

# The Flame of St. Francis

See the Church again—for the First Time



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"Seek the Lord in All that You Do!"

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## A Personal Conversion Story

by Andrew Ponto

The path to God for many of us can be widely varied. Many of those in the Catholic Church are "Cradle" Catholics who were reared in the Church and have either been here from the beginning, or have perhaps returned after a self-imposed exile.

Others, like myself, are converts. Although most of our paths may have not been as dramatic or newsworthy as John Henry Newman, they still represent a particularly different path than perhaps most lifelong Catholics may have taken. However, I do believe we have in common many of the same day to day fears and doubts no matter what route we took to joining the Church that Jesus found.

When I was a teenager, I was fortunate to have had two parents who took family and my upbringing seriously. It was a happy childhood. It was a home, however, that was somewhat detached from religion. It wasn't something that we spoke negatively about as much as it was something we didn't speak about much at all. Both of my parents had endured negative experiences in their early church life, and one of the indirect ramifications was that I was brought up without much direct experience with religion. With the exception of the occasional visit to a High School Friend's Lutheran church it didn't play much of a part in my life.

As I grew into the early portion of my adulthood I can't honestly say I was particularly overly intellectually curious about religion at that point either. My world at that time consisted of finishing classes, getting decent enough grades, working up the courage to talk to women I was attracted to and watching an inordinate amount of sports on TV. When I look back at much of it now it's obviously not a path that was particularly deep, but at the time it



Andrew's Baptism

was the path I chose to take.

There was a point when I was in my late 20's, a few more years ago than I care to admit, that it all sort of hit me that it all felt rather vacant. It turns out the Twins winning their baseball division actually hadn't really changed my life after all. Nor had the job promotion meant what I thought it would. It also turned out that the dating relationships I had really didn't bring me the meaning that I thought that they would either.

It was then that I began to have a fascination with religion. First it was in general, as I would be what many now label a "seeker". Rather quickly, I knew that my true fascination was with Christianity. The story of Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice was compelling to me. However, I didn't understand at the time the need to belong to any sort of denomination or church. Rather, I was compelled to drop in and out of church services from time to time and to read the bible myself, so didn't have anyone telling me "what to think".

As I would spend the next decade attending various Christian churches and reading the Bible I

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felt a strong attraction to Christianity but there was always something missing. It wasn't until I stepped into St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church that I felt everything come together at once. I was instantly drawn to the seriousness of the service, the liturgical approach to the gospel as well as the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I understood that this was the Religious home I had been searching for over the course of a decade.

One of the things that had intimidated me about the Catholic Church in the past was the process it took to actually join the Church. Initially it seemed to me to be something of a long process. However, I quickly came to understand that it is a necessary process to be able to truly understand the Church and her teachings in full, and to have the chance to properly reflect on the importance of the journey I was continuing.

Jesus said to Peter "And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) We each need to have a rock upon which we can build our lives. I finally have come to understand in full that the rock of my life, my foundation, is the Catholic Church. On Holy Saturday this year I had the honor of receiving my baptism, communion and my first reception of the Eucharist. The ability to receive these Sacraments is a true blessing, and have helped me further along on the journey of living my life not selfishly for myself only, but rather to be in service of Jesus Christ and his Church.

Another wonderful lesson I've begun to understand is that being "on my own" when it came to worship wasn't what God intended for us. We are meant for community, and to have each other to learn from and rely on. The worship experience is significantly better with others when that is possible. The mentorship and friendship from the wonderful people at St. Francis has truly been a blessing to have, and I can only hope that I am able to help

others as they have helped me in a similar fashion as the years continue forward.

Pope John Paul II's leadership during his pontificate was exemplified by his signature phrase "Be not afraid!" I can hope that all of us, most certainly including myself, can live by this motto in the way we live each day.

## REFLECTION

### Hawks, Eagles, and the Catholic Faith

by Anthony Scheffer

The red-tailed hawk, *buteo jamaicensis*, is my favorite bird. Hawks are large creatures, with females (the larger of the two) having a wingspan that approaches five feet. When there are a male and female together in season, you might see them flying a kind of courtship dance of great swooping circles in the sky. Hawks can hover and they can dive at great speed when they are pursuing prey. Like eagles, hawks are raptors, that is, hunters—but the hawk has something the eagle has not. Eagles are noble, and rare; hawks are common as the rain. The range of the red-tailed hawk extends from Alaska to Florida, and you see them in places you'd never see an eagle.

The Catholic Faith is more like the hawk than the eagle, for the Faith exalts the ordinary and the everyday. Every human being starts out just like everyone else, but by the sacrament of Baptism we are changed; we become a wholly new sort of creature, each one of us becoming a clear conduit of the Eternal Light in a way that the world has never seen before. We grow in holiness by consuming the Eucharist, which is made miraculously from ordinary flatbread and wine every time Mass is celebrated. Just as the everyday bread and wine become the stuff of God, we who once were common become noble, and we will never be the same again. It's kind of like the hawk, who in his own way is noble as the eagle, even though he is just being himself.

## What is *The Flame of St. Francis*?

*The Flame of St. Francis* is an occasional journal of articles, prayers, apologetics, and other written words devoted to moving the reader to a deeper conversion in Christ. The purpose is to inspire, to evangelize and re-evangelize the community by showing the beauty and power of the Catholic Faith. Readers are invited to "See the Church again—for the First Time" through new eyes and in a way that will bring new hope. Any article that is evangelical, apologetic, or inspirational in nature is welcome to be submitted for consideration. Send all submissions to [anthony@stfrancismhd.org](mailto:anthony@stfrancismhd.org).