**John 8:1-11 woman caught in adultery, let one without sin cast the first stone**

My name is Lilit Thwaites. I've been a parishioner, singer and occasional reader at St Carthage's since early 1982, when my Anglican husband Tim and I were expecting our first child. At the time, I made what to some might have seemed the rash decision that any God worthy of the name would understand perfectly if my husband and I chose to alternate churches together as a family every Sunday rather than each of us heading off to different churches.

Knowing this, some Catholics might see me as a bit of a fraud standing here at the pulpit of a Catholic church, but then this is St Carthage's, a Catholic church which acts as a refuge for many people like me who clearly don't quite fit into the traditional Catholic mould. Let me explain a bit further.

I was born in Czechoslovakia, my background is a mix of Czech (and Catholic) on my mother's side and Russian (and Russian Orthodox) on my father's, and I grew up in England, Scotland and then Canada, before finally arriving in Australia in 1981. Given the era in which I was born, before my parents were married, my Russian Orthodox father (with approval from the then Patriarch in Prague) was required to sign a document agreeing that any children would be raised as Catholics – as I'm sure some of you here belonging to so-called mixed marriages had to do as well. We children were duly raised as Catholics, and attended Catholic schools in England, Scotland and Canada.
[As an aside, some 35 years later, in Calgary, Canada, my non-Catholic husband-to-be only had to agree verbally to the Catholic priest who was going to marry us, that he would (and I quote) "raise the children in the knowledge of the Catholic faith".]

Back to my childhood. I can't speak for my older siblings, but I was in fact totally unaware that my father was not a Catholic until after we moved to Glasgow when I was about 8. He attended Mass with us every Sunday – though I did notice that he was always the one who took us outside if we were misbehaving – and he took part in all the major Catholic feasts and events that we were involved in at school and at Church.

But when we moved to Glasgow, two things happened which finally alerted me to the fact that he wasn't a Catholic. They made such an impression on me that they gave rise to my first questions about being a Catholic, and what exactly was meant by that.

The first occurred when my parents were told that there was no place for my younger sister in the Catholic primary school my parents had selected for both of us. I later found out that my father made an appointment with the Headmistress, Sister Ignatius, and informed her that there was a non-Catholic school nearby which would be happy to accept my sister, and so they intended to enrol her there. Suddenly, magically, a place became available for her. Needless to say, the significance of this didn't really register at the time, but I guess my parents saw this as an opportunity to tell us that, despite his regular attendance at mass, etc, our father was in fact not Catholic but Russian Orthodox.

The sky didn't fall in as a result of this revelation – maybe I was still too young to appreciate fully the import of what they had told me. But the impact finally hit home one Sunday not long afterwards at morning Mass, when Fr Murray (a young priest of the hell, fire and damnation variety) preached a sermon in which he highlighted that anyone who had been given the opportunity to become a Catholic and had chosen not to take up the offer, was doomed to hell.

Now at this stage, I was aware that Fr Murray had been a regular visitor to our house for some time and when I had asked why, was told by my mother that he felt it was his priestly duty to try to convert my father to Catholicism, but that he had so far failed in his mission. So, in effect, I interpreted Fr Murray's words that Sunday morning as saying that my father was doomed to hell – something I just couldn't accept. He was just as "good" a person as any Catholic I knew. In fact, to my mind, he was better than many Catholics I knew at that young age; there was no way he could be going to hell. The God I'd grown up with and been taught about wouldn't do something like that!

It's a bit of a stretch, but perhaps there is a tenuous link to today's Gospel, and one of the messages I see in it—about being too quick to judge and condemn in situations where Jesus doesn't judge.

**My point?:** I guess you could say that I've been a questioning Catholic ever since, one to whom many priests and Church officials I have come across over the years would have refused communion and sanctuary. Fortunately, as an adult, I've always managed to find a "good" and welcoming home in which to worship (like St Carthage's), even though I have not always "trod the right path" in the eyes of some Catholics.

And what do I mean by that? I mean a parish which has understood and "enabled" me to alternate Sunday Mass with a small, equally welcoming Anglican Church in North Melbourne. I mean a church which makes non-Catholics like my husband feel welcome to receive communion here, and which has enabled our children and grandchildren over the years to be baptised in ceremonies performed by both an Anglican and a Catholic priest. Believe me, when I first arrived in Melbourne in 1981 – and some of you will have shared my experience – most Catholic churches would never have allowed any of this to take place under their roof.

Fortunately, these days, there are more and more parishes like St Carthage's and its Anglican counterpart, St Alban's; and more and more priests who understand and welcome parishioners like me and my family, parishioners whom the Scottish Fr Murray would undoubtedly classify as "sinners" to be cast into hell. Apologies to Fr Murray if I've judged you too harshly!.

I prefer Christ's message, which doesn't discriminate between, or judge people, based on their "appearance" or faith, but rather, enjoins us to look after one another to the best of our ability, to "love one another as I have loved you", and to refrain from casting stones at those they judge to be sinful.

So, my thanks to the priests and parishioners of St Carthage who welcomed me and my family way back when, who continue to be accepting of anyone who walks through the doors of this Church looking for sanctuary, and who have never, at least that I am aware of, cast any stones or aspersions at anyone who doesn't quite fit the traditional– still often expected – Catholic mould.

By the way, the response to my father of the Russian Orthodox patriarch who gave permission for him to marry my mother, knowing that the children would

thereby be Catholic, was this. “Better the children be raised good Catholics than wishy-washy Russian Orthodox.”