

HOLY NAME MEN:

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Open Letter to Holy Name Men From a Woman Convert Tells Debt to Catholic Men for Her Conversion

IT MAY SEEM somewhat pointless to single out Holy Name Men to broach the subject of an increased faith. For certainly they stand as one of Catholicity's groups who, along with other Catholic men, profess their faith openly.

I offer three reasons for asking audience of them—and pray they will hear me out. One, the weak and inactive men of the parish do not bother to read Catholic publications; so it would be lost on them. Two, it is a subject Holy Name men might well pass on to their sons and other youths.

Finally, Holy Name men attending Mass in a body, faithfully going to meetings, or marching proudly in that annual parade, may be willing to add a one little something that can make a convert.

I have talked with other converts, men and women, young and old, about the fact that wom-

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en, in acts of profession of faith, have practically no impact on the non-Catholic bystander as compared to the simplest act of a man.

I still hold that it goes back, subconsciously, to the fact of Christ being a man, as well as God, that we walk in man's image to Him, not woman's.

MARY, OF COURSE, is a powerful force and a joy in the Catholic way of life. But Mary isn't known or recognized by non-Catholics usually. It's only after you have been a practicing Catholic a while that you really come to know her sweetness, her influence, the warmth and protectiveness of her woman's love.

But Christ is known to all non-Catholics, and He acted out the Christian faith. Holy Name men, then, must also act out the Christian faith for the lonely soul outside the Church.

If you ever get to New York City, go and sit quietly for a while in the great Saint Patrick's Cathedral and watch. For in what's fondly called Saint Pat's, there are more daily, more annual, visitors of no-faith or other faiths than in any other place of Catholic worship in our country.

If you pay close attention, you will see them singly or in pairs, walking through, when there is no Mass, all showing the one common characteristic of curiosity.

Scattered throughout the vast cathedral at any time of night or day are Catholics of all ages and both sexes, kneeling or sitting in prayer or meditation.

Invariably, the outsider will give but a swift, passing glance at a girl or a woman saying a Rosary, reading from a prayer book, or just praying, hands folded.

But at every businessman or young boy, heads turn, eyes stare, feet hesitate a brief moment. The woman at prayer is taken for granted, leaves, you touched but faintly. But the man or the boy leaves you deeply impressed and thoughtful.

Again, it goes back to that generally accepted idea of so many that "religion's for the woman folk."

There's a feeling of surprise, of genuine admiration, that a man could be so intent in his practice of faith. That the businessman cut short his lunch, that the boy left his play, that it isn't even Sunday!

THIS IS SOMETHING I know firsthand. The year prior to my conversion was spent working on New York's East 55th Street. Many and many a time I dropped by Saint Pat's in those days of seeking I knew not what.

Always men and boys at prayer touched me deeply. I somehow did not long for what the women seemed so sure of, but what the men and the youth found so absorbing, so strengthening, I seemed to sense I was reaching out for. And it continued that way for another year.

Stopping by Catholic churches I always (without knowing why) marvelled at "Why, there's a man praying during working hours!" or "Look at the young boy at the altar."

I can take a look at the male converts in my own family since I, the first family member, was received into Holy Mother Church. It was the outward signs of faith by men that impressed them, not what we women did.

And I know the last "holdout" in our family, a rugged ex-Marine, is going to finally find the way only through some other man or men. The final gift will, of course, be handed him by God. But some man has to guide him where he may reach out for that gift.

One last thought: while it is still highly admirable to a potential convert to see older men at prayer, with each lowering of the years the impression deepens. That is why we ask you to pass this on to your sons, if it does not apply to you. For there is nothing like a football-playing, teenage male at prayer that can so touch the heart and reason of a girl or woman.

SOMETIMES THE non-Catholic young girl will laugh or tease, but you can count on her feeling very differently inside. And don't overlook the tremendous good an example set by a boy, can have on the Catholic girl who is weak in her faith.

I guess one of the most impressive things in the Church is the real, he-man Catholic boy or young man who indulges on Saturday—in sports and is there serving at his Altar on Sunday.

This, then, is our fervent plea to Holy Name men. You are so commendable, so inspirational, in the big professions of your faith, do try to see the effect of the smaller acts.

Your presence at Mass does not hit the non-Catholic, for he or she is seldom at Mass. But far more of these outsiders than you realize, drop by Catholic churches everywhere. Either because the doors are "wide open" or because the Catholic Church just draws them, appeals to them. They do not know why. Or very often they are accompanying a friend or relative paying a visit.

Any person, sitting in any pew, in any Catholic church, may be seeking faith desperately. Don't take it for granted that they are Catholics because they are there. Again I speak with experience. All five converts in our family alone, paid many visits to Catholic churches, on weekdays and in the daylight and evening hours.

Won't you keep this in mind—try always to run in when you are near a Catholic church, even if you have but a moment.

If you but walk to the altar, head held high, kneel for the Sign of the Cross, some longing soul in the back may have a flash of light. His, or her, mind and soul may have been illumined in that one encouraging moment with decision, with a "That's for me!"

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