

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

I'm at the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach with my husband. It has been a delightful day. He has gone to a meeting and we plan to play together tonight and tomorrow.

This morning I went out on the beach and rented one of those lounge chairs with a canvas top, so as not to get too much sun. Then I wrote a report to my Third Order Franciscan Counselor. I let her know how I was doing on living my "Rule of Life." I really didn't want to get into this, but here I am.

What is a Rule of Life all about? Having a Rule of Life is like having guidelines, boundaries to help you walk with Christ. It is a particular calling to a particular way of life. Mine just happens to be in the way of St. Francis of Assisi. I'm no big deal. It's no big deal. It's just a calling. We Protestants don't hear about religious orders very often; that's why I guess I keep mentioning it. I hope by hearing, you'll become more comfortable with the idea, and who knows, you might be one too. You might be like me. I've always been a Franciscan; I just didn't know the name.

There have been Third Order Franciscans who are laity, everyday people living everyday lives, for over eight hundred years, ever since St. Francis had followers. He realized from the beginning everyone wasn't called to take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. There were people who needed to stay

just where they were, as wives, as husbands, as mothers, as fathers, and in various professions, but were called to live in the spirit of these vows. The three aims of the Third Order are: one, to make our Lord known and loved everywhere; two, to spread the spirit of love and unity within the family of God; and three, to live simply. We try to serve our Lord by three ways. First, prayer; second, study and third, by work. There are nine areas of our rule. One is Holy Communion, then penance, personal prayer, self-denial, retreat, study, simplicity of living, work, and obedience.

An image which might help was one of today's sights at the beach. It was really windy. The surf was up. The beach was crowded with people, but very few were venturing out into the strong surf. Occasionally, I'd hear whistles blown by the lifeguards. At first I thought, "I wonder if that means there's a shark around," and I bet I wasn't the only one thinking of Jaws. Most everyone would stop what they were doing, whether in the water or out, and watch. The swimmer nearest to the lifeguard would move in closer or even get out of the water and come talk to the lifeguard.

This happened two or three times and, of course, my curiosity finally got the best of me. So I went to buy something to drink and I casually meandered over to the lifeguard's chair and asked what the whistling was all about.

He said that there was a strong undertow and rip tide today and he used the whistle as a warning signal. I asked

why he had whistled at an elderly man who was only in knee-deep water and not at the swimmers to his right, who were farther out in the water. Did it have anything to do with his age? He said, "No. It had to do with the rip tide and undertow. The man was too close to the jetty on the left. If caught by these strong water forces, he would be pulled into them and get badly cut on the sharp coral."

There were buoyed ropes marking off the swimming area. I asked if they checked the water conditions daily and moved the ropes around depending on the swimming conditions? He answered, "No" to the ropes and "Yes" to the checking of conditions. He said, "The ropes stay where they are, we just have to adjust the people." Again, the ropes stay where they are, we just have to adjust the people.

I thought that was an interesting quote. We, as Christians, have guidelines, ropes, rules, that help us stay within healthy, danger-free territory, just like swimmers in this safe roped-off water. We have our Father God's rule book, His Bible, and if that's not clear enough, we have His Son's Life and Death and Resurrection and if that's not enough, we have the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. They all help set the guidelines, the safe parameters. Then we have lifeguards, Saints who have gone before who have been in troubled waters, who have survived the turbulence, the storms, the undertows and rip tides. Their lives can help cheer us on like a coach, they encourage us, warn us, teach us, show us the way. Just as

different coaching and teaching styles are more effective on some personalities and not others, that is true with the Saints.

As I've said before, I'm a Franciscan -- not a Benedictine or a Dominican, but a Franciscan. My heart's song to Jesus has been tuned to the way of St. Francis. Do we all need to be in an Order? Of course not. This is not a club, but as I said, a calling. Of course, I could survive this life without responding to this call. We always have the ability to say "No" to God.

I could refuse the gift, and that is how I see it, as a gift -- a wonderful gift to help me get through life, to help me stay focused on the Lord and to grow in Him. My heart's cry is that "I am nothing but by the grace of God." If I am prideful about His call, if it smells of exclusivity, if it narrows the love of God rather than expands it, then it is all a sham, a Pharisaic sham.

And if that be the case, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." Wait. Wait just a minute. That is the case. "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." It is from that point, that humble point, we can accept various gifts from the Lord. Mine just happens to be a particular, and some may call peculiar, call to the Third Order of St. Francis.

I do not know why this letter is so hard for me to write to you. It's been like pulling teeth. I think it has to do with sharing something that is so near and dear to my heart and hoping, praying that my words can give clarity to the mystery of a calling. Wrong! "No way, Jose!" I need to get off this

subject. It's God's job to bring clarity to a call, not mine, I'm just to respond.

I'm just going around and around and it's getting heavier and heavier. I'm wanting your approval, your acceptance, your understanding of this gift. "Bingo!" And up blasts "pride" once more. Lord, forgive.

In this morning's Bible reading, one sentence jumped strongly out at me. It's 1 Corinthians 7:17: "Let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him and in which God has called him." Hmm. I am a Third Order Franciscan. Let's leave it at that. I almost got myself caught in a rip tide! Sorry, but if you hear a "call," check it out. I just don't seem to be willing to give this up, do I?

*I am your boundaried sister in Christ,
Lucy*

Now, what did that lifeguard say? "The ropes stay where they are, we just have to adjust the people." Also, 1 Corinthians 7:17, "Let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him and in which God has called him." Lord, may we be your boundaried people, boundaried by your love. Ahh, what freedom! I think I'm going to go skipping! Peace.