

Jeff Ryan – Witness To My Faith

There are four stages in my faith journey which I call the Four C's. In each stage, God met me where I was at and eventually led me into a more deeper relationship with Him. I suspect my journey will sound familiar to many of you.

The first stage, Cradle Catholic

I was born of Irish and Italian heritage and the faith was part of who we were. My mom took us to church every week and we knelt at our bed and said our prayers every night. When I was a teenager I started playing guitar in the folk group at Mass and played at weddings. When you sing you pray twice and music has been an important part of my faith journey. But it was the '70s, and I drifted away from practicing my faith although I still believed.

The second stage, Cafeteria Catholic

Although I considered myself Catholic, I picked and chose what I believed and practiced. Deacon Art would have called me a CEO Catholic (Christmas and Easter Only). I met my wife Lori while attending UConn and truly believe God brought us together. She was also Catholic and at a similar stage in her journey. When we began our family, our faith began to awaken. One summer on vacation I purchased a one year Bible and reading scripture every day started to feed the spiritual hunger I was beginning to feel.

The third stage, Convicted Catholic

We wanted to bring our kids up in the faith and started attending Church at St Bernard. When we asked to have our son baptized, Father Flower (whom some of you may remember) questioned our commitment since we weren't regularly attending mass each weekend. I'll forever thank Father for that. Around this time, my dad passed away at a young age. I felt God's presence in a special way during this difficult time, but also realized I had only a vague understanding of what happens when we die and was determined to learn more about my faith.

The fourth stage, Committed Catholic

My mom gave me my dad's Rosary which I began praying and now pray every day with Lori. I began to study my faith so I had answers to the questions I had and taught CCD and RCIA to help others in their faith formation. We experienced trials with difficult pregnancies and learned how God works through others as his hands and feet. My faith is important to me and I express it in different ways. I keep a small crucifix at my office and I'm often asked about it. I'm fortunate to be a part of our men's prayer group with others who look to deepen their commitment week by week as we reflect on the scriptures for the coming Sunday and how they apply to us.

Cradle, Cafeteria, Convicted and Committed describe the four stages in my journey so far. Will there be a 5th C? God hasn't revealed that yet, but I wouldn't put it past Him.

I can tell you that the cycle of the Four C's continues with my four children, most of whom have moved from the cradle to the cafeteria stage. I know God is working in their lives just like he did in mine, meeting them where they are at. My prayers are that they be convicted and then grow their commitment to Christ just like I did.

Romans 8:28 has been the guiding scripture of my life: "all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose". If I've learned anything worth sharing in my journey thus far through all four stages, it is that you can bank on that!