

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

Home. Homecoming. That's on my mind today for I just returned from the annual Fitzpatrick United Methodist Church's Homecoming. This tiny little community, located about 45 minutes from Montgomery, boasts of having one general store and two churches. The normal church attendance is about 20 people, but for today's festivities there must have been over a hundred. It was a sweet, sweet time.

I was included because my youngest son's wife's family has attended this church for generations. Ah, to sing some of the old familiar favorite hymns -- to see the pride the pastor had as he introduced each one of the youth who sang two contemporary songs was so right. He didn't just introduce, but told to which family they belonged, sometimes not one generation, but two were mentioned. The youth smiled. The families smiled. We all smiled and clapped. It was all just so good and wholesome and old fashioned and right. No frills. No fal de rol. We praised. We prayed and then went out on the church grounds and had a wonderful picnic lunch.

My two-year-old grandson was the only one a little confused. At first he kept saying, "Easter Bunny? Easter Bunny?" for the last time he had attended a function at this church it was for an Easter Egg Hunt. At that time he proudly found one -- that is, one and only one egg. That was all and

that was enough. He took that egg and sat down on that spot, peeled it, and ate it and that was that. I guess he was hoping to find just one more today. Wasn't that reasonable? Instead, he had to settle for fried chicken, deviled eggs, casseroles, salads, rolls, desserts. You've never seen such a feast. And it was Homecoming!

The real Homecoming was made, however, by Miss Thelma. She was the wife of Reverend Wolfe, the retired pastor who traveled the day before all the way from South Carolina for this special day. On arrival, he learned of his wife's unexpected death and, of course, immediately returned home. The presiding Pastor filled in and gave the sermon. He did an admirable job, pointing out that Miss Thelma was having the Real Homecoming with her Lord and I concur. As I said, it was a sweet, sweet day.

Since returning home, I've had the most fun allowing my mind to wander and to mentally go through the files under the subject of "Homecomings." Memories float up to my consciousness. Each scene has been filled with richness and warmth and wonder. I think each has provided a little glimpse of what our Real Homecoming, the one with our Lord, will be like.

Let's see, the first big Homecoming I could remember in my life was when I was 15. I flew home from camp in Switzerland. I remember I had on a recently purchased brown and white ski sweater and an alpine green felt hat in August,

no less. A huge contingency made up of family and friends met us at the airport. I, who seldom cry, bawled like a baby with joy when I saw all of the greeters and especially when I saw my mama and Daddy. I hadn't been homesick. I'd had the time of my life. I think the real re-uniting with loved ones just overwhelmed me emotionally. It was like a pea going back to its pod. It was a Dorothy a la Wizard of Oz-type reality. "There is no place like home."

Then I remembered just a few years ago going on a weekend church retreat. It ended with a surprise visit from a huge group of our parishioners. To unexpectedly see all this church family that I love was a powerful Homecoming experience. I imagined it was similar to what our heavenly Homecoming will be like.

Then the final fun memory which surfaced was my sister and I attended a decorators' showhouse. That's when an organization takes a house and different interior designers decorate each room. The house just happened to be "Oakland," the house which my grandfather built and where we were raised. My sister and I had the time of our lives, as if school girls running from one room to the next reliving memories and sharing stories and tales. We even went so far as collecting the plastic cups that had "Oakland" stamped on it for the gala. Now that I think about it, our actions had seemed quite ridiculous. It was a black tie, sophisticated, sedate soiree. All the guests acted appropriately, except these

two middle-aged sisters. But you see, we were reliving Thanksgivings and Christmases and birthdays and weddings and dates and dances all rolled up in one. But do you know what? At the end of the night, it was surprisingly easy to leave, for that was more of a "housecoming" as opposed to a Homecoming. We did share powerful memories, but the people we loved no longer lived there. It was no longer a home, but a grand old house full of memories. Homes are alive, well and kicking, full of community and love. A Homecoming is coming back to a womb-like world. The Ultimate Homecoming I think is about each of us little creatures going back to our Creator. Oh, I have a heart's yearning for that ultimate reunion someday. Do you, Pilgrim? Where we are known, totally known, even more than the preacher knew his flock at Fitzpatrick Church homecoming.

When I want to picture that reunion, the image that comes to mind is Rembrandt's painting of the Prodigal Son. The wayward son is kneeling and his father is leaning over embracing him in welcome. I bet if Rembrandt painted the next scene of that Homecoming, the logical progression would be the Daddy's coming and making that son stand and they joyfully, prayerfully embrace in a bear hug and with laughter and tears and the Father saying, "Welcome Home." Ah, Pilgrim, I look forward to hearing those words, do you? "Welcome Home!"

Might you spend a little time today opening up some of

your own Homecoming memory files? It's quite fun and I highly recommend the exercise. To help you get started, dwell a little bit with the Prodigal Son. That's Luke 15:11-32 and then take a look at the description of our eternal home found in chapter 21 of Revelation, and then, just rest in these words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 25, verse 21. He said, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master." Ah -- enter into the joy of your master. Now, Pilgrim, when we hear such words, that will truly be a Homecoming-- our eternal Homecoming.

Peace,

Your Homeward Bound sister in Christ,

Lucy

God bless.