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While I grew up Catholic and the roots were there, I didn’t embrace my faith until I was an adult. I still have a long way to go, but I’m better than I was.

I come from a very strong German-Catholic community. At the time, Catholic school was only offered in grades 4-8, and even then, it was only part-time. The school was directly adjacent to the public school. We walked back and forth between buildings for our classes. The Catholic school offered religion class, reading and social studies. We went over to the public school for math, science, band/gym, and lunch. I don’t remember ever thinking it was a unique situation. It was just how it was. The public school took into account the liturgical year. Half-days or teacher work days and Spring Break were scheduled to accommodate important days for the Church- All Saint’s Day, Good Friday, Easter, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. We NEVER had sporting events on Sundays. It was common for someone, maybe even the coach, to pray before a track meet or volleyball game, and I can recall the announcer once praying for an injured player at a football game. This, and prayers before and after meals, and at bedtime were just a part of everyday life. I remember having religious pictures, icons, and other Catholic artifacts in my childhood home. Likewise, our grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends also had these types of things in their homes. They also had the same kind of prayer rituals. Living our faith was a part of our daily lives.

But then I grew up. “Enlightened” by a World Religions class at the local community college, exposure to co-workers who didn’t have the same kind of upbringing that I had, and the natural desire to establish my own independence resulted in me leaving the church. I didn’t necessarily rebel. I just fell away.

For the next 15-20 years, I pretty much did my own thing. I had a variety of jobs as I worked my way through college. I was a CNA at a nursing home. I milked cows on a dairy farm. I worked at summer camps. I did retail sales at the mall. I waitressed at restaurants and I delivered pizza. I babysat and was employed at daycare centers. Eventually, I got my degree and became an elementary school teacher.

I also had a variety of “extra-curriculars.” I played softball on a women’s league. I frequented bars/pool halls and was even on a pool league. I hung out with friends and co-workers. I travelled to many places. I lived what I thought was a fun life because I did whatever felt good. That’s what society had led me to believe was okay. But in hindsight, I can see that even though I did enjoy myself and did create a lot of memories, I was being completely selfish. For 20-some years, I indulged in all of God’s blessings and abundance without ever giving Him thanks or tempering myself to honor Him.

Eventually, I did grow up enough to gain a new perspective on this temporal life. It is full of God’s blessings. He created all these things for us to enjoy. But He wishes for us to show prudence and moderation in our decisions and in what we do. We are supposed to view the world through the lens of the Commandments. We are to show God’s love and mercy through our own thoughts and actions. We are called to humble ourselves and live by His rules. Adam and Eve committed the first sin when they didn’t trust God enough to provide for and protect them. We do the same thing when we live for our own desires, when we worry and don’t trust in God’s timing, and when we create excuses to justify how we’re living our human existence. Remember that God wants us to live with Him in Heaven for all eternity! Can’t you show a little self-control, eat some crow, and be generous with your gifts as a way to show God you want the same thing?

Remember that God is merciful. This was about the only consolation I had when I finally went to confession and received reconciliation after all that time away. Trust that the priest is acting “in the person of Christ” and will be as happy for and forgiving of you as the father was to the prodigal son. (Luke 15: 11-32.) It is not too late to start more boldly living your faith. God wants you to grow your relationship with Him. If you’re still saying the same prayers, participating in Mass in just a rote way, and living your life in the same way as you have for the last 10-20 years, then it’s time to grow! Consider adding the rosary to your daily prayers. Have you thought about coming to Mass on days other than just the obligatory Sunday? Join our Faith Formation classes or do an online Bible Study. Search out opportunities to use your gifts: cook at a food kitchen, organize a community clothes closet, help a couple of struggling newlyweds get their car fixed, offer to babysit for free for a single mother so she can have a little time for herself, shovel/plow someone’s driveway, sew/knit/crochet lap robes and deliver them to homebound folks. The list of ways that you can help others is endless. You just have to make the time, make a connection to the recipient(s), and commit to doing it. Please let me know what I can do to help you.

Blessings,

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