



THE PRIEST WHO FOUND CHRIST

I was born in Venice, north of Italy, on March 22, 1917. At the age of ten, I was sent to a Roman Catholic Seminary in Piacenza and ordained a priest, after 12 years of study, on October 22, 1939.

Two months later Cardinal R. Rossi, my superior, sent me to America as assistant pastor of the new Italian Church of Blessed Mother Cabrini, in Chicago. For four years I preached in Chicago, and later in New York. I never questioned if my sermons or instructions were according to the Bible. My only work and ambition was to please the Pope.

It was on a Sunday, Feb. 1944, when I turned on the radio and accidentally tuned in on a Protestant church program. The pastor was giving his message. I was going to change the program because I was not to listen to Protestant sermons, but interested, I do not know why – I kept listening.

My old theology was shaken by one text from the Bible I heard over the radio: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Therefore, it is not a sin against the Holy Ghost to believe that one is saved.

I was not yet converted, but my mind was full of doubts about the Roman religion. I was beginning to worry about the teachings of the Bible more than about the dogma and decrees of my pope. People were giving me, every day, a generous offering for thirty minutes of ceremony called Mass, because I promised them to relieve the souls of their relatives from the fires of purgatory. But every time I looked at the big crucifix upon the altar it seemed to me that Christ was rebuking me, saying: “You are stealing money from poor, hard-working people by false promises. You teach doctrines against my teaching. Souls of believers do not go to a place of torment, because I have said, ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors.’ (Revelation 14:13). I do not need a repetition of the sacrifices of the Cross. My sacrifice was complete. My work of salvation was perfect and God has sanctioned it by raising Me from the dead. ‘For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified’ (Hebrews 10:14). If the priests and the pope have power of liberating souls from purgatory with Masses and indulgences, why do they wait for an offering?”

I could no longer face the Christ on the altar. When I was preaching that the pope is the vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter, the infallible rock upon which Christ’s church was built, a voice seemed to rebuke me again:

“You saw the Pope in Rome; his large, rich palace; his guards; men kissing his feet. Do you really believe that he represents Me? I came to serve the people; I washed men’s feet; I had nowhere to lay My head. Look at Me upon the cross. Do you really believe that God has built His church upon a man when the Bible clearly says that Christ’s Vicar on earth is the Holy Ghost, and not a man? (John 14:26). ‘And that rock was Christ.’ If the Roman Church is built upon a man, then it is not my church.

I was teaching my people to go to Mary, to the Saints, instead of going directly to Christ. But a voice within me was saying: “Who has saved you upon the cross? Who paid your debts by shedding His blood? Mary, the Saints, or I, Jesus? You, and many other priests do not believe in scapulars, rosaries, statues, candles; but you continue to keep them in your churches because they are a good source of income. But I do not want any merchandising in My church. My believers should adore me – spirit and truth. Destroy these idols.”

Where my doubts were really tormenting me was inside the confessional box. People were coming to me, kneeling before me, confessing their sins to me. And I, with a sign of the cross was promising that I had the power to forgive their sins. I, a sinner, a man, was taking God’s place, God’s right and that terrible voice was penetrating me, saying “you are depriving God of His glory. If sinners want to obtain forgiveness for their sins they must go to God and not to you. It is God’s law they have broken. To God, therefore, they must make confession; to God alone they must pray for forgiveness. No man can forgive sins, but Jesus can and does forgive sins. ‘Thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins.’ (St. Matthew 1:21). “There is none other Name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’ (The Acts 4:12). ‘For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.’ ” (I Timothy 2:5).

I could not stay any longer in the Roman Catholic Church because I could not continue to serve two masters, the Pope and Christ. I could not believe two contradictory teachings, tradition and the Bible. I had to choose between Christ and the Pope; between tradition and the Bible; and I have chosen Christ and the Bible. I left the Roman Catholic Priesthood and the Roman religion in 1944 and now I have been led by the Holy Spirit to evangelize Roman Catholics and urge, with lectures in churches, colleges and public places, Christians to witness without fear in order to gain their Roman Catholic friends to Christ.

Friend, if my testimony has touched your heart, and you realize your need of Christ’s salvation from sin, as I did, and His forgiveness and peace, will you with a broken heart call upon the Lord Jesus Christ to save you now, for He said: “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” (St. John 6:37). – *Joseph Zacchello*