

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

I wish you were sitting across from me right now and we were just enjoying each other's company. I'd listen and learn about your unique life with the Lord. In these daily love letters, you've heard much about my life - there are ups and downs and roundabouts. There are joys and giggles and some sadness and tears. It's a mixed bag, like all of our lives, but the good news is that there is always Jesus making the journey with each one of us.

Today you'll be hearing that I'm a tertiary. A what? You'll find out in this imaginary conversation we'll be having together. I included it for this is part of who I am, but also I believe it's so important that we let no terms or labels divide Christ's body. That must grieve the Holy Spirit, who I think is daily knocking down barriers and calling the church of Christ together in love. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12: "The body is a unit. Though it is made up of many parts and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ, so we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body. And he goes on in verse 27 and says, "Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it." Isn't that good news? So here goes today's imaginary conversation.

"It's A Call, Y'all"

(An Imaginary Conversation)

"It's a call, y'all."

"What's a call?"

"Being a Tertiary."

"What's a Tertiary?"

"It's being a member of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis."

"What's the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis?"

"It's a religious order consisting of men and women, married or single, clergy or laity, who, though following the ordinary professions of life, are called to dedication through lifelong discipline and vow."

"Gosh, that sounds heavy."

"Heavy? Oh, heavens no, but humbling, yes. We're no big deal. To quote a fellow Alabama Tertiary, Lou Willie, 'We are to be the humus of the church.'"

"Humus? You mean dirt-like?"

"Why, yes, if you like, humus - humble - humor - happy. Oh, dear, here I go with words. Please forgive me. Some of us have a tendency to let our imaginations go. We can't help it. We see the glory of our Lord everywhere, even in words. Why, give us a bird or a baby or a blossom or a butterfly (oh, here I go again) and we're off on a dance with our Lord."

"The whole thing sounds rather 'Catholic' to me."

“Well, I guess it is in the big sense of the word, the ‘Holy Catholic Church’ sense that we declare our belief in every time we say the Creed.”

“Are you sure this is an approved activity? I’ve never heard of such.”

“Why, yes, we are approved. In fact, we are a worldwide religious community of the Anglican Communion. There are over 2,500 members of which about 550 are in the American Province and there are also Third Order non-denominational Franciscans and Roman Catholic Third Order Franciscans.”

“I see. Well, what’s the purpose?”

“We have three aims. First, to make our Lord known and loved everywhere. Second, to spread the spirit of love and unity within the family of God. And, third, to live simply.”

“Well, those sound pretty reasonable. Good goals for any Christian.”

“Yes, I agree. We try to serve our Lord in three ways: by prayer, by study, and by work.”

“Don’t we all?”

“Of course we do. It’s just that some of us need a little bit more structure. You see, each Tertiary has a Rule of Life that he or she tries to follow.”

“A what?”

“A Rule of Life. Each Franciscan Tertiary writes his or her own Rule of Life with approval. We, of course, have guidelines and there are nine areas that must be covered. They are: Holy

Communion, Penitence, Personal Prayer, Self Denial, Retreat, Study, Simplicity, Work, and Obedience.”

“Well, who checks on you? Do you get a grade or something?”

“No, no grade. It's a community, a fellowship, a family of like-minded people, soulmates. We are joined in love by Christ and Francis. I have to smile to myself as I picture all the tertiaries I've met thus far. Big ones, little ones, short ones, tall ones, funny, sunny, happy ones, slow, low, humble ones, some purple, green, orange, and blue. Does this sound like a description of you?”

“What?”

“Oh, excuse me. I'll get back on track and prose. The point I was trying to make is that the order is made up of a gloriously diverse group. The thing that bonds us together is that we each feel called to try to follow our Lord Jesus Christ in a particular way, one as close to the way of our patron Francis of Assisi as possible. Of course, we all fail. That's part of the fun of it. By realizing we fall short every single day of our lives, it helps us to function lowly. We like to skip and sing and laugh joyfully through life, not out of ignorance or isolation, but because we know who we are, Christ's own - but as I said, we are re no big deal. There are inquirers, postulants, novices, and professed.”

“What do these titles mean?”

“An inquirer is someone who’s just asking questions. They want to know more about the Order. A Postulant is the first stage of testing your Call. This period lasts for at least six months. You write a monthly report to an assigned counselor who helps you with your Rule. You also have a Spiritual Director of your own choosing who helps you along the way. Then if you choose to go on and all the lights are green, you become a Novice for at least two years. The monthly reports continue along with spiritual direction. There’s no winning or losing. It’s not a pass/fail situation. It’s a Call.

If it’s real and this Franciscan world is the right avenue for you, the call seems to grow stronger and stronger, at least that has been my experience. It’s been like coming home. I am a Franciscan. I’ve always been a Franciscan, even before I knew there was such a thing. It’s been a precious, precious gift to me from the Lord. It’s a choice. I could still let the gift go at any moment.

The last stage is becoming Professed. That is when you take your life Vow. You are vowing to try, with the Grace of God, to hold on to this gift, this Call, for the rest of your life. You still yearly renew and live your Rule of Life, and are always under a Spiritual Director and report quarterly to your Convocation’s Chaplain.”

“I see. That’s a lot to consider.”

“I agree. I don’t know if this world is for you - that has to be your call - rather it has to be a particular ‘Call’ our Lord

Jesus is giving you. And, as I said, we are no big deal. We are the humus in the Church. I just thought you ought to know about us. Maybe you're like me and have been one as long as you can remember, but just didn't know your name: Christian - Franciscan - tertiary - and in Alabama, we're called God's Joyful Fools."

"Pax et Bonum (à la St. Francis), which means Peace and All Good."

*I am your sister in Christ,
Lucy*