



There are perhaps as many ways into the arms of Mother Church as there are Children of God. Mine, though perhaps circuitous, ended or, if you prefer, began at St. Anastasia's O.C.I.A. (Order of Christian Initiation for Adults).

I was baptized into the Lutheran church (Missouri Synod) as an infant, shuttled off to a nondenominational church with baptist/evangelical leanings as a youth, and enrolled in an Assembly of God (Pentecostal) school for elementary and middle school. When I left for college, I attended a Lutheran church again almost by accident before graduating and becoming a member of a Messianic Jewish congregation. I remained there for a couple years before being pulled once more into Lutheranism through rigorous theological studies and the influence of my best friend, but this time it was with an intention to enter the Lutheran seminary. When that same friend later announced his intent to convert to Catholicism, I did my very best to drag him back from the precipice. Our debates raged on for years. In the end, I ate delectable crow.

Looking back, it strikes me that Catholicism is unique within Christendom in that so many who convert do so kicking and screaming. The undercurrent of the intellectual tradition swept me off my feet. The historical witness of the Fathers all but bludgeoned me. The social teaching convicted me like a vice. And the splendor of the art, architecture, and liturgies cut right to my heart. In short, I came face-to-face with the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. When I found St. Anastasia's, all those abstract understandings coalesced into what could only be called a family. I found a Father who heard my confession, embraced me as the prodigal son I was, and fed me the Bread of Life. I found in the many friendly faces that served me and prayed for me week after week, a Mother who truly cared. On either side of me within O.C.I.A. were children likewise eager to learn and grow.

I could fill many paragraphs with praise for the delicious food, the engaging lessons, the more-than-generous gifts, the sincere hearts of the O.C.I.A. leaders, and the fraternity fostered over those months. To do so though would, I fear, risk missing the point. To anyone considering joining O.C.I.A. next year, what really matters, though you may not know it yet, is your nearness to Christ. The chief end of man is to know, love, and serve God in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next. Insofar as that is the prize for which we race, St. Anastasia's O.C.I.A. is a place of privilege for anyone yearning for the embrace of Mother Church. Welcome home.