



Chapter 8

Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise. Proverbs 19:20

As I was being drawn closer to the tender mercies of God, I felt I was nearing the point of no return. My heart was enraptured but my head demanded reassurance. I needed confirmation, and confirmation came just in the nick of time...

The Double-Take

At this point in the journey, I felt quite confident that God was asking me to trust Him—to take a leap of faith and convert to Catholicism. The Church calls it “Entering the Fullness of the Catholic Faith.” Since I was already a baptized Christian, not converting from another religion, such as Buddhism, I would only need to be confirmed to become a Catholic. The question remained as to how, when, and where. I knew that this was not going to be easy for my family or my friends and that it would have great ramifications on my participation in the women’s ministry that I had founded.

I had met Fr. Michael just before my own loving father became gravely ill and passed away. I could not help but think that the timing was providential since Fr. Michael was able to give me so much faith-based solace. At his suggestion, I had been going to St. Matthew’s Cathedral to attend Mass and receive the Eucharist, and to sit and pray to mourn the loss of my dear dad. I was enraptured with the sheer beauty of it all. The church itself was magnificent. It was adorned with the most spectacular mosaics, all in the Pre-Raphaelite style, which happened to be my favorite form of expression in art. The entire place seemed to be a reassuring love letter from God to me. It was as if heaven was touching earth, and this place was a tiny crack in the door to my celestial Father’s splendid home. It gave me great peace to imagine the happiness that my earthly father must have been experiencing in the fullness of His Presence. If I could have closed my eyes and conjured up an environment for me to sit and worship God where my spirit would be comforted and my soul

would be touched by all of my senses, I could not have imagined a more perfect place. It was as if St. Matthew's had been built just for me.

I, of course, had been in dialogue with my husband, Dale, about all that was happening. I had not gone into every detail of my experience since I had some reservations about telling him what I felt God was calling me to do. I was not quite sure what his reaction would be. He had been supportive of my taking the Catechism classes and meeting with Fr. Michael, because he could see it was challenging me in new and, as of yet, unexplored ways in my faith. He could see the fruit in my life, as well. But I knew that my joining the Catholic Church would cause a real "hub-bub" in many ways, especially on Saturdays or Sundays, as I would need to attend Mass as well as our family church service.

After much prayer, I finally mustered up my courage to tell him that I was feeling a true calling to join the Catholic Church. In his most loving, devout, and pragmatic way, he said, "Well, Mel, if you feel God is calling you to become a Catholic, you had best do it, or that will be considered disobedience!" And he smiled.

I could not believe it! I was thinking to myself, "I wonder if he actually heard what I said!" He was so supportive. True, he had none of the "baggage" I had. He had not been raised in a particular denomination. His parents were kind and loving, but were not churchgoers. He had been raised overseas and had only become a Christian in high school through an interdenominational organization called "Campus Crusade for Christ." He did not have all the hang-ups I did about unfamiliar beliefs. To him, if it was about Jesus, it was "all good," and it was just that simple.

He only made two requests: that I would first speak with the pastors at the Anglican Church where we attended, and, if given the "Okay," that I please wait about another year since he was on the Vestry (Board of Governors) of our church which was undergoing some tough transitions of its own. He did not want to further muddy the waters for anyone because of this. I agreed even though my heart so longed to take the Eucharist much sooner. I humbly and silently uttered a prayer, "Lord, You know my heart. Please change his as far as timing, if this be your will."

As Dale had asked, I quickly made an appointment to speak to one of the pastors at our church. Funny enough, he was a former Catholic himself. He was not only fine with my conversion, but quite delighted! He told me that people often came to him feeling this calling. What a relief! I then went to the heads of our healing prayer team to ask them to pray and discern if this was my true calling. Once again...surprise! The word was "Yes!" I was joining for all of the right reasons, and in the right way.

A few weeks later, on the one-year anniversary of my father's death, I asked my dear husband to please go with me to a Mass at St. Matthew's to pray for the repose of daddy's soul and to honor his memory. It was an absolutely perfect Sunday evening. The choir, the liturgy, the bells and smells—it was all there. During Mass, my heart was full of sadness at the death of my father and, yet, at the same time, I was joyful because of the hope we have in Jesus. I looked at my husband and he so tenderly looked at me. I did not say a word. He then touched my hand and said, "Mel, I can tell...this is for you. You can join the Church anytime you feel you are ready. You do not need to wait."

Ahh! The blessing! The release! The joy! And at the same time... the fear! I had been given the “All-clear! Go ahead!” signal on every level and now it was up to me to follow through! I panicked! But I knew I had to follow through. I would now need to inform my pastors at our church of my final decision, talk to my children, friends, and co-ministers in the Word.

First, I phoned Fr. Michael and gave him the great news. He was, of course, elated. Then I began in time to tell each one that would be affected by this change and, as one can guess, there were many varied reactions to the news—some surprisingly positive, others very hurt, shocked, even disappointed and angry.

As the weeks passed, I ashamedly not once, but twice backed out of the dates Fr. Michael had set for my Confirmation service. I was still just so afraid, and struggling with the potential fallout of my decision. Because I had taken the class with him and he knew of my struggles and theological journey, Fr. Michael had been able to arrange for me to come into the Church at my beloved St. Matthew’s through a very kind priest there. At the time I was unaware of all of the complications he had faced to make it work. I knew nothing of the administrative details he had to arrange and the permissions necessary to do a Confirmation during the liturgical season of Lent. The priest at St. Matthew’s had been accommodating, but poor Fr. Michael was more stressed than I realized. When I called the third time to tell him, that I was AT LAST READY to be Confirmed, he sweetly, but with a slight urgency in his voice, stated, “If you back out again, it will be beyond my ability to help you. Because of the Church calendar you will need to go through an RCIA program and wait another year to join. I need to let St. Matthew’s know by 5:00 tonight if you *really* are going to go through with it this time.”

His frankness about the situation helped me to realize I needed to make the decision once and for all and stick with it. I had to let my “yes be yes or my no be no.” I knew that God had been so gracious to me already. Fr. Michael was literally pounding his head on his desk asking me, “WHAT MORE COULD YOU WANT? You have been given so many graces, consolations and signs!” To him, it was absolutely clear. And at times, it was to me, too. I knew it was what I was supposed to do, but I was just so full of fear.

A dear stranger at Mass one day had given me a prayer card, and I so wanted to mean every word of it... I just kept praying it day after day:

Lord Jesus, I desire to receive You into my heart. Through this union with You I offer myself to the heavenly Father as a sacrificial host abandoning myself totally and completely to the most merciful and holy will of my God. From today onward, Your will Lord, is my food. Take my whole being: dispose of me as You please. Whatever Your Fatherly hand gives me, I will accept with surrender, peace and joy. I fear nothing, no matter in what direction You lead me. I no longer fear any of Your inspirations nor do I probe anxiously to see where they will lead me. Lead me O Lord, along whatever road You please; I have placed all my trust in Your will, which is, for me, love and mercy itself.

(Adapted from St. Maria Faustina Kowalska’s Act of Oblation, *Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, 1264).

Father Michael needed to know by 5:00! I began to pray once again for a final sign that would relieve my anguished heart and soul once and for all, and allow me to move forward into a life filled with peace with Him in the Catholic Church.

I am quite aware that asking for this final sign was possibly presuming on the Lord's patience, but I was aware that He knew my heart, and that He knew that it was all His. And yet, there was a raging war going on inside of my head that He needed to vanquish once and for all.

Just ten minutes shy of my "deadline," I had never felt such a tumultuous angst in my soul.

I escaped from the noisy world into the quiet of my car to pray. The cherished silence was suddenly and surprisingly interrupted by the ringing of my phone. It was a number I did not recognize and the area code signaled it was from California. I was so deep into prayer, pleading to God for an answer that I was annoyed that I had forgotten to turn off my phone. I hesitated and wondered who it could possibly be and decided after several rings to take the call never even considering the possibility that this could be the answer to my prayer... The caller asked, "Is this Melissa?" I said, "Yes."

She said, "Hi! My name is Myrna, and I am a friend of Evans'. You called me about three months ago. I lost your number and just now found it. I felt I was supposed to call you back but I only have about ten minutes, because I am getting on a flight. How can I help you?"

I was shocked. Years before I had ever thought about becoming a Catholic, a friend of mine had spoken to me after one of my Bible study lectures. Her name was Evans and she had asked me if I had ever met a friend of hers named Myrna. When I replied "no," she said, "Well, you remind me so much of her. You talk alike, you teach alike, you have the same passion of spirit. And coincidentally, her husband's name is Dale, and her daughter's name is Melissa. You guys are so much alike it is uncanny. Only thing is... she became a Catholic."

I said, "Wow! Now that is weird. We sound so similar, but why would anyone want to do that?" Fast-forward about ten years to the present moment. I had spoken to Evans and gotten Myrna's phone number because I very much wanted to speak with Myrna about her journey and why she had decided to become a Catholic. I had thought that, if Evans had said we were such kindred spirits, perhaps Myrna could answer some of my questions. The only problem was, I had never reached her. I had left a message and, quite frankly, had forgotten I had even called her.

"Thank you for calling me back," I said. "You pretty much won't believe the timing of your call and I, too, only have about ten minutes." I explained I was considering becoming a Catholic and then said, "If you don't mind, can we just cut to the chase and can you tell me what it was that made you decide to become Catholic? How did you know you were to do this?"

She began, "Oh, it was crystal clear. I was praying and the Lord gave me a vision of a mountain and it was covered with large boulders. At the top of the mountain was a cross. Along in the boulders was a path worn into the rocks by many thousands of pilgrims coming from all over the world streaming up the path. And then I heard a voice and it said, "This is the Divine Way. You are to walk in it."

I could not believe my ears! I was stupefied. I said, "Could you please repeat what you just said?" She said it again, and then added, "Oh, and of course, in the Catholic Church I received the Eucharist, Mary as my mother, and all of the saints as intercessors... why would I not have wanted to join?"

I was utterly speechless. I simply said, "thank you," and hung up the phone.

To this day, I have never been so stunned. God in His absolute loving, merciful kindness gave me all I needed to hear and more. Myrna's vision was an almost exact carbon copy of the one He had given to me. How could I doubt that I was to join the Church for one more minute? Bolstered with extreme confidence, and humbled once again, I called Fr. Michael at the stroke of 5:00 and simply said, "I'm ALL in."

On February 27, 2010, I was received into the fullness of the Roman Catholic Church. I became Melissa Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. (I had fallen in love with St. Therese after reading *Story of a Soul*, and I couldn't help but think she had more than a little something to do with all that had taken place.) There were no lightning strikes, visions, or audible voices. There was only nervousness that gave way to an enormous lifting of a weight from my soul. I felt as if I had dropped a one-hundred-pound backpack off of my shoulders. At last I felt peace. I had a true sense that I had come home. The fight was over and the struggle had ended. There was a strong sense of grounding—of rock solid grounding. I had never felt like this before. I was completely whole... I had absolute Shalom.

And did it last? Well, yes, for awhile. At times, I honestly would look down to see if my feet were still touching the earth...they were. I so longed for the Eucharist. I would plan my day around when and where I could get to Mass, a bit like an alcoholic planning his day around a drink, only this was THE Spirit that was intoxicating my soul. It was a most euphoric time. Little did I know that God was filling me to the brim because I was about to be poured out like never before. This was the beautiful calm before the storms that were about to hit—and hit very, very hard.

Praise: I praise You Lord for the confirmation of hearing from Myrna, "This is the Divine Way. You are to walk in it."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are always working on both ends of the equation of my life. Help me to trust in You and Your timing. Please give me the grace I need to walk in FAITH even when I have no idea where the path or Your inspiration will lead. Help me to love You more, and to show that love through my obedience, even when I do not completely understand. Please, Lord, give me more of You in every way possible. Amen.

Promise: "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Proverbs 16:9

Proof of the Promise: I have learned that He has got us absolutely covered, and is weaving our live's paths always toward Him... if we will only listen, and follow closely out of love.

Ponder: Journal here about any encounters you have had with God. Sometimes, as you know, they can be like little bread crumbs He has strewn all along the way--"God-incidences" meant to encourage you. Other times the experience can be profound...

