found out that one of the women Carlos had an affair with became the mother of his children. This very man who hadn't wanted children with me, evidently did want children with another woman!

I learned about this because the woman called me up to tell me, wanting me to leave Carlos, in hopes that he would marry her.

It was at this point that I started seeking the Lord by going back to Church — even though I couldn't receive Holy Communion since I was not married



in the Church. I wanted Jesus to heal my marriage. I was willing to forgive Carlos and even be the step-mother of his children if he asked me to do so.

Everyone, including the priest, said that I should run from my husband. "It's not a real marriage in the eyes of God," they would say. Because I thought

a wife should be submissive, I was not sure I should leave him.

When I was forty-three, one night my husband was sound asleep, when God the Father woke me up and told me: “He is going to leave you.” I woke up crying, and my husband asked me what was wrong. I told him, “God told me you are going to leave me.”

Carlos comforted me, saying “everything will be fine.”

But things got worse. Emotionally he was leaving me, day by day.

A few months later, I filed for a divorce. A priest told me to give him everything except my retirement pension.

Immediately Carlos moved the other woman and his three year old child and newborn into the house.



IN THE ARMS OF JESUS IN HIS CHURCH



I moved into an efficiency garage apartment on the grounds of a relative.

I mourned the loss of my husband, as I had grieved my parents when they died. In spite of all the abuse, he had been my best friend, my family, my everyone!

Slowly I came to forgive him, because Jesus told me to do it.



After a few months, I made a general Confession. I wasn't afraid to tell all my sins to the priest, because God had shown me forgiveness. He gave me the grace to forgive my ex-husband from the heart.

And now I could receive Holy Communion on Sundays.



Every day I went to work as usual, but other times I spent in Church.

At this time, I started attending workshops and retreats. These were called “charismatic.” Here is how I got involved. A co-worker at the newspaper invited me to a Christmas concert.

At this concert, I started to cry just as I had as a child. I felt the uneasy sense again, but now I knew this was Jesus trying to heal my broken heart.

The group that sponsored the concert had a ten week program they gave in different parish churches. The main leader was a charismatic layman. His first subject was “Who Was Jesus and Why Did He Have to Die.”

Even though I had gone to Sunday Mass and read the gospels, somehow I didn’t really understand who Jesus was in a personal way. Every week I would go back and learn more and more about Jesus and His Church.

During this new springtime of spirituality in my heart, I would go from Catholic Church to Catholic Church weekday evenings following this lay evangelist in his crusade.

All these sessions included a time when the ministry team walked around the Church laying hands on us.

It is important for you to know that this Catholic evangelist insisted that the program was not an end in itself. We should go back to our own parish churches and participate in the Mass and spread the word.

The biggest experience I had at this time was to



know in my heart that Jesus loved me more than any other person ever had, more than my father ever showed me, or my husband, even when we were being loving.

Now I knew what I had glimpsed as a child, that there was a supernatural kind of love of God for me. He had been seeking me even as a child. Now I wanted to talk about Jesus to everyone I knew at work and in the family.

My Vocation as a Church Worker



The next change in my life came when I started going to the Mass of Fr. Dominic, a fervent priest dedicated to evangelizing the poor. I volunteered in various ministries in this Church.

Every time after Mass when I shook hands with Dr. Dominic he would ask “So, are you ready to make a career change?”

I prayed to God that Fr. Dominic stop asking me this, because I didn’t like change. My job at the newspaper was one of the only things in my life that had worked out well. It was my security.

One day he told me that there was a position opening in the Church for parish administration. The salary was considerably less than what I was earning as a newspaper worker.

I prayed to God: “If You want this to happen,

give me the courage to take this new job.”

So, soon after, I told Fr. Dominic, “I’m ready.”

“Okay, let’s move forward,” he replied.

I was now fifty-one years old. It frightened me to make this change because I was unsure about security issues. Suppose Fr. Dominic is transferred away, would I still be hired at the Church?

I put my trust in the Lord.

I am in awe at God’s providence so much do I love my new job. I love to serve others — it feels as if I am in a different world from ordinary life!

Everyone who comes to the door or calls on the phone I view as someone Jesus wants me to help.

Jesus teaches me how to see people through His eyes with compassion instead of just being people to process.



At the same time, being so often in the Church at daily Mass and in parish work, I get to learn from my wonderful priest, Fr. Dominic.



Spiritual Healing



A feature of charismatic renewal is healing of memories. One of the workshops I went to after my reversion to the Church was about what is called inter-generational curses!

For example, often a child who was abused him/herself will become an abuser. In my case my dad battered my mother. I didn't batter anyone, but I chose as a husband someone who was a batterer, like my father.

Healing ministers work with those who come to such programs on going back to the original memories of trauma and feeling the healing presence of Jesus in that situation.

After the divorce from Carlos, I never dated. Jesus became my everything! Someone told me: “Let Jesus spoil you.” I talk to Him all day long, and Jesus speaks softly to me. I know it is He because He gives me peace and comfort.

I often pray in bed at night — “Jesus, help me. I’m scared. I have pain in my shoulder. I don’t know what to do. This hurts very much. Relieve this pain. I just want to rest... This is what you felt when your arms were on the cross. I am so sorry for you, Jesus.”

Even though the pain is still there, He gives me peace and I fall asleep.



In my Church, we have a chapel where people come all through the day and evening and adore Jesus in the Host in the monstrance. I run to this chapel when I am upset and Jesus says: “I love you.”

From studying healing of memories, I came to see that I had low self-esteem as a child because of my father’s critical attitude towards me. He never said “I love you.”

Now, when I struggle with low self-esteem and fear of rejection, I run to Jesus, and He reassures me that I belong to Him. I am His everything and when I receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, I invite Him to run through every part of me, every cell, every vein. I tell Him: “Help me to live for You; help me to take care of my body for You.”

I couldn't talk to my father. I couldn't talk to my husband in this kind of intimate passionate way. Because I knew, unconsciously, that Carlos was unfaithful, I couldn't open myself to him.

The relationship to Fr. Dominic has also been healing. A priest is called “Father.” My father was authoritarian. He never looked me in the eyes. It was as if I didn't exist. Carlos never looked at me with respect. It seemed to me I was a nobody for him.

Fr. Dominic is authoritative, but he looks at me as somebody important and worthy of respect.

By contrast, my mother was always compassionate and affectionate. So, it is easy for me to be the same with sisters, cousins, nieces, and woman friends.

BELOVED OF JESUS



Jesus is the ultimate for me. “I will never leave you alone.” And He gives us the Church, and His Mother. This is my home.

Jesus wants everyone to be close to His heart and to find Him in His Church.

If you feel lost, alone, worthless, Jesus is waiting for you with open arms. He loves you. He wants to heal you. He is waiting for you in His Church. He wants to share His mother with you. He loves you. You are worthy.



