

## Former atheist poet reveals details of her Catholic conversion

Poet Sally Read speaks with CNA in Rome



Rome, Italy, Jul 27, 2012 (CNA/EWTN News).- “Until two years ago, I was a really committed atheist and I really hated the Catholic Church,” said poet Sally Read, as she explained how all that dramatically changed during nine months in 2010.

“The whole process took from March to December, and I was received into the Catholic Church at the Vatican in December, so it was a bit of a lightning flash,” she told CNA on July 24.

A 41-year-old Englishwoman, Sally Read is regarded as a rising star within the world of poetry. Her publisher describes the former psychiatric nurse as “one of a new generation of younger poets shaping the future of British poetry.”

She now lives in the Italian seaside town of Santa Marinella with her husband and their daughter. It was there that her conversion story began two years ago while she was writing an anthology based on her experiences with psychiatric patients.

“As I was writing this book, I became very aware that I didn’t know where the soul was and I didn’t know if the soul existed. And it was really driving me crazy.” Her frustration led her into discussion, and often heated debate, with a Canadian priest who was based in the coastal resort town.

“So, while I was talking to this priest about, well, is there a God and all of that kind of stuff, I kind of had this feeling as a poet that God was the ultimate poet and the ultimate Creator, and I was simply being used as an instrument,” she recalled.

It was at that point that she phoned the priest to say, “I don’t think I’m an atheist after all.” But she refused to make the intellectual leap to Christianity, insisting to her priest friend that he would never convert her.

“He was very patient and very good.” He said, ‘Christ will convert you, I’m not going to convert you ...’

Read was raised in a strictly anti-religious household and, so, she now felt like “everything I had ever believed in (was) being turned upside down.”

“It was very, very difficult. I mean, I wasn’t sleeping at all. I was very emotionally traumatized,” she said, describing those months in 2010 as “the most disrupted period in my whole life.”

Her turmoil ended abruptly one afternoon when she stepped into a local Catholic Church.

“Just one day, I was in tears and said to this icon of Christ, ‘If you’re there, then you have to help me.’ And, this thing happened which is very hard to explain, but I felt as if I was being physically lifted up and my tears stopped, and I felt this presence.”

She described the sensation as “utterly tangible,” so much so that from then on she “knew that life was devoted to Christ. There was nothing else.”

Her journey into the Catholic Church quickly followed.

“I realized that there was only one Church and the way to be closest to Christ was to be a Catholic, because it’s the Eucharist and taking Communion.”

Since then she has faced opposition from family members and shock from a socially-liberal artistic establishment. And, yet, “I’m still happier than I’ve ever been,” she said with a broad grin on her face.

As for writing, her third anthology of poetry will be released this year. But the philosophical outlook of her work has now changed dramatically.

“So, I don’t know where it’s going to go with poetry, but I think it’s going to be interesting,” Read said.

David Kerr - CNA