

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your Glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

"Tossing and turning, turning and tossing. I tossed and I turned all night. I kicked the blankets on the floor..."

I wish I could remember all the words of this early 60's hit, for it applies to last night's sleep. "Bong!" I'm up. My internal alarm clock has gone off. I'm on the floor in the bathroom, sitting Indian style, writing with a hotel pen on a yellow pad to my precious pilgrim friend.

Today I want to add a thought concerning those images and icons I mentioned in your last letter. Watch out that they don't become idols, but are always windows that bring you closer to God and man. I had a good little lesson on this very thing last month. My husband I were in New York City for a board meeting. I got up early Sunday morning and walked from our hotel to St. Phillips Cathedral. It was weird walking a deserted Fifth Avenue. The only occupants were a few street people asleep against buildings near steam vents. Wow! That heavy weight of a morning scene was heightened by the feeling of the dawning sun having a hard struggle to try and show itself between those huge skyscrapers. I'd get just a little sliver of a glimpse of light at each corner.

Then I entered the gorgeous church with its ornate stone-carved altar and heavenly, blue stained-glass window. It was almost empty, just as I had found it the day before when I'd

make a quick pass through. It was then that I had noticed for the first time their two huge icons in either corner of the front. One was of Christ. The other was of the Madonna and Child. It was there, on the second one, that I lingered on Saturday, and it was there to which I was drawn on Sunday. This particular depiction of the Mother and Child has become an especially meaningful one to me. It is of baby Jesus tenderly caressing His mother's cheek. Two summers ago on a European trip, this representation seemed to keep showing up wherever I went. It was over my bed in Rome, over a castle entrance in the Czech Republic, in a book at my sister-in-law's converted barn in England, in the chapel at Keble College in Oxford.

When I arrived at the apex of this trip, a convent in England to make a four-day silent retreat, guess what was the only image in their tiny guesthouse chapel? You've got it. Mary with the Babe tenderly touching His mama's cheek. I'm a little dense, but I did realize there must be more to the story and the Lord must be wanting me to ponder this reoccurring picture so I spent most of those four days silently meditating on that image. Sometimes in my imagination, I was the mama, sometimes the Baby - always the message was one of love. In any position, scenario, situation, prayer, or pondering, I mentally played with that image, and it seemed that always its secret, its gift was the same - "I love you. I love you." Wow! That is so hard to accept from the Lord. Even today - this day - this moment "I love you." The Lord is continually declaring, "I

love you.” “But Lord, let me love You. You’re lovable. You’re deserving. Let’s just let me love You right now and leave it at that. I’ll start accepting Your love a little later when I’m more sin-free and have gotten my act more together.” Wrong... Speak about trying to control, trying to distance myself, close doors, bar windows. Lord, forgive.

Anyway, back to New York City and St. Phillips. I was thrilled to see one more rendition of this theme and larger than I’d ever seen depicted. It is this theme and this theme only that I could spend my whole life trying to comprehend, for it is only in taking on and accepting His love that all other love flows.

After the service, I held back and waited so I could talk to the minister about this extraordinary icon. I asked if he knew its origin or history or if there were any fliers to tell me more. I’m sure he could sense my greedy enthusiasm for knowledge. He quickly but politely said, “No.” Then after a noted pause and my not leaving, he said sheepishly with a grin, “Well, if you must know, one of the ministers bought it on sale in the bookstore at B. Altman’s Department Store in New York City.” On sale! I smiled back and said, “Thank you.” Yes! Thank You, Lord! My icon-loving balloon was popped. His statement brought me back to what was ultimately important, which is never the symbol or the icon, but rather the message or truth it is trying to portray. I don’t think Jesus or Mother Mary would have stayed for long in that almost empty church, but would

have been out combing the streets, helping those poor, tired, weary, forlorn, broken people outside. "But some might have diseases, could have been HIV positive, been drug addicts or crazy." So? Lord, forgive when our beautiful buildings, built to Your glory aren't filled with your beloved ones in all sorts and conditions.

My friend, the Reverend Bill King, says churches are always to be places of hospitality and safe havens. Empty with icons doesn't quite fill the bill. Might you have some symbols and icons that need to be replaced by real, live people? I will always love the caressing icon, but I will try my best to view it in the right Light - our Lord's loving Light that it continually reaches out to us and others. We are to do the same.

Peace, precious pilgrim. My husband awakes. He's precious too. We all are, you know, because of the love of Jesus. This day may we perceive His love to a deeper level and may all of our actions flow out of that reality so that we can go forth more strongly in His love to do His work, even if it's in the streets like New York City. Mark records Jesus' great commission in chapter 16, verse 15. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." That is what we are each commanded to do, but before we go off we'd better be sure of and full of His love. That's the only way to be equipped and empowered for the journey. Now here we go into the streets of Miami. I'm ready for my little soul's tank is full - full of our

*Lord's love. Have a blessed day. Be sure to top off your tank too
- with that ever-flowing fuel - God's love. Peace.*

I am your beloved sister in Christ,

Lucy