

Preface

People often ask me why I wanted to be a priest. The simple answer is I never planned to be a priest. I grew up in a very Catholic family; my parents brought me to daily Mass, encouraged family prayer and taught me that the Faith should be at the center of my life. However, it was not until the end of my junior year of high school that I first heard the call to be a priest.

My life, while focused on Christ, was full of distractions. I attended an academically challenging high school, played high school sports, and worked a job. With all of those activities and an active social life, there was very little time for silence, where I could hear God's call. Just before Easter, one of the monks who taught at my high school, challenged me to make a silent retreat at the monastery over Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. As the silence began to settle in on that retreat, I felt deep down an understanding that I was supposed to be a priest. As the silence continued on that retreat the nudge towards the priesthood would not go away and the harder I tried to convince myself that priesthood was not for me the stronger the call became. As I left that retreat I found myself lying awake at night for the next few weeks doing some serious soul searching.

The thought of becoming a priest forced me to step back for the first time in my life and ask myself if I truly believed in Jesus and if I really wanted to practice my faith. Up to that point I simply took my faith for granted but the thought of priesthood forced me to personally investigate my faith and decide if I wanted to commit my life to Christ.

For the next few months I lay awake at night asking the most fundamental and difficult life changing questions that I had previously taken for granted. First I asked myself if I truly believed God existed, because the idea of living a Christian life if God was not real simply did not make sense. As I questioned if there was really a God, I recognized that it was absurd to believe this organized and complex world just happened by chance and that there must be someone who created this universe.

Convinced that God existed, I asked myself if I truly believed Jesus was who He said He was. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, so either Jesus is the greatest gift the world has ever received or He is the greatest fraud. As I investigated the life of Jesus I began to understand that it simply did not make sense for Jesus to be a fraud. After all how could the son of a carpenter, surrounded by 12 average people, start a religion that attracted all kinds of followers? Why would Jesus be willing to die if He had made up the whole part about being the Son of God? No human person

has ever risen from the dead, but Jesus did. If the resurrection is a made up story what happened to Jesus' body? Countless people wanted Jesus to turn out to be a fraud; surely someone would have found His body. Perhaps the strongest proof that Jesus is the Son of God is the historical fact that ten of His followers died as a witness to that truth. I don't know about you, but I wouldn't die for a lie. While it is hard to imagine that God would send His only son into the world, the evidence is overwhelming that He did just that!

Convinced that God existed and that Jesus was truly the Son of God I set out to investigate if Jesus truly intended to found a Church and if the Catholic Church was truly the church God intended to found. The only way to refute the claim that God founded the Catholic Church is to claim that it was founded by men, yet how did 12 relatively unintelligent men (the apostles) found a religion that has lasted 2,000 years, outlasting powerful empires that have tried to wipe it off the face of the earth and still boast over a billion members today? Further, the Catholic Church claims that when the Pope speaks on matters of faith or morals he cannot error. In an effort to disprove the Church I set out to show that at some point in her 2,000 year history there was a pope who contradicted what another pope had said on a matter of faith and morals only to discover, that while there have been many wicked popes, the Church has never contradicted Herself on a teaching concerning a matter of faith or morals. Once again I was forced to confront the evidence and admit that there is no rational way to believe that the Catholic Church was not founded by God.

Coming to believe in Christ and His Church I was able to take a leap of faith and truly commit myself to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Even in coming to believe Jesus was who He said He was, living out that profession seemed impossible. As I tried to live out my Catholic faith I found it difficult to understand and difficult to put into practice. It was not until I began to understand what my relationship with God truly was that everything began to fall into place.

As I started studying to become a priest I began to put the pieces together and discovered that God, who made me, knows me better than myself and loves me made me for a purpose. I recognized that God, in His love for me, wants what is best for me and so in living out the teachings of the Catholic Church I was being lead from slavery to sin into the freedom as a son of God. Trusting in God's infinite love I realized that if God was calling me to be a priest, I would ultimately find fulfillment in following that call to the priesthood.

As a priest, I encounter so many people, at all stages of life, who are asking those same basic questions I asked at the end of my junior year of high school. It is my hope that this book can be a

simple introduction to the Catholic faith. I pray it helps you to answer many of those basic questions about the Catholic Church that I had as I was struggling to understand and accept my faith and that it ultimately leads you to live a life of discipleship in the Catholic Church.

Introduction

Regardless of our disposition towards religion, we can't help but search after God. Even people who claim to practice no religion frequently ask religious questions like: Who am I? Why do I exist? What is the purpose of life? What happens when I die? Where did this world come from? Ultimately our religion, professed or not, influences how we live our lives.

Throughout the day all of us have to make decisions. While we may arrive at different conclusions, all of us are searching after the same thing, to be fulfilled. In pursuing fulfillment we come to realize there are varying degrees of fulfillment. There are somethings, like a good meal, that fulfill us for a short time. There are other things, like a marriage, which fulfill us on a deep level for an extended period of time. Yet regardless of how fulfilled we feel, there is always a part of our heart which longs for more. There must then be someone or something that satisfies that deepest longing.

Christians recognize that ultimately it is God alone who can satisfy our deepest longings. If it is really true that God satisfies our deepest longings then our faith is not something that we add onto our lives; it is at the core of who we are as human people and the study of our faith helps us to answer those deep life altering questions which brings us to an understanding of how to live a truly fulfilled life.