

Phyllis O'Boyle

Testimony

It was a warm May Day. I was four years old. I remember my mother dressed me and my sister in our best church clothes. My dad wore a suit instead of his usual overalls. My mother put on a hat. The baby was fussy in her dress. We went to this big building and stood on a stage with a man dressed funny. He put water on all of our heads, and then he put water on the baby which made her cry and have one of her tantrums. Someone took a picture of us. That was the day I was baptized into the family of God.

When I was nine, I went to Presbyterian confirmation classes with my Sunday school class. I remember some of my classmates, Polly, Ginger, Peter and five more I don't remember. We learned a lot about sin and how you go to hell. I never heard about that at home. My parents were the kind and gentle type. In the confirmation class we memorized Bible verses and, the Ten Commandments, and of course, the Lord's Prayer. On confirmation Sunday we were led into a room off the chapel where the church elders were seated around the table. We sat across from them, and they asked us questions. Jesus was more of a threat. He would judge us if we sinned. God seemed so large and, apparently, he got angry with you when you did something wrong. I couldn't relate to him as a father because my father wasn't anything like that. He NEVER yelled at me or got angry with me. My mother had to discipline us girls because she said my dad was "too soft-hearted". (Truthfully, she was, too). However, I answered the questions right, and I was confirmed with my class in front of the same church where I had been baptized.

When I was fourteen, I began to take my faith seriously and began reading the Bible everyday. I was determined to read the entire Bible. As I read, I discovered a different God from the one I learned about in confirmation class. He was a God more like my father, and gradually, I began to understand Him. I continued to attend that church until I was married in that church at age 18.

At age eighteen, I began confirmation classes in the Lutheran church that my new husband attended as a child. The message was one of forgiveness and compassion. It resonated with me, and I was confirmed a Lutheran at age 19. The marriage was not based on a firm foundation but the church's message fulfilled me and gave me the relationship with Jesus I had longed for. I did everything I could throughout the next two decades to live the life of a disciple of Christ. I taught Sunday school for 13 years. I did art work for the chapel. When my marriage failed, I turned to the pastor for counseling and guidance. I made sure my two children followed through with confirmation, and I attended the Lutheran church with them until they graduated and left home.

When I was in my early thirties, I had to return to college so that I could support my children as a single mother. I met my one and only true husband. I was walking down the hall of the university to sign up for my first classes in the teaching program at Eastern Oregon University, and I saw him. He was talking to a woman, and he was so compassionate. I said a little prayer, "God, please give me a husband like that who knows how to love." When I went to my first classes, there he was, teaching one of the classes. A year later, we were married. I was happy as a Lutheran, but I believed that I should go to church with my husband. I began to attend the Catholic Church with my cradle Catholic husband named Peter, (of course, the rock the church is built on, I was told.)

As my children left home and began lives of their own, I began to take charge of my spiritual journey for the first time. I questioned everything I had been taught. I threw out what didn't feel right to me. I read the Bible and other religious books, and I always referred back to the actual words of Jesus. I tried to live my life based on my faith. I changed from the child who was afraid of sin and the young mother who was full of regret to a woman who cared more about others than her own problems. Peter was always there to answer questions, and I have always valued his mentorship. As a couple, we stopped taking communion and began the journey toward annulment for both of us. After ten years, Father Misel of Saint Anthony's Catholic Church in Long Beach California helped us to navigate the path to annulment and marriage vows sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Here I was! I was going through confirmation again in my fifties! For the third time. Father Misel set up a personal confirmation for me with Sister Barbara. She was wonderful. We talked candidly for hours. For the first time, I was able to ask ANY question. I was able to tell her any secret I had held about my life's journey. I felt like my eyes were opened, and I could see the face of God for the first time, and it was love. It was every human face in God's creation because he created us in His image. I became a Catholic.

