

## **“I discovered that Catholics read the Bible”**

Larissa, who was Protestant, had a Catholic boyfriend in Brazil. At first she thought he was going to convert (and he vice versa). There came a time when their differences seemed unsolvable. But Google helped to solve the problem.

09/12/2022

I come from a family that is divided between Evangelicals and Catholics.

My father's family is Evangelical and my mother's is Catholic (but only as listed on the census). That is, my mother's side of the family doesn't practice any religion. The result was that I didn't have much Catholic example and ended up receiving more influence from my father's family, who practiced their faith. I started accompanying my aunts to church, and whenever our family got together we had a prayer service. In 2010, when I was 18 years old, I was baptized at the Presbyterian Church in Palmas but I soon moved on to the Baptist Church. I was happy and satisfied with my faith, until in 2012 I started dating Danilo, my current husband.

Danilo was Catholic and I was Protestant. At first this wasn't a problem, since we got along well and I was sure he would end up converting to Protestantism. But I

didn't realize that he was hoping that I would convert to the Catholicism.

As time went by, difficulties arose, because I always took my spiritual life seriously and so did Danilo. Since I was very involved in my church and he was involved in his, we decided to end the relationship due to our religious incompatibility. We couldn't agree on what faith we would bring up our children in.

We were apart for about four months but at the end of 2014 we renewed our relationship. But soon the same problem arose, since we both continued holding the same convictions.

In early 2015, the story begins to take another direction. I decided to take a few days off after a busy period at the end of my university studies, and on one of those days I was browsing the internet where a Google link appeared: "The journey of an ex-

Baptist towards Catholicism.” I clicked on it and started reading. It was the story of Fabio Salgado, who has a master’s in philosophy and has a deep intellectual life. He came from a Protestant family and never had any contact with Catholicism. One day he decided to study the history of Christianity from the beginning to find out the truth. And after two years of in-depth research he came to the conclusion that the Catholic Church is, in fact, the early Church.

He also mentioned that he had a girlfriend who was a Protestant. He had converted but she was still a Protestant. In the end, he gave his email address and I decided to write him. My greatest interest was to know how the relationship with his Protestant girlfriend was going, since I was in the same situation.

I sent an email and surprisingly received a reply the next day. We

started talking regularly and, in short, he catechized me. Then, through Fábio, I met Father Paulo Ricardo and started watching his videos. I also became acquainted with the books of Scott Hahn, a former Presbyterian minister who converted to Catholicism. One of his best-known books is called *Rome Sweet Home*, which tells the story of his conversion. In fact, Danilo had given me this book just before we broke up, but I wasn't prepared to read it then.

Fabio told me that the first step would be to read this book by Scott Hahn. But when I started talking to him I had no intention of converting to Catholicism. I just wanted to know how to handle my own relationship. I decided I wouldn't lose anything by learning more about the Catholic faith and reading these books, since it could eventually strengthen my own position.

In the next three months I read several books by Scott Hahn, namely, *Rome Sweet Home*, *The Lamb's Supper* and *Hail, Holy Queen*. I also attended many classes given by Father Paulo Ricardo. During this time of reflection I didn't tell Danilo anything.

The more I learned, the more I realized that Catholics weren't as ignorant as I thought. I discovered that they read the Bible and that, although I didn't understand it very well, there was a reasonable explanation for each Catholic teaching. I saw that the important point was not simply to read the Bible but the correct interpretation of it. Over time, I was forced to admit that there was an interpretation that came from the authority of a Church that has existed for over two thousand years. I saw the Church was an institution that has lasted longer than any other and has

survived tragic periods in its history, while always being consistent in its teachings on faith and morals.

Despite everything, the Church has never wavered in doctrine, which shows a consistent unity.

After three months of study, I decided to tell Danilo everything that was going on in my life, but I asked him to act with as much discretion as possible.

It was a very difficult period for me because I really wanted to follow the truth. So I asked God not to let me be deceived by my emotions, and to ensure me that I was really on the right path. I was very careful not to let myself be influenced by Danilo, because I wanted to make sure that I was doing all this only for God. And I asked Danilo not to keep inviting me to go to Mass and other activities connected with the Church.

All this happened in 2015, which moreover was a very difficult year for me, because I no longer felt at home in my own church. But I still wasn't very comfortable in the Catholic church. When the end of the year came, I became sure that there was no turning back and that the right path was to become Catholic.

The year 2015 was also important because in that year I met many practicing Catholics, which was a crucial point for me, as I had no examples of good Catholics until then. That same year Danilo moved away from Palmas and it was good for me because I still feared being overly influenced by him at that time.

I began praying insistently, asking for a spiritual director. Then in February 2016, on a pre-Lenten retreat, I met a Carmelite Friar wearing a habit in the 100° heat. We started talking and

I noticed an immediate empathy. I asked him if a friar could be a spiritual director or only a priest could do this, and he told he was willing to try to assist me.

I still hadn't told him my full story, until he confided to me that before becoming a friar he had been Evangelical. At that moment, I felt deeply loved by God and my eyes began to fill with tears. It was as if God was once again confirming that I was on the right path.

So he started to advise me, but unfortunately two months later he was transferred to São Paulo. But before he moved, he advised me to enroll in a catechism class, and providentially I had a very good catechist who helped me a lot. Since I had already been baptized in the Presbyterian Church and the Catholic Church considers this baptism valid, I just had to make my public

profession of faith and receive the Eucharist and Confirmation.

It was a beautiful and emotional moment. Right after I recited my profession of faith, the bishop congratulated me and I felt welcomed to the Church. Today I can say that the spiritual wealth of the Catholic Church has brought me an inner peace that I never felt before. The feeling of belonging to the history of a Church that has lasted for so many years is incredible. I have learned that we can only truly love what we know and this requires a lot of willingness on our part. We need to know the foundations of the Church's doctrine in order to love it. I guarantee it's worth it!

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