

Grace B. Testimonial

Part 1: Life Before

I grew up Catholic. My parents brought our family to Mass, we prayed together, prayed the Rosary, I attended Faith Formation, and I received all of my sacraments. They gave me a Catholic foundation, and I'm incredibly grateful for that.

I learned the prayers, participated in the traditions, and knew the basics of my faith, but I never really understood why they mattered or how they connected to my own life. Because my faith had not yet become my own, when I went to college, it was easy for me to walk away. As I focused on building my life and career, God became an afterthought. I returned briefly to get married in the Church, but my everyday life still didn't revolve around faith, so I drifted away again.

At the time, I didn't think anything was missing. Now I realize that the foundation my parents gave me was always there. It just took many years for me to finally understand it and make it my own.

Part 2: Turning Point

Everything began to change when the Galang family invited my daughter to Faith Formation with their daughter.

As part of Faith Formation, we started attending Mass regularly as a family. If I'm honest, I was there out of obligation, not because I wanted to grow in faith. I mostly kept to myself, so I dreaded the Known by Name weekends, where we were encouraged to wear nametags, introduce ourselves to someone new, and start a conversation. As someone who is naturally quiet, that was definitely outside my comfort zone. My husband is pretty quiet too, so we would just end up talking to each other sometimes. But there were also times when someone sitting nearby would introduce themselves first, and once we started talking, it was never as uncomfortable as I expected it to be.

I think that was one of the first things that stood out to me about St. Joseph: people genuinely wanted to connect. Even though I was quiet, I never felt like I didn't belong. That welcoming environment made it easier to keep showing up, and week after week, something began to change.

I found myself actually listening. In the past, my mind would wander during Mass. Even when I tried to pay attention, the readings and homilies often felt distant, and much of it went in one ear and out the other.

But Father Martin had a way of explaining the faith that made me want to listen. He helped me see that the readings and teachings at Mass had meaning and connected to everyday life in ways I had never noticed before. For the first time, I wasn't just sitting through Mass waiting for it to end. I actually left Mass thinking about what I had heard instead of forgetting it as soon as I walked out the door.

That was really the beginning of me wanting to learn more about my faith. This new curiosity led me to start looking into my faith outside of Sunday Mass. I started watching videos, listening to podcasts, and exploring topics I had never taken the time to understand before. Before I knew it, my algorithm had changed, and I was getting recommended Catholic content all the time! I never expected to be so interested in learning about my faith, but I found myself wanting to understand more and more. The more I learned, the more my perspective shifted. I wasn't just learning about my faith anymore. I wanted to live it.

As my faith started becoming more personal, I began to look at my own life differently. When we first returned to church, I started receiving Communion again out of habit, even though deep down I knew I shouldn't because I had not been to confession in eighteen years. I knew confession was something I needed to do, but I was afraid. I didn't want to sit in front of a priest and expose the parts of my life I wasn't proud of. But the more I learned and the closer I felt to Jesus, the harder it became to ignore. I wanted to make things right, so I started preparing myself for confession.

Walking into the confessional after eighteen years was still incredibly difficult. I felt nervous and vulnerable, but I knew it was a step I needed to take. When I walked out that day, I truly believed the hardest part was behind me. I thought I had finally done what I needed to do and that I would be able to receive Communion again.

But as I continued learning more about my faith, I came across something I never expected. Because I had been married in the Church, later divorced, and then remarried civilly, I learned that I needed to go through the annulment process and have my current marriage recognized by the Church before I could receive Communion again.

I won't pretend that didn't hurt. I felt crushed. After finally taking such a big step toward God by going to confession, it felt like another obstacle appeared just when I thought I was finally moving forward. At first, I struggled to understand it. It felt unfair, and I even wondered if what I had learned was actually true.

I knew I needed to talk to a priest to understand my situation and what I needed to do next. That was not easy. For years, I had kept my distance from priests and deacons. It wasn't because of anything they had done. I think I was afraid they could see how far I had drifted from my faith, and I felt ashamed. I didn't want them to see me only through the mistakes of my past. Even after returning to the Church, that feeling was still there. If I saw a priest or deacon coming toward me, I would often avoid eye contact because it felt easier to stay unnoticed.

This time, though, I reached out.

Father Martin and Deacon Ken met me with kindness and encouragement. They didn't make me feel judged or defined by my past. Instead, they helped me understand the next steps and genuinely wanted to help me move forward through the process. I felt supported instead of alone.

But I also knew the annulment process could take time, and there was no way of knowing the outcome. As I looked ahead at the waiting and uncertainty, one question kept coming back to me:

Is continuing down this path worth it, even if I don't know when or if I will be able to receive Communion again?

Part 3: Life Now

Today, my life is completely different, but it did not happen overnight. I first started coming back to Mass around the end of September. By April, I realized this was no longer something I was simply doing. My faith had become something I genuinely wanted to grow in.

One of the biggest changes has been the way I experience Mass. In the past, I would come late and leave right after Communion just to beat the parking lot traffic. I knew there was a final blessing, but it wasn't important to me at the time. Today, Mass is no longer something I rush through. It has become something I look forward to.

Now, I actually arrive early so I can claim my favorite spot in the back of the church. Funny enough, I've had people ask me, "You got here early, so why are you sitting in the back?" I guess some things haven't changed. The back is still where I'm most comfortable. The difference is that I'm no longer sitting there waiting for Mass to end. I'm listening, learning, and actually looking forward to what I will hear.

I even have the daily Mass readings emailed to me so I can read them beforehand. It helps me better understand and connect with what I hear during Mass. I also started attending weekday Mass whenever I can. Beginning my day with God changes the way I approach everything else. It has become one of my favorite ways to start the day.

My prayer life has changed too. During the years I was away from the Church, prayer was something I would occasionally turn to, but it was not a regular part of my daily life. Now, it has become a much bigger part of my relationship with God. I don't just pray when I need something. I find myself talking to Him when I wake up, before bed, and in the middle of everyday moments when I want to bring something to Him. I never realized prayer could become an ongoing conversation instead of something reserved for special moments.

Prayer has also naturally become part of our family life. We pray together now because I want my daughters to grow up knowing that God is not just someone we learn about at church, but someone we can know personally and invite into our everyday lives.

Even in the middle of all this growth, I am still learning how to trust God with the things I can't control. Because I still can't receive Communion, I began going to Adoration. I am still very new to it, and honestly, I don't always know what I'm supposed to be doing there. Sometimes I pray, and sometimes I just sit there quietly. But I continue to go, even if it is only for a few minutes, because it reminds me that I can still be close to Jesus even in this time of uncertainty.

I have always loved volunteering at my kids' school, but I usually choose the behind-the-scenes jobs where I can help without drawing much attention to myself. As my faith continued to grow, I found myself wanting to serve at church too. I started saying yes to opportunities I probably would have avoided before. One of those things was volunteering for Vacation Bible School. I was hoping to be assigned something that did not require much interaction. Instead, I was assigned the Scripture station, probably the most interactive thing possible! I was told to bring a Bible, and I had to admit that I didn't even own one. I remember thinking, "I'm pretty sure they put me in the one place I was least qualified to be." But God clearly has a sense of humor. There I was, assigned to the Scripture station, learning Scripture right alongside the preschoolers. Thankfully, they were a very forgiving crowd.

Now, I can see that this was another sign of how much had changed. I went from someone who quietly sat in the back and preferred not to be noticed to someone who was open to serving and becoming part of the community that welcomed my family.

That experience also reminded me how much I still wanted to learn. Wanting to understand more about my faith, I discovered the Bible in a Year podcast, which has helped me understand Scripture in a way I never had before. Until recently, I had never really explored the Bible. Now I find myself listening to the readings at Mass differently and beginning to understand things I had overlooked for years. I know I still have so much to learn, but I am grateful that I am finally taking the time to understand the faith my parents gave me and make it my own.

Today, I can see how God was quietly working through every step of this journey. The Galang family's invitation, my daughter's Faith Formation, the welcoming community at St. Joseph, Father Martin's homilies, and even the waiting and uncertainty of the annulment process all became part of how He was changing my heart. What began as simply bringing my daughter to church became the beginning of my own faith coming alive.

This journey is not just for me anymore. It is for my daughters, too. When my girls were baptized, I promised to raise them in the Catholic faith. At the time, I repeated those words without fully understanding what they meant. Now, I finally do. I want my girls to know what I am only now discovering for myself: that faith is not just a set of routines we follow or something we inherit from our parents. It is a relationship with God that we are invited to know, understand, and make our own. It is a relationship that can guide us throughout our lives.

I am still in the middle of this journey. The annulment process takes time, and waiting month after month without knowing the outcome is not always easy. At one point, I wondered if all of this was really worth it just so I could receive Communion again. Today, I can answer that question without hesitation: yes. Because I realized this journey became about more than just receiving Communion again. Of course, I still hope that one day I will be able to receive again, but this time of waiting has taught me that I can still grow closer to God even when I do not know what will happen next.

Through all of this, I have learned that God often works in the ordinary moments we least expect. I wasn't searching for a deeper faith when this journey began. I was just trying to be a good mom and

bring my daughter to Faith Formation. I had no idea that the same invitation I thought I was giving my daughter would become the invitation God used to bring me back to Him.