

## *His Banner Over Me Is Love*

*“He who hears My word...has passed out of death into life.”* (John 5:24)

At age nineteen, I was baptized a Roman Catholic. I had been searching for God and thought I had found the true religion in Catholicism. My new faith was a great comfort to me, but in a few years I began to experience spiritual problems. I yearned for assurance of salvation, but peace eluded me.



Jo Ellen, as a young woman

I could not even be certain of purgatory! However, I hoped that by my “good works” God would credit my “spiritual bookkeeping”, freeing me from that abode entirely. The thought of purgatory terrified me.

### **Fear and Uncertainty**

One morning after Mass as I was standing by the “purgatorial altar,” dimly in my mind I could hear echoing pleas of her long-dead inhabitants--saved, but doomed to suffer. Out of the caverns of death they seemed to call. It troubled me that the Church taught that God would not help them, but strangely, I could help them by prayers and Masses. Since a money donation was required for Masses, I just prayed. It seemed so out of balance. I left the church that morning uneasy and puzzled.

Each confession was a minor traumatic experience, but the Church said it was God’s “sacrament of forgiveness.” Without it, sins could not be forgiven. Salvation certainly seemed a

“tipsy” affair and God seemed impossible to please; consequently, I turned to Mary and the saints for intercessory prayer, hoping they would slip me through the keyhole if God shut the door.

After about five years of this fear and uncertainty, I became extremely scrupulous. Scrupulosity is a plague of “spiritual jitters” that only scrupulous Catholics understand. It took priestly counsel, much prayer and over two years to cure. By that time I was emotionally damaged and a spiritual cripple.

### **Becoming a Nun**

Because of all these things, I seriously considered becoming a nun to save my soul and serve God, Whom I thirsted after and longed to please in spite of discomfort in His company. I thought if I were a sister, God would give me a little more consideration at judgment. Nuns are called “spiritual brides” of Christ. That sounded pretty safe to me.

On December 8, 1966, I entered the Benedictine convent. At first I was thrilled with my new life. I desperately wanted to stay, but from the beginning, apprehension that I was not going to remain, baffled me. Hovering over me like a taunting spirit, God drove me out of the convent shortly before Christmas. God used sleepless nights to deal with my will to remain.

One night I had a persistent thought that kept repeating, “Trust me, trust me.” I came to understand by this message that great spiritual darkness lay ahead for me; Christ would be with me, but I would have to go on in faith. I was further led to believe that I had a missionary vocation. This was all so confusing and frightening that the next day I asked my novice mistress for permission to go to confession. After I related my experience to the priest, he told me that a long, dry spiritual darkness lay ahead and that I would have to go on faith alone.

### **Empty Ritual**

A few days later I requested to leave and departed, broken and confused, planning to enter the Maryknoll Missionary Order in August. However, God had other plans. Upon discussing with the priest my departure from the convent, I was further bewildered when he told me I had no religious vocation at all! It was at this time that doubts about the validity of the Roman Church began to take hold of my thinking. When I told the same priest that I was losing my Catholic faith, he said, “You don’t have to if you don’t want to!” What next?

As time went on, I became increasingly unhappy. Mass, prayer, and the whole rigamarole were so empty and meaningless that I quit attending services, convinced at the same time that I would not go to hell if I missed Mass on purpose. I concluded that Catholicism was not what I thought it was, the pope was not infallible, and the Catholic Church did not have the complete truth, regardless of her claims. I knew I had a spiritual problem, but I also knew that no priest could help me.

As a result of all this, I personally excommunicated myself from Romanism and placed my spiritual dilemma confidently in God the Father’s hands, trusting that He would show me the way.

### **A “Spiritual Prodigal”**

For almost two years I was a “spiritual prodigal.” During this time I married a Catholic, who shared my confusion. When our first child was born, I was troubled about baptism. Although I was a “fallen away” Catholic and had left the Church, remnants of her influence

remained in my mind. So, wearily, I went to confession, attended Mass and received the sacraments. Then I had my son baptized. Feebly, I tried to repair my “Religious patchwork quilt”. In spite of obedience to Church procedure after such a relapse, I still had no peace of soul and nothing helped. I prayed frantically for understanding and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In a short time, God answered my prayers.

One day four years later, while praying for spiritual truth, I was directed to read the Bible. Shortly thereafter a Christian friend invited me to a Bible class. It was at this class that the Holy Spirit began the twigs for the nest He was building in my heart, waiting for His indwelling.

After ponderous Bible study and guidance from the preacher who taught the class, I began to see grievous contradictions between God’s Word and the Roman Catholic Church. When reading Matthew 16:15-18, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that **Christ**, not Peter, was the “rock” on which the church was built! Since Christ was the **true** foundation, was Peter ever pope at all? In Mark 7: 9 Jesus said, “*Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*” I already knew that “popemanship” was a Catholic tradition, so when the truth of this Scripture cut my heart, the pope literally toppled from his throne. Yet, I had no answer for my own personal salvation to take the place of the Catholic Church.

### **New Birth in Christ**

One day at home while pondering John 5:24, “*Verily, verily I say unto you, He who heareth My words and believeth on Him who sent Me, hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life,*” the final link with Catholicism cracked and the chains of Rome fell. The Holy Spirit removed me from the jungle of Catholicism and placed me in the rich meadow of the Living Word, Jesus Christ. This is not man’s doing but the gift of God by grace through faith. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourself; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8).

In place of my desire to be the spiritual bride of Christ as a nun, I was given the gift of a **new birth** and covered, not with the clothing of man, but with the righteousness of Christ, making me a child of God. “*But as many as received Him (Jesus Christ), to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:12-13). Jesus said, “*...Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3).

As a born-again believer, I brought no robe of self-righteousness when I received Jesus into my life as **Savior**. Rather, He clothed me in His righteousness and presented me to the Father as one of the redeemed and heir of heaven **at that moment**.

### **Salvation in Christ Alone**

I was at great peace spiritually after I found salvation in Christ by faith alone. Once I turned to Him by His grace, I never went to another Mass, said a Rosary or confessed to a priest. I knew that I was secure in Christ as it says in the Scriptures, “*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*” (1 John 5:13).

Other Scriptures that confirmed for me the truth that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone included Acts 4:12, “*Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” And 1 Timothy 2:5 that says, “*For there*

*is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Jesus Christ.” Mary also needed a Savior. In the Magnificat, she prayed, “my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47).*

God also showed me in Hebrews 10:10-14 that the Mass clearly was not ordained by Him, for, *“...we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;...For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.”*

There are no works that can save me or any person for it is *“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).* *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*



**Jo Ellen, as a born again believer**

### **Proclaiming Truth**

After I was born-again, I wrote to every Catholic priest and friend I knew, as well as to my novice mistress and told them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With every Catholic I have come into contact with since that time, I have tried to share the good news. For a year and a half I worked in a convent nursing home and continue to keep those dear sisters in my heart and prayers. For several years I have worked in a hospital, nursing homes and in private care as a nurse aide. Although I started training to become an licensed practical nurse, it did not work out for me. At present I am employed at the Caring Presence Home Health Care Agency giving all types of care and service to elderly people in their homes. I hope to have many opportunities to speak of Christ and His gift of salvation.

Another way I hope to bring glory to the Lord is by writing Christian children’s stories and articles. At present, five have been selected for publication.

One of my first attempts to spread the Gospel was to write my testimony and print it in tract form. I did not know what I was going to do with those first thousand copies, but the Lord found a place for them all. Since then, I have had my story printed in Spanish and three languages of India, Hindi, Telegu and Tamil-Nadu. It has been used extensively in the United States, India, Ghana, Africa, Uganda and other English speaking countries. From the reports I have heard, our dear Lord has used my story of His grace, love and mercy to help many others. It has been printed in four magazines and two newsletters. This is totally the work of the Holy Spirit.

At the time of writing this account of my life, I am a member of Otis Baptist Church in Carlsbad, New Mexico, where my husband and I have lived since April 17, 1996. I have had

training in Child Evangelism courses and taught Good News Clubs, Vacation Bible School and other groups. I read and study my Bible in depth, participate in many Bible studies and have read and continue to read many Christian books and magazines.



Jo Ellen, in her home in 1996

I have one son, James, and a dear daughter-in-law, Dana, who lives in Boise, Idaho. Both my son and his wife are born again and have been blessed with two children, a girl, Kaela, age six and Michael, age four. As a grandmother, it gives me much pleasure to share Christian books, videos, and other materials to help them grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

Peace and joy have increased as I have drawn closer to Christ and His Word. I thank Him with all my heart, soul and spirit for His gift of eternal life. Cooperating with His grace, I desire to speak for Him as He leads me. I pray that every Catholic will respond to the truth of God's Word that they may know Jesus Christ, and He as the Truth will set them free.