

Testify!

By Graham Osborne

When sharing or defending the faith, we can never overlook the power of our own testimony: evidence of how God has worked in our own lives. It can add a powerful, convincing witness to our words. Many of you have read my column for years. Perhaps you've wondered, "what makes someone do and write the things I do? What makes him so adamant that everyone should be Catholic? Why does he defend the Church so strongly, or insist that Catholic teaching is right, and that often, other teachings or beliefs are in error?" Let me answer by sharing my own story.

I, apparently, am a miracle baby. After I was born, my parents discovered that my mom should not have been able to have any children at all. A few later, I would lie dying of pneumonia in a Victoria hospital. The doctors sent me home to die, as there was nothing further they could do. But I did not die. And the only recollection that I have from that time in my life is a vision of an elderly man kneeling by my bedside in prayer (don't know who it was) in a glowing, golden light. I can see it today as clearly as I saw it then.

Then there was the excitement of shoving the coat hanger in an outdoor electrical socket. As a 3 year old, I completely enjoyed the resulting spectacular light show, but with little appreciation of how blessed I was to still be alive.

At the age of 9, I started reading my Bible every night. I'm not sure what specific event triggered it, but it could have only been the Holy Spirit. I would never again turn out the light without having read at least a few verses of Scripture. This practice has stayed with me my whole life, and was unquestionably the preparation for who I am today.

Fast forward to my thirties. While I was still a faithful Catholic – never missing Mass, going to Confession regularly, loved the Church – I still found myself living a less than exemplary life at times. Too many parties, and I was often a poor example of a Christian. But then something happened. I went to a Marian Conference with my girlfriend, Myrna. Protestant convert, Steve Wood, got up and gave one of the greatest talks I have ever heard. He traced the Church's teachings about the Blessed Mother in Scripture, from Genesis right to Revelation.

At the end of his talk I was overwhelmed. I had never heard the faith taught this way: so grounded in Scripture, so clear, packed with quotes from the Early Church Fathers. I had never even heard of the Early Church Fathers, but these guys were literally a treasure: a snap shot of the Early Church that gave a powerful witness to the fact that the early Christian Church was unequivocally the Catholic Church.

I felt exhilarated, inspired, encouraged. The Holy Spirit had touched me in some way, and I would never be the same. I ran upstairs to buy some Steve Wood tapes. I had never bought a Catholic tape in my life, but now I couldn't get enough. The bookseller was out of Steve Wood tapes, but he insisted I buy this Scott Hahn Conversion Story tape. I had never even heard of Scott Hahn, but it was only \$1, so I bought it, more out of being polite. Who knew I would have to pull my Jeep over to the side of the road to listen to it, it was so powerful. If you have never heard this testimony, drop everything and listen to it!

But unknown to me, my girlfriend had been greatly affected by this conference as well: that was also the day she knew she would marry me ... but I wouldn't find this out until years later!

From then on, my truck never played secular music, only Scripture studies and defending the faith talks. I read Scripture constantly, often into the wee hours of the night, jotting down notes and Bible quotes. I bought more Catholic books than I could ever read in a lifetime – and I'm still buying more! I literally have over forty books beside my bed at this moment, all in various stages of completion.

On one occasion, our pastor was called away and he asked me to lead a Bible study for him. It happened to be on John 17, Jesus' prayer for perfect unity in his followers. In this prayer, Jesus confirmed that it would be this perfect Christian unity that would convince the people of the world that the Father loved them and sent His only Son to save them.

As I reflected further, the significance of this passage hit me with a sudden, blinding clarity! *Perfect Christian unity was the key to evangelizing the world!* Must tell the Pope, I thought! But of course the Pope had already written an entire encyclical on this (*Ut Unum Sint*), and the Church Fathers had taught this for centuries ...

But this was just the confirmation I needed, and it greatly affected my sense of urgency to share the faith, both with Catholics – to strengthen their faith so that they could better teach their children and acquaintances – but especially with our separated brothers and sisters in Christ (Protestants). On these two groups largely rests the evangelization of the world. All that is needed is that “perfect” unity Jesus prayed for. And this is exactly why I write this column.

I started sharing my faith with literally everyone, and was particularly drawn to typical questions Protestants would challenge Catholics with (note that my dad is a non-practicing Presbyterian). Eventually, I would be asked to give talks and conferences all over Western Canada, giving my weekend YB Catholic? Conference at over 30 parishes in the RCAF alone. This would also lead to the beginning of this column back in 2007.

At the very first conference I ever gave (Precious Blood Parish in Cloverdale, a parish my saintly Grandma had helped build, and the very parish I was baptized in), something miraculous happened. The final day's talk was on the Eucharist. As I began my talk, unknown to me, the candles on either side of the Tabernacle spontaneously lit. They flared brighter at the pinnacle of the talk, and then went out on their own as I finished.

"Did you see it?" the parish secretary rushed up to me excitedly after the talk. "See what?" "The candles by the tabernacle!" She then explained what she had seen. I was **stunned**.

But in the midst of all of this, God was constantly working in my life in other ways as well. For several years, I had been trying to discern whether God was calling me to marriage or the Priesthood.

I remember shortly after Myrna and I had called off our original wedding date, my Mom and Dad had taken me to Hawaii. I had never been there before, and while it was beautiful, much of the time, I was downright miserable. Surrounded by happy couples holding hands and walking on the beach, I started feeling pretty sorry for myself.

**Then one morning**, I drove past a local Church and stopped in. I just knelt before the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle and prayed: "Jesus, am I to be married, or am I called to the priesthood? I just don't know. What should I do?"

Now I had never ask God for a *sign* in my life, and generally, it's not something I would necessarily recommend – at least not without good spiritual direction. But as I knelt alone before the Tabernacle, I felt an overwhelming sense to ask God for a sign. I had been studying Scripture at Redeemer Pacific College [**now Catholic Pacific College**], and had recently read the stories of Gideon and other Old Testament figures who had asked for or been given signs from God.

So I asked! "God, if I am to be married, make all the readings this Sunday to be about marriage. And if I'm to be a priest, then make all the readings to be about the priesthood."

I had the missal right there beside me, but decided I was supposed to wait and hear the answer in Mass. That Sunday, as I sat with my Mom at Mass **in that very same church**, the Old Testament reading was from Isaiah and was all about marriage: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, **and your land shall no more be termed Desolate**; but **you shall be called My delight is in her, and** your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married ..." And the Gospel was the Wedding at Cana. I was overwhelmed!

Then, this beautiful girl arrived late. The church was packed, but she made her way to a seat right beside me [seriously!] I looked up and asked, "is this her!?" At

the sign of peace, I could barely shake her hand, and after Mass, I couldn't even bring myself to talk to her. She left as quickly as she came, and I would never see her again (recall that this column is called, "The Shy Catholic" ... now you know why!)

But I clearly understood from all of this that the Lord would provide – in an instant – and not to worry or wonder how things would happen, but to just simply remain faithful and trust.

Confirmed now in my call to marriage, I was still unsure of whether Myrna was the one I should marry. It's a long story, but as I drove into Vancouver one day (to pick up *another* girl for *another* Church conference!), I was particularly disturbed by all the questions swirling around my discernment – almost sick to my stomach. So as I drove across the Oak Street Bridge (I remember it like it was yesterday), I asked God – literally begged Him: "is Myrna the one I should marry?"

We had taken time apart to discern further at this point, and I felt very confused. So immediately after asking God this question, I started a decade of the Rosary, asking Jesus and the Blessed Mother to help me know what to do. I had not seen Myrna in over 4 months. I lived in White Rock and she lived in Kitsilano. The odds of us running into each other in that big city at that moment were probably close to zero. As I rolled to a stop at a red light in Vancouver, I had the window down. I closed my eyes and started into my 5th Hail Mary". Suddenly, I heard this, "Hi there!" I opened my eyes, and in the car beside me was Myrna...

I took all these various things to my spiritual director, a very faithful priest, absolutely solid in his teaching of the Catholic Faith, and he agreed that God seemed to be pointing to marriage, and not to the priesthood, and specifically to marrying Myrna.

On the day Myrna and I would get re-engaged, she called me on her way home and asked, "do you know what today is?" "Um, Thursday?" I said. "It's the same day we decided to postpone our first wedding", she confirmed. Again, what are the odds?! We married on August 22, the Queenship of Mary.

Married life would be filled with many blessings, but three come particularly to mind. In hospital for only the second time in my life, doctors misdiagnosed a serious infection. Epiglottitis causes a sudden swelling of the epiglottis. In earlier days, virtually everyone died from this rare infection, as the swelling of the epiglottis [a small valve in the throat] eventually blocks the airway and the patient dies.

Prepped for potential emergency surgery, we called our pastor, Father Bill Ashley, and he rushed down to the hospital and gave me the Anointing of the Sick. For two days I had been unable to swallow or barely speak as the doctors

watched me carefully, ready to perform the surgery in a moment if needed. But within minutes of the anointing, my throat had returned to normal!

A year later my, my one year old daughter was X-rayed and diagnosed with the same condition. Given her tiny airway and the characteristically quick progression of this infection, this was incredibly serious. We immediately called Fr. Ashley again, and he gave her the Anointing of the Sick as well, minutes before we were hustled into an Ambulance manned with a special infant crash team to transfer her to Children's Hospital for emergency surgery. Nothing can describe the feeling a dad has as he holds his child, not knowing if she will die in his arms or not.

When we got to Children's, the ER team immediately scoped her trachea to assess her. To our great joy, she had been healed! As my wife and I sat with her, we were overwhelmed to hear her little voice, for the first time in 2 days, saying her little Maria expressions. We had our little one back!

But a few years later we would be back at Emergency yet again, this time with our 7 year old son, Michael. He had been X-rayed and tested and diagnosed with septic pneumonia, and was in serious condition. One in five children died with this form of pneumonia. We again immediately called our pastor, Fr Nelson Santos, who rushed down to the hospital (his sixth trip of the day to this same hospital!) and anointed Michael.

Shortly after, the nurse came in to check his vitals. "No fever, no chest sounds, no chest pain, breathing normal." She re-read his chart. "Is this Michael?" She asked. They took further blood tests, and started IV antibiotics, but the doctor decided the best place for him now was to rest at home. "Call an ambulance immediately if you see even a hint of fever returning," she warned us. I would sleep with him beside me that night, checking his little forehead constantly through the night. But the pneumonia was gone and never returned.

So if you have ever wondered why I write this column, or why I am so adamant that every Christian become Catholic, this is why. I am absolutely convinced that Christian unity will evangelize the world. I am equally convinced that every Christian must become Catholic. Jesus didn't found multiple denominations, he built one Church, and the gates of hell will never prevail against it. Yes it is filled with weak, sinful human beings. But he left it great sources of grace: the Sacraments – all of them! Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Confession, Matrimony and Holy Orders.

I have seen the power of the Sacraments working in my own life. I have seen people healed. I have read in Scripture where, thirteen times in nine verses, Jesus says, in one form or another, "unless you eat my Body and drink my Blood, you cannot have eternal life." How can I be silent about these things? If this is the

Church Jesus built on rock for the salvation of the world, how can we not want every single person in it?

A final note. Part of the struggle I had in all of this was because, at times, I felt a pull towards the priesthood as well. At present, I am discerning a call to the Permanent Diaconate, and feel a strong calling this way. Perhaps I was feeling a sense of this call earlier on in my discernment, I'm not sure. But whatever the case, I will trust that God will guide me in this discernment too!