

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN



St Mary's
Parish

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Community

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MANY YEARS AGO, when people asked me why I was becoming a Christian, I would tell a conversion story. I told it to friends, colleagues, to family, and to anybody who wanted to know, and then I was asked if I would like to tell it in an article in a Christian paper, to which I agreed. I wrote two thousand words on how I began to study philosophy and theology as a teenager at school. I wrote how I arrived at the conclusion that morality was objective, and that the universe did not simply exist but was created. I wrote that Christianity was the most historically plausible creed which incorporated these truths, and that was why I was now being received into the Christian church. I found it very easy to write, because I understood barely anything of the depth and profundity of the mystery attendant upon being brought to faith in Christ. I understood so little that I was almost entirely unaware of how much there was yet for me to understand. (At nineteen, I generally understood very little on the natural plane, let alone the supernatural.)

I feel sufficiently kind toward that nineteen-year-old that I can read the article nowadays without too much embarrassment. When I do, in my account of my conversion I find not God, but arguments for God. I had enough maturity to refrain from making myself the object of my writing, but nevertheless, its object was not Christ; it was Christian credibility. God may have found me, but it seemed more important that I had found proofs for him.

The reason I wrote in this way was not because I had no relationship with Christ. It was not because what I thought of as my faith was merely an impersonal sense of triumph at having grasped a theological argument. It was because a neat, methodical, well-structured, and easily comprehensible conversion story was what people seemed to want. Usually they were simply interested, or curious, or wanted to celebrate with me, but to that young woman, in the midst of the most astonishing change of her life, the question “Why did you convert to Christianity?” seemed to say that she needed to explain Christ in order to follow him.

Where else can a conversion story truly end except with death and the face of God?

Nowadays I am happily aware that there is very little I can say with honest certainty about those months of preparing for my baptism, that time which I wrote about and spoke about so profligately back when I was in the habit of telling people a conversion story. All I know is that it was a time when I came to realize that the way to be drawn most fully into the world was to acknowledge that it wasn't all there was, and while I was unsure where this decision would lead me, or what it would cost me, it was enough to convince me to start out on the way. That real yet unspeakable trust, that depth of hope in God, which I had at the time, is what I find in Mark's account of the call of these silent, inscrutable, yet utterly convicted disciples. It comes, too, with a sense of great tenderness and compassion both for them and for my former self: the catechumen who did not, and could not, possibly know the life of constant conversion that was waiting for her as she stepped away from the baptismal font.

I want to go back and tell that teenager, who wrote down her conversion story with such conclusive certainty, that she now has enough material for ten or twenty essays on conversion. I want to tell her of the depth, height, and breadth of conversion to Christ, joyous and painful, which is far beyond anything she could have comprehended – and yet nothing compared to what the next decades will hold for her. I want to tell her that, if she opens her Bible, she will find that the disciples who answer the call to follow Jesus are the same disciples who will three times hear him predict his own death and yet not understand; fall on their faces at the sight of him transfigured; run away from his maimed and suffering body on the cross. Three days later, they have the glorified wounds of Christ offered to them, not as a reproach, as human justice might demand, but as invitation and as gift. How bizarre would it be, and how disparaging to them, to view these events merely as an epilogue to the story of dropped nets by a lakeside?

IN THE CONVENT, we pray often for a good death. We do so particularly at the office of Night Prayer, where the Psalms are offered in the dark, on the cusp of sleep, as preparation for the profound darkness of the sleep of death. One of my older sisters is wont to say – lightly, but still truthfully – that after Final Profession, the only other major event in a sister's life is her death. Our whole Christian lives are a preparation for a good Christian death, one in which we pass through the new and living way to the beatific vision. We can hope for such a death, and reach out our hands toward it, no matter what happened to us at the time we came to faith. It is not at that

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Child Protection: <http://www.stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie/ministries/child-protection/> also www.csp.dublindiocese.ie

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first moment of conversion, but at the end of our Christian journey that the true meaning of our discipleship will settle and reveal itself, if indeed it ever does in this life.

I know of many books in which Christians give an account of their initial conversion, but I do not know of any recounting their ongoing conversion toward the end of their lives. People do not want to hear the conversion stories of Christians approaching death, and yet are more than happy to ask for stories from new Christians who have barely begun to convert at all, before so much of their conversion has happened to them or even become comprehensible to them. Where else can a conversion story truly end except with death and the face of God?

I think many people assume that my demurral from telling a "conversion story" is an unexpected form of shyness, rather than something principled. It's not that I don't want to tell anybody the personal details of how I came to faith, and it's not that I don't trust anybody with them. It's simply that I am beginning to understand, seven years on, that much of what is truly significant happens after the point at which most people expect the story to end. If we must know each other's faith journeys, then we need the honesty to present our first conversion just as the Gospels do: not as a culmination, nor as a reassuring and satisfying conclusion to our story, but as the most mysterious of beginnings.



COVID-19 Support Line for Older People

ALONE manage a national support line and additional supports for older people who have concerns or are facing difficulties relating to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

Professional staff are available to answer queries and give advice and reassurance where necessary.

The support line is open: seven days a week, 8.00am – 8.00pm by calling 0818 222 024.



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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Recently Deceased

Terry Meagher

Anniversaries

9.30am: Eimear Leonard

11am: William and Christina Cullen

Jim Dufficy

Sunday 1 November

11am Gerard Lardner