



# Mary by My Side

JAMES M. HERBERT

**M**Y CONVERSION STORY does not consist of some huge miraculous events that changed my life overnight. No, it took years after that tiny mustard seed was implanted within my soul.

I grew up in a wonderful Christian family. We attended services every Sunday for years at the Evangelical Reform Church that my father attended throughout his life. When we all became teenagers and did not *want* to attend, we stopped going. At this point, my relationship with God was superficial. This is where the seed came into my life. When I was twenty-two, I met my wonderful future wife Renée at work and fell in love instantly. Then eighteen, she had a glow that made me want to find out more about her. I found out that she was a Catholic, and came from a very devout Catholic family. I vividly remember going to her house to meet some of her family. I walked into the living room, and there were twelve to fifteen people seated around the room with candles lit, statues within reach, and chanting of some sort. I had no clue about anything Catholic or their beliefs. I was reassured by Renée that this was not a séance, but a devotion to Mary called the rosary. Her family was part of a group of friends and neighbors that would pray the rosary together. Well, I loved her dearly and accepted that part of her beliefs, even though I felt very uncomfortable at the time.

I started attending Mass on Sundays with her, just to be with her. I also felt that I could learn more about her as a possible wife and mother of our children. When the time

came for my proposal to her, her parish priest met with us and asked only one thing: “Will you allow your wife to raise your children Catholic?” Not once did I hesitate, because I wanted them to grow up with a very strong relationship with God, a relationship like Renée had with Jesus Christ and his mother Mary.

Years went by, sitting beside my wife and then three children every Sunday. We decided to homeschool our

children when our oldest was eight years old. Renée paid particular attention to teaching the children their faith. I saw them grow in their faith and I felt a call to learn more. My children would ask me questions that I couldn’t answer. I saw my oldest child teaching my younger children about Jesus. I was amazed that she knew so much, and she was so full of joy about her faith.

Around the same time, I received a letter from my brother-in-law, who was in the seminary preparing for the priesthood. The letter was about the Catholic faith and Our Lady. He invited me to think about fully joining the Church and meeting Mother

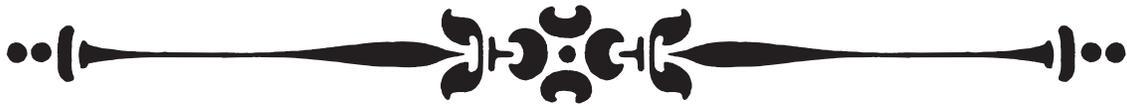
Mary. As a result, I began to think more and more that God was calling me to a conversion to the truths of the Catholic Church. At my brother-in-law’s invitation, I decided to join the RCIA. Several other people had informed me about the RCIA, but no one had ever invited me to it. I wanted to finally receive the Eucharist so I might truly participate in receiving our Lord, and I wanted to do so with my oldest daughter, who was preparing for her First Communion.



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I thoroughly enjoyed my RCIA classes. I felt right at home, never feeling a bit uncomfortable. I truly learned a lot from the classes. The catechists taught us about the true meaning of the sacraments, Church history, and *why* we should pray. The talks, conversion stories, and all the information they provided for us were outstanding. I felt like they lit a fire within me. I had a peace in my heart that was so deep that I was able to forgive those people who have had hurt me in the past. I was able to ask for forgiveness, which I would have never done before. Every day I rushed home from work to read my Bible. I said short prayers all day long as I found the chance to do so. At one point, I even thought about becoming a deacon.

During the year of preparation, my father passed away, and eighteen hours later my fourth child was brought into this world. The support and prayers from the RCIA group and my sponsor is truly what helped me get through my father's death, and they shared the joy of my son's birth. They helped me feel that Mary, our Mother was by my side through all of this. The RCIA gave me the knowledge that I will never walk alone, that Mary our Mother will treat me as her only son as she did with Jesus. I know that Mary will be with me until death.

One of the things I remember the most was the lesson on the rosary. They taught us the importance of it and instruct-



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*“Christ will reward me for my suffering if I accept all my crosses and carry them as he did for us.”*

I accept all my crosses and carry them as he did for us. Although this injury has set me back in worldly things, it has brought me closer to my family and to God. I know this is a cross that I have been given and I will be glad to carry it to the end. It has made me a better man, husband, father, and Catholic. I offer up all my suffering for all those in need.

ed us how to recite it. Despite my wife growing up praying the rosary within her family, she and the children did not pray the rosary together. I started saying the rosary every day on my way to and from work. After several months of this, I mentioned it to my wife to make sure I was saying it correctly. She was shocked to hear that I prayed the rosary daily and that she did not. From that day on, we have prayed the rosary as a family daily.

Two years after the birth of my son, I severely injured my back at work. After undergoing countless surgeries and procedures, with no relief, I still am unable to work and even hold my small child. The injury resulted in the selling of our home and some possessions. We had to rely on the help of others to get us back on our feet. I can honestly say that without my faith and the intercession of the Blessed Mother, I could not have made it through all this pain and suffering, along with other problems that this injury has caused my family. As I was taught in the RCIA, Christ will reward me for my suffering if

