

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

"And a partridge in a pear tree." Well, not exactly, but almost. It's been another blustery, cold, rainy day in merry old England. Kay, my sister-in-law, is still under the weather with a cold. Janet and I ventured out once more -- this time in search of greeting cards in Burford.

Betty, the across-the-street neighbor, earlier took on the challenging job of trying to teach me how to knit. Len, her husband, was kind enough to hold the yarn between his arms so that I could roll this gorgeous multicolored yarn into a ball. My tension on the yarn loosened up a bit and I might even be getting the knack of it.

This dear couple took us under their wings from day one. They live in a quaint 17th century thatched cottage. We've had delightful visits in front of their living room fireplace on cold days and leisurely afternoon teas in their fabulous back garden in the summers. They've entertained both friends and family visitors and introduced us to many of the natives. Always one of the highlights of a Taynton trip is visiting Betty and Len.

They have two lop-eared rabbits and two guinea pigs that play together in the backyard on sunny days, along with various wild birds who come for tea on sunny afternoons. Each bird has a name and is known personally by Betty. Dr.

Doolittle would feel quite at home talking to these animals and their keepers. Len is in his spry eighties and Betty is in her spry seventies. Amazing, both are amazing.

Back to today's activity. Janet and I tried to be quiet as mice when we returned from our outing. The Barn is still like a barn in that there is little privacy. The three bedrooms on the second floor are all balcony rooms - all open out and overhang the living room. You can be anywhere in the Barn and carry on a conversation with another person, wherever they may be. It's like living on an ancient stage, like a tiny Globe Theater. Two-foot thick stone walls are on the outside. Spiral wooden steps are at either end of the house. A fireplace is at the far end. A large picture window is in the living room, directly across from the kitchen alcove and doorway. The rule in the Cotswolds about converted barns is that you have to keep the barn opening apparent, thus the wonderfully large glass window. So, whatever is going on weather-wise outside, you really get a sense of it inside. In England, the weather is constantly changing. This visit has mainly been rain and wind and snowdrops and crocuses and best of all are the pheasants nested in an apple tree right outside of Kay's bedroom window. I had heard about them from both Kay and Janet, but had not seen them myself. I insisted if they saw them today, which is my last day here, to please let me know.

Well, bless her soul, Kay, even sick, called me to come look for she had been awakened out of a sound sleep by the cock's

crowling. I tiptoed up the steps into her room and peeked out her bedroom window. Much to my delight, there in the tree was not one, but four pheasants roosting - a male and three females.

I knew this tree well. It is one of the two ancient apple trees, which over time have been connected by vines. They have formed a natural canopy. In the summer, one of our most delightful dinners had been underneath this natural arbor. Now, from this new perspective of looking down upon it in the winter time, it seems to have become a giant nest, holding these four huge birds comfortably. They seem to have plenty of room. The wind continues to howl. The rain continues to beat against the window panes. And there they sit, snug as a bug in a rug, these four gigantic, gorgeous birds.

With the vision of wonderment still fresh in my mind, I braved the elements and walked to Taynton's tiny church for the 6 PM evening service. There is worship there each Sunday, but you must check the posted church bulletin for time and type of service. The minister is acting priest for three surrounding churches, so it's always a surprise and a delight to find out what's happening on a given Sunday.

I've spent many a reflective time in this worn space. It's built of the famous honey-colored Taynton stone quarried rocks right outside of the village. I love to come here with the village, but I also love to come here alone and sing. In this high-vaulted space, the acoustics are marvelous. I love to stroll

in the surrounding yard among the mature yew trees and ancient gravestones. I was delighted once when I discovered a tiny hidden stream, part of the Wind Rush, gently meandering through the property's edge.

Once we had the joy of borrowing the tower's key from the gentleman whose responsibility it is to weekly wind the clock and bells. We climbed these claustrophobically steep, dark, winding stone stairs onto the roof. It was one of the most glorious breathtaking views I've ever experienced. It was a patchwork of various colors of green and yellows, made up of Cotswold villages and fields. Fantastic.

Last year, as part of the town's fete, the ladies of the village decorated the church with a profusion of flowers. It was made fit for the Queen herself to visit. The arrangements were placed in every conceivable nook and cranny, popping out joyfully as if nosegays of adoration. Need I say more? The pleasant memories just seem to flood my imagination.

But what I want to mention was last night's service. There were more people than usual. I'd say almost half the village had turned out on this miserable night. Even the vicar made a comment on his surprise and delight at the numbers. We worshipped. We sang. We prayed. We heard a meaningful homily. After the dismissal, we genteelly greeted each other, as only the English know how to do so quietly. Each of us prepared ourselves to brave the elements once more. It was pitch black dark and I'd forgotten my umbrella and

flashlight. Without hesitation, I took off my coat, held it over my head, and thus tented; I blindly guessed my way home. All those previous visits paid off and I made it safely back to the Barn.

We spent my last night in front of a glowing fire chatting and eating and drinking and watching a little "telly." It was a perfect ending to a perfect week.

Kay had turned the outside backyard spotlight on for a brief time so that we could check once more on our fine-feathered friends. They were happily ensconced in this woven mansion in the sky, seemingly unaware of the whirling, swirling dervish storm of the night. They were at peace.

We are also to be at peace no matter what our circumstances. This reality is what the essence of this visit to the convent and the Barn and the church are about. I know in the very core of my being, that all is eternally well. It just helps immensely to pull away; not actually escape, but rather to draw apart as our Lord often did. It helps to get a more objective, fresher look on the world around you. The situations and the circumstances at home are probably still the same. After our house fire our yard is still a mud hole and our home is still a burned-out shell. However, I'm more equipped now to get my eyes off that mess onto my important things like our Father in Heaven, our family, our friends and to be once more a Kingdom dweller, no matter the external circumstances.

Peace, precious Pilgrim. May each one of us feather our nest with the comforting reality that we are ever resting in the arms of Jesus.

Your sister in Christ,

Lucy