

## **A Pro-Choice Catholic's Conversion Story**

I became a Catholic 25 years ago, while I was still a newly wed. The first time my husband took me to mass, it was love at first sight. The mass was, and still is, the most beautiful form of worship I have ever experienced. I was raised in an atheist family and the Catholic faith was as foreign to my life experience though, as Buddhism would be to Catholics today.

I loved learning everything I could about Catholicism in the RCIA classes at our parish. The Catholic faith was fascinating and beautiful and I just couldn't learn enough. Finally, I had encountered the truth, the truth about God and Jesus, and the reason for our lives. I agreed with everything the church believed - except for women's reproductive issues. Quite frankly, I thought the Catholic beliefs on contraceptives and abortion was a bit weird and foreign to modern thinking. Besides, a lot of old men who had never been married, ran the Catholic church and what did they know? The leaders of the church lived a chaste life and never married or had children. What right did they have to tell women what to do with their own sex lives? That was a private matter and it was none of their business. My body was none of their concern. It was ok if this is what "they" believed, but I didn't have to accept absolutely everything "they" taught.

But, I did agree with everything else about the Catholic faith, so I decided that maybe I didn't know everything and I would at least try and keep an open mind about it. The Catholic church had been around for about 2,000 years and I had only been alive for 27 years, so maybe they had learned something along the way that I just didn't understand yet?

When I was accepted into the Catholic Church at the Easter vigil, along with our newborn son, it was the most beautiful and holy, experience of my life. The entire evening was basked in the warmth, light and love of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and that fire continues to glow within me today, over 25 years later.

In the years that followed, I did everything I could to try and keep an open mind and heart to the church's teachings, but I still adamantly refused to accept the church's position on birth control and abortion. I felt very strongly, that it was a woman's right to choose what was best for her life and the church had no business being involved in such a private matter. I was very pro-choice. In fact, every time the subject even came up at church, I got up and left the room. I just didn't want to hear what they had to say. Even the words "pro-life" was offensive to me. I was offended every time the church included a prayer "to end abortion" in the prayer of intentions at mass. It was like I was sitting in a foreign country, where everyone else believed something different from me. However, I never voiced my disagreement with the Catholic church's teaching on abortion in public, out of respect for our holy church.

After a while though, the "prayers to end abortion" no longer upset me after hearing them for several years. The Mother's Day Rose Sale didn't rub me the wrong way and I didn't get up and leave the room when the subject of abortion came up at church. The parishioners were quietly, patiently, witnessing to life like drops of water that wore down the concrete that had encased my heart. An old lady at church invited me to pray the rosary for an end to abortion and I ended up going, just because she made me feel included, like I belonged with them. A young woman asked me to join her on the Life Chain, which I did, but felt uncomfortable the whole time. I only joined her because I really wanted to make a new friend in the church and she did become my friend and still is to this day.

Eventually, an older woman invited me to join them on a bus trip to the March for Life in Washington, DC. A group of about 8 adults were joining another group and would I like to go too? Again, it felt wonderful to be included in our parish faith community and I decided to go with them. It was a beautiful experience being with all of them. But, when we attended the Vigil for Life and then later, the March for Life, I still felt like a foreigner in an unfamiliar land. I thought to myself, "if they only knew" that I don't agree with all of this, but I loved the company and ended up going on the March for Life three more times in the future, with our teenage son and daughter. I still felt like a duck out of water, but was slowly coming to understand that it was quite possible I was mistaken. Intellectually, I came to understand the church's teaching on abortion. Emotionally, it was a different story. I couldn't accept the truth in my heart. I held back a piece of my heart.

One day, I was praying at adoration when I noticed a book on abortion with a pretty picture on the front. I picked it up and began reading it out of curiosity. The picture showed a tiny baby in a little tear drop sack of water. The story told how the little baby swam around in the little sack of water, even though it was only a few weeks old. I admired the photography of this tiny baby, which was beautiful. I was sitting in front of our Lord in the monstrance admiring the beautiful photographs of this tiny baby swimming around in a tear drop full of water, when it hit me. The photograph was taken *before* the baby died. The photographer only saw him and took his picture because he was aborted and this beautiful, little life swimming around in a tear drop sack of water died not long after the picture was taken of him.

The truth hit me like a ton of bricks. I cried so hard, I had to leave the adoration chapel and drive to a nearby lake, where I sat and cried for a very long time. How could I have been that wrong? That beautiful, tiny baby swimming around in a little sack of water was not a clump of tissue. He was alive. And he died. No one ever knew he lived, except for the photographer who took his picture. I cried and cried over him and the remaining pieces of rock surrounding my heart crumbled away.

If it wasn't for the grace of God, the graces from Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, and his unconditional love and acceptance of me that day at adoration, my conversion wouldn't have happened. And if it wasn't for the silent, consistent, humble, yet clear witness of the average parishioners in our church that spoke up for life and befriended me, I would not have ever picked up that book in the adoration chapel with an open mind, allowing the love of Jesus Christ to finally enter my heart. The parishioners in our church were like drops of water that wore down the concrete encasing my heart, with their love, friendship and witness to life, which opened the way for Jesus to finally be able to enter into my heart and heal my selfishness.

Now, I have joined them, as a drop of water in our parish, speaking up for all the little babies that swim around in little tear drop sacks of water. I hope you will join me and speak up for them too, because they can not speak for themselves. No one else may care that they exist, but we do, and so does our Lord Jesus Christ.

Article by  
Laura Lea Kazlas

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