

Precious Pilgrim,

It's 5:30 AM. I'd hoped that I would wake up this early on our last day of this conference at Camp Kanuga in Hendersonville, North Carolina so that I would, could, see the sunrise once more. I had no alarm clock and went to bed at midnight so I was pleasantly surprised that my internal clock went off. I quietly got out of bed, but this is an old cabin and it squeaks and I didn't want to awaken the other four cabin mates.

So here I sit in my bed, hair rollers out, sweater on and top part ready to go, but with my pj's still on the bottom. Even I realize this is not an acceptable outfit to go prancing out into the pre-dawn. After the trial run of testing this old floor, I realized there was no way I could go without disturbing the others. I wish now that I could go back to sleep for the body is still tired, but I'm fighting to stay awake, and to write to you.

My prayer is that I can share some of this retreat's experience with you. If I wait until after our eight-hour drive home, the freshness will have gone, plus I'll need to have moved on to enjoy the homecoming.

If I were allowed to take one theme home with me from this conference, it would be our "woundedness," our universal woundedness. If I were allowed to flesh those words out into an image, it would have to be in a triptych form.

The first picture would be a frieze of Tuesday night's healing service. What I expected was not what occurred. I

should have realized right from the start that it was going to be a different experience than the one or two previous ones I'd attended. Usually, at a designated time, those who want prayers for healing come forward at specific times. Usually, it's just a handful and hardly disruptive. It takes probably five minutes. No big deal. We "healthy" sing or pray while the "sick" get anointed with oil and hands laid on them by the minister. I've never gone forward, for I've always considered myself "healthy," plus I think there probably has been a little pride of "I'm OK."

Well, night before last was different and as I said, I should have realized it right from the start. When we entered the Chapel of Transfiguration, there at the far end was the altar and this conference's familiar picture icon of the Trinity, and on the floor right in front of it, lay an almost full-size wooden cross with a few candles sitting on it. This cross was a new addition to the chapel. As I walked closer, I saw lying on top of that plain dark cross was the cross of San Damiano. It is the crucifix that seemed to speak to St. Francis of Assisi and it told him to "go and rebuild my church," the Lord's church. It is a very powerful image, the Christ represented is one that is alive.

As you can imagine, my senses were beginning to perk up a little - realizing that something different was going to occur this night. I've been to a lot of church services, but none with this set-up.

The service went according to the familiar. The preacher gave a sermon about "woundedness" and how we are all afflicted and that this night we could bring our wounds to the wounded Christ and ask for healing. Internally I thought, "Not me, baby. I'm fine. I'm not going up there, even though it's pretty dark and no one can see who's who. Why, I've got it pretty well together."

Lord, forgive, but that's what was going on in my brain. So, I decided to just be one of the singers and let the others, those others, the ones that were "wounded" go up, and I could use my beautiful voice and just sing. Lord, forgive. Whose voice? The one who gave me? You gave me?

So, that's what happened. People started getting up and going forward. In fact, almost every person, except maybe two or three came forward, including, guess who, little old me. Surprise. Surprise. After a little reflection and conviction by the Holy Spirit, some, just some of my own woundedness came to mind. Thank the dear Lord "all" of my woundedness didn't float up or I probably wouldn't have been able to stand and they would have had to carry me up.

It was a quiet, unsensational, humble, holy moment. Woundedness. Everyone's woundedness. Some might hide their infirmities better than others, but now I realize all, all carry wounds. It's part of our human, fallen condition. Christ wants them. That's too much to comprehend in one kneeling. It will take all of my life, but at least there was a beginning.

The second image that I'd like to freeze and take home in my imaginary triptych occurred last night at "questions and answers" session. The participants of the conference were given the opportunity to go to one of the mikes which had been set up in the aisle and ask seminar presenters questions.

A few people, at first, came forward a little shyly and mainly gave compliments, well-deserved compliments to the both of them. Then, a few more brave souls came forward and asked questions of clarity on some tough scriptural verses that had been used in some of the teachings.

I can't remember all. My mind has absorbed so much in these four days and there have been so many rich experiences. My main impression was at this point, all was going well and as expected, there were good questions and good answers. Then a man came forward. I recognized him, for he had eaten dinner at the same table for one of the meals. I knew a little bit of his story. It was a rich one, as all of our stories are, if we are willing to share them.

I'd been told by one of his friends and admirers that he had suffered a severed spine in a helicopter accident. He had survived two crashes in the Vietnam War without injury, but in another, at home, he had not been so fortunate.

His friend, who also was debilitated, but by Parkinson's Disease, said that this man was a man of great courage and bravery. He was expected to have been bedridden for life, but he does walk, with crutches. This strong giant of a man started

speaking in the microphone. He expressed how last night's healing service had been for him. That he had chosen not to come forward. That he had rationalized to himself that he did not need it and didn't think he believed in it. He said as he sat there and watched as the "wounded" came forward, he realized he was full of pride and just couldn't bring himself to the point of allowing the letting-go and the giving up of control. Then, with tears, asked if he could have hands laid on him.

The Bishop responded in incredible love and said he would be glad at our next service to lay hands on him. There wasn't a dry eye in the place. The man on the crutches walked back to his chair and sat down. His vulnerability had touched each one of us profoundly. He seemed even taller, even braver than before.

The third scene in this triptych frieze that I want to take home and also want to share with you took place at our final service. Everyone came forward to receive Holy Communion, including the man on the crutches. He also received the laying on of hands. Just by chance, the song we were singing was "The Lord of the Dance." And just by chance, the man on the crutches had hands laid on him by a bishop that had been crippled since birth. Just by chance, the man on the crutches was totally surrounded by others, the entire congregation, who also were crippled one way or another since birth. Again, as never before, I realized our human brokenness. There is only

One Healer, One Deep Healer, who wants our wounds. That's why He got onto that cross, in order to receive. It is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's now 6 AM. I soon will be able to move around, for the others will be getting up. I didn't get to see the sunrise this morning. And that's OK. Instead I got to write to you and look out of a window into the dark and gaze upon a lit chapel steeple with a cross -- the Chapel of the Transfiguration.

Ah! The images that float through my brain. May the "trptych of our woundedness" be one that I cherish and remember for the rest of my journey. Wonderful woundedness allows us to come forward and dwell closer to our Christ - and to our brothers and sisters. May we all grow closer to Him and to each other.

*I am your wounded, but healing,
sister in Christ,
Lucy*