

Coming Home

Twenty years after 'leaving the Church', Margy came home. Having lived 'on the wild side' for most of her twenties and thirties, she had an experience of conversion and reconciliation which transformed her life and brought her back to the practice of her Catholic faith.

In her homecoming, Margy found a Church of unconditional love and a faith heritage that felt both deeply familiar and sparkingly new. Through a potent mix of celebration and repentance, she found herself identifying with Luke's portrayal of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). From this standpoint she also came to appreciate the gift of the 'older brother' – the Catholics who had 'stayed home' all those years, keeping their faith alive through steady religious practice. In gratitude Margy wrote a reflection which, in abridged form, follows:

Letter to my older brother

Brother, I know that you think Dad has spoilt me rotten with the fatted calf, the fine clothes and the fuss made of me. I also know that it has been hard for you too. After all, you have done everything 'right' and according to Dad's wishes. Please don't envy me, for in truth, I am the one who envies you.

When I took the loot and left home I thought I had it made - I was my own person with my own rules. I didn't need anyone to tell me what to do. So I followed my

whims and even pitied you for the boring life you were stuck with at home. I did some pretty wild things and called myself a 'free spirit'. I deemed people like you 'weak-minded' or 'conservative'.

But as the years went by, the golden dream world I had created in my head started to rust and tarnish. It wasn't golden, it was an unreal existence. My pride wouldn't allow me to admit I had made a big mistake. It was then that I started to envy you. I thought of you at home with Dad and I would cry. I'd try to cover my grief with still more excitement. I became interested in other people's gods. I moved around religions like pieces on a chest board. I searched for belonging in unfulfilling relationships, drugs, sex, new towns and new friends. I can't describe to you the feelings of horror and despair upon waking up in the morning and realising my life was a series of empty experiences.

So now I'm home where I belong. I am aware that home wouldn't be the same if you weren't there. I regret the wasted life I led in pursuit of the 'good time'. In truth, brother, I need you. I watch you carefully to see how you live your life so that I have an example. I need you to teach me what Dad has taught you over the years. I envy the time you and Dad spent together, just living and loving without drama in a natural, familiar, intimate way. I honour and respect you for staying, even when you may have day-dreamed

about 'busting out'.

If you hadn't stayed, I may not have had a home to return to. The business would not be as productive and supportive without you. You showed love and faithfulness to Dad by staying. Your work has meant that many people call the farm home.

Please forgive me for the way I've treated you and thought about you in the past. Please never doubt that you did the right thing. I look at what you have and see the richness of your life. I can only pray that one day I too can experience the fruits of a faithful life.

I love you big brother.

- Margy. •

