

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**September 3, 2017**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home to the Faith**

I cannot think of anything more important for Catholics today than the issue of fallen away Catholics. I believe all of us know at least one person who has drifted away from the Church during our lifetime. Sadly the people we know are close family members. Sadly many of these people leave the Church because they have had a negative experience with someone (or someones) or they never received the faith in its fullest form. I know for a fact that if I had not gone onto the seminary, I would not be Catholic today because the information I received in religious education classes were simply inadequate. (Nothing against my teachers for they were good people, who strived to do their best). I would like therefore this month to devote my spiritual ponderings to reflecting on how to invite people to give the Catholic Church another chance to be their spiritual home. In order to provide a structure for these reflections, I will be referring to a 2015 article from Our Sunday Visitor entitled "Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home To the Faith" by Brandon Vogt. Quotes from Brandon's article will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

**Whenever I talk to parents facing this problem, they often use the words "helpless" and "hopeless." They feel helpless because their children tune them out or ignore them whenever they bring up religious topics, and they feel hopeless because they think it's impossible their children would ever come back. These parents are desperate to do something — they just don't know what to do. I'm convinced what they most need is a plan, for as the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, "A goal without a plan is just a wish." It's not enough to just sit back and hope our children will return. We need a proven road map.**

When I know that I am going into a meeting and I want a certain outcome from it, I always find that I do better when I go into the meeting with a plan. For example, when I present an idea to a group, I can explain to the group how the pro's outweigh the cons. Doing this shows to others people how serious I am about the subject matter and helps me to avoid pitfalls that would jeopardize my intended outcome. In a similar way having a plan to engage a fallen away Catholic allows you to see and best use the opportunities that lay before you and to avoid pitfalls that would make it harder to achieve your goals.

### **1. Pray, fast and sacrifice**

**If you aren't doing these three things, the other steps won't matter. Commit right now to praying 5-10 minutes each day for your child's return. Jesus' parable of the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8) confirms that God loves tireless prayer — even if you pray for the same need every day. Don't give up, and don't think your prayer is unheeded or pointless. Look at what St. Monica's prayers did for St. Augustine. Also, fast and sacrifice for your child. Skip a meal, give up Facebook or Netflix for a week or willingly bear a small pain. Then offer your sufferings to God on behalf of your child. Unite them to the cross and ask that he send new grace into your child's life.**

It is important to pray because prayer is conversing with the God. The better your prayer life is the more joyous you will be, the better you will be able to handle difficult situations in life, and the more you will be able to be yourself (because you know God's love for you.) These are three things that all people look for in life. Everyone wants more joyful, to face difficult situations without fear, and to be authentically themselves (and be loved for being their true-selves).

Fasting reminds us that there the first sin (or sign of distrust of God's love) was a fast. Fasting allows us to demonstrate in a real way that God is the most important thing in our life and that we trust him to take care of our needs. It also shows that we are willing to give things up because being relationship with God is more important than physical pleasures (probably at least one of the reasons why the person left the faith).

Sacrificing for something shows how much we want something. Parents for example sacrifice their time, sleep, and even their own wellbeing in order to help their children succeed. In the same way sacrifices are a visible sign of showing others what we are willing to give up to have God in our lives. Part of the reason why I have such a love for the Mass was because my mother made many sacrifices to make sure all six (children) went each week especially when we were on vacation. The sacrifices she made demonstrated to me how important Mass was.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**September 10, 2017**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home to the Faith**

I have dedicated this month's Spiritual Ponderings to reflect on ideas of how best to bring fallen away Catholics back to the Catholic Church. Brandon Vogt's article: "Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home To the Faith" is providing us with the structure we need for this important topic that always has the possibility of derailing into many different tracks of thought if we are not capable. Quotes from Brandon's article will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

## **2. Equip yourself**

**You can't give what you don't have. You may be excited about sharing the Faith, but enthusiasm and goodwill won't get you far. You need to know your faith. The two go-to sources are the Bible and the catechism. Become familiar with them and read them each day, in small doses. Then find good Catholic books that will help you explain and defend the Faith so you're ready when your child reveals his main hang-ups with the Church.**

Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said "There are not one hundred people in the United States who hate The Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive the Catholic Church to be." I want to say three things on this topic.

The first thing is that you do not have to know everything about every topic to be a good Catholic but if you do not know anything about the Catholic faith how can you convince people that you truly love the Catholic Church. For example, I like baseball a lot, but I would have a hard time convincing anyone of that fact if I did not know who Jackie Robison was, the name of the local baseball team, or how many strikes it takes to make an out. The more you take something seriously the more you show how much you care about the subject material. Do you know the name of your bishop (archbishop)? Do you know why Catholics should not live together before marriage? Do you know why Catholic go to Mass each week?

The second thing is that you do not need to know everything. I used to think that I had to know everything and this would become very discouraging because there is just so much information about there. Now when I don't know something, I at least know where to look. For example the other day someone asked me a question about Scripture and I did not have the answer to therefore I encouraged the person to contact the Scripture teacher at the seminary.

Finally, each Catholic should find something that he or she does not naturally agree with the Church with and then struggle to figure out why the Church's teaching is what is and why do we oppose it. If we do those two things, we will witness to others how a person can take the Catholic faith seriously.

## **3. Plant the seeds**

**Even before you start discussing God or the Church with your child, you need to plant small seeds of faith and trust in his life. One seed is unconditional love. Your child needs to know that you'll love him no matter what — no matter his moral choices or whether he stays away from the Church. He must know that you totally will his good. Only then will he listen to you. You should also begin planting "seed gifts" in his life. These are DVDs, books or CDs that can lead him to reconsider the Church. Many people who come back to the Church point to a resource like this that sparked their return. Leave a booklet on his desk, mail him a DVD or drop a CD in his car.**

Planting seeds is always good when done in the right context. I would not present faith gifts in a public context (for example a Christmas gift exchange). Allow the person a chance to save face. Allow them to explore the faith inspiring gift in an environment where he or she does not have to reject the gift in front of others in order to still appease their current crowd of friends.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**September 17, 2017**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home to the Faith**

I have dedicated this month's Spiritual Ponderings to reflect on ideas of how best to bring fallen away Catholics back to the Catholic Church. I know that this is an important topic too many of us because I believe we all know at least one person who has fallen away from the daily living out of one's faith. Brandon Vogt's article: "Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home To the Faith" is providing us with the structure we need for this important topic that always has the possibility of derailing into many different tracks of thought if we are not capable. Quotes from Brandon's article will be in bold and my commentary will be in the normal font.

#### **4. Start the conversation**

**At some point, you need to open a dialogue about God and the Church. You might say, "Can I ask you something? I wonder if you'd be up for talking about spiritual things some time. I know you have a mixed relationship with the Church, but would you be open to chatting about it with me? I just want to listen." Then do just that: listen. Your goal is to detect why your child has drifted from the Church. Note that the reasons he gives may be different than what you expect. Ask him what he believes and why, and what pushed or pulled him away. Don't respond to the objections or criticisms just yet — just absorb them. This may involve biting your tongue, but the scar tissue will be worth it!**

Remember that the key here is dialogue. In dialogue both parties want to discover the truth or the right way to do something. If you are not looking for the truth or the best way to do something and when one or both parties have a desire to "win" the argument you are no longer dialoguing but rather you are in conflict. Very few people are ever persuaded by conflict. Remember therefore to always speak in a nice tone, never criticize or put down, etc.

Remember also that the issue may not be the issue.

#### **5. Move the dialogue forward**

**You've now identified why your child left the Church. Maybe he drifted away unintentionally. Maybe he switched religions. Maybe he disagrees with the Church's moral teachings. Or maybe he no longer believes in God. Whatever the case, now's the time to start discussing those factors. Speaking with joy and positivity, clear up any misconceptions he has. For example, if he says, "I was never spiritually fed as a Catholic," it's likely he never fully understood the Eucharist or was exposed to the great spiritual masters of our tradition. Gently propose those to him and encourage him to reconsider.**

I am a big Star Wars fan. I have loved the movies from the first time I saw them. My love for them increased when I watched a documentary about the making of Star Wars. The documentary helped me understand how truly radical George Lucas's vision was and how his experience of making Star Wars has helped modern day movie making. Did you know for example that George Lucas left Hollywood after making Empire Strikes back because he was fine by the Screen Actors guild and director's guild for not having opening credits. Angry, George left Hollywood and created Skywalker Ranch and it is there that he and his engineers created so much of the equipment used in modern film making today. How can you help your love one know about the Catholic Church? Maybe you could show them a good movie series like Catholicism by Fr. Robert Barron?

You could also give them a copy of the lives of the saints. They may be surprised to find out that Dorothy Day had an abortion which she later regretted. They may also be surprised that a young Frenchman named Jacques Fesch is up for canonization despite being executed for killing a police officer because he became a mystic in prison after expressing sorrow for his life of crime. They may be inspired by the life of Maximillian Kolbe who gave himself up to death so that another man could live. They may also be inspired by the intellectual thought of Thomas Aquinas, Edith Stein, or the wit of G.K. Chesterton.

Invite them to take a class with you or to watch a video program on the Catholic faith. Show them that you are still learning and invite them to dive deeper into the Catholic faith.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**September 26, 2017**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Seven Steps to Bring Your Child Home to the Faith**

St. Monica prayed many years for the conversion of her son Augustine. It is therefore important to remind yourself that God's time is not our time. It is also important that we continue to grow stronger in our own faith life. Here are the last two steps from Brandon Vogt's article in bold and my commentary in normal font.

#### **6. Invite and connect**

**Once your child expresses curiosity and openness to returning, invite him to a parish event. This might be a weekend retreat, such as Christ Renews His Parish or Cursillo, or perhaps a parish small-group study or community event. Your goal is to usher him into the life of the parish, which will re-establish the communal bonds of faith. If your child is in college, connect him with the local Catholic campus ministry, such as FOCUS or the Newman Center. Leaders there will be thrilled to talk with him and help him on his journey. Don't move too fast, though. Only extend these invitations after he's expressed openness to returning, otherwise you may push him away.**

I know that one of the things that keep me Catholic is the example and faith stories of others. Often when I begin to doubt, I stop and think just for a moment about a person I know who has more reasons to stop believing than I do and yet they believe. My mother lost a child (my older sister when she was four and I was two). I cannot imagine the pain she feels but I can see that she only gets through it (or deals with it) through the power of her faith. If she can continue to believe so can I. Many of my good friends keep me faithful through their selfless service of others in the name of Jesus. It is important that we remind those returning and ourselves that it is alright to be inspired by others holiness but we should never compare ourselves with others.

#### **7. Close the loop**

**Finally, you need to help your child formally reconcile with the Church. Lots of people get stuck here. A priest once told me about a lady who left the Church as a teenager and stayed away for over 30 years. Her reason? She simply didn't know how to come back. Don't let that happen. Once your child is ready to return, talk with your pastor and determine the right steps to close the loop. Maybe he just needs a good confession, or perhaps the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is more appropriate. A good priest will assess the situation and determine the best next steps.**

Formal recognition of someone coming back (even if not public) can help a person connect better with the larger community.

**Obviously, we've only scratched the surface of this road map. To go much deeper, check out the tips and strategies in "RETURN." The key is to never give up hope. Hopelessness is not a word in God's vocabulary. As long as your child still has breath, there is always hope. God loves your child even more than you do. As much as you yearn for your child to come home, God desires his return infinitely more and is continually working to make that happen, even when things appear dire. So trust God, beg him to keep moving in your child's life, and be confident that he will bring your child home.**

#### **Prayer For the Return of Lapsed Catholics to the Sacraments**

Almighty Father, You desire not the death of the sinner, but that he may be converted and live. Pour out upon us Your mercy and hear the prayers of Your servants. Soften the hearts of Your children who have strayed from the true path which You established for their salvation. They are now forgetful of their duties as Catholics, and pursue the pleasures of the world. Grant that they may quickly return to the practice of every Christian virtue, so that their lives may shine with the integrity of faith, the fervor of piety, and the ardor of charity. Restore them all to Your sacraments and the life of Your grace, through the merits of the most precious blood of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen