

*Come Holy Spirit  
Use me to Your glory*

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*It's a soft night. A breeze is gently flowing through the trees. The first crickets of the season are cranking up their legs. Daisy, the dog, and I are sitting outside on the kitchen steps waiting for family members to arrive. This is as far as I've been allowed to venture out for the past week. I'm homebound because I have pneumonia.*

*I can tell I'm finally getting better. Hopefully, by Friday I'll be allowed out and back to real life. I'm weak as a kitten. As I gradually grew sicker, I correspondingly went slower. This slowness wasn't all bad, for I began noticing marvelous things, which I must previously have been missing. I began to take morning strolls instead of walking at my usual marathon race pace. As a result, I've been keenly aware of nature's beauty and more cognizant of the lovebirds singing their songs -- night and day.*

*This has been the most unusual season I've ever experienced. I'd have to say it's been a "soft night" time. By soft night, I mean it hasn't been as heavy as "a dark night of the soul" to use St. John of the Cross' term. It hasn't been a desolate, desert time or a black hole-type time. I know because I've experienced such after the deaths of loved ones. This has been different. It's been a soft night - a light dark -- an expansive gray time. Let me try to explain.*

*First, I need the backdrop of this four-week illness, the first and fourth weeks spent homebound. This pulled-in, pulled-down, slowed-down time made me even more aware of the goings on around me. Here are some examples:*

*During this season the Lord greatly blessed my life by allowing me to meet and spend quality time with two extraordinary ladies. They both are dealing with big time heavy situations, ones which might put some under or seem unbearable. One has a son who has been in a coma for two years. The other has a mother with Alzheimer's disease. Both special loved ones live at home. The atmospheres could have been heavy, oppressive, stifling, hopeless. They weren't. These women and their homes reflected more strongly than any other I've experienced a warmth and a peace and a deep joy. A deep joy -- isn't that incredible! I thought so at first. I thought, "Boy, I don't think I could handle either of these situations gracefully." But the reality is these two ladies are full of grace, and this glorious gift abundantly overflows into their homes and effervescently bubbles forth, touching everyone they encounter. I thank the dear Lord for allowing these two ladies into my life. It was a soft night -- a light dark -- an expansive gray time.*

*During this season, my daughter-in-law's sister had a stroke. She's six months pregnant. She and the baby are both doing fine now. During the pins-and-needles hospital stay, it was a soft night -- a light dark -- an expansive gray time.*

*During this season, acres upon acres of the woods at the lake burned. Violets are now popping up among the ashes. It was a soft night -- a light dark -- an expansive gray time.*

*During this season, a tornado hit a church in north Alabama as children were preparing for a pageant. Many were killed. A baby was found safe in the bottom drawer of a chest. She had miraculously been flown through the air and landed unharmed in this safe haven. It was a soft night -- a light dark -- an expansive gray time.*

*During this season a niece was born with a rare respiratory infection. She spent ten days in intensive care, but is now at home and doing fine. It was a soft night -- a light dark -- an expansive gray time.*

*I'm not, Pilgrim, trying to get you depressed. Similar happenings are occurring hourly. They are part of our human condition. We can daily read the newspapers or watch CNN and fill our minds with almost identical situations and circumstances. It's just that the ones that I'm reporting to you seem to have occurred in closer proximity to me than usual and all during this season.*

*You might wonder at my refrain and why I add the positive word to each rather negative one -- the soft to the night, the light to the dark, the expansive to the gray. Well, so often it's when we're experiencing the valleys or the plains, rather than mountaintops that our focus is fine-tuned and our faith is tested. Down or flat times aren't necessarily*

*negative times, but on reflection are often when we experience real growth spurts. It is often when our vision is limited and our room is barred and the doors are shut by either external or internal situations that the real relationships between us and our Lord become apparent. Who is in that room with you when you're quarantined or housebound or feeling isolated or cut off? Oh, is this an alone or scary picture I'm painting? I'm smiling as I write this paragraph, so please don't let it be too heavy on you.*

*A scene from John's gospel comes to mind. It seems appropriate. It's right after the Resurrection in Chapter 20. Mary Magdalene had gone in the early morning hours to our Lord's tomb. She wanted to correctly prepare His body, for it had been taken down from the cross and disposed of with such haste because the Sabbath was about to begin. It was all she could do. It was the least she could do. The image of her Lord's crucifixion had been seared into her brain. It had been the worst of all deaths, even more than if it had been her very own. She couldn't get that gory picture out of her mind. How could she continue to live without her Lord? He who had brought her back into life by forgiving her of her sins. How could she, who felt as if she had been reborn, made new, made fresh, made clean by Him - how could she live without her Lord if He were not alive? Oh, and as if that crucifixion wasn't heinous and horrible enough, they also had to add the stripping and the whipping and the piercing and the crowning*

*with thorns. How could they have desecrated Him so? She had to at least prepare the body properly, so she went to the tomb.*

*The stone was rolled away. She ran and told Simon and John. They ran and found the tomb empty. John says in his gospel he saw and believed, but then in the next sentence he says, "they didn't understand the scripture." John 20:9. It says he and Simon left and went to their own homes.*

*Mary stayed and saw the Resurrected Christ. She was told by her Lord to go and tell the disciples what she had seen and heard. This she did, but not to a receptive audience. They were huddled together behind closed doors and scared. Their world seemed to be closing in on them. All hope seemed to have died. That room must have been absolutely stifling from the fear emanating from those seemingly lost souls. So much so that when Mary gave them the good news, they couldn't receive it. Their reception and perceptions must have been so hopelessly dark and shut down that they couldn't even comprehend what Mary was telling them. "He's alive! He's alive!" fell on deaf ears and frozen hearts—frozen by their fear of having been abandoned. Never abandoned!*

*For then—even though the door was shut, just as their minds were—even though the door was locked, just as their minds were, Jesus came into that gray, dark night of a room. He was present once more. It was His presence that made that night "soft"—that dark "light"—that gray "expansive." It was expansive so that their world could never close in on them*

*again—never--even under trials--even under persecutions—  
even under executions. Their world would not ever be dark  
again, for their Lord and Savior was alive. This truth is also  
our truth. Our Lord and Savior lives!*

*As I said, Pilgrim, this season of illness has been a soft  
night—light dark—expansive gray time. I was homebound but  
received a glorious house call. Thank you, Lord. Our Savior  
lives and He reigns.*

*I am your sister in Christ,  
Lucy*