

REL 402 - Visit to a Roman Catholic Church

I was brought up as a Roman Catholic, but then 6 years ago things changed and then I didn't believe anymore. Ever since then I have not stepped into a church. I am revisiting my faith after so many years since my life has changed and I started to believe again. I finally took the first step and visited the Roman Catholic Church in Portales, the only one at that. Since this assignment required visiting a church if we choose to, it was a good push to enter a church again. I found that this assignment would be appropriate for me. I called to see when mass was and then located it on my gps on my phone.

I visited St. Helen's Church and when I entered I was greeted by M-. I gladly explained to her my story and she was glad I was taking the first step alone. She told me how the mass would be since it had been a while I had been to one. She also told me what other days they had masses and if they were at the church or in another church building next to theirs. She asked me if she could get my number so that the college students could contact me, she said I would enjoy the mass and I would get along with the students. Then when I entered the church I was supposed to dip my hand in holy water and make the sign of the cross, and then before I got to the bench I was supposed to kneel down and make the sign of the cross again. When you get to your seat people either sit or kneel down to do a prayer before mass starts. I went a little too early so while I sat at the bench I saw that there were others early as well and they were kneeling down to pray. So I also did the same thing. A lady was preparing things for the priest. She was taking out the things that the priest would need during the mass. She was not only one who greeted you or gave you information about the church; she looked to be in charge of the church as if she was a director. She was a busy woman and very dedicated to the church, she was also the priest's helper during the mass.

Everyone entered the church waiting for mass to start and for the priest to walk in. When the priest walked in everyone stood up as he started with the sign of the cross and then everyone sat down. He started to talk and read from the bible, there are volunteers who also read from the book and while they read everyone was sitting down. Those who volunteered to read made the sign of the cross and knelt down facing the cross and then went to the podium to speak and when the speaker was done they repeated the sign of the cross. After some of the reading there was a song that was sung right after. Everyone could join in and sing as the singer or singers were doing it. There were two singers and one played the guitar while she was singing. The music was beautiful to hear. When it started I was lost and confused on what I was doing. I saw that everyone grabbed a purple book which had all of the reading for each mass, so I also grabbed one and tried to find where everyone was reading from. It took me a while till I got to where the reader was speaking from. The book was dated for each Sunday, for special holidays, and other events that are important that do not fall on Sunday. So when I figured out what Sunday it was then I found the page I was supposed to be on. The same steps were repeated a few times where someone speaks and we sat or stood. We knelt down once to do a prayer and then we got up and then we grabbed the peoples' hands beside us and with the priest, we said a prayer before we drank the wine and took the white circle thing which is bread. After the prayer everyone shook everyone's hand around them and said "Peace be with you". We all knelt down again and while we did that the priest was saying a prayer, blessing the wine and the bread once again. When he was done with the prayer he was the first one to drink the wine and take the bread. Then we all stood up again and by row we went to get the wine and bread if we chose to. While the priest was giving the wine and bread someone sang songs while this process was happening. I saw that some people didn't go up there, but sat down. Some only got the wine or the bread, and some did both. There were children who crossed their hands on their chest and I didn't understand why¹. I chose to sit down because I didn't remember what to do. When those who got the wine and bread came back to their seats they knelt down and prayed again. We all waited till the priest was done and put the stuff away and everyone sat down. The priest spoke again and there came a point that people came around with a money basket asking for money from us, I believe it's to help with church expenses or something of that sort. When the mass was almost over the priest gave announcements about upcoming masses and when they would be. He also had prayers for certain people and asked us to pray for them, and when he was done with the announcements and prayers we made the sign of the cross with him and he let us go. The priest and his helpers were the first ones to leave, and then everyone else did. I saw that some people as they left knelt down and made the sign of the cross and some did not. The priest stayed outside and some people approached him and shook his hand and had conversations with him. At that I shook one of the priest's hands and then spoke to M- who had greeted me. She gave me a bulletin with the Church's information and the upcoming masses and when they would be so I could return to a future mass

It was an interesting visit to a Roman Catholic church because I was not sure what to expect after 6 years, some things seemed familiar and others were not so familiar. It was hard to keep up with the readings and the songs. I was not familiar with any of the songs. I have been to many different Roman Catholic churches in the past and they are not always the same. It was interesting to see how a Roman Catholic church is after so many years. I felt really confused being there while everyone else knew what they were doing. I know it will take me attending more masses to finally get the hang of things again. I liked that the people were so friendly towards me and greeted me in a warm manner. I thought it was great that the priest had a special mass for college students. It goes to show that he likes to dedicate his time to the youth. I liked this option and am thinking about attending this mass. Where I used to live we didn't have a college, so this was something I had never heard of before. The people from the church made me feel like I was doing the right thing and that I

would always be welcomed. It was an interesting experience to re-visit a faith I once used to know about. It seems that not much has changed but it was not similar to what I remember.

¹ It was a sign that they were too young to take communion, and they wanted a blessing instead