

# **Yes! I Am Catholic**

**How Faith Plays a Role in My Life**

**Beth Dotson Brown**

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## Dedication

I dedicate this book to my husband, Jim, my family, my friends, and all the health-care professionals who helped me become physically healthy again as I was writing this book.

## Author Acknowledgments

There are so many people who have kept me in their prayers during the past year that I cannot name them all, but you know who you are and that it has been your prayers that carried me through.

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And, finally, I must express my gratitude to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this book. These are your stories, and ultimately it is your generosity in sharing them that will touch our readers. Peace to you all.

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# Introduction

## Ask and you shall receive.

Anyone who has gone to church has heard that sentiment. Although it is a favorite of mine, at times I have found it to be deceptively simple. There have been occasions when I asked and did not receive, or so it seemed.

There have also been times when I received even before I knew what to ask for. Such was the case with this book. The offer to write it came to me just when I most needed to hear stories of faith.

## Seek and you shall find.

Although I was facing a personal health crisis, I spent time in silent prayer, trying to open myself to answers from God and guidance about who to interview for this book.

God told me to knock and the door would be opened. So it was.

I made a list of people that I might interview and invited them to share their stories. I began to ask simple questions: Why do you choose to be Catholic? What do you like about your faith? Each person I spoke with opened the door and gave me answers.

One of the first stories that truly inspired me was that of Helen Barr, a fashion business owner in New York City. She had faced repeated tragedies in her life, including the aftereffects of the 9-11 terrorist attack on her business and the death of her sister from cancer. Yet she said it was her faith that sustained her. Even when she did not know what to do from minute to minute, she remained open to hearing God's guidance, and God took care of her.

I interviewed my uncle and godfather, Bill Tougaw. I knew that he had left the Church for a significant period of time in his life, but I did not know why or why he had returned. He shared that story, as well as the four words from the Our Father that have gotten him through the most difficult times in his life: thy will be done.

I talked with actress and Olympic gold medalist Tara Lipinski as she prepared for an acting audition. She told me about her devotion to Saint Thérèse the Little Flower and the miracles God had wrought in her life through the intercession of this saint. I marveled at her story about the workings of one of my favorite saints in her life. And I remembered the power of prayer.

Each of the people I interviewed opened the door to their faith life so that all of us might take away a bit from their stories to strengthen our own journeys. They certainly did that for me. My soul became richer as it filled with the stories of these people, people who could be your next-door neighbor, favorite athlete, beloved author, or special teacher. God sent me an answer to a prayer I did not know I had, and I am all the richer for it.

As you read this book, I hope these stories will have some of the answers you are seeking. Turn the page and the door will be open.





# my faith sustains me

It is often a moment of crisis that causes people to understand the importance of their faith. They nearly accomplish a lifetime goal, only to fall short of it; a loved one dies; terrorists attack. People realize that they were sustained by faith during the crisis.



## derek parra

Derek Parra says that building a relationship with God is like building any other relationship; it takes time and commitment. For him, part of the building process has been spending time with the Scriptures and talking to God. “Once you feel comfortable with that connection,” he says, “it’s like having Mom and Dad to help you and kiss the boo-boo. God can do the same thing in God’s own way.”

## Derek Parra, Olympic Medalist, Speed Skating

Derek Parra was raised Catholic in a Mexican-American home in California. He faced his share of troubles at a young age, when his parents divorced. He left home when he was seventeen years old to pursue a skating career.

“I always believed in heaven and God and everything like that, but it wasn’t until I was away from home that I developed a personal relationship with God,” Derek recalls.

He began developing that relationship while he was living in a trailer without electricity near a training facility in Wisconsin. He did not have any money, but his coach found him work and helped him continue to train. Living in the middle of the woods, Derek struggled with loneliness.

During this time a pastor handed him a Bible.

“I started reading it, and that’s when I developed a personal relationship with God. This relation-

ship reinforced my faith. From that point on in my life and in my career as a skater, God played an important role. When I had hard times, I didn’t look at them as hard times but as times when God was teaching me something. I was learning something from the experience that would help me in another part of my life.”

When Derek found himself without money, food, or work, “somebody came out of nowhere to help me.” It happened too many times, he says, for it to be coincidence. Rather, he believes it was God working in his life.

Derek took his faith and his experience with him to Nagano, Japan, in 1998, when he earned a spot on the U.S. Olympic speed skating team. Just as he was perched

**“I started reading it, and that’s when I developed a personal relationship with God.”**

on the brink of achieving one of his goals, his name was pulled from the starting list because of a clerical error. “I was devastated and didn’t know what to think,” Derek says.

He returned to the United States for four more years of training. At the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, his name stayed on the roster. Then it rose to the top. Derek won the gold medal in the 1500-meter race and set a world record in the process. He won the silver medal in the 3000-meter race.

Looking back on the Nagano experience, Derek can now say: “I think I wasn’t prepared back then to win. I wasn’t prepared as a person to handle everything, and that experience allowed me to grow. I came back after four more years of training and growing up as a person. I ended up being able to handle everything that happened at that time. With God’s grace, I was successful and won the gold medal and went out and preached to others about my faith and talked about it freely. Maybe that’s why. Maybe I was chosen to win because of what I would do and how I would share my faith.”

Faith continues to be the foundation of Derek’s life. He believes that the faith Catholics share makes them all one family. He calls on his Church family as he continues to train. “Maybe that’s something I enjoy the most because I’m living in Utah and my family is in Florida when I’m preparing for the games. When I am lonely, when I’m feeling alone, I can call anybody I know at the church. I can go to church and I can call the pastor and talk, and it’s like being home.”

“**W**hen I had hard times, I didn’t look at them as hard times but as times when God was teaching me something. I was learning something from the experience that would help me in another part of my life.”

## Acknowledgments

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**Why do you choose to be Catholic?**