

Faith is a Process — Paige Rien — 2024-05-02

Paige is a designer, former HDTV host, and author, speaker, mother to four, and convert to the Catholic Faith. She is chiefly interested in the intersection of the home and our personal path to holiness, and encourages us to treat our homes as sacred spaces. She has been in addiction recovery for over 25 years, which guided her conversion and influences her work today.

PROCESS VS JOURNEY — This talk is mainly about her personal "process" in Faith. Since she is an expert in her own story, she decided to talk about it, and her Faith process. Faith is not a journey for Paige, but more a process, more like baking bread, where all the ingredients are everywhere, and somehow they come together. It looks ugly for a while, with yeast bubbling, dough proofing, sometimes a chemical process, and even an explosion when different things come together — this is all what her Faith journey has looked like to her. She summarized her Faith in two contrasting images from her life, one recent, one a long time ago. At a recent parish dinner commemorating the end of a Lenten journey, Paige was standing in the rear of the chapel for a pre-dinner Mass. The chapel was filled with people she knew, filled with people she loved and with love for her; she was with her community, fully present, fully participating in this Mass, fully immersed in the Lord. She contrasted this with a memory from her childhood, where she was baptized in the Albanian Orthodox Church. The two hour liturgy occurred once a week, in a church across town. Her family did not attend often, and when they did, they were often late, and sat in the back of the church. She noticed an older teen, Stephanie, sitting in the front by herself, who was so present, trying so hard. Paige did not understand someone so fully engaged in her faith, someone as close to the Lord as she could get. Paige hated her, and along with her family thought "who does she think she is?" Back in the present, she realized she was in a room full of Stephanies, herself included! So what happened in between?

BEGINNINGS — God made Paige a sensitive, intense human being with a great depth of feeling, a very emotional person, drawn to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, because she was an "emotional basket case" in her childhood. Paige knew the Lord turned that into something else for Thérèse, so she hoped the Lord would similarly turn things into something else for her. Being sensitive, and prone to feeling uncomfortable, and profoundly lonely, she found ways to make all things quieter within her by eating. The only thing that felt right was eating. Eating was a solution to whatever was going on, to celebrate, to be sad, to process feelings, to avoid being uncomfortable. Food is also a great separator, can take us out, can be isolating. Food can remove us from people who are difficult, who are mean, or make us uncomfortable. She then found alcohol as the great solution to get rid of the food problem. Paige went to college at Brown, played basketball and drank heavily. She put herself into tough situations, and began to find her way out by attending various 12 step programs, including AA, and debtors anonymous as she discovered that being an alcoholic student was expensive. There was a lot of intensity for Paige in all of these areas as she was trying just to be normal.

A MUSTARD SEED — The idea of a higher power was her mustard seed in recovery. In her generation, and how she was raised led her to believe that SHE was the higher power, and could and should fix all her problems. After all, she got into an ivy league school, she played high school basketball on a state championship team for which she won an MVP trophy. How could she not fix the little mundane things that were keeping her down and destroying her life? She was told that she had to believe that there is something greater than her in order to keep coming. The mustard seed was planted. At that time, that higher power had no face, no name, no building, no book, no tradition, no story. Eventually, she started saying God as she understood HER! She was in recovery about 10 years, sober and abstinent, totally redesigned and re-imagined as a human being, coming to know herself for the first time. She got a job in television, got very involved in the New Age movement as she was still seeking, and was open to anything transcendent, as long as it was not connected to religion. She still hated the Church in that season of her life, felt excluded from it, did not really grow up in it, sitting in the back, always feeling outside. She got married to a lapsed but curious Catholic. And they were seeking a church home. Not intending to ever have children, they had 4 children. She started zeroing in on the ideas about the home. In this season of life, she felt the Lord was revealing Himself to her. Always, without her knowing it, God was guiding her. Somehow she ended up at Medjugorje when she was still mostly in her pagan attitude. While her family was on vacation in Croatia, an aunt convinced the family to go. She had a transformative experience on Apparition Hill, without even knowing what it was, who Mary was. It took her years to understand that the Lord got her there and changed her heart bit by bit.

MOTHERHOOD AND FAITH FORMATION — She believes that the HDTV job, the health stuff was a training ground to help her understand how valuable the home is for salvation. What happens in the home and what happens with the family is fundamental in how we are formed as people. She began to think about how she was formed and how she wanted to form her children. She got serious about the home at this time. The Church defines the domestic church not as a what, but as a who - the domestic church is the family. Jesus revealed Himself even further to her when she became a mother, something she never expected to happen. In motherhood, she learned to be teachable. A fundamental piece of her faith process was to be teachable, and she was not in the beginning. She wants her heart to be open to all those who can teach her, to the Word of God, to scripture, to what she is supposed to learn, to know, to grasp and to consume. She

wants to be open, and never close the door and think that she already knows the answer. The idea about being teachable came from her husband's Catholic family. She was surrounded by sisters-in-law who kept having baptisms, and she kept being dragged into the Catholic Church. There was something unmistakable — there was something there — a joy, happy marriages, delight over babies and more babies, a comfort with themselves. They had a different kind of brokenness than she was used to. There was something beautiful that she could not deny. Might it be the Catholic Church? She joined a woman's group with a bit of a chip on her shoulder. There was a tremendous amount of warmth and love and teaching, and openness. She asked lots of challenging questions, and thought they would not want her there, that she was ruining the vibe of the group. She thought of herself as the "cantankerous group member" until she heard from one of her fellow group members who told her "they pray for someone like you to come in." She now understands what that meant. When we love something and we feel so alive, we want other people to come.

12 STEPS AND CATHOLICISM — Paige began to see the Catholic Church in the 12 steps. After she came to the Catholic Church in 2018, she was thinking she would not have to go to meetings anymore. Her priest told her "everybody thinks that." Often in AA meetings, there is antagonism towards religion, and the Church in particular. She then discovered a group "Catholics in Recovery," a fellowship that can be started in any parish. Her Parish, Holy Redeemer, hosts the only one in Maryland and Virginia. They talk about recovery, the sacraments, the Gospel, and what it is like to be Catholic and all the things to get well. Thanks to the protestant co-author of the book they wrote together who (unlike Paige) was so well-versed in the Bible, she was inspired to listen to the Bible in a Year podcast, and realized how much the stories are about addiction, brokenness and recovery. Through her lens, she sees stories of human brokenness through consumption, and a Lord who is dying to feed us the right way. Paige noticed great parallels between the 12 steps of recovery and her newly discovered Faith. She gave us a brief summary:

1. Admit we are Powerless — That is Christmas — we need a Savior.
2. Believe in a greater Power — My Lord and my God.
3. Decide to turn our life and our will over to the care of God — Jesus, I trust in You.
4. Make a moral inventory of ourselves — Confession
5. Admit to God, to ourselves and another human our wrongs — Confession continued.
6. Ready to have God remove all our defects of character — Personal call to holiness.
7. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings — Personal call to holiness continued.
8. Make a list of those harmed and resolve to make amends — Forgiveness and repentance.
9. Make direct amends where possible — Forgiveness and repentance continued.
10. Continue to take personal inventory and admit when we are wrong — Ignatian Examen.
11. Seek (through prayer and meditation) to improve our conscious contact with God — Be still and know that I am God.
12. Have a spiritual awakening, and carry message to others — Spread the Good News.

Paige talked about some of the many correlations between the AA program and the Catholic Church. Both have a universal quality about them — we can find a meeting anywhere in the world. Likewise, we can find the same Mass being celebrated anywhere in the world. There is a unity and uniformity in a 12 step meeting, and also with the Mass. 12 step people do not realize how much of a home they would find in the Catholic Church, more than any other denomination. Once Paige saw all the parallels in the 12 steps, she wanted to make it official, and was received into the Catholic Church in 2018.

TRANSFORMATIVE RECOVERY — Paige spoke of the idea of attraction, not promotion, which is a big part of recovery. We are meant to spread the Gospel, and some promotion may be necessary, but for her, given her past, it has to be more about attraction. How do we do attraction and not promotion? Through joy, through meals, through connection, through women's groups, through friendships. The process has been a consolation for Paige. It took her a long time to come to the Faith, and she cannot think of anyone in her life who was looking out for her all these years, except maybe her mother-in-law in heaven praying for her son who had left the church, and married a "pagan." There were no others in her family who were concerned about her coming around to the Faith. Is there someone in our life who we are praying for? They may be in different parts of their process. We need to be patient and never give up on them. Paige began to love the Church, the scriptures: The pieces of her life were starting to come together. For her, ideas about recovery, and the home and faith are all the same. She concluded her talk with two scripture references. First, she spoke of the healing of the demoniac in Mark 5. When he was healed, he wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus told him to go back to his community and do good there. This is a beautiful idea, and our call is to be out and spread the good news and tell others what Jesus has done for us. Next, she ended her talk by reciting Psalm 33, 6-22, which she says talks about process in a beautiful way, God's awesome power to transform us, to make of us something, no matter where we were before.

CONCLUSION — We are all hungry, we come out of the womb hungry, but often for all of the wrong things like food or attention or money. Because of her special sensitivity to that hunger, Paige learned that the hunger was not for things. Faith is a process of finding the source of our hunger and feeding it with the Only One who can truly fill us.