

*Come Holy Spirit  
Use me to Your glory*

*Precious Pilgrim,*

*Right now it's the dawning of a new day. I write to you by candlelight and flashlight. I'm on the last day of a self-imposed four-day retreat to a hermitage. I'm in this tiny one-room cabin tucked back in the woods on the property of Sacred Heart Convent in Cullman, Alabama. I chose to do this because it was an assigned topic on which I was asked to talk. And I couldn't see myself writing to you about a hermit-like retreat unless I had personally experienced one over a length of time.*

*When I called and asked if they had such a place and if it was available, they said yes. So here I am. The cabin is surrounded by a dense, virgin hardwood forest. The convent is about a mile and a half away and there is no electricity or toilet facility. There is a sink with undrinkable running water. I came prepared as best I knew how. For my guidebook, I used Catherine de Hueck Doherty's Poustinia. My provisions are a Bible, a Prayer Book, an icon, a seven-day candle, a few clothes, a few toiletries, a sleeping bag, a bath towel, bread and water.*

*I cannot tell you what a wonderful space this has become. This 8' x 10' room has a bed, a bedside table, a rocking chair, and a three-tiered plastic corner shelf. On the top shelf is a 9" x 6" picture of Jesus, an incense-burning stick, both of which*

were already here, and the seven-day candle. And on the next shelf is a picture of Mary and Baby Jesus which I brought. This picture also is lit by a candle, and there's one single perfect rose in a plastic cup. The weather has been incredibly wonderful. It has been raining practically non-stop since I arrived. This is ideal for this cloistered, enclosed time. I couldn't have wandered around if I'd wanted to. The hermitage has a tiny concrete front porch and a tiny concrete back porch. I learned on my first night that I'm not the only occupant of this building. Some precious little creatures have crawled out a hole right above my bed in the attic. They aren't too noisy. It was lightning and thundering that first night, my prayers were mainly that this structure would stand and that the little creatures wouldn't plop onto my bed through the ceiling. All was well. This ark did and does continue to float. There has been a tick in my hair and spiders galore. My new found fragrance is "Off Skintastic", a bug spray. And each day I've been spraying myself from head to toe.

I arrived Sunday afternoon, got settled, had Evening Prayer and dinner (four slices of bread and some water) on the back porch and turned in early. The next day, fortunately, there was a brief let up in the rain, so I washed my hair in the sink and took a birdie bath outside. Most of the rest of the stormy day was spent inside with every candle burning, including a little kerosene wall lantern by which I could read.

*It was quite cozy. I spent the day praying and reading and resting. It was a delicious, delicious gift of a day. I read out loud John's Gospel and started on his Letters. The weather finally let up enough to have Evening Prayer outside, and to watch fireflies and to listen to the birds sing was delightful. Then it was off to another rainy, stormy wonderful night's sleep. I was a little braver in that I left the curtains up for the fresh air breezes.*

*Yesterday was my last full day so I decided to get tough, all lights out - all day and all night. No candles, no flashlight, no kerosene lamp. It was delightful. I mainly spent it on the back porch. I moved the rocking chair outside. If it was flush up against the exterior wall, I didn't get wet. There was Sung Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, and Evening Prayer, which seemed to give a rhythm to the day. The meals continued the same: four slices of bread and some bottled water. They were delicious. I continued reading out loud John's Letters and then Revelation. For exercise I did a little song and dance routine to some of my favorite hymns.*

*There is a feeling of suspended time. There is a slowness about everything. I took off my watch on arrival and only occasionally look at it. There is never a sense of boredom or loneliness. I am never afraid. It is totally a gift, a love offering. I came to be apart with the Lord God, to draw nearer to Him. He is nearer than our very breath, Pilgrim, as you know. It's just that our noisy, busy world distracts.*

*Right in front of this little hermitage is a wooden sign, which says "Ausculta" and it's Latin for "Listen." "Listen." "Listen." There is a keen sense of who our Father God is and who I am. I am loved by the Beloved and so are you, Pilgrim. For me, it's been "a still, small voice" at this hermitage. There is a calm, a peace, a gentleness.*

*Over my shoulder there is a little plaque which says, "Shalom." I hammered a little Jerusalem Cross over it which came from Mount of Transfiguration. I was there just over a month ago and went to the cave where Lazarus was called out. As I stood in that claustrophobic spot, I could just imagine Jesus calling, "Lazarus, come out." - "Lucy, come out." - "My precious pilgrim, come out." What tombs are you stuck in? I think cave-dwelling, or hermitage-dwelling, helps break the silence of our noisy world so that we can really hear our Lord God's loving voice and then become what He intends. Peace and all good, Pilgrim.*

*Love,*

*Lucy*

*P.S. Back home my brother-in-law phoned and we had a good conversation. I love him and he loves me. I told him all about this retreat and said I had more of an appreciation of my son Will's three-day solo experience on an Outward Bound trip. Tom said my trip hadn't been an Outward Bound but rather an "Inward Bound." I concur. Peace, Pilgrim.*