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Convert Finds 'God's Home' After Many Years' Journey

By MRS. GRACE JOHNSON

When asked recently why I became a convert of Catholicism, my first reaction was one of irritation because, ever since my Baptism several years ago, I have felt as if I was always a Catholic. Then I began to think back over the years and the story of my conversion—God's way of leading me to the One Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church.

My parents were members of the German Lutheran Church. My father was a very good man but very strict as to religious belief and very strongly prejudiced against the Catholics. As a child I had to attend Sunday School, even though it was difficult for me to understand because the teaching was in German.

When I became a young lady, the Church of my parents became a stranger to me—I even stopped going, much to my father's displeasure. I began working and the more I came in contact with Catholic friends the more I began to realize that they were not as bad as I was taught to believe.

In fact, I fell in love with a Catholic young man, later to be my husband, and began going to Church with him, but only occasionally because of fear of my father. There was something very attractive and appealing about the Catholic Church — I felt so much at home — this must be God's home!

George Johnson, my young man, wanted to marry me, but I knew that my father was opposed to the idea of my marriage to a Catholic. Since I was only seventeen then, I had to abide by his wishes.

George was intent on marriage, by elopement if necessary, and so we went to New York and were married by a minister, an act which caused George to become excommunicated from his Church with consequences which I realized as the years went by. An act for which I have begged God's forgiveness many times since my conversion.

GOD HAD plans for me which I never dreamed of! George and I worked hard, and somehow managed to overcome the difficulties of the first years of marriage. We were not blessed with children, but there were other indications that we were not abandoned by God.

In time we prospered by careful saving and wise investment, and bought our own home in a good neighborhood, acquiring friends many of whom were Catholics. At our frequent gatherings they would speak of their Church and I envied them what they had.

Gradually I began praying that someday somehow I would be be fortunate enough to be a Catholic, not realizing the sacrifice God would ask of me for so priceless a gift.

NO ONE made a positive move to lead me into the Church, not even my own George who had thought erroneously that his being excommunicated made this step impossible. But I became more and more attracted to Catholicism, not so much through reason as through some strange power working on my heart, drawing me on.

Then came the Depression and we lost all our life savings. This I now see as God's first step in answering my prayers, the first part of my sacrifice for God's gift of Faith. It was a difficult task to start all over again after nearly thirty years of hard work, but we began the rebuilding hopefully. With our new savings from daily sweat of brow we bought a home.

Much to my joy, there was a Catholic Church on the corner — St. Stanislaus — inspiring in its beauty, warm and appealing in its atmosphere of home. My neighbors all thought I was a Catholic, and the priests of the parish were very friendly, so much so that I was encouraged to stop in for a visit occasionally, very self-consciously as if everyone was watching me.

But I felt so good inside of me, so much at peace, that I soon was entering as bravely as if I really belonged. I knew, however, that I would not be completely happy until I was truly a Catholic.

Before going on, let me relate what had happened while George and I were rebuilding our lost fortune — this was part two of God's price for Faith. George developed cancer — a terrible shock to us both. He began taking treatments which temporarily arrested the growth of the disease.

As time went on he began to feel more and more pain and with it, discouragement. There were many misunderstandings and small quarrels in those days. Both of us were very much upset.

Therefore, prayer was my increasing consolation, and my visits to Church took on a selfish motive. I needed God's help! This led to the next step in my conversion.

Encouraged by me, George invited the pastor of the parish to our home. He accepted our invitation graciously and we had a wonderful visit, my first personal contact with a priest. I was thrilled and so obviously happy that the pastor remarked would not it be wonderful if I could be a Catholic.

That was what I had been waiting for, someone to ask me! I replied immediately that I would be most happy to be one, if possible, and at once we made arrangements for my first instrution.

FROM THE moment I began taking instructions, the young priest (who was assigned by the pastor to take care of me) most patiently and kindly won me over to God. I couldn't wait for the days to pass. The instructions so satisfied my hunger for knowledge that I could have stayed for hours. In all honesty I must say that this young priest showed me my God through his own priestly Christ-like heart. I am deeply grateful to him.

Having finished my course of instruction I was baptized; George and I went to Confession, received Holy Communion together, and our marriage was made valid in the eyes of God! How extremely happy we were—George was back in his Father's home, and I at last had my prayers answered!

NOW, I WAS sure, everything was going to be all right. But there was still the last part of God's price to be paid, as He soon made known.

George became seriously stricken with cancer, was operated on and given only a few months to live. My world seemed to be falling into ruin. What kindness was shown to us by the priests, God alone knows. George was anointed and prepared for death. But even in the midst of sorrow, God was good to us.

George's condition improved and he lived for over three years, added proof to me that God really did work His wonderful power through the Sacraments.

When George finally died, I thought my world had finally come to an end. What was I going to do all alone? But again my Catholic friends and neighbors, especially my priests were sent by God to my rescue. They showed me how to live again, how to see in all of this God's Holy Will. I was encouraged to receive Holy Communion frequently, especially on the First Fridays of each month.

As time went on I became active in parish activities, and became a member of the Holy Name of Mary Society, working and praying with the others, striving to become as much a part of Church life as any member of my parish. I found much consolation in attending novenas and devotions in the various Churches.

I began to see that all the Churches, as long as they were Catholic, were my home; all of them were One and the Same Holy House of God. I belonged to them all and they to me. I felt as if I had never been anything but a Catholic all my life!

Desiring to know more about God I have tried to attend all convert lecture series; also took the convert correspondence course from St. Bernard's Seminary; recently I became a member of the Convert Guild of St. Andrew's Seminary. Knowledge of God has made me feel young in my desires to work for the spread of His Church.

Most dear to me all through, even though I haven't mentioned it thus far, has been my devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary—She has been my Mother all through my trials. Christ gave me His Cross to bear and His Mother to help me bear it.

So, in conclusion—why did I become a convert? My God willed it so! He led me through His incomprehensible ways into His Church, using His wonderful priests, as instruments.

I AM HOME now at last with God and His Mother in His Church! If I had my life to live over again, knowing beforehand the price God would ask me in return for the gift of Faith and the joys I have known because of it, I wouldn't hesitate a moment—God's Holy Will Be Done!

NURSE GRADS MAP DANCE

CHRISTMAS BALL of St. Mary's Hospital Nurses' Alumnae Association in Powers Hotel, Dec. 26 is being planned by Miss Dorothy Hood, orchestra chairman (left) and Mrs. Marilyn Muller, publicity chairman.

Christmas Ball Scheduled By St. Mary Nurse Alumnae

St. Mary's Hospital Nurses' Alumnae Association will hold their annual Christmas Ball on Friday, Dec. 26, in Powers Hotel Ballroom. Vic Sweet and his orchestra will play for dancing from 9:00 p.m. 1:00 a.m.

Mrs. Mary Whitehair and Miss Ruth E. Mandell are co-chairmen. They are being assisted by Miss Dorothy Hood, orchestra chairman; Mrs. Marilyn Muller, publicity chairman; and Miss Barbara Cooney, ticket chairman.

Other committee members include: Miss Felice LaMagnacco, Miss Anne-Marie Mandell, Miss Rosemary McGuire, Miss June McDonald, Miss Lottie Bolaro and Miss Eileen Trebold.

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Leaders of the troops for the caroling will be: Troop 486, Audrey Rinehart, Frances Malczewski; Troop 305, Elizabeth Ann Cook and Mary Lou Polletto; Troop 99, Mrs. R. DeRoma and Angela DeRoma.

Troop committee arranging the Christmas Party is comprised of Mesdames R. Oldfield, Patrick McBride, Gerald Rizzo, Robert Vogt, Philip Hafner, Edward Haefer, Armand LaMay, Samuel Tebone, S. Gorczynski, R. Roesser, Ross Marinaro and Fred Enders.

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