

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

I'm in a very precarious position and don't know how long this will last. I'm stretched out on the floor with my elbows propping me up, trying to write to you. I'm spending the night out in the country at the home of my youngest son and his wife. I haven't seen these precious two for a little while, so I called and asked if I could spend the night and get in a good visit, which we have had.

As I suspected, that prone position didn't last for long. It was only from that vantage point in my bedroom that I could see the moon. Now, I'm outside sitting on their front porch. Martha and Jud are watching a movie and their two black labs are keeping me company. Tonight I sought the dark sky for an eclipse of the moon is expected. Can you believe my fortune?

Yes! It has begun, ever, ever so slowly. As I watch and wait, I enjoy the soft sounds of the night. There's an owl, a few tree frogs, crickets and a distant dog's bark. The nearest house is a few miles away. There are no cars or trains or planes down this country dirt road, no ambulance or fire truck or police cars - only the sounds of nature, the soft sounds of nature, the wonderfully refreshing soft sweet sounds of nature.

What would I like to share with you from this day, besides this night's spectacular sky? I guess I'd like to revisit the Palm

Sunday service at our church. It had such a feeling of Easter already about it. The church was packed. The music was wonderful. The sermon was powerful. All aspects replenished my spirit, but what touched me at the deepest level were the giggling children.

On Palm Sunday, we try to have a real live donkey from the zoo outside the church, one like Jesus might have ridden on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As you can imagine, she was the center of attention and was surrounded by children. We have an introductory short service outside called "The Blessing of the Palms" and then process into the church for the rest of the service. We choir members followed behind the cross and the donkey. Our line was in its usual perfect formation. We are good at this, for we process and recess weekly. Palm Sunday, however, is the only time I remember children going beside us giggling and skipping and full of glee. Somehow their joyful response brought the Palm Sunday's reenactment to life as never before. The joy, the excitement, the thrill that must have electrified the air - "Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming." "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord."

We choir members each carried a palm spear. Each parishioner had a palm cross pinned to his or her clothes. Oh yes, we were there back in time in our imaginations celebrating the triumphal entry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. The donkey was left behind at the door

and we continued our march into church with the laughter of the children still energizing the atmosphere.

As I said, all was similar, very much the same as any other Sunday, except when it came for the reading of the Gospel. Instead of the usual format in which the minister comes and stands in the midst of the congregation and reads, a group of parishioners came forward. I noticed they were some of our most active members and leaders. Then they read Mark 14:32-72 and Mark 15:1-47 as if it were a play, for each had been assigned a part.

It starts off powerfully positive as the real Palm Sunday did, and then the long, slow journey home begins. Midway through this scripture, there is a dramatic turn of events. You go from the mountaintop of the palm-waving triumphal entry of Jesus to the rock-bottom reality of Golgotha. Somehow, having our church leaders do the readings made it more humbly heart-piercing. Somehow, when the whole congregation silently stood up halfway through, we also became a part of the reenactment. We could have crucified. We can crucify, often we do crucify our Lord Jesus! Lord, forgive. "Crucify Him. Crucify Him," we stood and said together in unison.

Thank the dear Lord, there is more to the story and we haven't gotten to the good part, that will come at Easter. For now, it is time to draw closer to the cross and remain there for a little while. It's not a comfortable spot. It's not supposed to

be. It's not unbearable, but life changing, rearranging. It's not about self-degradation, but rather, realignment to Christ. The week before Easter is truly a gift. It is a desert time where the focus is piercingly bright. Prayerfully, we are becoming - becoming - becoming more and more, by His grace, like Him. This isn't possible without our spending time at the cross. Of course, it is a daily reality, of dying to self in order that our Resurrected Christ might live more within us. It's just that this week gives us a more consecrated view, a more concentrated view.

It's time to quit your letter. God's peace to you, precious Pilgrim. Grab a chair. The show is about to begin. It is a tough act to follow, but we are called to take up our own individual cross and to try and walk that walk to Golgotha, too. It's heavy, it's hard, but somehow it can become easier and easier if we gaze on Christ - now is the chance. Holy Week begins.

May I end by reading Mark 15:22-39.

And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated Place of a Skull. And they tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it. And they crucified Him and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified Him. And the inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." And they crucified two robbers with Him, one on his right, and one on

his left. And the scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors." And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" And those who were crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him. And when the sixth hour had come, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And when some of the bystanders heard it, they began crying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Precious Pilgrim, may you have a blessed Holy Week.

I am your sister in Christ,

Lucy

