

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

*I'm writing to you from my sister-in-law's converted
Cotswolds barn in Taynton, England.*

*Things are going by so fast, I can't keep up. It's twenty
minutes until twelve and way past my bedtime, but I do want
to try and write to you each day. My sister-in-law Kay and her
friend Janet picked me up yesterday after the noonday service
at the Convent where I've been on a three-day silent retreat. I
gave Sister Michaela, my retreatant director, a big hug and
kiss goodbye. Hopefully, I'll be back in May. It's strange. It's
never a clingy hug hello or a clingy hug goodbye. As I
mentioned earlier, she is a gift. There is no other way of
explaining how an Aussie nun and an Alabamian got
together. She reminds me of my wonderful grandmother, not
in looks, but in her encouraging disposition. She has a grand
sense of humor. Somehow her veil is always just a little
crooked. We laugh together as if we were school chums. She
shares some of her life story and poetry. I share some of mine.
It's just nice and comfortable. Both of our goals are the same,
to belong totally to the Lord. She's a lot farther along on the
journey. Our lives are connected on this side and I know will
be on the next. Quietly I can whisper to you that I love her and
I know she loves me. As I said, she is a gift.*

Anyway, Kay and Janet picked me up. We went to one of

our favorite restaurants in the village of Woodstock for lunch. Then Janet and I were dropped off in Burford. We individually ran into our favorite haunts and individually walked back to the Barn, which is a mile and a half away. The marvelous dance of the Cotswolds is that you are allowed to come together and then to go off on your own and then to come together again. Part of my pilgrimage to this place, and I will have to call it a pilgrimage, is going to St. John the Baptist Church in Burford. It's called the Cotswolds Cathedral. It is here that I came every morning for two weeks during morning prayer with the Vicar Tingle. It is here that I've come to Holy Communion during the week in their Chapel of St. Mary's. I think of the mature ladies with sensible shoes kneeling on weekdays, praying all over the world.

I also popped in and out of the stores on the hilly main street and then started my favorite walk -- the one-and-a-half-mile trek from Burford to Taynton and the Barn. Each year I have walked this route almost daily. Half of it is along a path, where I've been chased by a bull, and the rest is along an almost single-lane road. The sights are sheep, green fields, rabbits, pheasant, stone walls, woven hedgerows, distant streams and wildflowers. It's up and down and around and about and I love it. My favorite part is when you're almost at the Barn. There's a signpost saying Taynton and the word SLOW written on the pavement. It is at this point that the world seems to change and take on a whole new rhythm.

SLOW. There are no stores in Taynton, only residents, about sixty. Tonight at a neighbor's reception, I learned that jokingly there is an upper Taynton and a lower Taynton.

There is a wonderful Norman church whose bell must have the slowest gong in existence. Usually I fall asleep while waiting to count the next chime. There's a town "fete" every other year to support the church. You can walk the whole town within five minutes.

So yesterday we "did" Taynton. It was delightful. There were seven of us, and that was a capacity crowd.

Today Janet and I went to Oxford. Kay stayed home fighting off a cold. Janet, who had never driven in England, did fabulously. Neither driving on the wrong side of the road nor changing gears seemed to daunt her. On arrival, we split up as before. I went to my favorite haunts -- Blackwell's Bookstore and some secondhand bookstores. I ate a picnic in my favorite park, which is across from Keble College, just sitting and thinking and praying and absorbing this wonderful place.

Then we were off and running back to the Barn, a quick freshening-up, and off again in the backdoor neighbors. Kay was still under the weather. Although Janet and I would have loved to have crawled into our PJ's and watched TV in front of the fire, we did our duty and dressed -- high heels, stockings and all, to go to tonight's soiree. I'm so glad we went. It was a delightful occasion. The flowers and the food and the drinks

and the company were all grand.

The house was the manor house to the Barn and is quite fabulous in an understated, tastefully English way. What really impressed me was not the antiques or china (although I did want to turn my plate over and see what pattern it was, but I knew better, thanks Mama), but the marvelous host and hostess and how gracious they were. That's what impressed me. There were eight of us of different ages, stages, and backgrounds. We couldn't have gathered a more diverse group. Our host and hostess mixed and matched, mingled and passed hors d'oeuvres and champagne, and constantly checked on every one of us -- but in a slow, attentive way, not at a frantic pace. Our hostess came up to me at one point and asked if we might change seats, because she knew the gentleman next to her and I would enjoy talking. We did. And I did. This elderly artist could not have been more interesting. I happened to have bought one of his flower watercolors for a gift last year. He had since suffered a stroke and a heart attack. I did enjoy our conversation.

It was marvelous to see true hospitality at work. We all left feeling as if the party had been planned just for us. We each felt like the guest of honor -- a marvelous care-gift had been given.

On arriving home, we did get to put on our PJ's and wrap up in quilts before the fire and have bean soup and crackers and cheese and olives and celery and bread and lemon curd

(that's one of the advantages of a girls' spend-the-night party - you can eat weird stuff and it's OK). We watched the movie "Emma," and just had a comfortable, warm, cozy old time of it. Life is good. Life is grand. I know how blessed I am.

I don't want to forget the gracious gift of hospitality tonight that was given by slight acquaintances, given as if we were honored guests. Janet and I were put on the invitation list strictly because of Kay, but you would never have known. To be treated with such warmth made our later fireside chat at the Barn even more invitingly close. True hospitality. May I never forget experiencing it, and I pray that the Lord will allow me to cultivate such a sincere graciousness towards all people.

Paul says in Romans 12:13 -- Practice hospitality. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:9 -- Offer hospitality. John says in 3 John 1: 8 - Show hospitality. For me, the most incredible gift of hospitality, God's gift of hospitality and welcome is portrayed in the Lord's parable of the prodigal son. My Precious Pilgrim, we are to cultivate the spirit of Christian hospitality. We are to greet one another with a kiss of kindness, reflecting by God's grace the equality of love, love for all that our Lord God has for all. Of course, I fail often. Usually, when mentally role-playing the prodigal son, I feel most comfortable playing the prodigal or the eldest son. I do realize, however, as Christ's own, He is calling us to be more like Him and like that welcoming father. Ah, by His grace, by His grace may Christian

hospitality come forth in this broken world.

I am, with love,

your sister in Christ,

Lucy