

*Come Holy Spirit  
Use me to Your glory*

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*I'm still on a silent retreat at St. Mary's Convent in  
Freeland, England. This is the last night of my three-day stay.  
These Poor Clares nuns are Anglican, Franciscan  
contemplative cloistered sisters. They very seldom, if ever, leave  
this spot. They are self-supported along with being self-  
contained.*

*Their reason for being, their calling, is to pray. They run  
the guesthouse, where they accept donations rather than a  
fixed fee. They also have a tiny gift shop. It has a good  
selection of books and homemade items. There are silk-  
screened cards, crocheted whatnots, free-range eggs, jellies,  
jams and potpourri. There is no waste here. Used tea bags  
along with food scraps go into the compost for fertilizer.  
Furniture is obviously secondhand and recovered with  
donated fabrics. Everything is clean, sturdy, and sensible.*

*The pièce de resistance of the guesthouse is the backyard  
garden. This visit, I am so fortunate, I have the best room in  
the house, not because of the inside accommodations, for they  
are the same - single bed, desk, chair, sink - but the exterior  
view. This room has a bay window, which overlooks the  
garden.*

*In the summer, the flowers are breathtakingly beautiful.  
The grass is immaculately groomed. Any time the sun would*

*peak out of the clouds, we guests would rush quickly to the back closet that holds folded-down lawn chairs and go perch under a tree and feast on the fragrant air and gaze on its flowering beauty.*

*Last summer my room's view was over the clothesline and garbage cans. The summer before, I had the tiniest room with the tiniest window in the house. I'm not complaining. It's just the facts. And this year, I lucked out and got the room with the view, this winter view, the stark, bleak, windows rattling view. The gorgeous, big old trees are stripped leafless. The smaller, wispiest trees and bushes are naked.*

*It's 5:30 PM. The gray winter sky is darkening into night. The whole scene is like a black etching. Shadows. Lines. Stillness. There is a rhythmic swaying of the leafless trees. There are a few unmovable evergreens, but it is the bare trees that continue to hold my attention. England has the most incredible weather, ever-changing from one moment to the next. I don't remember a more miserable winter's day than yesterday. It literally was so bad that I was concerned that the bay window might blow right in from the gale force wind and fierce rains.*

*All of a sudden, much to my surprise and delight, I heard a bird singing - not just a little "chirp, chirp" plea for help, but a true live song. He was just having a grand old time of it. I couldn't believe my ears! I found myself laughing out loud with glee, of course very quietly, so as not to disturb anyone*

*else. Can you imagine? I bet all the other birds were saying to themselves, "There goes that blasted fool again." Maybe he had seen the old Gene Kelly movie, "Singing in the Rain." All I know is that his tune changed my whole outlook on the day.*

*Driving storms and howling winds and bare-boned gardens are perfect bay window scenes for reflective retreat time. It is at such times that you can ask questions like, "Who are you, Lord Jesus? And who am I, a miserable sinner?" Such questions are good, especially during retreats.*

*"I am nothing but by the grace of God." That is my little heart's phrase that I've been living with for years. It might sound a little dreary, but actually, it brings me great joy.*

*"Nothingness" is quite light, quite freeing. For me, everything depends on God's grace. It's not that I'm not responsible for my own actions, but all I know is that left on my own, I'll invariably muck things up. There is not one sin I'm not capable of committing. That's just part of my fallen humanness - but by the grace of God, all things can be made right.*

*A reflective retreat is a time for getting down to basics - pruning away the dead wood, stripping away any unnecessary weeds that might later choke. You're to take a real hard look at yourself, not alone, but with the companionship of the Holy Spirit. He is the Physician, the Gardener, the Pruner, and all is done with love. We want our little tiny flower of a soul to be able to bloom. Retreats help in the process.*

*"Singing in the Rain." Thanks, Mr. Bird, I needed that. It helped this winter pruning session not to be too heavy, and it's not supposed to - for we are loved by Love.*

*When I arrived at the convent, I was unloading my tote bag from the rental car and my sister-in-law's friend, Janet, laughingly said, "You're not, Lucy, going to take the spa bag to the convent with you?" "Why, yes." She found that amusing, but that's me and my life. One of the important aspects of this exercise is the integration of this mixed-up self called Lucy, who goes to spas and convents; who loves frumpy and fashionable; who is an adult and a child; who likes to wear high heels and gold roller skates; who right now is barefooted with pink satin PJs and pink rollers; who is writing on a yellow pad in front of an icon of the Lord Jesus and Mary and wearing rhinestone magnifying glasses. I'm a Christian who likes icons and incense and clapping and swaying gospel. I'm trying to become comfortable with all of me instead of an either/or dichotomy.*

*Do you also have some little idiosyncrasies, harmless little quirks that might seem peculiar to others? Forget it. Embrace them. "Be true to your self who the Lord is calling you to be" as a preacher advised me.*

*Remember Peter, when he had just been forgiven by our Lord Jesus for betraying him three times? It's John 21:15-17. Our Lord Jesus said, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others do?"*

*"Yes, Lord," he answered, "You know that I love you."*

*Jesus said to him, "Take care of my lambs."*

*A second time Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"*

*"Yes, Lord," he answered, "You know that I love you."*

*Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep."*

*A third time Jesus said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"*

*Peter became sad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" And so he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; You know that I love you!"*

*Jesus said to him, "Take care of my sheep!"*

*I'm sure Peter's eyes and heart and mind were totally fixed on his risen Lord. But the very instant the balm of forgiveness had been applied - the next statement by Peter was, "What about John?" He wanted to know John's future, not his own. Oh, that reaction is so human. We're curious about others and their walks, but our eyes are to be continually on the Lord. We are to be true to the Calling that He is calling us individually to answer. We're to answer that Call and no one else's. If it happens to be a mixed bag, a mixed-up kaleidoscope like I am, then don't fight it, as I have for years, but embrace it.*

*Yes, I do highly recommend taking a spa bag to a convent. It's great for carrying toiletries to the communal bathroom and groceries at the convenience store if you have to*

*pick those up. And it's perfect to carry your bible and yellow writing pad. Peace.*

*I am your mixed-up bag sister in Christ,*

*Lucy*