

How I Experienced Divine Union with God

Part One: 2022 — A Shift After Hanoi

After returning from my trip to Hanoi, Vietnam, I found a profound shift — I needed to change. I was photographing in color for seven years, and when I returned home, I began to shoot in black and white.

The most profound thing I realized in Hanoi was how happy and lovely the families were. When I would walk around the lake on the weekend — when the street closed down — I saw all the beautiful families with so many children. I felt like I was missing something in life.

Like I was just an outsider, despite being out there in the world, on the front lines of life. It felt like I was purely in a state of observation, and I was yearning to become what was in my photographs — or to live a normal life like the families around the lake.

Descent Into Pain

Then came intense emotional pain and suffering — mourning, crying, breaking down with my mother on the couch. It felt like the world was a prison.

I remember walking out into the hallway of my condo, looking at the vents, inspecting the air conditioning systems — just staring at the dust and gunk buildup — thinking:

*“You’re not supposed to spend time inside.
This is just an unhealthy prison cell.
It’s so unnatural. So strange.”*

When I looked out my window at all the buildings, they looked like perfect little prisons. The offices were cells. And when I walked through the mall, it looked like everyone was trapped inside glass cubes — like prisoners.

A Lifestyle Shift

I went through the depths of hell:

- Speaking uncomfortable truths
- Overcoming past traumas
- Removing toxic friendships or any relationships that didn't serve me
- Quitting the news and all media

I began rebuilding from the ground up:

- Wearing barefoot shoes
- Relearning how to walk
- Training my body with more intensity
- Daily fasting
- 100% carnivore diet (no breakfast or lunch)
- I stopped sitting down
- I started living a primal lifestyle — walking from sunrise to sunset every single day

I also:

- Started reading ancient philosophy and the Bible
- Spent my days in solitude and isolation
- Walked every day to the cliff that overlooks the Schuylkill River Trail

My time in nature reminded me of my childhood — playing in the Wissahickon Forest, where I spent hours alone, building teepees with sticks, bridges with stones, blazing trails, and exploring the unknown.

Recording the Journey

I started writing.

I started filming videos where I spoke candidly,
almost like real-life stream-of-consciousness **street philosophy** —
recording not for others, but as a way to **learn**.

Part Two: Easter 2023 — The Return to Church

April 2023. Easter Sunday. I woke up and everything changed.

The world felt like a playground.
I returned to church for the first time since I was thirteen.
One mass — that's all it took.
I knew the truth of Jesus.
I felt the spirit return to me.

I was so happy to be back in a community,
to sing songs, to read the Bible,
to be surrounded by beautiful people and beautiful things.

I started praying regularly.
I reconnected with my faith.
The world began to feel new again.
Like I was a child.
I was reawakening my Catholic roots.

One thing that stood out to me about mass was how they say the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel at the end. This is a prayer that I never learned as a boy in Catholic school. And I didn't know about Saint Michael the Archangel.

I went on a bike pilgrimage to the miraculous medal shrine in Germantown.

Rejection from Within

When I began returning to church, feeling joy again, and openly sharing my love for Christ — I expected celebration, or at least peace.

But instead, I was met with strange resistance — not from strangers, but from those closest to me.

Somebody in my family told me **Jesus wasn't real** — that there were no carpenters in Jerusalem because *"there was no wood."*

Two Years in Solitude

I spent nearly **two years in solitude**,
hiking the woods, walking nature paths,
spending most days in silence.

My conscience — **Christ** — began to speak to me.

It told me to leave my meaningless job
and return to my roots.

Leaving the System

I had started working as a photographer for the City of Philadelphia.
But after a few months, I felt **empty**.
It didn't feel meaningful. I knew I was here to do something more.

The moment of clarity came at a **banquet**.

Everyone was feasting and praising each other.
It felt like hedonism.
Like everyone was wearing a mask.
And I sat there thinking:

*"Does anyone actually deserve an award?
What are we even doing here?
Are we just stealing money to do nothing truly helpful?"*

It felt like sin.

I knew I couldn't participate in it anymore.
Something in my **soul** told me: *this is not it*.

Going to Rome

I listened.
I left everything behind and went to Rome.

There, I prayed daily at **Chiesa Santa Maria dei Miracoli**,
a church dedicated to a Marian miracle.

I drank from the miracle well at **Chiesa di Santa Maria in Via** —
only because it was in the best location for street photography.
But my **intuition** guided me there, without any plan.

I visited **Castel Sant'Angelo** every day.
I tried to memorize the Prayer of **Saint Michael the Archangel**,
a prayer I first encountered in Philadelphia,
because I never learned it as a kid in Catholic school.

The Rainbow and the Dragon

On a day trip to Paris, I had a dream:

*A clouded dragon chased me.
It transformed into a rainbow in the sky.*

The next day, I stumbled upon a sculpture of **Saint Michael the Archangel** in Paris.
He stood above two dragons.
A real rainbow appeared in the sky above the sculpture.

I returned to the church in Rome and told the priest what had happened.
He gave me a **Miraculous Medal** —
a symbol of protection, grace, and Mary's intercession.

Since that trip, I have been **overflowing with joy, love, and abundance**.

Finding Purpose Again

I found a job I absolutely love —
working in **horticulture**, spending my days in the park.
I feel most connected to God here,
most at peace in solitude.

I started reading the mystics:

- **Saint Teresa of Avila**
- **Saint John of the Cross**

Because deep down, I knew:

I am a mystic.

The experience in Rome confirmed it.
And I wanted to understand.

Since then, I've made creative breakthroughs in photography and art.
I am now at **eternal peace**.

Rejection and Radiance

Living in the truth of Jesus, through his moral teachings and acts,
I noticed something strange happening:

- People started to **hate me** in public.
- Random strangers would say mean things.
- Others would be drawn to me with **kindness** and open hearts.

Some people freaked out at me for no reason. One person is now even banned from coming into my workplace because of how hateful he was. Even at church, someone told me I'd be a better Catholic if I stopped eating meat to lower my carbon footprint.

I stopped going.

I didn't like the fear, guilt, and shame.

However, many people were receptive and loved me. For instance my bus driver visited me at the horticulture center for a tour because we built strong rapport.

Another time a stranger sought me out while walking in prayer in the morning in the park and told me how I inspired him when he wakes up in the morning to just be grateful for the sunrise and another day.

Becoming a Disciple

I no longer subscribe to the Church's dogma or tradition.

I simply consider myself a disciple of Christ.

The Amish and the Jesus Man

One day, I walked along the river trail and ran into an **Amish man** and his friend — a man dressed in a tunic with long hair and a beard like Jesus.

They asked me a strange question:

“Have you ever told someone the truth, even though it made them uncomfortable?”

I said yes —
that was the very moment I began my awakening.

They asked me to follow them, and I did.

We walked to the train station, where we saw a homeless man.
The Jesus figure **put his hand on his back, lifted him up, and took him inside.**
The man was obviously suffering — possessed or diseased or on drugs.
But what I witnessed was almost a **miracle.**

He brought the man into the station, gave him his phone,
allowed him to call for help.
Then we entered an open area, where he pulled out a songbook.
And me, this Amish man, and this Jesus figure —
we just **started singing** as people lined up for the train.

Part Three: The Amish Bible Study

I had a few more encounters with them.
They would come to the city and sit on benches, just talking with people waiting for
the train about Jesus.
I observed them. I spoke with them. I was intrigued.

Then one day, they invited me to a Bible study in **Lancaster**.
I made a **spontaneous** decision to go.
We drove to an **Amish home** on a random farm in the middle of nowhere.

I ended up in the basement of that house —
surrounded by excommunicated Amish people.
They had left their community because they no longer felt the church's teachings
aligned with Christ.
They believed the dogma and traditions were too extreme — not grounded in love.

I shared my own story.
Told them how I also felt out of place in my church.
It felt **good** to be with others who understood.
To just sit together and share.

We:

- Sang songs in harmony for 30 minutes
- Took turns reading a passage from Revelation about **St. Michael the Archangel visiting the body of Moses**
- Went into small prayer groups and **prayed for one another**

Then I went home.
A **profound** experience.

Easter 2025 — Self-Baptism

The night before Easter 2025, something strange happened.

Everything I do is unconscious but also conscious —
like I'm just a big kid operating on a **subconscious** level.

I lit a candle.
I got into a hot bath.
I thought of **Nicodemus** and how Jesus told him to be *born of the water and spirit*.

I remembered talking about this with the Amish —
wondering what it truly means to be **born again**.

In the bath, I had a **profound experience**.
It felt like I was **purifying my soul**.
Like I gave myself a **baptism**.

3:33 A.M.

I woke up at **exactly 3:33 A.M.**
Something sacred in the air.
A synchronicity I can't explain.

The week continued, back to routine.

A Soul on the Bus

On my bus, there is a beautiful soul who often sits across from me.
Where I usually stand — drawing on my iPad, going through photos, making notes,
reading, praying the Rosary.

And when I say “beautiful soul,” I mean **soul**.

Because the **first day I saw her**, over a year ago, I thought:

“Gray-eyed Athena.”

I experienced **anamnesis**.

Something struck me — like I remembered her.
I saw beyond her physical appearance.
It felt like **soul recognition**.
Something ancient stirred in me.

It was beyond any primal attraction.
It was a mirror. A tuning fork in my heart.
Like the **presence of God in another soul**.

Later, I learned she was from Germantown—the very same neighborhood where I
had first returned to Christ, at the Miraculous Medal Shrine.

Synchronicities with Her

I walk the city more than anyone.
I know its rhythms and patterns —
light, motion, nature, people.

And I kept **seeing her** — again and again —
three times randomly in the month leading up to Easter.

Something stirred in me.

So I asked her for her number.
I asked if she wanted to go to look at sculptures at the **Rodin Museum**.

She said yes — and told me she comes from a family of famous sculptors.

She was busy until the summer, so she postponed it.
Still — I felt incredible that day.

I went into the sunlight and felt like I was **basking in God's light**.

For some reason, I looked up the significance of the date.
May 8 — the day **Saint Michael first appeared**.

Déjà Vu and a Witness

Later that day, I ran into a photographer I know.
He's a 60-year-old Muslim man.
We always walk and talk.

I had told him about her **before** Easter —
how I needed to speak to her.

So when I told him I finally did, we were standing outside the **Victory Building**,
and I remember feeling the flash and the feeling of **déjà vu**.

I told him that she teaches at this local school nearby.

He said:

*"My son is graduating from there this year.
My younger one is going into 9th grade."*

"The school's moving — just a few blocks from where you live."

That moment shook me.
I don't remember the last time I felt déjà vu like that.
It felt like I was inside a **dream I had already dreamed**.

Confession of the Poem

Eventually, I sat next to her on the bus.

I told her that before I even spoke to her,
I had named her **Grey-Eyed Athena**.

She was a **muse** for me during my creative transformation —
from color to black and white photography.

Because every time I saw her, I entered a **creative frenzy**.
A million ideas. A burst of spiritual energy.

We started talking about religion.

She told me she studied **religion in college**.
Studied abroad in the Middle East — places like **Jordan**, learning about Islam.

I told her about my time in **Jericho**,
sleeping on mosque floors, learning Islam firsthand.

She told me she grew up **Quaker**,
I told her I grew up **Catholic**.

When I asked what she believes now,
I said:

“Spiritual and religious are kind of the same, no?”

And then she asked what I am now.

I said simply:

“I am a disciple of Christ.”

When she got off the bus,
she turned and stared at me from the street.

It felt **so profound**.
Beyond lust. Beyond romance.
A **spiritual connection**.

Like seeing **beyond the veil** —
literally seeing her spirit.

More Encounters

We kept having small, warm interactions on the bus.

Then one day, walking through the park, I saw her again.
I was barefoot on the curb — like I always am in Rittenhouse.

We laughed. I said, “Funny seeing you again.”

The next weekend — same thing.
I waved as she read her book and kept walking.

Then Monday, I saw her again on the bus.

She was journaling by hand.

I said, “That’s old school. You actually use your hands?”
I told her I use voice dictation instead.

She pulled out her book.
I asked what she was reading.

She showed me: **“God of the Woods.”**

I showed her mine: **“City of God.”**

Just days earlier, I had been reading *Paradise Lost* —
and told her I felt like I work in the **Garden of Eden**.

A Night of Pain and Revelation (dark night of the soul)

June 3, 2025 —
I went to the boxing gym and had an intense agility workout.

I ate afterward, but didn’t take a hot bath.
I was too tired. Fell asleep.

Middle of the night — I woke up in **excruciating pain**.
Could barely move.

I got into a hot bath. And in that suffering,
I was **called**.

Something inside me said:

“You need to give her the poem.”

Unattached to outcome. Just share it.

Despite knowing little about her.
Despite how strange it might seem.

It wasn't romantic. It was **spiritual**.

June 4 — Agape in the Garden

I walked into the garden.

I was thinking of **Jesus**.
And suddenly, I began to weep.

I collapsed on my knees,
laying in the grass as sunlight touched my skin.

My eyelids were watery —
light turned to white.

I opened my eyes and began **laughing with joy**.

*The birds,
the flowers,
the trees,
the bugs...*

It was all too beautiful.

I said in prayer:

*"I don't deserve any of this, Lord.
I don't deserve this love.
I don't deserve this beauty."*

I wept like never before.

June 6 — A Mystic Confirmed

Two days later, I went to the park with the gift I had prepared for her.

I ran into a former monk.

I confessed everything —
told him my experience of **Agape**.

He said:

*"Maybe God is calling you to be a **Mystic**."*

I shared my entire spiritual journey with him.

He then said:

"Do you know what the Gospel of the day is?"

He told me:

John 21:15–19 — the restoration of Peter.

John 21:15–17 – Breakdown of Love in the Greek

The Greek Words:

- **Agapāis me?** – Do you *agape* me? (divine, unconditional love)
 - **Philō se.** – I *philia* you. (brotherly love, affection)
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Line-by-Line Breakdown:

First time:

- Jesus: “*Simon, son of John, do you **agape** me?*”
- Peter: “*Yes, Lord; you know that I **philia** you.*”

Second time:

- Jesus: “*Simon, son of John, do you **agape** me?*”
- Peter: “*Yes, Lord; you know that I **philia** you.*”

Third time:

- Jesus: “*Simon, son of John, do you **philia** me?*” ← **This is the shift**
 - Peter was grieved because He asked this the third time...
 - Peter: “*Lord, you know everything; you know that I **philia** you.*”
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What It Means:

- Jesus first asks for **divine love** — *agape*, the deepest, highest form of love.
 - Peter responds with **philia** — affection, deep friendship, but not quite divine-level.
 - On the third time, Jesus **meets Peter where he is** — switching to *philia*, acknowledging Peter’s current capacity for love.
 - Peter is grieved not just because Jesus asks three times, but because **Jesus steps down** to his level.
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The Message:

God meets us where we are—but still calls us higher.

I then told the monk after explaining my story:

“If you have good news, shouldn’t you share it?”

He smiled and said:

“That’s what Gospel means.”

I had no idea that’s what it meant...

Transmutation and the Poem

One evening, I went out to dinner with some friends.

The topic of women came up — but I didn’t resonate with the conversation.

I told them, “Honestly, I’ve been on semen retention for four years.
It’s transformed my life.”

I shared how I’d been seeing this soul on the bus —
how it wasn’t lust or romance, but something deeper.
And I said:

*“You know, when you feel love or longing,
you can transmute that energy into something creative.”*

For me, that became photography.
But in this case, it became **a poem**.

I named it **“Gray-Eyed Athena.”**

It was never meant to be romantic —
but an offering of divine love.
A reflection of God.

Giving the Agape Gift

So I attended mass on Sunday for Pentecost, and then on Monday I started my walk and headed towards the park. I had the gift of agape in my bag—carrying it almost as a metaphor, a symbol of divine love.

The first person I saw was the girl from the bus. She was sitting on the bench. I went up and spoke to her for about 30 minutes, and at the end, I gave her the gift: a poem and a framed photograph I had taken of a pigeon flying above City Hall.

The next day, at the elderly art camp where I work at the Horticulture Center, I saw two ladies sitting down and said hello. We started talking, and I asked where they were from. One of them said she was from Mumbai, India—**Bandra**, specifically.

I was shocked. I had *literally* been there. I only have one photograph from that trip framed and printed in the break room at work: **Bandra Fort**, with a bird mid-flight. It's an iconic image.

I ran back, grabbed the print, and gave it to her. We hugged. Took selfies.

It was surreal—because just the day before, I had given a framed print of birds in flight over City Hall to the girl on the bench.

And now, I met someone from across the world, from the exact neighborhood I had visited years ago, and just so happened to have the perfect gift for her too.

It felt like God was reminding me:

***“Keep giving.
Keep embodying divine love.
Keep pouring agape.”***

Beatrice and the Divine

There must be some archetypal truth to *The Divine Comedy*—
the way Beatrice guides Dante through Paradise.
Not as a lover,
but as a mirror of God's light.

Maybe we really can find Beatrice in this life—
not to fall in love,
but to be **called upward** by love itself.

That's what she was for me.
A divine mirror.
A spark.
A nudge toward the eternal.

And through her light,
I didn't find romance.

I found God.