

# Come Dance with Me

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Our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and with His Church can be likened to a great dance with Him in the lead. Our Lord knows the steps and if we follow Him in the dance he will lead us in a wonderful and exciting dance of life.

The story of my conversion to the Catholic faith began the winter of my senior year in high school as I sat on my bed doing my homework, in my little home town of Clendenin, West Virginia. It was a Sunday night and I had the distinct feeling that I was to go to the Sunday evening service. I had never attended the Sunday evening prayer meeting at our Methodist church, and neither had my parents. So they were quite surprised when I entered the living room; asked for the car keys, and left for church.

When I entered the sanctuary, it was filled with a golden light. It was as though I had entered into the presence of God! I was overwhelmed - so much so that I involuntarily fell to my knees. There was no way I could have stood, the presence of the Spirit was so real to me at that moment. I never forgot what happened or the knowledge that at a point in my young life I had stepped into the presence of God.

Twelve years later . . . I have graduated from college, am teaching high school and have returned to my hometown with my husband and two small children. I haven't always attended church or stayed active in my prayer life, but I had just finished reading a book that had asked the question, "Was I willing to obey the voice of God?"

It was Easter morning and I am back in the same church where 12 years previous I had experienced the presence of God. As I stood for the final hymn and was focusing on the pipes of the organ in the front of the church, I realized that the pipes were disappearing from my vision. It was as if I could "see" through the pipes, through the walls of the church and to the outside. I saw a beautiful, peaceful pastoral scene. I was looking at a serene forest, filled with tall trees and filtered sunlight. There was a sparkling stream running through this forest, reflecting the filtered sunlight. The only way through the forest was to follow the stream - the living water. When the walk through the forest was ended, it opened up into a beautiful flower filled meadow enhanced by a gentle breeze.

At the horizon, across the meadow, was the sun - so big and bright that it filled my view. But yet it was this sun that had provided the light in the forest, and it was this sun that was reflected in the water of the clear sparkling stream.

Then as suddenly as it began, it ended. The pipes were closing in on my field of vision and I was still standing, holding my baby daughter while the congregation finished the hymn.

Now the challenge presented itself. God was asking me if I was ready to unconditionally follow His lead. My answer, "Yes, Lord."

The fun began! I was strongly urged, in my spirit, to go up to the front of the church during the "altar call" (Our minister always made an altar call, but no one ever actually went to the front to rededicate their life to Christ.) My impression was that I was to go up with my baby in arms to

rededicate my life because seven families attending that service needed the healing that I was interceding for them to receive. When I arrived at the front of the church, the minister came down from his pulpit and asked me why I was there. I simply responded, "God sent me!" He announced that the service was over, then left the building as quickly as he could.

The following week representatives of seven families called to tell me of the miraculous ways God had worked in their family since Easter Sunday to bring about long sought after healing. Within the month I had a "coincidental" meeting with the Rev. Dennis Bennett, who was a leader in the early Charismatic Renewal of the Episcopal communion. I told him about my experience on Easter. He explained that the stream was the living water of Christ, and that I had to stay close to the stream to be able to negotiate the "forests" of life. The light at the end of the meadow was the light of God. That light filled the meadow, gave light to the forest, and was reflected in the water of the stream.

A year later . . . I am at home and another vision occurs - this time while I am praying in my living room. The scene was a barren, rocky flat expanse of land. The only way to distinguish the road from the surrounding land was that the road was lined with large rocks. When I looked down the road I saw a woman lying face down. She was dressed in black from a head covering which included a veil to button-up black shoes. I assumed she was dead. Then a man dressed in a white robe entered the scene from the vantage point closest to me. He walked over to the woman and knelt by her head, which put his back toward me. He prayed for the woman, helped her to a kneeling position and lifted her veil. To my total shock - it was me - and not as an old woman but at my current age. The man was so kind, and gently helped her to a standing position. It was my understanding as the woman in the vision that the road led to a gated city. The man dressed in his white robe looked at the woman and said, "Go! Tell my people I am coming."

At that point, the woman in the vision started running for the gated city to spread the news that our Lord was coming. But before she had taken more than a few steps, he ordered her to stop. He spoke only one more time, "You can't tell them about Me, without Me!"

The woman turned, faced Jesus and the vision ended.

A couple of months later, I seriously began to contemplate going to seminary to study youth ministry and counseling. I was still teaching high school, my husband of ten years and I had divorced, and I had custody of our two children. For the next year, I prayed and sought the counsel of friends, ministers and prayed some more. By spring I knew I was to quit my job and go to seminary. I think what was instrumental in the decision was my students coming to me for advice. They were confused and seeking direction. I knew it was the Holy Spirit working in their lives and I also knew that if I was to give my students wise counsel I needed to be more grounded in my own faith. After all, Christ had basically told me in the vision that I could not do anything without Him.

In the meantime God had led me from the United Methodist church of my youth to the Baptist church. It was clear to me that the change was not for doctrinal reasons. Exactly why I was to switch churches was unclear. Yet, I had promised God that as long as He made His will very clear to me, I would do my best to follow His lead. If He thought I needed to know the "why" that was fine, but I would also follow without any cause or reason.

But God knew that if He wanted me to follow Him that His direction would have to be very clear. He knows that I don't get "hints" and "nudgings". He has to just about hit me over the head to get my attention. Oh, how I admire people whom He can gently call and softly guide!

God, knowing that quitting my job that I loved, moving 250 miles away with two young children and leaving my family, sent an angel to guide me through the last month before moving. It was a summer afternoon and my son and daughter, who were seven and five at that time, and I were driving along a narrow road on our way to the swimming pool. This was an area very familiar to me because of my thirty-three years in the community, also my father had taught with my cousin for forty years "back on the hill in a two room school." As the children and I were driving to the pool on this hot July day, we passed an old man carrying a bag of groceries. I told the children that we were going to turn around and pick the stranger up and take him home. It was too hot for him to be walking. We would go to the pool after we saw him safely home. My seven-year-old son reminded me that we shouldn't pick up strangers. I assured him that this time it was a good thing to do and that this was an instance when we needed to be God's helpers.

The man gladly got into the car and began a very general conversation about the weather. In the course of a few minutes his conversation changed to addressing the subject of God's will for our lives. He informed me that only by obeying God's will for our lives do we find true peace and happiness. He stated that sometimes God asks us to truly step out in faith and trust that He is guiding us. At a certain point, I came to a fork in the road and asked him whether I was to turn to the left or right. He answered that I could drop him off here and he could walk the rest of the way. I insisted that it was too hot and we had plenty of time to take him the rest of the way home. We then turned to the left and drove up the hill to the little country community where my dad had taught for so many years. As we were driving along the ridge of the hill, the old gentleman's conversation continued about God's will for our life and our need to be obedient. Soon we came to a clearing. Across the clearing was a stand of trees. The man told me that his home was "over there." I stopped to let him out. He opened the door, retrieved his groceries and turned to walk away. Before he did so, he turned opened the door, looked at me for the first time eye to eye and made a very profound statement, "Do you believe in the divine providence of God?" I wasn't quite sure what he meant, but it sounded like something I would believe, so I replied, "Yes." He looked at me again and said, "God bless you." Shutting the car door, he turned and started walking across the field toward the clump of trees. The children and I turned the car around, having done our good deed, and resumed our trip to the pool.

That evening as we were having supper with my parents, my son brought up the fact that I had picked up a "stranger!" Dad asked me about the old man and after I described where I had dropped him off, Dad suggested that we drive by the place. When we arrive at the spot where a couple of hours earlier I had left the man, my father began to question me. He wanted to know if I was certain of the location. I replied that of course I was certain. He had walked toward that clump of trees. My children concurred. It was a good thing that I had witnesses. Looking at me strangely, my dad proceeded to tell me that this was the place where "Old Man Gandee" once lived. He had died over thirty years ago and the house had later burned down.

Now the Old Man's conversation made much more sense. Was he a ghost? No, I don't believe so, but I do believe he was an angel who used these particular circumstances to speak to me, using the abandoned property as his drop-off point so my father's knowledge of the area could

let me know that there was more to our conversation than had first appeared. I have come to realize that, taking into consideration my inability to understand small hints and nudges, God sent one of His messengers to actually sit in my car with me to reassure me about my decision to leave everything and follow Him to seminary.

Seminary! What an experience for my children and me. It was liberating, it was fun and it was nurturing for all of us. I entered Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio in the fall of 1982. Even though it was run by the Brethren denomination, it had the most ecumenical student body in the state, ranging from Quakers to Greek Orthodox. The children and I lived in an apartment on the seminary campus. Everyone was so open and friendly; I knew I had made the right choice. I knew I was where God had led me. Even so, he wasn't finished with His surprises.

About a month after arriving on campus, the first divorced mother with children to be admitted, my daughter, Mary Ann, came running into the apartment, her eyes just glistening. "Mommy, Mommy, I found us a husband!" I can see the excitement on her face when I remember that day. My response - "That's nice." There was no way I ever wanted to marry again - or even date. I had seen too many of my friends go through a divorce, then when they began to date again their children became very attached to whomever they were dating. When the mother and boyfriend would break up, the children would be devastated all over again. I had decided that my job was to raise my children. That was my primary goal and duty. After they had graduated from high school, maybe I would again think about marriage. Meanwhile, the children were to come first. As the year progressed, I heard that this person named Jim Anderson, who my daughter had met on that fateful day, was really a nice guy. He loved children, had come to seminary to study Church history and theology, and he was single! Soon Mary Ann introduced her brother, Matt, to her new friend. Matt was just as enamored with Jim as she was. Eventually I also met Jim, the only Catholic man on campus. He began going with me on outings with the children, because they insisted that we invite him.

I also began to realize while attending theology classes and a Bible study held by a couple in my apartment building, that what I believed about the Holy Trinity, Mary and the Eucharist, even though being raised Methodist in rural West Virginia, was extremely Catholic. It was no wonder that I drove my Methodist minister crazy!

That spring, Jim asked me if I would like to attend the National Conference on the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church at Notre Dame University. I was a chance to see not only where Jim was coming from spiritually, but also to learn about the Catholic Church. Of course Mary Ann had been correct and Jim and I had become engaged the previous winter. The experience at Notre Dame would prove to change my life.

Since I had grown up in West Virginia, my exposure to the Catholic faith had been very minimal. There are so few Catholics in West Virginia that I did not have any pre-conceived ideas about the Faith. I was clueless, as usual, but willing to investigate and learn.

Besides, on that Easter morning several years previous, I had promised God that if I understood what He wanted me to do, I would respond with, "Yes, Lord!" So now I was on a journey to Notre Dame to see what the Catholic Church was like. The conference totally captivated me. I felt that my eyes were opened, that Charismatic Catholics experienced the best of all worlds; the singing, praising God, wonderful teaching . . . Then the Sunday Mass came. I had never

attended a Mass and here I was, in the arena on the Notre Dame campus, preparing to celebrate Mass with an intimate little group - a crowd of 17,000 people! By that time, I already understood, from my studies at seminary, that Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ. That made perfect sense to me. I could remember saying to my Methodist minister in a youth group meeting that I did not understand why Methodists didn't believe that Jesus was truly present in the Eucharist. After all, Christ had said at the Last Supper, "This is my body." So how could we believe otherwise? The ministers in the Methodist church were generally kind and helpful to me, but when I would broadside them with questions like this, they would never have any convincing answer.

Returning to the Mass at the conference . . . I am being very attentive, trying to take in as much as possible, when I become acutely aware of one priest distributing Holy Communion, directly across the arena from me. I can hear him saying, "The Body of Christ" over and over. I glance away, when I look back I see a different figure with long dark hair, clad in white robes. His back is to me. He is facing the people distributing Communion. He seems to be standing out, very subtly from the rest of the people. I then hear him speak. He is no longer saying, "The Body of Christ." He is now saying, "This is My Body." I think to myself that either this is another version of the liturgy, or this is actually Christ standing over there distributing His own Body to all who came to Him.

When Jim returned from receiving Communion, he nudged me and asked if was all right. He could tell by the intense look on my face that something was happening. I turn to him to say that I was fine; when I looked back the aged priest had returned once again distributing the Body of Christ. I was confused and in awe of what I sensed was occurring. I told Jim what had happened. He said that what I'd seen made perfect sense, because the Catholic Church taught that the priest was an *alter Christus*, that is "another Christ" ministering in Jesus' name. My reply was, "It's time for me to start praying!"

I knelt and began to pray. To my utter surprise and delight - my vision of years ago returned. It picks up where it left off. I am back on the rocky road, with the woman dressed in black, and Christ has just said to me, "You can't tell them about Me, without Me." I now slowly walk back to Jesus and kneel on the rocky road at His feet. He puts his hand on my head and says, "This is My Church and these are My people. This is where you are to be." He then ever so gently assists me to stand and we begin walking down the road toward the gated city. But the landscape begins to change like a scientific documentary of spring in fast forward motion. To either side of the road beautiful flowers, tulips mainly, start popping out of the ground. Trees begin spring up, and grass is growing. The vision ends.

I left the conference knowing that I would be joining the Catholic Church. Who would dare argue with such obvious direction from the Lord? Jim and I were married later that summer and I was received into full communion with the Holy Catholic Church the following Easter of 1984.

"Dance, dance, wherever you may be  
I am the Lord of the dance, said He  
And I lead you all, wherever you may be  
And I lead you all in the Dance, said He."

