



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Fr. Ambrose On His Call

I was born in Socorro, New Mexico in 1965. My Mother's family is Hispanic and Catholic, my father's is secular --in fact, he's not a baptized Christian at all and believes in New Age ideas like reincarnation and astrology. Since my parents were not married in the Church, the Catholic influence on my upbringing was always present but never strong or even coherent since it was combined with secular and New Age beliefs. I would summarize my early background this way: religion is good, but one shouldn't take dogma too seriously or claim that one's own religion is uniquely the Truth.

I did attend Catholic parochial school in New Mexico and later in Oklahoma through the seventh grade. Then I received a scholarship to Casady School, an Episcopal school in Oklahoma City. As I studied history and literature and then read J.R.R. Tolkien, the notion that God has somehow gathered the fragments of humanity together through the Incarnation seemed to be fitting and even beautiful: it was the story of stories, the ultimate symbol, the Myth-become- Fact, as C.S. Lewis called it. And then, when I was 15, my semi-lapsed Catholic great-uncle gave me a box of old books, among which was Newman's *Apologia*: and after reading that, the vestiges of my anti-dogmatic prejudice were swept away.

It actually helped that I was in an Anglican school: I felt, in an odd sort of way, that it helped me to understand Newman and his pilgrimage of faith better--and that, in some sense, it could also be my path, too.

I then went to college at Princeton. While so many of my contemporaries were ceasing to practice their faith, I was discovering it. I read Ronald Knox and Chesterton and C. S. Lewis and St. Augustine. Meanwhile, I was also appalled at the secular blindness that was so evident in the University: the faculty and students seemed to want to tear down their own civilization without having anything constructive to put in its place. The aging New Left had, quite undeservedly, become the new establishment, and a very intolerant and fanatical one at that.

This was liberation? By comparison, the Christian thinkers I had read and the Catholic friends I had made seemed infinitely more attractive and interesting.

In 1987, my family's finances took a drastic downturn due to the fall in oil prices. Oklahoma and Texas were especially hard-hit. And then my father had a heart attack and could no longer work. I had to leave Princeton for several years in order to work in the family restaurant business since we were deeply in debt.

I was only able to return to Princeton in 1995 and graduated in May '96 with a degree in Comparative Literature. After I finally finished my undergraduate work, I was free to seek a religious vocation--something I believed was indicated by the



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unusual path_ I had followed. I was a reader of the journal *First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life* and had seen many ads there for St. Louis Abbey. Since I had no idea where to begin, I wrote to Fr Ralph, the vocations director.

I made two visits and was impressed by the spirit and the liturgical life at the Abbey. The balance of respect for tradition and contemporary adaptation was in line with what the Second Vatican Council intended. And I even found out that I knew a little about the English Benedictines from reading a novel by Rumer Godden called *In This House of Brede*. So I thought this was where I should enter.

I took the name Ambrose in honor of the English Benedictine martyr, Ambrose Barlow, one of the Forty Martyrs canonized in 1970.

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