

Throughout my life, my faith has always been present, but it has gone through stages of struggle and strength. When I attended a public elementary school, my faith was at an all-time low. It's not that I didn't believe in God or I did things to defy the catholic teachings, but I did feel like God was not a priority in my life. However, I began to attend a Catholic middle school and this all turned around for me. When I was exposed to a Catholic education, I began to see the world from a new perspective. Everything became dramatically more precious. I saw how fragile life could be and understood how thankful I should be for the life I was given. Each "goodbye" had an underlying wonder of "forever?" behind it. I understood how vulnerable and stripped Jesus was as he became victim to the cross. He gave up everything, willingly, to allow for the life that I have today. Every second that passes possesses the chance of a world-changing event. Once I understood this perspective on life, I began to often think about Jesus' sacrifice. I started to say, "I love you," more frequently. I chose my words carefully and did each action with purpose. God has become prominent in my life; each decision, task, and challenge I face is prayed about. With God in my life, I never feel alone.

The first time I ever felt truly connected to God was early in my freshman year. I had been discussing my theology class with my mom and asked about her belief in God. She told me a story that still creates tears in my eyes as I recall it. When I was two, I had been diagnosed with Leukemia. At this same time, my grandfather was admitted into the hospital due to a possibly cancerous brain tumor. My dad's business was struggling and because of the constant hospital bills, he was unable to provide a steady living for our family. With my infant sister just born, and my older sister only being six, my mom was given more than enough responsibility. As she told this story she emphasized how empty and destroyed she felt as things continued to spiral downwards. Still battling Leukemia, I was diagnosed with pneumonia and seemed to become worse and worse. I was admitted into the hospital and kept in isolation, my parents weren't allowed to touch me without having on a gown and mask. Feeling like she had hit rock-bottom, my mom's faith struggled. That is until one pivotal night, when her faith would be renewed and strengthened to this very day. On this night, my mom fell asleep and dreamt that she was laying in her bed. As she slumbered, a man walked into her room. The man, she remembers, was in a long dress and his brown beard and hair were flowing. It was Jesus. Jesus sat down by her

bedside and grabbed her hand. He held it to his heart and repeatedly said, "Everything is going to be okay." When my mom awoke, she was lying in the exact same position as she was in the dream. Without my background of religious education, I would have thought that this story was made up or exaggerated, however, I have been taught that miracles do happen at the hands of God. I believe my entire family received a miracle that night because, soon after my mom's experience, everything did become okay. Here I am, alive and well, 16 years after my diagnosis. My grandfather, myself, and my parents have all healed physically and emotionally. My family is restored and has blossomed. Since that moment, my mom's faith has become incredibly strong, and after hearing the story, so has mine.

From attending a Roman Catholic high school, _____ I have not only grown in my faith, but in my morals. The way I act, respond and think have all been influenced by my Catholic education. I have become a more giving person, one who loves service. I have given hundreds of service hours throughout my high school journey, and I don't intend to stop there. I am accustomed to learning in a Catholic environment, and I believe that the effects of it will have lifetime results. With hopes to continue my religious journey at a Catholic university, I know that my morals, faith, and love will all become tremendously strengthened. Due to my Catholic education, I have been given the gift of Jesus, or in other words, the gift of unfaltering love.