

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*I get claustrophobia. I think it started when I was a teenager. Three of us sneaked into a drive-in movie by hiding in a car trunk. (Please don't tell my mother and I have repented.) The driver wouldn't let us out for a long time, as a joke. Fun and games! Thus, I am stuck today with hating closed-in places. I don't like driving in tunnels and King Tut's exhibit gave me the creeps.*

*There is one profound exception and I do want to tell you about it - the Christian Catacombs. My husband and I were lucky enough to go to Rome last spring. It is the city of churches. We must have visited at least ten. I cannot describe their beauty. Each one trying to express adoration of God more deeply than the other. The windows, the spirals, the altars, the statues, the ceilings, the organs - all the glory! Generation after generation trying to express their love for their immortal, invisible, omnipotent God. Glorious!*

*And then there were the Catacombs. Floor after floor after floor of stacked empty graves. There must have been thirty of us in our group. The Catacombs are owned by the Papal State, so each tour is conducted by a priest. Ours was from India. We didn't need much light to see, for his face shown as he recreated the world in which these first Christians lived - the persecutions, the secrecy, the total commitment to their Savior. The tombs are carved out of lava rock, stacked probably five*

*high to the ceiling. We'd weave back and forth along narrow corridors on floor after floor, level after level.*

*Most of the tombs were empty because of the vandalism over the centuries and I'm glad, for it made their statement so much more poignant. Along a narrow way, we came into a larger space - a room. Again, empty tombs on all sides and in this holy space, we were told Christians met to worship. Somehow, this "church" outshone, for me, all the others I'd seen. No windows, no spirals, no altars, but a room surrounded by empty tombs. It felt to me like Christ's tomb must have felt to the women.*

*Mark 16:6a. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here."*

*What a monument! I've been to an Indian burial ground and Chinese emperor's tombs and felt nothing but claustrophobia. In the Catacombs it was different, for I knew that I was on hallowed ground. I let the group go on a little ahead. I stopped and prayed. Prayed for these saints who left no jewels or pottery or buried treasure behind, only empty tombs - as their Savior had.*

*Hallelujah! "He has risen! He is not here!"*

*Your sister in Christ,*

*Lucy*