

Did the Disciples Have Conversion Stories?

The moment of commitment is not the climax of the Christian calling but the first step in a lifelong journey.

Sister Carino Hodder



IT IS A DANGEROUS THING INDEED to end a story with baptism. There is much that is strange and testing about coming to faith in Christ as an adult, and one of the constant, if more subtle, challenges is how to make sense of it – not to ourselves, but to the people around us. The question usually comes like this: “Why did you convert to Christianity?”

It’s not just a request for information; it’s a request for a whole story, self-contained, conclusive, and at least mostly comprehensible. I try my best to give an answer. I lay a path, within my limited understanding of the designs of providence, of the temporal steppingstones that led me to the point of conversion: that old church I stumbled into and sat in for an hour, that priest who answered my difficult questions.

The real answer is that I don’t know the whole story, because my conversion is ongoing, but no one wants to hear that. People want a story that begins with an atheist teenager and ends with a woman having holy water poured on her head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, or perhaps a great moment of clarity arising from sorrow, illness, or death. They also sometimes want an epilogue on how I ended up in a convent – depending on how long we’ve got together in this lift, or how late the bus is. No one wants to hear a story in which the author has no idea of the ending, nor where the beginning should be, then tells you she is not actually the author of the story at all.

Seven years into the life of grace, I can confidently reject any attempt imposed upon me to produce a conversion story. Partly this comes from an awareness that I can love and trust God well within my human limitations, at peace in the knowledge that his ways are not my ways and his thoughts are not my thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). But the main reason I do not want to have a “conversion story” is because, as far as I can see, none of Christ’s first disciples had one.

WHEN I FIRST ENTERED THE CONVENT in which I am now a sister, I spent much of my time praying with the Gospel of Mark. The beginning of convent life is a time for prolonged reflection, for considering one’s call, and for me that began with reflection on how I ended up as a Christian in the first place. I thought about the conversion story I had so often told people, and realized that because I had told it so often, I believed in it myself, when in fact it was merely my own interpretation of the workings of grace. I came to the Gospel of Mark ready to reflect on my conversion story once again, focusing on the words of the scriptures.

Mark’s account of the calling of the disciples is remarkably bare and rapid-paced. It takes a mere four verses, Mark 1:16–20, for Simon and Andrew to leave their fishing nets by the shore of the Sea of Galilee and follow Christ.

We are not told what Simon and Andrew had been thinking and reading about before Christ approached, or what interactions and events had made them open to the possibility of discipleship that day. We are not told what they found attractive or plausible about Jesus. We are also not told what else, if anything, Jesus said to them before the command to follow. Instead, we are given a mere four verses, the most jarringly, almost shockingly brief account possible, and then we are given a whole life of faith, a whole life of infinite, incremental moments of conversion, to read about. Perhaps there was no material for Mark to draw on; perhaps Simon and Andrew had never spoken about it, or could not speak about it, because they did not know how to. Maybe they did, but always preferred to speak about what happened next. The call matters, of course, but more important is the journey it begins. The Gospel describes the way of discipleship: a physical journey that embodies – incarnates, if you like – a spiritual journey, from fear to faith, from self-protection to trust. This journey is haunted with a growing urgency by the inevitability of that strange and wondrous reality, death-dealing and life-giving, that is the cross.

Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection are not merely the events that mark the end of the way. They are the very reason *for* the way, for this whole mysterious and almost unimaginable story that Simon, Andrew, and each one of us have chosen to place ourselves in. This “good news” ends in what, in human terms, is scandal, failure, and an empty tomb. It is either the rubber stamp on our despair or the most astounding sign of hope. And still, at the end of it all, we know no more about the disciples’ decision to leave everything and follow Christ than what those four brief, enigmatic verses tell us: he called them, and they left their father, Zebedee, and followed him.

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Urú is a beautiful collaboration by long time duo partners Catrina Scullion (soprano) and Catriona Mc Elhinney-Grimes (pianist).

In addition to performing at concerts and events all over Ireland, the duo has also presented a solo recital series in the NCH over the last few years .

Urú (eclipse) is a celebration of the duo's musical and family heritage. A collaboration between their classical training and Irish roots.

Catriona is from Donegal and Catrina, from Co Antrim. The album features songs which are special to both and features some of their own arrangements.

You are welcome to join us (virtually) for our album launch via webcam and livestream (via <https://m.facebook.com/catrinascullionsop/>) on Friday 30th Oct @7pm from St Mary's Church Haddington Road.

The album will be on sale after the launch through Catrina's website

<http://www.catrinascullionsoprano.com/>

or you can contact her directly on 0863408228.

In Memoriam

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Sunday 25 October

9.30am: Eimear Leonard

11am: William and Christina Cullen

Jim Dufficy



Pope at Audience: God remains near to us in suffering

In his catechesis at the Wednesday General Audience, Pope Francis reflects on the witness of prayer as laid out in the Book of Psalms, saying the door to God's heart is always open in our moments of pain.

By Devin Watkins

How to pray

As part of the books of wisdom, the Psalms communicate to the believer "knowing how to pray".

"In the Psalms we find all human sentiments: the joys, the sorrows, the doubts, the hopes, the bitterness that colour our lives," said the Pope.

God, he added, inspired the language of prayer in the books so that those who read them might learn how to praise, thank, implore, and invoke Him.

"In short, the Psalms are the word of God that we human beings use to speak with Him."

The prayers in the Psalms arise out of lived experience, not abstract ideas, said the Pope. "To pray them it is enough for us to be what we are," with all our problems and uncertainties.

Question of suffering

Pope Francis went on to explore how the Psalmist confronts the issue of suffering, saying it is accepted as part of life and thus transformed into a question.

"Until when?" he said, is the question that remains unanswered.

"Every suffering calls for liberation, every tear calls for consolation, every wound awaits healing, every slander a sentence of absolution."

The Psalms, said the Pope, reminds us that life is not saved unless suffering is healed.

The person who prays, he added, knows that they are "are precious in the eyes of God, and so it makes sense to cry out."

Prayer: a cry to God

The Psalms show us that crying out to God in prayer "is the way and beginning of salvation."

Pope Francis said prayer turns pain into "a relationship: a cry for help waiting to intercept a listening ear."

"All human pains for God are sacred," he added. "Before God we are not strangers, or numbers. We are faces and hearts, known one by one, by name."

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