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Defense of my Faith

Through the sacrament of Baptism, we are brought into God's kingdom and welcomed into the faith and love of the Church. When we are anointed as babies with the holy oil and blessed by water, our parents and godparents promise to bring us up in the teachings of our faith and to be role models for us to emulate throughout our life. As Jesus instructed His apostles in Mark 10: 14, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." But what if one of your parents does not really believe and practice that faith and is an avowed atheist and only consented to your baptism at the insistence of the other parent? This is how I have come to the position of having to defend and live my faith daily against a parent who is in direct opposition to the most important precept in my life and how this experience has only served to strengthen and enrich my faith while intensifying my devotion to God.

When I was very young and not really aware of my father's convictions about God's existence, I remember wondering why he did not attend Mass, or join in with prayers at mealtime, or why he did not say bedtime prayers with me. He never made the Sign of the Cross, and his participation at Christmas and Easter celebrations was only to exchange gifts without acknowledging the religious significance of the day. But, I never gave it much thought until I started school, and he voiced strong opposition to my attending a catholic school. It was then he explicitly told me of his atheism. By this time, my parents had divorced and my mother enrolled me in a catholic school despite his objections. He didn't pursue the matter legally, but he showed

his disdain by refusing to attend any of my religious activities, including First Communion, or when I was picked to do a reading during Mass. Another example of his aversion to God was his refusal to take part in Boy Scouts with me, stating they were too religious. I dropped out of scouts because I did not have a male figure who could go camping with me. I felt very sad and left out as I watched my friends share the scouting experience with their fathers. Naturally, I was extremely hurt and confused about his attitude. I felt he was not only rejecting God, but me, too. As I got older and more knowledgeable about my faith, I approached the subject with him. I needed to try and understand why he felt the way he did. His response was a very vehement denial of God's existence and my "fantasy" beliefs. Over the years, we have discussed and debated topics such as creation vs. evolution, and the "myth of God." He believes that God resulted from an ancient and ignorant people who didn't have science to explain things, and if God is so loving and caring, why does He allow so much evil to happen in the world. These and many more issues have not swayed either one of us from our beliefs. We all want to win arguments, but my dad and I continue at a stalemate. I wish I could say that I think down the road he might change his mind, but I don't really expect that will happen. It makes me sad to realize that he will never know the peace, purpose, and happiness that faith in God and His teachings bring into your life.

The irony of this standoff is that atheism has become the catalyst for me to learn, practice, and delve more deeply into my faith in order to uncover further compelling arguments for the existence of God. By listening to my own rationalizations, I am convinced of His existence and am trying to live my faith in a manner that, I hope, pleases Him and helps me serve my fellow man. The ultimate reward for my faithfulness is the promise of a new eternal life. Things happen for a reason, and I truly believe this is God's way of telling me how to live and

grow in my faith and how to become an example for others to see this faith manifested in my actions and deeds. Like Saint Monica who prayed for 17 years for her son, Saint Augustine, to embrace God, I will continue to love, respect, and have patience with my father and fervently pray for him to allow faith to enter into his life. This would be the greatest experience we could share.