

PROLOGUE

The most common question I get, when meeting people for the first time, is: “How did you end up from Finland to become a Traditional priest?”

It is understandable why people ask this question. Over the years, I have developed a short answer fit for every situation. It goes something like this: “I come from the Lutheran religion, then as a teenager I understood that the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ. I first converted to the Novus Ordo religion, but when I realized it was not the Catholic Church, I left it and became a traditional Catholic. And after Father Anthony Cekada encouraged me in my vocation to priesthood, I was ordained a priest and started working at Saint Gertrude the Great Church.”

Of course there is much more in my story than this. Though many of the faithful seem to think otherwise, I have never thought my story to be that interesting. I don’t think there’s anything extraordinary in my story, even in my conversion story. Many Finns have converted to Catholicism; but though I did become a priest, I became a priest in a group called the *Sedevacantists*, which is commonly regarded as a fringe group at best, and a cult at worst.

While writing my story, I thought of the words of Oscar Wilde, who was also a convert to the Catholic Faith. One of his literary characters is named Ernest. When Ernest is paging through Thomas Carlyle’s *Reminiscences*, which book in its time aroused much controversy because it revealed the harsh and gloomy personality of the author, he says in an indifferent voice:

As a rule, I dislike modern memoirs. They are generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth recording; which, however, is, no doubt, the true explanation of their popularity, as the English public always feels perfectly at its ease when a mediocrity is talking to it.*

That is what I thought applied to me, too. Though lives of priests might seem very special, we are ordinary men. We just have received holy orders. But just like reception of the sacrament of Confirmation does not change every child into another Saint Joan of Arc, so also the conferral of the sacrament of Holy Orders does not change a man into another Saint John Vianney.

I point this out, because there are among the faithful two extremes which must be avoided. The first one is the danger of *idolizing* their shepherds. This happens when the priest is seen as an infallible saint, whose every whim must be followed

* “The True Function and Value of Criticism,” *The Nineteenth Century*, July 1890, p. 123.

and defended. But respect differs essentially from adoration. *Respect*, not worship, is due to parents, superiors, and priests. As Our Lord says: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; to Him only shalt thou do service.”* (Luke 4:8)

As a child, I loved reading the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. One of his stories which both Bishop Daniel Dolan, my ordaining bishop, and I liked very much was *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. What many might not know is that the story is actually based on a real-life event in Andersen’s life. When he was a child, his mother took him to see Frederik VI, the king of Denmark. Hans and his mother waited in a crowd, and when the king stepped from his carriage, Hans blurted out with a straightness of a child: “Oh, he’s nothing but a man!”

The mother of little Hans tried (as parents do) to quiet him and said: “Have you gone mad, child?” But the moral, which Hans brilliantly later inscribed in his fairy tale, was completely true. Kings are just as much subject to faults, imperfections and passions as the common people are. And so are priests. I have met many bishops and priests on my journey from Finland to Saint Gertrude the Great. And though most of them have been very devoted and zealous, I have not seen in any of them signs of exceptional holiness, such as one reads from the lives of saints. Probably because I come from a working-class background, the sight of a cassock, even one with red buttons, has not made any big impression on me. What we Finns value is fidelity, zealousness, and gratitude. And if those are lacking, no rank or title can substitute them.

The second danger which must be avoided is to treat the priests as mere sacrament machines, who are to be placed completely under the people’s thumb. Though the sacrament of Holy Orders does not automatically sanctify a man, it does mark him *separate* from the laypeople. The priest must be respected, not because of his personality, but because of his office. Among the many things what Vatican Council II and its reforms in the 1960s destroyed, was the faithful’s respect to the priesthood and priests. One of the hardest things in my time as a priest has been seeing two of my mentors, Bishop Daniel Dolan and Father Anthony Cekada, being slandered publicly on the Internet and social media, being accused of things I know they are innocent of. And almost always this has been done by other Traditional Catholics.

So priesthood is both a blessing and a cross. But this makes a priest much closer to Jesus, the Eternal High Priest and His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. And most importantly, it empowers a man to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is what the sin-filled world needs most in our days.

* Father Ronald Knox’s translation

But the priesthood also separates the priest from the faithful, including his own family. Fortunately, I have seen in my parish work faithful, who are genuinely grateful for the work of their priests, and neither idolize nor slander them. And it is always heart-warming when they do show proper respect to a priest. Personally, I always feel little embarrassed, when the faithful take my hand to kiss it. Of course I understand that they do this out of respect to the priesthood and not because I'm a great guy. But it still serves a reminder to me of Our Lords words to His chosen: "You do not belong to the world, because I have singled you out from the midst of the world." (John 15:19)

I have divided my book into three parts, which can be read independently of each other. Therefore, if the reader is not interested in my personal background or the history of my country, he can read only the third part, which deals with my conversion and road to priesthood.

In the first part, I write about my home country Finland. The history and culture of this land has affected greatly in my character and how I turned out to be. As a child, my favorite book was L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). In it, when the Scarecrow asks Dorothy to tell something about the country she comes from, she tells him all about Kansas and how gray everything there is. The Scarecrow listens carefully and says he can't understand why Dorothy wants to leave Oz and go back to dry and gray Kansas. And she says: "No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home."

Like Dorothy's Kansas, Finland is also known historically as a place of poverty. The vast majority of its people have been poor peasants and workers, who have had to struggle just to support themselves and their families. But still, Dorothy's homesickness is something I have always sympathized deeply with.

In the second part I deal with my personal history, about my hometown, family and school background. I also tell about what kind of entertainment and recreation I loved when growing up. Writing about those things felt almost as much history as writing the first part; so much my life has changed. The fact that all those things of Finland are, if not gone, at least almost as far as Kansas is from Oz, is both a blessing and a cross. It is so because Our Lord has said: "And every man that has forsaken home, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive his reward a hundredfold, and obtain everlasting life." (Matthew 19:29)

In the third part I tell how I became first a Catholic, then a Traditional Catholic, and finally a Sedevacantist priest. I would imagine this is the part which inte-

rests people the most. But it is also a part which was the hardest one to write because by writing memoirs one gets two kinds of enemies: those people you include and those you leave out. Still, I decided to take my chance, and to do my memoirs now, when the events are still – relatively – fresh in my mind.

When US Senator George McGovern (1922-2012) published his autobiography, he wrote in the preface that he hopes it will be only *partial* autobiography. He, in fact, still had decades of life left. My book is not really an autobiography, but rather a *memoir*, that is, reminiscences from my own life. And I, too, look forward to serving the faithful for many more years. But the sudden and completely unexpected death of Bishop Dolan in 2022 taught me that I cannot count on my own plans and expectations. Apostle James said it fittingly: “See how you go about saying, Today, or tomorrow, we will make our way to such and such a town, spend a year there, and make profit by trading, when you have no means of telling what the morrow will bring. What is your life but a wisp of smoke, which shews for a moment and then must vanish into nothing? You ought to be saying, We will do this or that if it is the Lord’s will, and if life is granted us.” (James 4:13-15)

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July 26, 2025

Feast of Saint Anne
Kansas City, Kansas