

# The Deacon's Corner by Deacon Ron Desmarais

## WHO IS DEACON RON? (Part 1)

First let me say as I alluded to in the Deacon's Corner that I did drift away from my faith in my adult years for a lot of reasons that were not outlined in the article on "*Why is the Mass Boring*". An inquiry led me to write a long response to my conversion story and afterwards I thought I would share it with you.

I was born into a good Catholic family. My father went back into the Army shortly after I was born. This would affect my life, my career choice, and my own family. I was baptized in Rochester, NH, received 1<sup>st</sup> Communion in Babenhausen, Germany, and Confirmed in Glen Bernie, MD. I was active in CYO in Anchorage, AK and it was where I met my future wife, Paula, where we both experienced the 1964 earthquake. I graduated from high school, attended a semester of college, and enlisted in the Army Security Agency at Ft. Meade, MD where my father was assigned as a Russian linguist.

Let me just say that I was a typical young GI during the Vietnam War. I spent two years in Vietnam and a year in Thailand doing the same intelligence mission. However, in Thailand I had better living conditions and a lot less stress. When I say a typical young GI of the times you can read into that whatever you want and you'll probably not be far off the mark.

Being from the coast of New England the part about the mountains and ocean are also true. So I just wanted to let you know that I experienced many things, thought I knew a lot, and like Frank Sinatra I "was doing it my way". I wasn't searching for another religious experience or another faith. I was comfortable calling myself Catholic, but always followed it by saying, "non-practicing". That is probably the biggest thing: *non-practicing*.

When I married my high school sweet heart 10 years after graduation we were married in the church. Because I was stationed in Germany and needed to get my wife over there to qualify for an accompanied tour we married in Tucson at the old court house. She was waiting for an annulment, but we married anyway. Shannon, born during my wife's previous marriage provided me with a ready-made family. Six months later Paula's annulment came through and we were married in Augsburg Germany. That didn't mean that I had returned to the church only that I renewed my acquaintance with it.

In the meantime I would go to Mass, but over time less and less often, reverting to my old ways. It was easy to use the excuse that my work shifts, field exercises, and other reasons kept me away. My daughter Renee was born in Woodbridge, Virginia while stationed at Vint Hill Farms. After only a year we found ourselves in Okinawa, Japan. During this tour Michael and Marc were born. Once the other children came along my wife started nagging me (my choice of words) to start going to Mass because of the kids. I tried, but I continued to find excuses as to why I couldn't go. I know that this was frustrating to her, she continued to encourage my return, and prayed a lot for my conversion of heart. While we were stationed at Ft. Devens, MA working at the Intelligence School our marriage started to show the strain. We went to marriage counseling which didn't help at all. In fact, at one point the counselor stated, "You two are so different I don't even know why you are married." Paula and I were so mad we left and never returned. It wasn't our differences that was the problem it was her relationship with God and my lack that was

straining the marriage. Some of my neighbors (I'm sure at the urging of my wife) started telling me that I should attend a Marriage Encounter weekend. That they had attended and it had strengthened their marriages. I was not too keen on the idea, but I reluctantly agreed to go.

However, I still had reservations about attending so on the way to the Encounter I stopped at my favorite computer store to purchase a couple magazines to take with me just in case. The "in case" being my reluctance to attend, but I wanted to make sure I was prepared if I didn't like it.

I have to admit that the weekend wasn't bad. The talks were good, and I participated by writing the journals and sharing with my wife "how does that made me feel." Things were going pretty good and I wasn't feeling threatened so my computer books sat in the bag. Some of the things we wrote about did help us and I have to admit that we were able to deal with a few issues that both of us had pet peeves about.

But everything came crashing down Saturday night when just before bed my wife started on the "I want you to come back to church" litany. Needless to say things went downhill from there. Because the Encounter weekend was at an old religious order the rooms had twin beds. When we arrived we placed our twin beds together. Now because of the argument we pushed them apart and went to sleep in a state of discord. In the morning we went to breakfast with our masks on, smiley faced and acting as if everything was okay. Obviously we had a lot to learn about improving our marriage and this wasn't helping any. Both of us were just waiting for the day to get over and we could head home and return to our "normal" life.

Don't ask me what the first talk of the morning was because I couldn't tell you. I do know that it had something to do with Christ knocking at the door and forgiveness. Whatever it was triggered my own deep

reflection and I zoned out into my own world deep in thought. All I know is that I had a realization that all the things I had done in my life didn't matter, but my relationship to Christ, the Father and Holy Spirit did matter. All the fears and reservations that I had and my unwillingness to believe that God would forgive me came crashing down and I knew that God did want to forgive me. That he did want me to return to His fold that I was the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep and he had left the 99 to go in search of me. Even now it is hard to explain the feelings that washed over me in that short period of time. Yet at the same time I knew that I was resisting, but all I had to do was yield and ask for forgiveness. When I did a feeling of peace overwhelmed me and in relief I began to cry.

I tried to control the tears, but it didn't work and the harder I tried the more the tears flowed. A couple people near me realized that I was going through something and passed down some Kleenex, but they soon just passed the whole box. I didn't want to make a scene, but others started to see that something was going on. My wife didn't know either, but she just placed her arm around me and pulled me close. After a few minutes I was able to get myself under control and finished the talk without any more disturbances.

After the talk my wife and I just went upstairs and talked for a long time. When we returned to the group everyone knew something had happened. Some who knew us inquired and others just got the information second hand. Naturally the people conducting the Marriage Encounter weekend inquired if everything was okay. They weren't sure it was good or bad. Our parish priest was also attending and he came by to talk with me and I agreed to see him when I got back.

After our return I did see our pastor for reconciliation.

(To be continued)