



As some of you know, my hubby and I reached our 25th wedding anniversary a few weeks ago. We celebrated by renewing our vows during a lovely Mass given by our long-time priest and friend. We had our family and close friends there, and our children stood by us as the two of us restated the promises that bound us together a day long ago. As I sat through the Mass and listened to our Pastor's touching and (eloquently) funny words about us, our marriage, and our family through the years, I thought about the countless ceremonies I have attended at this church. Among them, many Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, and weddings. Weddings...weddings??...my daughter dressed in a bridal gown popped into my head and I almost lost it... [GULP]. Can you imagine? Wow...I am so looking forward to many more sacrament-filled days, God-willing. Anyway, it was all very special, and it was a lot of fun.

But church for me hasn't always been fun. In this old, traditional and humble-looking building I have called my church for over four decades, I have not only shed tears of joy, but also of sadness. Because amidst the happy events, there have been those ever dreaded funeral Masses and their seemingly interminable processions behind coffins. Too many, actually. Of friends, of family members. Moments that have found me sitting in a pew with my heart down to my soles, finding death intolerable and mourning an insufferable heartache. And other days knee-bent and begging for miracles that did not come. No, church most definitely hasn't always been fun. Yet, during such moments I never felt alone. Then and there, I found the support I needed to lift my flattened soul; to make the unbearable bearable.

It goes without saying that I believe what's made all the difference has been the relationship I've maintained with this church through time. Despite the consensus about the Catholic Church the last few years, and in spite of its dysfunction. Many have left it because they have been "turned off" by the actions of a few. And I understand to a degree, I've felt disappointed too at times, and so I get it. But I also get that if I walk away, I would be cheating myself out of the place where I can find fulfillment in Christ in the form of the Holy Eucharist; out of the one place where I can find the Perfect amidst any and all imperfections.

I always tell my students to look for a church they like and to commit to it, to volunteer in it, to become part of it, and let *it* become part of them. I really think that we can find many more dedicated, grace-filled, loving, and forgiving people than not in most churches. We just have to look with better eyes, so that we don't miss the chance to find a church that can be for us a home away from home.

I was fortunate to have found one I love. I love the sweet smell of incense there, the beautiful fresh flowers, the flickering candles, and the soft warm glow from the stained glass windows (those scriptural storytellers in the light of day); the sound of the organ and the creaking wooden pews echoing in the silence (especially when I'm its only occupant); the forgiveness in the Lenten ashes, the hope in the palms, and the sustenance and salvation in the Eucharist. And I'm in awe of the humongous and haunting wood carved Risen Christ statue that looks over me from the altar...as I sit there, comfortable, at home.

Jesus was in my heart way before He led me to Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church. But there, I have found perspective and balance. And I have felt the support of extraordinarily genuine and long-lasting friendships. No, church for me hasn't always been fun. It's been so much more.



Find yours.



Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, Miami, FL

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.

~ *Matthew 16:18*

You can be committed to Church but not committed to Christ, but you cannot be committed to Christ and not committed to church.

~ *Joel Osteen*

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