

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

I was so deeply disappointed in myself. Yesterday when my husband and I met with one of our architects, he showed us the latest version of plans for the house. Since our house fire, we've basically been encouraging them to dream up the interior space for there are no interior walls to restrict them. What we have now is a big, burned barn of a building with some exterior Greek Revival traits.

The meeting was going well. We loved the new downstairs plans. Then the architect flipped the page to the upstairs blueprints. On first glance they looked good, and my excitement and enthusiasm continued. Then I noticed the missing part - my room. Lord, forgive me for even calling it "mine," but that's what it had become. It was to be a morning room coming off the stair landing. It was to be a warm, quiet spot to have tea and visit with friends. I wanted it also to be a grandchildren's haven, where we could have juice and cookies and they could sit on my lap and hug and we could share stories and secrets. It was gone. And the most precious part of the previous plans, a tiny chapel, had also changed and its priority seemed to have slipped, just by its new hidden entry. There were, of course, good reasons for these changes. They were explained to me. Thank the dear Lord, I didn't burst out crying. I did that later in the car alone.

I know I'm still getting over jet lag from my recent trip to England, for I awakened this morning again at 4:00. I know I'm more emotional because I'm tired, and I know I'm still healing over the house fire. Still, as I said in the beginning of this letter, I was deeply disappointed in my reaction. I think I'm doing fine and that "things" don't really matter. I guess I pride myself (that's the problem) on thinking that I hold lightly to material things. I pride myself in thinking that I could be content in a little one-room cell, like I experienced just a few days ago in the convent guesthouse. I pride myself in thinking that I could streamline my closet to two or three outfits. I pride myself in thinking that I could give it all away - clothes, jewels, paintings, books... things - as long as I have the Lord and His Love and my family and friends. Even those last two I'm trying to learn how to hold on to them more lightly and less possessively. And then, and then, "whamo!" I find myself bawling in the car while driving the one-and-a-half hour drive to Birmingham.

I seldom cry, and when I do it's usually just a one-eyed leakage. However, this was a real live blubbering bawl. It was a noisy, runny-nosed, shoulder-shaking, gut-wrenching explosion. I couldn't believe it. I shocked myself. What was going on here? This wasn't the real me, or was it? Luckily, this outburst only lasted about five minutes and then the CD of Handel's "Messiah" could be heard once more.

Homes. Why are they so important? I arrived in Birmingham fifteen minutes early, so I drove by the house where I was raised, which had been built by my grandfather. I had heard that this brick, columned colonial home had been completely redone. First, I took a back lane viewing. I figured a distant exposure would be gentler to this fragile state in which I found myself. If it looked too horrible from afar, I wouldn't subject myself to a frontal drive-by.

Ah, but it was wonderful, beautiful, glorious, better than ever before. The red bricks had been painted white. There had been a side addition, one I'd always heard about in the original plans.

Then I drove back to the main road and up the driveway. I had the nerve to park and get out and ring the doorbell. Thank the dear Lord the lady of the house was getting dressed and her housekeeper said she wanted to know if I could come back in twenty minutes. Thank the dear Lord I couldn't because of my appointments. I told the housekeeper to tell the owner "Thank you, but I couldn't" and to tell her that I had been raised in this house and had heard how lovely it was and had just wanted to drive by and see.

Whew! I was out of there! My nerve sometimes even surprises me! The visit did do the healing trick however. To stand on the columned porch where I played as a child and kissed as a teenager was enough. To gaze at the side yard where my husband and I were married was enough. This place

was better than ever. Our place will be better than ever. The mud, the burnout, the smell - the whole ugly sensory attack would eventually be over - at some point.

“All things work for good for those who love the Lord.” Over the last month, that scripture has been continually popping up. It’s appeared in letters, in books. It’s gotten to be comical. That verse is a great comfort, even more during this grieving time. Yes, I’ve finally named the emotion so I can get on with it. I am grieving.

Grieving is a process. It’s a necessary one. I guess I’ve been surprised over the amount of emotion I’ve stifled without even realizing it. House fires do require grieving. I guess I really hadn’t yet. It’s been almost two-and-a-half months. They haven’t started rebuilding yet. They’re still just tearing down. Every day I look out the guesthouse window where we’re living, the first thing I see is that ugly, scarred hull of our house.

You won’t believe it, but I know I’ve made progress. It snowed an inch or two right after the fire. In the Deep South this is a rare occurrence. It melted in a couple of hours, but never have I seen such huge flakes. It was the exciting topic of conversation at the Tuna Group, which is a weekly prayer and support group made up of six ladies who are my soul sisters. We have been meeting for over twelve years. The group is a gift. Each of us is allowed to be totally “Velveteen Rabbit” real with each other, which is rare.

I knew I must be a little out of kilter and not myself when after all of their childlike glee of happiness over the snow had been expressed. I said that I'd watched it from the guesthouse and that it reminded me of frozen tears and the house reminded me of the scripture about the whitewashed sepulcher with dead bones inside. Wow! How morbid! Was I ever hurting or what? They listened. They allowed. That was all I needed at the time. Do you have such a blessed group?

So, yes! I know today we have made progress! I've had an all-out dam-breaking gusher of a bawl. I needed it.

On my return drive home from Birmingham, I called my husband and I said I was better. (I don't know if that precious man even knew I had been worse!) He said that there was another meeting scheduled at 4 with the architects and that they thought they had solved the problems.

They had. The house is going to be more wonderful than ever. "My room" is back and even larger. The chapel is adjacent and there will be no door so that it will always be open, which I like. I pray the "my" will become more of an "our" and even "your" room, Precious Pilgrim, if you're ever in Montgomery. Hospitality, along with having a light hold on it, will make it a grand home. All is gift. All is God's.

After our meeting, I went over to see our two granddaughters. They had just received a present from us - a little yellow playhouse. It's adorable. To visit this playhouse, we had to put on boots. Guess what? It's located in a huge

mud puddle in the backyard just like our guesthouse. We can't seem to get away from that stuff. And that's OK. It will be fine. We all know it. Eventually, it will be fine. As Paul said, "All things work for good for those who love the Lord." We girls had a grand time playing.

Then my husband and I went to dinner. He said he'd heard that men could live in a rat hole, but women needed a nest. He said that he finally understood my reaction better. Duh! Daylight! Dawning! I love this precious man. I thank the Lord for him. Right now I am in the healing mode. Yes, this is good. Now those words of Paul's are becoming real and a part of my reality. All things do work for good for those who love the Lord. Right now, might you need to claim this verse too? Peace. Because of His cross and love, I can carry this little burden called a house fire. He will help you with your burden too for He loves us. Peace.

Lucy