

## **Traveling Companion: Why I am Still a Catholic**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

As another year rolls on, I think about another group beginning the R.C.I.A. (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process in the parish. I am always curious about what attracts these seekers to the process and hopefully, the Catholic Church. One of the first questions I ask them to share on is what drew them to the process and the church. I am always amazed as the answers.

As a young student studying for the priesthood, I was always fascinated by the conversion stories of famous people who joined the church. Years ago, I read a book called "Once a Catholic" that recalled a mixture of some of the anger, resentment and joy of some Catholics.

Recently, I finished reading a book of essays from some famous Catholics on why they are still Catholic. Novelist Jon Hauser said he is still a Catholic "because I want to be identified with the institution that, despite her dark ages and her lightweight popes, her blind alleys, her blood lust, her hypocrites in high places, has welcomed people to all classes and nations to its altars; because once, around the time of the last millennium, it preserved our Western civilization from oblivion; because it has left its traces in the cathedrals of Europe, in the scraps of prayers in our memories, in the bridges between continents and generations; and above all, because it has delivered Jesus' message safely across twenty centuries and is placing it now on the doorstep of the third millennium."

Novelist Susan Dodd says, "the Catholicism to which I was born is ingrained in me, to be sure. The creative process made it impossible to deny, overlook, disown that faith. To find and accept my faith again has restored to my soul a kind of wholeness. I am no less imperfect than I ever was, but a large missing piece of me has been set back in place. I can stand on my own two feet now as these weak hands and puny arms strain toward God."

TV commentator, Maria Shriver says "forty years after being baptized, I remain a committed Catholic. Why? Because it works. It works for me in my personal life and its teachings are my moral compass in my professional life as a television correspondent. I am a woman, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, and a friend; but equally important, I am an Irish Catholic and proud of it."

Mark Bavaro, ex New York Giants football player says that the reason he remains Catholic is "because the Church keeps me close to my loved ones, living and dead... that the Catholic Church is nothing more and nothing less than the vessel that will carry us all home to our ancestors and our Creator."

Mary Cunningham Agee, founder of the Nurturing Network, asks, "where else could I have possibly found such a compassionate, understanding, and inspirational mother than in the Catholic Church? How else but through the raw materials and sacred tools of my Catholic faith – prayer, the sacraments, holy scripture, the rich heritage of the saints, the inspired papal documents – could I have survived in this world of ours? Where else could I have turned for spiritual sustenance, nonjudgmental support, and an interpretation of human suffering that would become more meaningful with each new challenge that fate tossed our way?"

Commentator Michael Novak sees being Catholics as being on a voyage in a "wind thrown barque whose earlier sailor, Peter, through fear sank in the waves until the Lord took pity...no one can be Catholic in our culture without being battered daily."

Dr. Bernard Nathanson, political activist in the pro-abortion arena for years, was "brilliantly successful, earning indecent amounts of money practicing my professional specialty (obstetrics and gynecology), and was afflicted with a fulminating case of acquisitive fever: lavish homes, trendy autos, beautiful trophy wives, wine cellars, stables of horses, and fearfully expensive schools and tutors for my son." He discovered that the "only anodyne worth pursuing was the one that nullified all the rest: the search for God, the proprioceptive reality that Jesus Christ was in me to the tips of my very fingers and toes, the unbreakable promise of forgiveness for the Sisyphean moral baggage under which I had been weighed for too many years. Find the lapidary certitude of everlasting life."

Novelist Walker Percy chose the Catholic religion because of "grace, which leaves one unclear about who does the choosing."

When I think about the journeys of the people above, I think of my own; a faith given, that continues to be chosen and challenged daily through grace.