

**A COMING HOME STORY** by Lee Anne, posted with permission

My story is attached as it was written. I varied a little at each mass. I will share that something pretty awesome happened at the first mass. Tim was playing and the first song was Hosea - I know you're familiar. Anyway, I had been pretty nervous about my message. Then the first words I hear in song are "Come back to me, with all your heart. Don't let fear, keep us apart." Wow!! Just Wow! HE was reassuring me in the way he knew I'd hear. This will make more sense after you read my story.

Thanks for your interest and your support. I'm glad that He raised my hand that night, it was a powerful experience.

God bless and stay warm :)

~Lee Anne

**As spoken at the 2105 Ash Wednesday Services**

*"I was invited to speak to you for a few minutes today to share my "coming home" story.*

*I became Catholic like many of you, I was born into it. I was baptized in the same dress that my sisters, my children and my nieces and nephews all wore. I attended CCD after school on Wednesdays and "HAD" to go to church every Sunday. I'm sure I complained then, just like my kids complain now. When I was old enough, I even told my mom I was going to mass, then hid out at my best friend's house. When I was old enough, I drifted away, not wanting to be confined by the "rules" of the Church. I was too smart for that. Eventually, I wanted to get married, so back to church I went to complete my sacrament.*

*My husband and I were typical busy twenty-somethings. We tried to be good Catholics, but we were busy! Then we had kids, and my inner Catholic reminded me (as well as my very Catholic mother) – time for more sacraments. So back to church, back to trying and eventually back to "busy" – babies and toddlers take a lot of time and attention. So now I'm busy and tired. ... and I begin to notice that between the busy and tired, there's something else. Something's missing, but I don't quite know what it is.*

*During this time, a voice was speaking, but I wasn't quite listening. Even when He spoke loudly. For the sake of my story, and the timeliness, let's call this my time in the wilderness. While I was out there wandering, I did come home to visit a few times. Usually when my Mother was visiting. I can recall TWICE when I went to church after a long absence and that day's reading was of the Prodigal Son. Not once, but twice. Then there was the music. If there is one thing to know about me, my life is all about the lyrics. Music was always the one thing in Church I loved. Naturally, those return visits home had music. The most touching songs. The ones that make me cry. I cried from sadness and I cried from happiness. I cried like you cry when you go home and get that hug from your family that makes you feel safe.*

*But, my story doesn't end there. I STILL didn't get the message. I was still too busy, too tired and too smart. Well, my babies grew up and my inner Catholic starts talking about Sacraments again. I*

*mentioned I thought I was smart, but I also didn't want to be a hypocrite and I started to struggle with this.*

*Fast forward to five years ago. Two teenagers and a seven year old. Sacraments!!! I'm still tired, I'm still busy – more than ever it seems, but how smart am I really? Remember, I'm not going to be a hypocrite? So, this time, we ALL go back to church, here at St Michaels. It's warm and inviting, well maybe not temperature warm, but inviting. I'm "invited" to teach Religious Ed. I'm "invited" to join a committee. One night we're talking about "coming home" and does anyone know someone who left and came back. Up went my hand – I don't even remember moving my arm. I tell my story and then I'm "invited" to speak to you today.*

*Two things I will share with you that made the difference for me and filled the empty space inside.*

*ONE, my cousin John is a Catholic priest. During one of my "visits" to a mass he was leading, I told him I couldn't fully participate because I hadn't been to church in ages. He said, Lee Anne, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS COME TO THE TABLE. YOU ARE ALWAYS WELCOME. GOD WANTS YOU HERE. I told him how I struggled with being busy, tired, smart, and being a hypocrite and he said nobody's perfect. It's called faith for a reason. You can't explain it and it doesn't always make sense. We're all sinners and we're all rule breakers. If not, we wouldn't even need the Gift of Reconciliation.*

*THE SECOND just happened a few weeks ago. Fr Jim gave a homily that talked about how we ALL struggle with not being worthy, perfect or holy enough to practice our faith fully. He said we JUST NEED TO GET OUT OF OUR OWN WAY AND GOD WILL DO THE REST. OPEN UP JUST A LITTLE SPACE AND LET THE LIGHT SHINE THROUGH. We are a family here at St Michael's. A dysfunctional family most days, but family none the less. We are all welcome here. YOU are welcome here. Come home. Encourage others to come home to that warm, inviting, safe HUG that you just might be missing.*

*Remember I mentioned the music? My dad's favorite hymn is "Here I am Lord" and my mom's favorite is "Be Not Afraid." You'll see me crying anytime we sing them. Crying because I'm happy. Crying because I'm safe. Crying because I'm home. Well, Here I am, Lord. Be not afraid. Encourage our brothers and sisters to come home like I did. We love you, God loves you. Just the way you are. Busy, Tired, Smart or not so much.*

*One last thing. Now I have adult children who are busy, tired and smart. Please pray for them. Pray for me. And I will pray for you.*

*Thank you."*