

May, 1994.

Dear family,

Please consider this letter part of my autobiography. There was a lot of living done between my last chapter and this one but I am "putting the cart before the horse" again---hit and miss fashion. Know that I prayed, thought very carefully and often was consumed with how I am going explain the very sensitive subject of my Faith to you. Since so many of you are no longer going to church, I have little idea of how you feel. We (I mostly) have avoided the subject for reasons very sensitive to us. Faith is a gift which we either accept or reject. Your Dad and I have chosen to accept it and are very happy in our choice.

You can't be aware of the changes we have seen in the Catholic church. The church I was born into is nothing like the one we embrace today. That was the church of "hellfire and damnation" which scared you into being good. In all fairness God's love was always there. It was veiled in sadness for how poorly we responded to Jesus's great sacrifice for us. Since Vatican II when Pope John advocated that we "open the doors to let the fresh air in" more and more emphasis is being placed on God's mercy, his GREAT love for us, and forgiveness. The Church has changed gradually. We are endowed with a free will. God did not make robots of us subject to submission but gives his love and understanding for us to come to him in our need. We come to Him freely with motivated returned love.

More and more we get the message, "WE ARE THE CHURCH" Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Protestant, whoever believes in God. We have different forms of worship, may approach our perfection in various ways but there is a loving God who sets us free. I believe we are put on this world to love one another and serve God through how we treat others. God is with us; we are made in His image and likeness. You may choose to deny that but only your complete rejection of his goodness and mercy will separate us from His love.

The Catholic church has not been an exemplary vehicle from which we built our Faith. It has made many mistakes, been heathenistic with the wrong people in leadership, biased, lacked understanding of God's Word (true meaning of his message to us), and done lots of things the Church is ashamed of being and doing. His promise of LOVE has been there all along; it took a very long time for the message to get through. These mistakes were made by humans ("Catholics" among them) who had unrealistic and opportunistic ideas in mind. God's gift of our free will would not subject us to submission. We come to Him in LOVE for one another and respect from His great gift of life. We (Dad and I) try to live our lives accordingly. Unfortunately the Church is far from perfecting itself. Many churches have not been communicating this great love to us. Many of us are not taking advantage of the opportunities of bible study (your Dad and I have and feel vastly rewarded!) and many priests are "old church" who have little to offer today's world. Unfortunately the people are ahead of the clergy when it should be the other way around. We are fortunate at Blessed Sacrament. We have people and priests who are truly turned on to God's love. We work together as a team and great things are happening. We are fortunate to have a wise and progressive bishop (Untner) who is trying to show us and the world at large (he is a sought out person for lectures and enlightenmet) how great Our Lord's love really is.

Our priests today are servants of the people and encourage us to be one with them. Our pastor prefers we call him Jack instead of Fr. Johnson. At communion he is last to be served (and by a lay eucharist minister) instead of assuming the honorary first position. Our sermons are always directed to God's love and mercy for us. I could go on and on about the changes. It is my opinion that if the Church (assuming you have given it your attention and NOT prejudice) and really studied what it teaches does not provide you with the kind of life you can be proud of, your conscience should lead you to a better life. God will know that and understand.

My maturity and personal growth has led me to support my church through thick and thin. Even with its flaws, I found peace, reconciliation, and joy. I wanted to share with you children what was so very important to me. With the Vatican council changes I was able to grow with the Church. It was not easy. There are still things in the Church that need revising and upgrading. Some day we will have women priests and more appreciation of God's love for us. We grow impatient in waiting trying to hasten the process. We pray for God's will be done yet the world is consumed with egotism that it has to be MY way! God will not tamper with our wills yet there is a subtle move for humanity toward good. For me it's the "darkest just before the dawn". As Dad and I walked Sunday we happened to go by a lot of churches. All the parking lots were full. The church near us is so crowded on Sundays (Assembly of God) that their huge parking lot is full and Swede takes the overflow. I can see many of us need that extra something in our lives.

You are probably wondering why I am sharing my Faith beliefs with you at this time. This is something I hoped to cover as a last segment of my story but a recent comment from one of you children has greatly disquieted me (and that is putting it mild!) I felt as a responsible parent I owed it to you (and especially to myself) to share this most meaningful part of my life with you. I don't want to die leaving you uninformed. I enjoy good health, thank you God. I expect to enjoy more years. Do me one favor. Keep this letter and when you hear of my death, read it over and have some understanding of who I was. It is more important to me that you do that than come to my funeral.

Know that it was not easy for me to see you children, one by one, leave the church for---whatever reason. You and your will have no doubt validated your own reasoning. Truthfully ~~there hasn't been an experience in my life that has been more hurtful.~~ In marriage I had hoped my children could accept the Faith with the life God had given them. I grieve for myself but what hurts the most is the loss I feel that God's graces (though they are still given to you because he loves you) are not understood and appreciated. You are all such wonderful children, full of God's goodness, live exemplary lives, and make wonderful parents. That consoles me and I know God looks upon you with favor. I expect all of us will go to heaven. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Abba (God the Father more affectionately as "daddy") is a loving parent and I believe he wants our happiness. I go to him in my needs and he responds to them. This letter (the fact that I am writing it) comes as an answer to many days of concern and prayer. To that well intentioned person I say thank you for sharing. Please hear me out with the same attention and thoughtfulness I gave your letter. I am pleased to acknowledge God as my King (he does not profess to be king in this world), my shepherd (I need direction even this late in life) and proud to be part of His branch of life. I understand God's love through how I feel for you, my children, and my fellow humans. I believe my compassion and understanding comes through the good God has given me.

Thank you for reading through my jumbled thoughts. I want to be a credit to my Maker and hopefully earn the respect of you children. I made many mistakes in my life but I have to believe trying to raise you as catholics has benefitted and not stifled your lives. You learned from your parents what honesty, charity, concern for others and what God's love means in our lives. I would like to believe I am passing on some of the greatness of the Church and not negativism to you. I deeply and most assuredly love you, your spouses, children, and yes, mankind for God's goodness is in all of us. I have to believe that none of us reject or find God's goodness repulsive. I try to live by the Beatitudes; I pray I succeed.

I leave you with the thought; Faith is a gift. For those who believe no explanation is necessary. For those who don't; no explanation is possible.

Much love and admiration.

*Mom*