

# Six Toes in Eternity

## Book B

### Face to Face

2001-2003

#### Introduction

I wanted to share with you, loyal old readers and new ones as well, my sightings of the age sixty-four; the Bridegroom peering through the “lattices” of my present life as I grappled with the daily mood swings of fatigue, desperation and, more rarely, exulted in moments of joy and peace. I love to hear such accounts from my personal friends and from more famous ones who write them down in books. An expert in literature recently said that an author is an invisible friend whose story, thoughts, and images enrich the life of the reader. May it be so.

The impetus for beginning to journal again came on November 15, 2001 during Eucharistic Adoration, crouched in my alcove praying the Office of Readings. On the inside cover of that prayer book I have pasted the famous face of Christ painted by El Greco to be found on the cover of *Face to Face*. The words I heard him speaking in my heart as I looked at that Spanish face were those of St. Bernard: “Love is not Loved!”

When I stared into your sad El Greco eyes, my Jesus, those words “Love is not Loved!” came to me not as a general statement but as directed by You to me. It seems that You wanted me to know just how wounding it is for You that I will not trust the love that You went to such lengths to prove to me. Staring at the pure whiteness of Your presence in the host in the monstrance and, then, down at Your face in the painting, I tried to respond.

I could produce many reasons why I don’t love Love enough:

- is it easier for me to love you as truth

because truth is strong and love is vulnerable?

- is it easier for me to love you as beauty  
because beauty is sublime and love is messy?
- is it easier for me to love you as mercy  
because mercy is balm and love is strenuous?

When I look into Your tragic eyes, my Jesus, I think the reason might be deeper still. Terror of surrender to Your Divine heart whose beat is so loud I could no longer hear my own? Fear that after diving into the Your waves You might cast me out on the shore even more helpless to survive?

Or, still more simply, that I could refuse You nothing, no matter how painful, if I was close enough to know You wanted it!

I hear You telling me that I cannot experience the fullness of Your love for me if I am afraid to come closer. 'Perfect love casts out fear.' Surrender!

Yet a perfect unison of heartbeat with Jesus would render me more like you, Mother Mary. You certainly did not emerge from your surrender to the Holy Spirit as a dead fish. No! Rather as Queen of Apostles!

A word about the format of *Face to Face*. My husband used to say that if he brought his camera on a trip he saw everything differently. Scenery framed by the lens of the camera became a landscape. By analogy, when I look at my day through the lens of the mysteries of your rosary, Mary, I see things differently. I watch to find in each twenty-four hours a joyful mystery in my day, a sorrowful mystery in my day, and a glorious mystery in my day. If this idea seems pretentious or arrogant, don't judge in advance. As you read you will see how this focus helped me and could help you.

I want to try to use "Marian lens" as I sight Jesus peering through the lattices of these days. I hope that as I share what I see, not only that I will be inspired, but that you, my readers, will also find such mysteries in your own days. Sometimes I will add at the end of each day's mysteries any miscellaneous reflections or resolutions that came to mind.

Here is something more about inclusions in this journal of the dialogues with Jesus, Mary, and other persons known in prayer. As a teacher of spirituality I fully realize that making it sound as if every word heard in one's heart during prayer is straight from God can be faulty and arrogant. Experts in mysticism point out how mistakes or illusions can infuse the writings even of canonized saints. This can be explained by the fact that usually infused wisdom is given within a few moments. The recipient of the locution tends to embroider the few graced words with his or her own sense of the meaning of those words, sometimes adding many paragraphs. This added portion can even include factual errors coming from the limitations of the scientific knowledge of the times, such as medieval saints presupposing that the earth is the center of the universe. Detecting such falsehoods about facts in the writings of the mystic does not nullify the essential truth that may truly be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

With this perspective in mind, is it better never to attribute any thought or feeling to the working of God in the soul? Such caution would seem to be tying God's hands or gagging Him. "The Spirit moves where He wills." True, by sticking to formal prayers alone and never letting anyone else in on anything over and above, one can remove all one's own doubts and the potential ridicule of readers. But is that really God's will? Should a Catholic never share enlightenment that seems to come from the Lord? I have come to believe in writing down what I think Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, the angels and saints are telling me, mostly because I find their words better than mine!

Doing research the summer of 2002, while I editing the first part of *Face to Face*, I came upon an interesting way of explaining words heard in the heart, sometimes called locutions. by Sister Maximilian Marnau in an introduction to the mystical sharings of *St. Gertrude of Helfta* (p. 29)

"In her (Gertrude's) writings we have a detailed record of God's dealings with a soul, the personal relationship for which the Creator is willing to stoop with his creature. It is a picture of the Lord as she knew him, including not just his character, his goodness, and his love, but also the manner of his dealings with mankind."

Later, in the same volume we read of God telling Gertrude, (see p. 81) that he wanted her to write about how he worked in her that others may desire such graces for themselves.

The self-consciousness about writing down seemingly supernatural words that come to us in prayer might have another reason than fear of error or ridicule. I detect in myself a certain feeling that I am such toad like creature, especially in this "old hag" phase of my life, that Jesus couldn't possibly love me in an intimate way. Yet did he not sweep Teresa of Avila off her feet when she was in middle-age?

So that my entries will have more of a context for you, a note about my situation when I began this journal. I am giving this in some detail because many older people of around my age have been interested in knowing about this life-style thinking that it might someday interest them as an option. In 2001 I was a consecrated widow of a Catholic community. This group runs an institute for higher learning where I was teaching as a volunteer. I lived in a dorm room, without a car, liking to spend as little as possible of my pension and widow social security in order to donate money to poor Catholic missions where sisters ride the dangerous waves in canoes to visit outlying areas and a priest lives in a rectory with rats running through.

At the time I began the journal I would arise each morning 5:45 AM to have a snack before morning prayer and rosary. I taught three classes in Catholic philosophy – two for undergraduates and seminarians and one mostly for mothers from the city. Daily Mass during the week was at noon. After lunch I took a nap and then spent late afternoon in my office preparing classes, answering mail, and writing books. We had evening prayer and adoration at 5 PM, followed by dinner. Evenings, during the week, were spent mostly at meetings: a group for anger, fear and depression I facilitate; a writer's group, our society's team meeting. One weekend night was for Scrabble when I could find a partner. At 9 PM we had night prayer and a personal sharing by a member of the community based on the writings of the founder of the community.

Ideal? Not exactly. The reason I am not mentioning the name of the group or the college is because of painful conflicts endured during the years covered by this journal. Because my experiences yielded insights many might benefit from, I want to refer to the incidents in general terms but not mentioning names or places so that there will be the least likelihood of readers identifying the group or any specific persons. For symmetry, I am also leaving out the names of friends in other places mentioned in Face to Face. I hope you will not feel insulted if you recognize yourself in a happy anecdote, and wanted your names to appear in the book, but I think it will be more charitable not to refer to specific persons.

Since, even so, some people might be offended by references to situations they are familiar with, but with a different, perhaps opposing point of view, in this desktop book I am excerpting so as to leave out much that might fall into the category of detraction or just because it is only personally interesting and not that relevant to the lives of readers.

And so, concluding this long prologue I will proceed to my first entry reflecting on the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries of the first day I kept records.

November 16, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Dear Jesus, thank you for my joyful mystery of today; a dinner with a family I love. She is a medical doctor and he is a professor. When I anticipated coming to teach here, I was told about this older couple. Immediately I hoped they would be my friends. I was not disappointed. Was it you, Holy Spirit, who inspired them to ignore all my failings and want to be my friends? A little background will explain the fear of loneliness that made me so grateful for the kindness of this couple.

When I arrived here a few years ago I was five years a widow. Before that I had been trying to be a consecrated sister in an emerging community. As described in Notes from the Feminine Underground, above, I left that community. A few months after coming to this new place, the call seemed to come to try to be a consecrated widow in the group running the college. Lots of stress was involved in these decisions. More about my new experimental vocation as this journal continues.

Some Biblical scholars think that it was because you, Jesus, knew that your mother would be a widow that you revealed in the Gospels a special concern for widows. Whenever a passage is read in the liturgy about widows my ears perk up, especially the ones about taking care of widows and orphans. Since there are only two of us widows on the staff of the school, when these lines are read I look around hopefully, sure that someone is realizing how blessed he or she is for taking the messages seriously regarding the widows they see every day.

Did you, dear Jesus, when you told John to take care of Mary, know that even so stalwart and exalted a widow as your mother would be frightfully lonely with neither husband or son to protect her? We cannot know, but what most of us experience when our husbands are gone is a kind of tremulous vulnerability. I am thankful that you have given me a gift of openness to attract

potential friends. I think about how much worse it is for more inward shy widows. As a married woman I treasured my friends, but as a widow I find them indispensable.

As I write about the visit to this friendly couple on the day I am starting this journal, you seem to be admonishing me in a sweet way. “I told you that if you would be mine, you would also get the human love you needed. Why such surprise that I came through?”

“Oh, You know me, Lord. Even before becoming a widow, trust was not my long suit. But let me thank you for this particular married woman friend who combines in her character two qualities I seek, but don’t so often find together: a sharp intelligence and motherly warmth. From the beginning of our friendship I noticed a particular observant expression on her face during our conversations. Then, sometime later in the visit would come a gentle remark that pierced to the core of my problem such as, “Ronda, perhaps you have a more than usual need to belong?”

And now I am thinking about that. Is it true? Will it ever be enough, my Jesus, to belong simply to You? Of course I will always also need human friends, but will I always be seeking human closeness with such desperation? Some of these relationships seem just what You would wish for me, but sometimes I try to force others to fulfill my needs, blinding myself to their limitations. And, worse yet, sometimes I make those in whom I find many virtues or attractive traits into semi-idols and then, sooner or later, they become fallen idols.

I hear you reply that You want me to seek human love, for my sake and for the sake of those who can benefit by my love in return, no matter how flawed. I do not need to love humans less. I need to love You more. In that way I can come to others with more tenderness than thirst. That terrible thirst will have been quenched by Your love. You remind me that if I will “be still and know that You are God” I will be less anxious and fretful.

When I came from Arizona where I was living with my daughter Carla and her family, one of the first colleagues I met was the husband of the woman I just described. He is much more of a scholar than I am, but of so modest a reserve that he doesn’t make me feel out-classed. Of an exquisite sensibility, he manages to show compassionate interest without a word – just by the intent expression in his large brown eyes. Isn’t that an image, Jesus, of the way You look upon me?

But the fun of visiting this couple is much more earthy than these short descriptions would convey. Bless you, Lord, for homes. I always thought I would love to shed the duties of a homemaker: thirty years of cooking and cleaning and laundry, combined with being a professor and writer. Now that I am living in a dormitory room to escape these same obligations, I find tears coming to my eyes at the sight of a happy home with a woman making the nest warm and comforting. Each house I visit is a whole world in itself, filled with those objects and pictures and furniture reflective of the special tastes of the in-dwellers.

I would not trade my life for that of these mothers since I am really much more suited to pray and work than to cook even if it means gobble-quick-meals. Still, my appreciation for the beauty of family life has increased now that I can contemplate it as an outsider.

When I visit the homes of my beloved daughters and my grandchildren, I am now a passer-through with only voluntary chores. As a result everything wonderful in their way of life is detached for me from the crosses that go along with domesticity.

Since the theme of this joyful mystery of visiting my friends seems to be gratitude, let me end this passage by thanking you, dear God, for the joyful part of having known marriage and family life before my late vocation as a consecrated woman, and also, for the joy of now being free of the burdens of marriage and family life.

#### Sorrowful Mystery:

Today it rained and some water leaked in through a door into the cafeteria area. In our relatively dry climate here, whenever it rains most people praise you, God. I love the sound of rain on the roof or aslant my windows, but water coming inside frightens me. Brought up in city apartments high above the ground, I never thought of weather as actually entering a dwelling. When my husband, Martin, and I moved to a house in the suburbs with our children, I was startled when rain dared to come right through the crack at the bottom of our door. Was I fearful because I had lived so long in a city world of technology where problems are readily solved by calling the landlord or the repairman? I think my sense of menace at even a small trickle of rain slowly flowing toward our rug in the country came from this shock at something moving and alien, unlike the well-controlled water from the faucet. So, this morning, seeing water coming through the space under the dining room door of our college evoked these disconcerting memories. There was an almost flood the year I arrived here, but the hurricane skirted around our city.

As I bring this foolish sense of menace to you, Jesus, I think about how different Your life was, much closer to natural realities. So many of Your parables involve disasters for the imprudent. I hear you telling me now that my Father and Yours allows me to be insecure because He wants me to long for the home that is heaven.

I have often had an image of God stretching us like a rubber band way beyond the size we would like to be. So that we can encircle more of reality? In any case, I see in my mind's eye an image of You on a secure throne beckoning me to come into Your lap and let You hold me tight against all those fears, irrational and legitimate. Will I take the time to sit with You until Your "perfect love can cast out all fear"?

#### Glorious Mystery:

Today I had a conversation with the sister head of the community that founded our school. Her plane to Rome was delayed due to storms and so she had an unexpected two hours with no urgent appointments. I grabbed her for counsel. Before inserting here the words of wisdom she offered me, a comment about my response to her as a personality. My response to people I meet is much influenced by literary factors. Since this woman is English, the first time I saw her, on the steps of St. Peter's during the Rome Jubilee Assembly, I immediately identified her with the wonderful Benedictine nuns described by the novelist Rumer Godden in the classic [In This House of Brede](#). I was not disappointed.

Once, Lord, berating myself for what could seem a snobbish preference for those steeped in European culture, an artist priest friend saw it differently. “You like to be among those who love Christ with a sensibility formed by the arts. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Of course you, my Jesus, lived in the Middle East. Rightly, I believe, we criticize those who “sanitize” Your humanity of its Jewish features. Still, it would also be misguided to think that, on a cultural level, You as God-man are limited to a Nazareth-bound mentality. As a person of the Trinity, You could not have been external to the inspiration by the Holy Spirit of that great music and art of Christian European culture. Is this paradox part of the mystery of the way Your human nature and divine nature are joined? If Catholic exegesis was dominated by Hebrew-Catholics would our schools be rocking with the endless disputations of the rabbis? I guess my priest spiritual director is feeling burdened by many such questions I pop at him, for today as he passed me in a corridor of the college he joked, “you need a frontal lobotomy!”

Now as I bring the question about Jesus and culture to the Lord Himself, I hear His deep reassuring voice in my heart reminding me that in Him time and eternity are one. “I was incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth in time in a manner that would make it possible for the most people to follow Me. Yet, all beauty, goodness and truth is in My divine nature.”

This means to me that there is nothing I will find of greatness in the world that is not in the Son of God to the nth degree. I need to rejoice when I see beauty in the lily, goodness in a student wheeling out the garbage, truth in the least complicated of utterances, such as “Jesus saves.” I rejoice as well in the beauty of a symphony, the goodness of caring for a person even if I am in conflict with him or her, or the complex truths in a philosophy book.

Mostly I hear you telling me that I need to put away anxious scrupulosity in favor of joyful gratitude.

Anyhow, to return to my talk with the religious sister; this woman whose flavor is English in her “sense and sensibility,” sat with me in my office where I was wringing my hands over some problem at our school and told me in her marvelous soft but clipped accent, “There is no peace unless you work not for the team but for the Trinity. You have to decide – I don’t want to live in turmoil because of the muddy situations that are bound to arise. I want to transcend, to live in the Trinity, and then I can see clearly how I could help in those situations. You must care more about Jesus than about what you will do next. Wherever you are, the Trinity will be there.”

Considering the degree of turmoil I tolerate in myself, I recall a novelist having a man say about women: “nothing is ever enough, and everything is always too much!”

“What is it, then, my Jesus? Do I prefer turmoil to peace because it is more exciting? If so, does that mean I am not even looking for the good for myself and those around me? Really not wanting peace at all but rather the thrill of “war”? Please send the Holy Spirit and my guardian angel to put me, even squirming and kicking, onto the road of peace.”

So, those were my joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries this first time of writing a regular spiritual journal.

At the end of each day I will add anything that came to me in prayer unrelated to the framework of the mysteries.

Here is one of today. During my time of adoration prayer in the chapel it seems to me that Jesus begged, "Please let Me love you. It would give Me such joy to make a St. Ronda! Just as you labor and labor to make one of your courses better, so I labor to shape holy Ronda. Please let Me."

Saturday, November 17, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I was reading a book called "Plan of Life." The author asks the readers to trace themes that have permeated the way God has worked in their life-stories. Pondering this matter, I was surprised to see that an abiding theme was surprise.

Overly analytic, as are most philosophers, I tend to box my future up into "if A happens, then C, D, and E could follow. And if B happens, instead, then I have five possible ways I could meet the problems involved, well worked out in my imagination in all the details. For example, IF my daughters and their families, now living in California and New Hampshire, move to Florida next year, then I will visit them there all together at Christmas, spring break, and summer. This will involve not making that trip to teach in Australia. But if only one family moves to Florida, then... With this grid firmly in place I arise each day peering around to see if, indeed, it is the A or F or J scenario that is about to unfold.

No wonder, my God, You choose surprise as the way to check-mate my folly! Many of the joyful mysteries described here will involve surprises...

A surprise tonight came when a friend, not Catholic, who was leaving town, brought to a farewell dinner a huge metal box with drawers of all sizes in it. This contained the collection of many colored, all differently shaped beads that she uses in her jewelry business. "After dinner we can make rosaries," C. announced beaming. Rosaries are certainly usually made of beads, but almost always of the same color and shape. After dinner C. gave us a choice of thousands of beads of many different colors. Handing us paper plates she told us to choose our fifty-eight beads from a selection of miniscule tiny holed ones only a needle could enter, all the way to huge scaly fish beads an inch long. We hesitated. There were sometimes six or eight identical beads, but surely not fifty-eight of the same.

It was fun sitting like three little girls stringing beads. This overcame any scrupulosity about the beads not looking Catholic enough for a rosary. My friend, P., manifested her love of pristine beauty and order by choosing different shades of light blue. Since I wear shades of grey as a consecrated widow in my community, I am starved for bright color. I chose the more brilliant of the beads, including many multi-colored ones with tiny designs of stars and stripes.



Suddenly I remembered a dear very ailing friend of mine in Arizona, a Unity minister. My goal had been to bring her into the Catholic church. Not much success with that, but she would sometimes agree to pray the rosary with me meditatively leaving out the “pray for us sinners” since she didn’t believe in sin! Before I left town, my friend did go back to the more traditional Episcopal church of her family. Thank you Jesus and Mary. It happened that she loves bright colored clothing and jewelry. Having finished my own rosary before the others were finished, I asked if I could make one for this dear suffering friend. This time I went to town choosing five of the one- inch scaly bluish translucent fish, and many big yellow and red balls.

At the end of a delightful few hours, when I accompanied my friends into the hall I said: “I wish we could find a priest to bless these. It’s Saturday night. Not likely. But just then the priest president of our school came walking through the back door. Thank you, Jesus. Without a sign of amusement at the gaudiness of our rosaries he solemnly blessed them in “the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

The next morning I mailed off the rosary for my sick friend - Priority. I do believe it was you, dear Mary, who urged me to mail it so fast, because just at that time, I learned afterwards, she of failing lungs was rushed to the hospital with pneumonia. A friend of hers visited with my package. In the bleakness of her hospital room, there were the bright beads, a holy version of her many heavy necklaces. A few days later, on the phone came her weak voice telling me how she held it all day in her hands and even read the prayers in the very traditional booklet I sent with it on how to pray the mysteries. Oh, thank you dear Mother Mary for helping my friend with your prayer and also for helping me every day as well even when I don’t think to call on you for specific help.

Another joyful mystery, also a surprise, came that same night. I belong to a small parish on our college grounds devoted to what is called “The Pastoral Provision for Anglican-Use.” This was designed, originally, as a way for Anglicans who become Roman Catholic to retain their old English liturgy, actually mostly a translation of the original Latin Mass said by Catholics in England before the Reformation. Now many people attend who were never Anglicans but appreciate the beauty of this approved liturgy.

The couple who organize this Sunday Mass, both former Anglicans, come the night before to decorate the room in one of our buildings they use for this delightful old-fashioned service. Egg-head that I am, I have a horror of almost all physical activities. Part of it is that I am rather clumsy, with poor eye-hand coordination. I was always last to be chosen for baseball teams in school and camp. It took me seven years of driving to try passing a car on the freeway! So, decorating chapels is hardly my cup of tea.

The woman coordinator of the décor for the Mass is a persistent “try it, you’ll like it,” type. Since she is a round, earthy, lively, warm woman who I want to have for a friend, it is hard to resist her suggestions. Or was it You, also, Holy Spirit, who directed my steps after the rosary-making supper, to that chapel to see if help was needed?

Sure enough, there was my friend, laying out bundles of tall dried flowers, leaves and branches suitable for an autumn display on a table for insertion into the large vases on either side of the altar.

“Hmmmmm. I’ve actually never arranged flowers in my life,” I giggled nervously.

“Nothing to it. Just copy me.”

A half hour later I was proudly carrying my vase to the altar. At the morning Mass the next day, having moved from a spectator stance to being a helper, I felt more of a sense of belonging.

Is the Holy Spirit trying to lure me into the sensory wholeness I so flee in my one-sided intellectual workaholism?

Sorrowful Mystery:

The sorrowful mystery: anxiety about future losses. It is now sure that one of my favorite people is leaving the college for another mission. The community is missionary so it is both natural and sometimes obligatory for people to come and go. Even after three years of being here, however, it is still a shock to me when friends leave. Partly it is because I used to be a Benedictine Oblate (similar to a Third Order). Benedictines have a charism of stability such that monks and sisters seldom leave, often being in a community at a particular place for sixty years or more!

More deeply, Jesus healer, You know that such losses reopen that initial wound that came when my father left our family without any reason a child could fathom. So, now I call on You, whose heart is my eternal home. All those I have loved will, hopefully, one day be found forever in that heavenly place. What do You want me to do with this painful anxiousness about losses at this time in my life? Yes, I can offer the sorrow to You in gratitude for the human love that makes parting so hard. But is there more You want to tell me?

I hear You replying with words in my heart to the effect that I am always trying to leap above the cross with wings of insight. It just postpones the pain till the next loss. Instead, You want me to plunge into Your heart to unite my pain with Yours and Mother Mary's. Then You can bring me closer to You who bring a comfort that no intellectual understanding can bring. Face to face means heart to heart.

And so, today, before proceeding with amplifying my notes in this journal, I will pause and try to plunge my present anxieties into Your Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary; those hearts so much beloved by the members of our community.

Glorious Mystery:

The readings for the liturgy today were about widows. The sermon today had to do with the tough and tender nature of widows in the Old and New Testament. Imagine giving up one's last oil to feed a prophet or one's last mite to the temple treasury! I thought of the widow saints I wrote about in my book *A Widow's Walk*. (This book has since been re-published by Johnnette Benkovic's Simon Peter Press under the title *Walk with me, Jesus: A Widow's Journey*. For instance, how about medieval St. Elizabeth of Hungary, so strong to confront the luxurious living of the royal family and so tender to the poor.

Mary, called exalted widow in a Spanish novena prayer, teach me how to be tough when confronting evil, but tender when needed by those who are hurt. Gentle woman, you teach me that it is only in following your bridegroom, the Holy Spirit, that I

will avoid over-reacting in an angry toughness. You also want to teach me how to be tender not only to those I have a natural attraction for, but to everyone, even my opponents. If I forgive, that will be possible. I must not give up hope. I need to start with grateful trust in those “graced friendships” nurtured in the community I have joined.

A separate note from an article about Tolkien: “the only just literary critic is Christ who admires more than does any man the gifts He Himself has bestowed.”

November 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

From time to time the young people of the college undertake a more formal dinner than usual. To this they invite a speaker. An enhanced catered dinner is prepared with table decorations, and better dress.

I’m an advocate of simplicity of life, but I have to admit to the pleasure it gave me this evening to see our usually casual undergraduate students, staff and faculty decked out in their best garments. As a consecrated widow wearing modest grey clothing such occasions no longer involve any primping and preening for me.

At this occasion there was an older woman in an outfit of bright green and lavender velvet with a flowing gauzy scarf. Hair dyed a bright blond color, she wore lots of make-up and heavy jewelry. In the past such adornment would have caused in me mingled disgust and envy. This time was a more joyful mystery. I considered with what artistry this older woman each day painted the canvas of her face and body with so brilliant a blend of color and texture. By such flamboyant attire was she defying our fallen nature as it is expressed in the ravages of aging?

In the past the Holy Spirit has chided me for being too rigorist about externals. Yes, God values resignation to the defects and limitations of our natural bodies in the stages of life. Simplicity of dress, when it translates into more money to give to the destitute is surely worthy of God’s praise. But do I need to be harshly judgmental of those who out of the weakness of vanity or to cheer themselves up, please their spouses and friends, or simply for the playfulness of it, feel a need to do their darnedest to improve their looks with cosmetics or bright shiny fabrics?

I was glad that, at least for that evening I was relaxed enough to be a delighted spectator of the efforts of most of the women to make themselves attractive. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for moving me into better thoughts than my usual judgmental ones...

Glorious Mystery:

There was an impressive light shining through the darkness in the paintings shown by the speaker at our dinner, an artist who is a devout Catholic. Personally I am more drawn to Classical art and modern Impressionism than to contemporary work, but because I have gotten to know this artist and his wife I was able to understand better the stark use of charcoal and blood red he uses to manifest the enigma of suffering and evil. A silvery-white light in the distance of a green foreground representing St. John of the

Cross' dark night of the soul drew me into that mystery so much that the artist decided to give me that painting. It hangs in my office now. When I am in a sad mood it tells me that hope in the midst of suffering is deeper than any lightness coming from transitory comforts.

Additional reflections for today:

Going through some papers, I found notes I saved from the writings of a Christian therapist, Dean Kirk. It is plan for his patients to help them get out of brooding. Here are his suggested steps for self-help. I used this sheet myself during a difficult period of conflict.

1. Yes, I have a problem. I have a will and mind and I can use them.
2. Following the next steps will increase my success.
3. I am releasing things in the past. I don't have to grovel in the past.
4. I confess my passion to live in the comfort zone at any cost.
  5. I forgive myself for my errors in this area.
  6. All things that happen in my life I accept. I forgive the offenses of others and even the laws of nature.
    7. Divine forgiveness lightens me so I can enjoy peace.
    8. I persist in forgiveness. I chose to be blessed, not cursed.
    9. I forgive God for "failing me." I am forgiven. My rage is dissipating.
    10. I bestow forgiveness on all things, totally.
    11. I ask forgiveness of all others, dead and alive. I imagine them saying: "Yes, Ronda, I forgive you that you were so difficult and perfectionist.

November 19, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The joyful mystery of today was meeting with a man who wants to produce one of my late husband's plays. The one-woman show is called *Myself: Alma Mahler* and is about the wife of the composer Gustav Mahler. An actress Pam Fields from Arizona, who has performed the role many times, would like to present the play here. Mahler had a personal meaning for Martin because

Mahler was a Jew who became a Catholic, partly to forward his career in anti-Semitic Vienna, but also out of a deep love for the Christian vision. His glorious religious music influenced my husband's conversion to the Catholic faith.

For widows, memories play a different role than for wives with husbands still living. The best moments, and the worst as well, are no longer enmeshed in the trifles of daily living. They stand out, instead, in bold relief. My husband loved to write but was too perfectionist to produce anything easily. Many were the revisions of my husband's two plays and his fictional masterpiece about Christ and Satan in the desert called *Children of the Breath*. (CMJ Publications – now distributed by En Route Books) Practically every evening of our marriage Martin read aloud what he had written during the day.

The first production of *Myself: Alma Maher* with actress Judith Barcroft as Alma took place at the Columbia University chapel in New York City. It was sponsored by the Mahler Society. What an overwhelming moment for us. Finally the witty lines and the profound lines were out there in a space where strangers could relish them.

After Martin's death I saw one performance of the play acted by Pam Fields in Scottsdale, Arizona. Floods of tears, especially because after becoming a widow, in a number of ways, I had come to resemble the bad side of Alma.

Sorrowful Mystery:

This evening I happened upon a line by Kahil Gibran addressed to parents. It was about attitudes toward one's children. "You give them your love but not your thoughts for they have their own thoughts."

How much I wish I could simply make them love all my best thoughts!

Since the heyday of enthusiasm for Gibran's poetic ideas is past, at least in Catholic circles, I forgot that, after all, as in the writings of most best-selling authors, there are certainly some truths there. I am firmly against the mentality in some Catholic circles that only what comes from the pen of an ardent believer can be true. After all, look how much St. Thomas borrowed from Aristotle. In fact, Holy Spirit, haven't You told us that You breathe where You will? Sometimes I think just to catch me off guard, You like to speak to me through non-Catholic sages

For today's extra insights I have more sheets of the advice of therapist, Dr. Kirk:

Don't see everything as either zero-horrid or 100% perfect.

Don't embrace or obliterate.

Reserve a part of yourself just for God.

Not so many plans – follow the Holy Spirit.

Burn past garbage!

Be as lonely as necessary to transition from co-dependency.

Re-boot.

Be satisfied vs. complaining.

Be carefree.

Take care of your own life.

Chose healthy friends.

November 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

“Sing and leap for joy, daughter Jerusalem,” says St. Andrew of Crete. “Daughter Jerusalem” in Scripture stands for the whole people of God, but I take it personally also being a Jew by birth and, therefore, a daughter of Jerusalem. And what would I sing and leap for joy over? That the Messiah has come. That there is hope. Thank you Jesus.

When I became a Catholic at twenty-one after an upbringing of atheism with a Jewish cultural background, my heart certainly leapt for joy in having a savior. Certainly it felt like salvation to shed the grim vision of myself as nothing but a small hunk of matter with a troublesome Freudian id tacked on! Oh, endless gratitude to you, dear God, just for existing! Someone asked me once whether I was angry at God over the loss of my son, who died at age 19 and my husband who died two years afterwards. I smiled as I replied, “How could a convert from atheism be mad at God? I am so glad just that He exists I could never be mad at Him.”

Now my spirit sings and leaps for joy at anything beautiful, good, true, loving, creative. One of these realities in my life at the college is the group of Christian writers I started. Every Tuesday evening faculty, staff, students and friends from the city come to share three pages of their on-going literary work. After each one reads aloud his or her poem, article, or part of a book, we affirm the effort and then administer gentle critique.

I have never asked, but I would guess, that most of us take more joy in listening to the others than in having our own work scrutinized, except if the plaudits are loud, and the compliments profuse. One of the great boons of being in the group is a chance to learn from the wisdom you, Holy Spirit, have taught each of us. That includes the humor, for several of our poets specialize in zany and mild fun. I tend, myself, to melancholy, so that I have much fondness for anyone who can make me laugh.

Since one of your most important names, my Jesus, is “The Word,” it is no mystery to you, as it is to us, how words manifests thoughts in such a way as to enhance communication. How all of us in our little group delight when some feeling or truth is expressed in words with precision and grace, especially if is in a fresh manner.

Often I compare myself unfavorably to admired more silent contemplative friends. Even if I would do well to cultivate such gifts, surely you, Holy Spirit, urge me also to be grateful for the uses you have made of my childhood among word-mongers – both parents being gluttonous readers, careful editors and writers themselves. Most often my students and readers commend me for clarity of expression. Thank you for that gift.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A discussion arose today about gossip. Are all stories about others wrong to tell, or only some? Is it a matter only of intention? If life is funny, why isn't expressing amusement at the ways of other people just a normal part of conversation? This topic is important to me because I am much inclined to telling anecdotes about others and am sometimes the recipient of censorious looks when observed in the act by those who speak about others only in a positive manner.

Trying to sort it out, I am reminded that St. Paul says that we should speak only for the purpose of edification. Kierkegaard wrote a chapter in his book *Works of Love* on the evils of gossip, stressing that the foibles and even more the sins of others should be matters for tears rather than for entertaining others. Surely it is not edifying, upbuilding, to chat about silly or reprehensible behavior of others. I surely can't pretend that I give equal time to praying for the same people I tell tales about.

Just the same, would I really want to live in a place where no one ever said anything negative? Would truth be fully served by those whose conversation consisted only in exhortation and the narration of the good deeds of others?

At this point I am inclined to think that talking about what is going on around me is not a sin in itself. Certainly it is never a sin to talk to a holy friend or counselor about anything, no matter how negative when the purpose is to solicit pastoral advice. It is also a duty to protect people under one's guidance from vices of others by warning them.

However, talking about even small faults of others just for the sake of amusement is a defect of character. And, as the Church teaches, talking about sins of others, falls under the sin of detraction when it is true, and under calumny or slander when it is false. Detraction is defined as revealing accurate information not known to the person listening that will harm the reputation of another. Calumny or slander is where the purported facts are untrue and reported out of malice. Detraction would be a venial sin, I believe in most cases. Calumny would be a mortal sin in the case of the communication of something of grave consequence.

Maybe I should check with a moral theologian on the subtler aspects of this. But meanwhile, I need to continue to try to improve my conversation by questioning the motives and contents of whatever I say of any consequence. I might watch out for a gloating tone in talking about the faults of others, as if my main joy in life was to feel superior to others, whose failures I count up gleefully as anecdotal matter! As a weakness, such gossip can involve a deep insecurity and lack of trust in God's providence, such that I feel a need to "psyche" everyone out by compulsive analysis of their faults.

Ugh! What a depressing subject. No wonder St. James writes that the controlling of the tongue is so difficult. I can't remember ever asking you, St. James, to intercede for me, but this would be a good time. St. James, so clear about the evils of speech, I beg

you to remind me of your admonitions whenever I am tempted to relish tales about the flaws of others. Most of all, St. James, would you ask Jesus to fill my heart with such love for Him and for my neighbor that I will not want to joke about them anymore.

(Rereading this in 2013, I realize much more about the origins of the sinful practice of detraction. In Abraham Low's Recovery, International for anger, fear and depression, we have a term for this called "symbolic victory." The idea is that the faults of others can make us feel weak and at risk. For example, a bad driver on the freeway can kill us and those we love. But when we describe how bad that driver is or curse him/her, then we are in the superior position looking down at the other. We don't really get any victory, such as the bad driver slowing down, but we get a "symbolic" victory by thinking we can send the bad driver to hell in our curse. So we enjoy anger. This would also apply to detraction. We can't make the boss, say, into a friendly, nice person and we feel weak because we would lose our jobs if we protested when the boss is acting domineering or unfair. But when we describe this behavior in the cafeteria to others, we are superior, looking down at the boss. Symbolic victory! To improve on this we have to look to see how we feel weak in each situation and then see if we can improve the situation; but if we can't, then we have to bear the cross and offer the pain in union with Jesus for the good of souls vs. trying to stuff the feeling of weakness by detracting from the person who upsets us.)

November 21, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I find it so good when someone speaks from the heart about what he or she really cares about. When a special education teacher here talks about the students she is counseling, I am touched by the love she expresses by the earnestness in her face and the vehemence of her desire to help us to understand this area better. It is slow going, but I am gradually coming to sympathize more with the plight of those who have been ridiculed in earlier education for defects and now, as college students, need much more help than I had imagined.

Why did I put this topic under joyful mysteries of the day? Because I find it so good to learn something new, even if initially there is discomfort in being shown that I was in error about the nature of some student's disabilities. "The truth shall set you free," is one of my favorite words of Jesus. Oh, Holy Spirit, please help us to learn from each other instead of stubbornly holding onto false unchallenged opinions. Thank You for giving me joy in being corrected.

During prayer I considered the question of what I want to become more like in the upcoming year 2002:

To become:

Holy – constant prayer, secure in His heart.

Quieter – more custody of the tongue.

Hopeful – avoid despairing natural level predictions.



Compassionate – not so judging, more forgiving.

Trusting – God will send the human love I need.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Some older seminarians have difficulty with our jam-packed schedule of classes, prayer, and work around the campus. One told me today how overwhelming it is for him. Since I have always loved studying philosophy because I am long on concepts and short on facts, it is hard for me to see how difficult it is for those of a more sensory or practical bent to have to steep themselves in pure thought: eight courses in eight months! Take a man who has spent forty years of his life working as a wrestling coach, or driving a tractor. How humbling to have to start fresh to master a field as far from his natural interests as philosophy!

I can relate to their struggles by analogy to my experience of learning to drive. Scoring zero on sensate functions on the Myers-Briggs personality test, you can imagine how hard it is for me to concentrate on the spatial relations of traffic patterns. In my twenties I flunked the driving test three times before barely passing, and it took me about seven years to be able to change lanes on a freeway! How I finally made it, God be praised, is a pretty funny story. I like to tell those unhappy philosophy students about it just to make them laugh.

The fear was that if I tried to change lanes on a freeway I would be sufficiently off in my estimate of space to be hit by an upcoming car, or worse, truck. One night I had a take a long drive over some of the most complicated freeways of greater Los Angeles to get to a funeral. Just before I hit the road I had such a nasty spat with my husband that I thought, “Since I don’t care if I live any more, I might as well change lanes.” It worked! Thirty years after that breakthrough, I still wait to change lanes until there is more of a hiatus between cars than anyone else I know. But, instead of hugging the slowest lane and praying that there won’t be any need to get off the freeway on the left requiring three lane changes, I do manage to change lanes now whenever expedient.

Getting back to those of my seminarian students who find philosophy so hard, sometimes I have an urge to give up on them prematurely. “Look,” I want to say, “why not be a saintly brother instead of a highly educated priest?” However, usually all they need is a little more time with me outside of class and more patience with themselves. It is incredibly edifying to see how much sacrifice they are willing to make to get through the studies needed for the priesthood.

Now, thinking over this matter once again, I pray: “Dear Jesus, You picked mostly uneducated men to be Your apostles with the exception probably of Matthew and John. Surely You love those men you have called today whose hearts are bigger than their heads! But You also promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit on Your Church and, in this century, she insists that priests be well trained in philosophy and theology to withstand the onslaughts of error in society and sometimes in the Church itself. Please give

me the grace to teach them what they need to know and to take any amount of time to bring along those least gifted in the philosophical mode of thinking.”

Glorious Mystery:

On late afternoons in the winter at our college chapel a beautiful sight is the candlelight on the altar during evening prayer and adoration. We have tall white candles and about seven small red vigil lights. With darkness outside the windows the beauty of the candlelight seems even greater than in the summer, a symbol of “the light shining in the darkness.” Oh my Jesus, You are the light of the world, alleluia.

My husband loved best of anything in the liturgy of the year the moment at the Easter Vigil where the big candle, carried into the Church in the darkness, is lit and then from that one candle all our little ones are enflamed. I have always loved most the Good Friday service where my own sufferings are taken up into Yours, my Savior, and I feel my heart merged into Yours.

On another subject, who could I ask to intercede from heaven for our unhappy 20-21st century church for a resolution to the terrible liturgical conflicts we have been going through? Perhaps all the saintly Popes. Please help us, dearly beloved holy leaders of the past. How can we allow for diversity without lowering aesthetic standards to a minimum unbearable to those with good taste? Not having especially good taste myself, I can enjoy most styles of liturgy and environment, but some of my friends have to close their ears and their eyes to endure all the changes. Our Church used to be the patron of the arts with the most sublime standards of music, art, and architecture. Now, Lord, have mercy on us. Help us to encourage artists and musicians who can appeal to everyone yet elevate us to the heights!

Here is a beautiful quotation I read from the poet George Herbert: “Love is the liquor sweet and most divine, which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine.”

November 22, 2002

Joyful Mysteries:

At our college we are blessed to have Confession right before Mass every weekday. Today, as my penance, a priest suggested to be more grateful. Immediately I felt a rush of gratitude for so many people at the college whom I love. I remembered that you promised me, Jesus, that if I became a consecrated widow you would send me all the human love I needed. Most of the time, here, I can say that I love everyone. Thank you for fulfilling that promise.

Then, during the Mass, came delight in the singing of two students from the same family leading music at the Mass. One young woman has a voice a little like Joan Baez who I loved to hear during the 60’s. Music means so much to me. It was my father’s most important source of happiness. As a lad, he wanted to play drums in the orchestra, but his mother thought that was too low an occupation and could never convince him to transfer allegiance to piano or violin. In later life he played all the instruments of the percussion section of a small opera company’s orchestra. He never bought any instruments back to the house, but whenever

we listened to classical music, he would conduct the drum parts with his hands. Until he left us when my sister and I were eight years old, we never spent an evening without loud music in the background.

Even though I prefer the depth of the beauty of classical compositions, I also love the simply melodies of the better guitar music sung in Church now. Partly because of being somewhat melancholic, I think the lovely sounds lift my spirits even more than they do those of a happier disposition.

Some Catholics with higher musical tastes think it wrong to “artificially” rev people up by childish joyful singing. We need to be quiet at Mass, it is thought. Or let’s have only the so reverent old hymns for organ. I argue that if we use the solemn hymns to get more quiet and pious – not the mood we often come into the chapel with, why not have merry singing to bring us to the joy we should also be experiencing at the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass?

St. Augustine, you lived in a time where the sound of the people praising God sometimes broke the windows of the churches. But you were a paragon of reverent love of God. Show us how to love God with everything in us in the right balance.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I had an altercation with a priest over daily Mass scheduling. It happened that some of us missed the usual noon-time service. There was supposed to be an evening liturgy but the priest was delayed. When he arrived I tried to corral all those who missed earlier. Some I couldn’t find so I asked the priest if he could just give them Communion.

I realize that this is not exactly correct except in emergencies, but it seemed so unfair that they had to miss Communion because of the priest’s fault. He said that he would not give them Communion. Since daily Mass isn’t obligatory why should they be sad? I replied that even though it is not a juridical obligation, for many of us it is an obligation in love. If Jesus wants to leap down from heaven, so to speak, at the bidding of the priest, how could anything be more important. I couldn’t bring the priest to understand. It seemed as if he had no understanding of the longing for the Eucharist in the hearts of daily communicants. Occasionally I have to miss, but then I try to “make it up” by going to two Masses some day during the week.

Glorious Mystery:

During the 70’s and 80’s many priests were telling us that since venial sins were removed by the Mass itself, we shouldn’t make frequent confessions. One bishop actually said that for those in ministry four times a year would be plenty! If we followed his advice then if we saw someone in ministry on line at confession often we would be sure he or she was in serious if not mortal sin!

In the community that runs this school, however, most of us take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation about once a week. There are several reasons for this practice. One is that at least one priest at our college is willing to be available each day for this healing rite. A second is that the more time we spend in prayer, the more gruesome seem our more subtle but chronic sins.

For thirty years after becoming a Catholic I confessed sins of anger every time with other misdemeanors as “gravy.” Because of the success of Recovery, Inc. for anger, depression, and anxiety that I attend and facilitate, uncontrolled or bitter anger only appears once a month with harsh judgment and detraction taking first and second place. But I also have become aware of much less flagrant faults such as yielding to despair, ingratitude, and refusal to accept crosses I cannot get out from under.

So, what’s so glorious about this? Well, it was Thanksgiving Day and I was dying to go to confession. Usually at community Masses on holidays we have a priest hearing before the service. I forgot about this. I was sitting in my pew bemoaning my misfortune that I couldn’t rid myself of the slime of my venial but still heavy sins before receiving Holy Communion when I caught sight of the familiar red light over the door to the box.

With five minutes to go before Mass, I rushed into the confessional to see the beaming face of one of our newly ordained priest. Oh my Jesus, what a joy it is for me that there are priests who actually enjoy deleting our sins. By the opening song I was back in my seat at peace with myself and the world. Alleluia.

Regarding the decision that I have been torturing myself over for months about staying at the college next year, it seemed that Jesus told me more or less today during prayer: “I want you to be here not because “community works” but because I am here and I want you here for Me. You find some things to be ugly? Then close your eyes and see My face within – the one El Greco made. Trouble with communication? Try more silence.”

After these moving interior words I opened to a passage from Romans 15:1-6, “May God, the source of all patience and encouragement, enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the spirit of Jesus, so that with one heart and voice you can glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

November 23, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

My bedroom is in the dormitory. Through the windows I can see our rosary garden. The statue of Our Lady is lit up at night. Comforting. At sunrise I can watch the branches of the trees blowing in the wind. As children we always closed the shades at night, since we lived in apartment buildings where you could see into the rooms of the tenants across the way unless their blinds were shut. Even though most of my married life I lived in houses with much distance between us and the next dwelling, I stuck to the practice of lowering the shades. One time I was sharing a room at a retreat with a friend. She asked me if I minded keeping the shades up all night so that she could see the dawn from her bed on awakening. I was so delighted the next morning with this unexpected joy that I have followed her practice ever since.

There is a tall tree with many branches outside my window now. Because of our warm climate the leaves are still heavy on the branches of this tree even in late November. I wake up to the sound of the leaves brushing across the window. Fancifully I imagine they are trying to come in to visit me. Thank you, God, for this particular manifestation of Your bountiful creativity.

Staring at leaves always reminds me of a strange recurring image in the novels of Dostoevsky. Characters in despair to the point of suicide hesitate only because of their fondness for green sticky leaves. Astounding! I can be pulled out of despair by the majestic ocean or by a blazing sunset, but sticky leaves? Oh Lord, You know how to pull on secret strings in the heart of each one of your billion beloved sons and daughters to give them hope! A leaf, an ocean, a baby's smile....

Another most joyful mystery of the day was finishing the final editing of a novel I wrote with Gene Grandy, a member of a writer's group. I started writing this book now called *A Summer Knight's Tale* in Sedona, Arizona several years ago. The book, with a plot about the adventures of a zealous Franciscan young priest on his summer assignment in a parish, is really about how fervor needs to be balanced with prudence and justice if it is not to become twisted.

About a year later, six chapters into the novel, I decided to run what I had already done by Bud MacFarlane, Jr. In case you are not familiar with Bud, he is the author of three, going on four, sensational Catholic novels. On the extra pages at the back of each book he announces that he is eager to see manuscripts of Catholic fiction for publication.

If you are not familiar with marketing of religious books you will not know that unless you write in the style and manner of Andrew Greeley on the bad side, or with the depth of Michael O'Brien on the good side, it is almost impossible to find a publisher for a Catholic novel. The main reason is that most Catholic fiction readers get their books, such as romance novels or detective stories at Wal-Mart. They are not looking for profundity or even inspiration. They are usually looking for escape. When they want something spiritual they go to a Catholic bookstore that sells non-fiction almost exclusively.

In the past I made an attempt to peddle a few of my novels with no success, so the idea of a new Catholic publisher soliciting manuscripts was thrilling. After about four months I got a single-spaced three page reply. Bud thought the draft was good on character and plot but totally deficient on description and action. This lack he illustrated by many quotations from the books with critique.

After reading the letter twice over, I gave up on fiction. Since I am able to write successful non-fiction books, why bother? As an act of humility I decided to read the letter from Bud MacFarlane to my group of Christian writers who had been helping me edit the novel for a year. Let them see how even a well-published writer can take a hard knock – not get discouraged, and live to finish other books.

Giggling nervously I read out the scalding critique. If you are a writer or have any friends who write, you will know that any critique is scalding. After the expected sympathetic cooing of the women in the group, came a surprise. A new member, Gene Grandy, who was writing travelogues, said timidly: "I know you're a known writer and all, and I'm just starting, but I would know exactly how to fill in description and action to make your book work." It felt like grabbing at a straw to enter into a co-authorship at that stage, but still much better than throwing out a year of work.

Not only I, but all the members of our group thought every addition and change Gene made was nothing short of terrific. Since Gene was working two jobs plus doing lay ministry in the parish and also discerning the priesthood, the collaboration took much

longer than I hoped. About two years later we were ready to send it to Bud Macfarlane, Jr. for another look. By this time I had left Sedona to teach here. The icing on the cake is that I got an endorsement from a priest of our community who liked *A Summer Knight's Tale* and was not only one of Bud's best friends but also the model for the priest hero of Bud's books.

Then began a two year long wait for an answer. At the time of receiving our manuscript, Bud was busy moving to a remote forest refuge to outwit the Y2K disaster scenarios he had been writing about in his novels. The relatively peaceful [Y2K](#) was followed by the birth of a new baby. When the answer finally came it was negative. Bud liked the book. Of all the novels submitted this one was the best, but it wasn't long enough or sensational enough.

Alas! Grief! Authors feel about their books almost as if they were children. Was this a miscarriage or a still-birth? During the two year wait I had sent queries to several other publishers but they refused to even look because most novels don't sell. The one that does great Catholic novels, Ignatius, wants ones way above our level. Sadness!

Reluctantly I put the many versions of the novel and the discs into a file cabinet in marked "old manuscripts." But after death comes resurrection. A year later I was surfing the net looking to see if there was any Catholic writers' board. If there was one, maybe it would have tips for finding publishers for fiction. How about Catholic Writer's Association (CWA) with, praise be God, a notation that they were only open to chatting with authors who totally accept magisterial teaching! CWA Book Nook was one of the icons. It was full of notations about Catholic novels. Wow! Strange, though, I didn't recognize the names of any of the publishers.

Chatting with the board's "master" Kathryn Lively, who had written a novel I reviewed positively years ago, I discovered that these publishers were mostly e-book presses! I was stunned. What could an e-book be? Virtual sweethearts, virtual parties, virtual games were bizarre enough, but how could so solid a thing as a book be virtual? It took a month for me to get it. In case you're interested as a reader or a writer, here is how it works. (If you are not in the least bit interested in details on this, skip ahead to the paragraph after this next one!)

Whereas a regular publisher has to pay for paper, printing, warehousing to the tune of about \$20,000 for a good run on a book, for about \$500 you can take a disc with a book on it and transform it for the net so that anyone can down-load it for about \$5. Such net people don't get a book but they get what is called nowadays "a read." They can browse through a chapter of a book on the net to decide whether they want a disc of the whole or just have it transferred to their hard-drive. No dusting either! Some e-book publishers also do POD which means they print-on-demand regular looking copies for a higher price. This means they don't have to advance much money for printing or storage.

It didn't take me a whole month to start asking Kathryn Lively, the board master, a computer expert, why she didn't want to start a Catholic e-book publishing net. And, if so, why not take a look at my novel. So, now, only about 3 months later I have a contract in hand for *A SUMMER KNIGHT'S TALE BY CHERVIN AND GRANDY*.

You can also find the book on my web-site – [www.rondachervin.com](http://www.rondachervin.com). *A Summer Knight's Tale* even won a prize in the inspirational fiction category of an e-book award called Ep

Thank you, Holy Spirit for inspiring us to write this book. Thank you all the saints we prayed to at our Christian writers' group: St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, Ven. Cardinal Newman (who wrote novels), St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Thomas More, and any I am forgetting now...

#### Glorious Mystery

Back in my office I played a CD of Bach Motets. How often my glorious mystery is music. Brought up as girl on Tchaikovsky, Dvorak and Ravel it is surprising how much I love Bach. If I could take only one disc to a deserted island it would be something of Bach. Probably the low-key intensity of his passion is soothing to my jumpy nature. More deeply is the hope that comes from his rock-like faith. We should not underestimate the spiritual riches Protestants had then and still do now. Listening to these motets reminded me of my first contact with Bach as a college student. A boyfriend played the famous Wachet Auf – the piece about being awake to the call of Christ. At that atheist phase of my life I didn't think I liked choral music and I couldn't understand a word of German. Yet tears of joy came to my eyes as I heard that sublime music. After becoming a Catholic I bought a record with many Bach motets and played it over and over again until it wore out. I especially loved a piece based on the parable of Jesus about the clever and foolish virgins trimming or forgetting to trim their lamps for the wedding party. I've lost the reference number of that motet and haven't been able to find it again.

Guardian angel of Bach, was it you who inspired that deep graced music to express our deepest longings?

November 24, 2001

#### Joyful Mystery:

One of our students who goes home for the weekend brought back some spicy fried Filipino fish. A lovely feature of our small community life at the college is the way everyone is eager to share such treats. Typically we stand around the table where the delicacy is displayed and casting aside normal manners, just grab pieces in our hands until the last one is devoured. Since we are so multi-national often these gifts are ethnic, a factor that adds to the fun.

I often think how the most successful cultural exchange of peoples comes through food. In my lifetime it was first pizza that went from being flipped at two parlors to thousands of pizzerias, eventually to outdo the popularity of this concoction in the Italy of its origin. (By the way, I later found out that Tom Monaghan was one of those young men who flipped pizzas near 42nd St. NYC and went on to build up Domino's Pizzas) Then, Chinese food moved from an occasional small restaurant in New York City to become a part of even the smallest cities across the country. Next Japanese sushi was all the rage – expensive and exotic but now in many a mall. Thai restaurants made a smaller splash. Of course in hispanic parts of the country Mexican food has always been an entrée to that fine culture. Thank you God for, as it were, winning our hearts through our stomachs.

Many of us over sixty like to collect senior moments. In case you are not familiar with the phrase it refers to little instances where loss of memory leads to slight but somewhat embarrassing consequences. Well this one tops all. One of our older priests came to breakfast to recount how he had gotten out of bed and padded to the bathroom. Suddenly he turned around to see if he was still in bed!

It reminded me of another one recently shared: “Often mid-stream I ask myself what I am doing? Nothing? Then how do I know if I am through?”

When I turned sixty I wrote a book called *Seeking Christ in the Sufferings and Joys of Aging*. (CMJ, Marian Publishers – but now distributed by En Route Books). It was meant to be a serious research effort. Just the same, in my perusal of diverse accounts of aging I found many humorous passages. Now, five years later, I realize that being old has a tender child-like side. Help me to appreciate your providence, Father God, in this phase of my life. Yes, there is physical pain and emotional loss, but there can also come a certain playful joy in letting go of a performance-oriented sense of self.

An example would be my godmother, a woman of fierce will-power whose organizational ability centered around home and friends. She it was who wrote down and remembered everyone’s birthday in a lay community of more than fifty people. She it was who kept a running list of what had to be done day by day. Her sense of motherly responsibility for the clan was accompanied by much tension. When I first knew her back in the 1960’s I used to wonder how a woman so holy could be so stressed and sometimes irritable. But now, myself twice as harried and angry, I take hope from her final years. Confined to a bed, unable to take care even of herself no less a whole lay community, she spent her last years lying quietly in blissful gratitude for the ministry to her of others, pondering God’s goodness as she turned over in her soul the memories of ninety years!

Sorrowful Mystery:

There is much sadness but also ambivalence in me over the issue of evangelical poverty. Our community was founded to minister in the areas of deepest poverty – physical and spiritual. To run an institute of higher learning we need lots of benefactors many of whom are in our community.

In some ways our school is poor. Gadgets fall apart and cannot just be automatically replaced. There are other deficiencies that one brought up in a lower middle class household would find upsetting. At the same time, we are way above poverty level. There is plenty to eat, always including delicious desserts, and adequate heat and air-conditioning in the dormitory. Due to generous donors we have enough to build a beautiful new chapel.

I have always defended the Church for accepting the contributions even of the very poor for the sake of constructing stupendous cathedrals. This is on the basis that such edifices belong not to the clergy but to the whole people who visit them on the way to market as a kind of celestial salon. However, now that it is us who will experience the contrast between, for instance, less than I think we need of basics at the school, but an expensive wonderful chapel, the simplicity issue seems more complicated.



Consider, for starters, how much easier it is to ask a benefactor to contribute toward a stained glass windows than for hall rugs in the dorm. Yes, but! And the precious metal needed for the altar? Of an analytic bent my mind turns around such questions as how many miners throughout the centuries have died in grim conditions to provide silver and gold to adorn the fingers of the rich or the design of a chalice. I laugh at myself realizing I don't even know if gold or silver is mined in dark tunnels or found in streams!

Just the same, these questions inevitably lead to fantasies about my utopian dream college – a small self-supporting farming school with the least tuition and simplicity-minded professors and their families working for room and board. Barter. A doctor could live on campus donating his services in exchange for free education for his children. The same with the initial constructors. Beauty? Nature and the simply charm of the kind of poor chapels St. Francis and his followers built in the hills of Umbria. Beloved Saint Francis of Assisi, if you were here today would you advise us to avoid exhausting complaint about present conditions and seek a truly simple form of education or would you simply tell us to give up the idea of schools and live like you, learning from Scripture, the Church and the lilies of the field?

Glorious Mystery:

Longing for freedom of spirit has always been a part of my quest even though I am not quite sure what freedom of spirit really is. My external image of it comes from the popular movie about St. Francis: Brother Sun, Sister Moon with scenes of followers running through the fields. One of my mentors, Charles Rich, the lay contemplative,(see my web-site for books of mine about him and others I edited of his writings) claims that the real freedom of spirit comes interiorly from total surrender to God. Conchita, the Mexican mystical saint wrote that “Peace is the sweet freedom of spirit that does everything without anxiety.”

Today in prayer I heard the Holy Spirit tell me that if I love Jesus and nothing and no one as much, then this will bring freedom of spirit. I need to desire most to be one with God instead of agonizing so much over the outer form of my life. Perhaps I could retain the externals of my life as a professor and just drop the heavy investment in trying to “fix” everything.

The glory in this reflection comes from a fleeting sense that someday I will have that freedom of spirit. The sorrow comes from the knowledge that it is so far away. In search of freedom, after much conflict, I drop some external commitment, only to find a pretext a few months later to assume some other role with its minimal rewards and vexing duties! Lord, have mercy! In the words of Kierkegaard's prayer, “untie the knot of my being.”

November 25, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Even though it is real winter elsewhere, today we had our typical “winter” weather in the Southern part of the United States: balmy winds and sunshine galore. Since so much of the summer – April-October is boiling hot and I complain so much about it, I need to really pause and exult in this “perfect day.” A friend of mine, born on a Kansas farm, used to berate me for this manner of

thinking of weather. How selfish she thought New York City people are for rating the weather only in terms of their own comfort instead of with a view to the more important needs of the crops.

Father God, help me not to be so parochial about even such small things as weather. If it is important enough to complain about discomforts coming from heat or cold why isn't it important enough to rejoice thankfully about the happy times, longer than a perfunctory "Praise the Lord"? I mean really savor everything good.

Sorrowful Mystery:

In prayer to Mary who is considered to be the real founder of our community and our present school, I seem to hear her telling me that the early Christians were a sort of team but not as tightly organized as I want things to be. I do not need to fix on a plan so much as to pray and follow the Spirit as He directs. That slowed down my racing thoughts for a while.

Glorious Mystery:

A last thought - would it be good to include in a review at nightfall these two questions: To whom did I show love today? Who showed love to me?

November 26, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I had a small tiff about something trivial with a priest at the college. When I saw him in the hall I got the grace to say to him, "Father, I feel so bad. I really wanted to be your friend. I like you so much and now you hate me."

"No, I don't hate you," he replied smiling and gave me a big hug. This incident showed me, as always, what good results come from showing vulnerability.

Jesus and Mary, I find so much vulnerability in the images you have given to saints and mystics of your sacred and immaculate hearts. How much you want us to know that you wish us to love you back in response for the love you have in your hearts for us. May I never be so distracted by the poverty of the artistic rendering of those images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that I do not let the sight of your hearts on the walls of churches and in the homes of Catholic move my own heart.

Sorrowful Mystery:

This evening I was disappointed because a priest who was supposed to attend an important meeting didn't come. He was called away for a communal penance service by the Bishop. I thought another priest could be sent to the penance service who didn't have twenty people waiting for him some place else, i.e. where we were needing him.

Jesus, priest of priests, help me to understand. I hear You saying in my heart, dear Lord, that You infuse into priests at ordination an intense desire to serve in the sacraments more than in other ways and I need to accept this. Am I not so grateful for the Mass and Confession? Am I happy with priests who prefer golf or meetings to their more sublime obligations?

Glorious Mystery:

Today we had a groundbreaking for our new chapel. It was cold and windy but glorious to see representatives of so many groups who love our school come out for the Bishop's blessing. He gave a wonderful little sermon about how for a century or more people would be coming off the nearby freeway to find solace in our church. A special delight was to watch the children of the families close to us dig into the dirt with shovels as part of the ceremony. This was followed by an invitation to any of the priests, sisters, brothers, lay people of our group and others to take part in the ceremony by turning over a little dirt. I enjoyed hugging some of the benefactors who have given "anonymously" for the chapel but whose generosity I happen to know about.

What a sense of Your mystical body, Jesus, to have us all together for this great venture. I hear Mary, Mother of the Church, speaking in my heart. "Dearest daughter, take the time to ponder deeply these sublime moments where everything comes out even better than you could hope. It is true that you are too physically weak for ascetical sacrifices, but I do want you to accept small discomforts such as the cold and the wind tonight so that you will be free to enjoy times like these, full of grace. I want to be for you like a mother encouraging a small whiney child. When you feel bent out of shape, take my hand and let me mother you through the tiny difficulties of daily life."

Some other reflections of this day: Mary said once to Conchita (now in 2013 Venerable Concepcion de Cabrera (Conchita), the mystical Mexican grandmother saint who will one day be a doctor of the Church, "'I am gentle and humble of heart.' I do not come to teach science or ostentatious victories. I come to teach patience and humility. I want you resemble your Jesus in this."

I overheard a person remarking that our liturgies are not as beautiful as they could be if they were chanted in Latin. Someone replied, "Isn't it more important that we have fine-tuned hearts?" Of course there would be no harm in having both fine-tuned voices as well as hearts, but, this pithy comment seemed to me quite a challenge to my heart. As a matter of fact, we do pretty well with singing when we know the melody well such as chanting the mercy chaplet together.

November 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

When I was a wife I hated the burden of shopping. I found a way to do a whole week's worth in about half an hour. Suffering under the monotony of the same foods chosen so swiftly, my husband eventually took over that chore, spending three hours at the task and bringing home so many surprises we started calling out, "Hello, Santa Claus" when he came in the door with the twenty bags.

Besides not liking to interrupt my writing to shop I also disliked going out into “the world.” I saw any place besides the Church and Catholic schools as likely to include some kind of subtle worship of Mammon. Perhaps you also have noticed that whereas in medieval times the Catholic church was the center of town, a sacred place in the midst of the hurly burly of the market, now our new “sacred” place is the bank-vault. Lowered tones are apparently most appropriate when you enter the golden safe-deposit bank room ushered in by an “acolyte” with a special key in hand.

I ask my favorite woman saint, Teresa of Avila, whether any of those sisters who fled from the large Carmelite unreformed convents to her small tiny ones sometimes felt cooped up. After all, we read in biographies that you, Teresa, sometimes watched the hands turning on the clock and sighed, “One minute less of this tedious life before entering the joys of eternity.”

I hear her laughing at me. She seemed to say that nothing is perfect outside of heaven. But it is better to have a deep prayer life in union with God free from the distractions of a large community and constant often worldly guests, even if it is sometimes wearisome to be more enclosed. I imagine Teresa chiding me, “Be less rigid, Ronda. If I amused the nuns when they were bored by dancing with castanets, find your own way to get out of whatever bad moods the devil wants to throw you into.”

November 27, 2001

Glorious Mystery:

I love watching my brothers and sisters of the college during late afternoon adoration prayer. What facets of their souls become visible in their faces and postures when they are relating not to me or to the others but to You, Jesus, their divine savior!

Since we are a free-spirited community we put little strictures on body position in chapel. In the space between the first row of chairs and the altar I see a visiting priest from an Order doubled over in his long habit, face flattened on the carpet. A tired woman professor is kneeling piously but with torso listing to the side as she fluctuates between prayer of quiet, a doze, and a quick awakening with a glance at the devotional pamphlet she is holding in one hand. Another adorer is resting his head on arms folded on the back of the chair in front of him. Others stare transfixed at the host in the monstrance.

Sometimes I am amused if I hear snoring. Today, I am more touched by a kind of creaturely trust represented by these natural sounds and postures. We know that God understands how tired we are in his service. We also have a cozy kind of familiarity with each other that obviates any need to pretend, by a straight-backed perfection, to some recollected holiness we have not yet achieved. Come to think of it, little Therese of Lisieux admitted to falling asleep often in choir. Isn't it likely that Mary and Joseph often slept when Jesus remained awake?

When I question the relative "messiness" of the way our community lives, might God want to remind me that if he preferred uniformity to variety he would never have created hippos as well as stallions? And aren't I, myself, more like a hippo than a stallion?

November 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today I had long chats with women friends. Since so many of my relationships here are with seminarians, I cherish in a new way the dearness of companionable women. I picture us as participating in some way in the mystery of the visitation when you, Mary went to visit Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, for mutual comfort and sisterly sharing of wisdom. There is an empathy that comes immediately in communing with those of the same sex, heightened in this case by these particular women being older with adult children. Since the death of my son, Charlie, ten years ago, closeness to friends who are mothers is also increased by their great pity for me as a survivor of his suicide. (For more about that tragedy and how Jesus brought me through it see my autobiography, *En Route of Eternity* – Miriam Press or free, my book *Weeping with Jesus* (See En Route Books – Popular Spirituality). Like me they would rather die than have a child make that choice, and so they want to blanket me in their compassionate affection. At the time of his death, Mary, you showed me unmistakably how close you were to me in the partial similitude of your enduring the death of your son, Jesus. O mother saints who lived through the death of children, Elizabeth Seton, Cornelia Connelly, Conchita, Praxedes – and others, intercede for me in my worst memories and for all those others I have met since who grieve those losses.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I was reflecting today about the character of a friend who seems to carry all the negativity of the group he belongs to. A valiant, loyal and cocky person on the good side, he is also disappointed in life and bitter about past injuries. Subjected to verbal abuse from his father as a boy, he exhibits exceptional sensitivity to slights to which he retaliates by ridiculing his victimizers in conversation not with them but with others about them. Because his remarks are so amusing, I chide myself as an enabler of his bad traits.

You seem to be teaching me, Holy Spirit, to praise this man lavishly for what he says and does that is good and try to change the subject when his wit turns sour. I know that we can learn from the flaws of others as well as from their virtues. Help me withdraw my own claws when I have been hurt. Let me find fun not in sarcasm and caricature but rather in the ambiguities of life that are so human and humorous. How I love it when others are able to relax a tense atmosphere by means of non-toxic outrageous puns and zany stories.

Glorious Mystery:

Every weekday evening we have what are called spiritual exercises. A member of the team is assigned on a rotating basis to meditate on the writings of our founder and come up with a personal witness sharing about how the truth in the excerpt has manifested itself in his or her life that week. Tonight one of the seminarians told us how there came a time when his rich family went bankrupt. Abruptly they had to change their way of life and live like the poor. Instead of elaborate amusements they had to revert to impromptu family fun at home. He asked us to recall greater joy in life coming because of being poorer than usual. My memory came from Junior High School days. Our parents were recently divorced. We had little money. What intense delight I took in my first pink Spaulding handball, purchased with fifty cents saved over a long time. In those days the first priority was bubble-gum which I forsook to buy the little ball.

Yes, there is glory in small things. Sometimes when I close my eyes during the rosary or the mercy chaplet, there is bliss in just the sound of the known voices of the others. If we were not so small as a school I could never identify each voice. What a good way of experiencing Your mystical body, my Jesus.

November 31, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today some of us professors worked on the Catholic Arts and Wisdom courses we are planning to teach next year. I love team teaching, especially the chance to enjoy other professor's gifts and wisdom in the warm setting of a small classroom. Not just me, but also others with me, building a sort of intellectual "nest" where you, Holy Spirit, can come through our words to our beloved students.

The objective is to help the students to come into a synthesis of theology, philosophy, literature, art and music. Even though I also like less noble forms of art such as cartoons, or popular Gospel songs, I find it almost unbearable that a graduate of Catholic

higher education might never have heard Monteverdi's choral music or looked carefully at even a copy of a fresco of Fra Angelico. One of my colleagues who is gifted in music and teaches literature will bring in that aspect as well as books about art and architecture. I will prepare the lectures about philosophy and spirituality for each period of Catholic history.

Of course one of the reasons why planning is so exciting is that we are projecting the ideal without any of the limits. What do we do when the slide projector breaks down? When worrying about such glitches, I need to remember how once on a retreat the priest-director's opening talk was to be accompanied by slides. Two hundred participants sat patiently watching him take half an hour trying to fix the broken projector. Not once did he curse or even sigh! I remember this patient endurance more than any words he spoke later in the retreat.

Next best to planning courses is the unexpected pleasure that comes when the students themselves burst the boundaries of my "packaged" goals in their own creative response to the truths they have discovered in reading and group work.

Even writing about the joys of teaching makes the adrenalin flow faster. So many have to work at jobs they dislike to make a living. Thank You, Father God for Your providence in finding a profession for me that would bring me such happiness and also be fruitful for Your kingdom.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today, I feel anxiety about the future. Fear of loneliness dominates. What am I afraid of, my Jesus? When I asked that question in prayer, it seemed that You were trying to show me that my longing for more intimate relationships on the team is right in line with what the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of our group's documents to hope for. My need for greater openness, more beauty on campus without sacrificing simplicity, is what we all need. In fact, one of our sisters proclaimed at a meeting that the root of problems on the team and at the college came from the lack of enough one on one love among us, thereby corroborating what I was sensing.

Greater love between us should overflow into the classroom. Since some male professors consider being personal in the classroom as, perhaps, somewhat feminine, it gives me a certain satisfaction to read about how personally John Paul II taught philosophy in his former days as Professor Karol Wojtyla. I love the scenes in films about his life that show him saying Mass in the mountains on hikes with his student disciples. Even now, when there is a crowd, he reaches out to individuals. Whenever the energy in a class dries up I come to realize it is because I have stopped loving them as individuals and started just to "teach the material"!

Glorious Mystery:

I found such a wonderful line in a hymn in the *Office of Readings* (a book of psalms and passages from the Fathers, Doctors and other Saints of the Church. This used to be chanted at Matins early in the morning. Now it is usually prayed any time of the day by religious and lay and is often found within the four-volume set of the Liturgy of the Hours).

This line I found in the Common of the Apostles, “If you really love me, be glad, have hope, for I leave with you my Spirit to guide you.”

Perhaps you don’t give much credence to or do not know too much about the theory of the four temperaments. I have not studied it in depth but I find the distinction between the choleric, phlegmatic, sanguine and melancholic temperaments to be helpful. In more ordinary language people can be divided into those with predominantly angry or laid back, optimistic or pessimistic ways of relating to life. Usually an individual has one the strongest, one fairly characteristic, with the others rarely in evidence. Each has its good side. Choleric (angry) people are also usually high-energy and willing to come against evils. Phlegmatic (passive laid back) ones, not being “driven” can sit for hours listening to others and giving advice. They are patient with delay. It takes a sanguine (optimistic) person to start new ventures and to rebound from discouraging setbacks. Melancholics (sad-sacks) face up to the worst without denial and are more likely to come up with deep remedies than the other types.

I am primarily choleric but with a definite melancholic streak. As a result, hoping in times of difficulty is impossible on a natural level. Are you forcing me, God, to hope in You alone, by increasing the difficulty so that I have to leap above nature into grace? As the saints did, not just at Mass but at every minute of the day?

Let me remember that the medievals listed despair as a terrible sin. And let me savor that glorious song verse, “If you really love me, be glad, have hope, for I leave with you my Spirit to guide you.”

December 1, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today a friend renewed his promises in the community. I was so happy for him. This morning, this man instead of being cranky over his many greater and lesser crosses, was emanated only a sense of the solemnity of his commitment to belonging to Jesus alone. We could glimpse in a small way this introvert’s deep love for you, Jesus, and the Church, the fulcrum of his vocation. In his disgust with what he thinks of in others as sentimental displays of piety, he rarely manifests the love for you that has sustained him through decades of physical pain and spiritual anguish.

Thank you, Jesus, Mary and Joseph for drawing my brothers and sisters into this intimate union with you. Thank you for the fidelity of married people to our sacrament through the mountains and valleys. How good anniversaries are for renewal of purpose in the face of the petty and more significant frustrations of daily life.

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Taking stock of the entries in *Face to Face* so far, I am wondering what you, the reader, are thinking. Pretty intense, eh? Naturally, a journal is not a diary. Between the strong emotional reactions and the bringing of these before the face of the Trinity, the Holy Family, and the angels and saints, there is no room for hourly notations of such boring things as now I brushed my teeth and, then, walked to the classroom. Perhaps I should spend more time thanking You, God, for those neutral low-key realities that



act as a sort of insulation. Ordinary life does function as a pause between struggles to jump out of the little hells of each day, often of my own making, into Your loving arms.

December 3, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today a group of women who take my community education classes in spirituality and literature attended a luncheon at the house of one of the students. I have always liked this woman for her warmth and a certain air of sadness that appeals to the motherly side of my nature. People in this part of the country dress in the most casual fashion possible. In New York City where I was born and bred the attire of a woman is a pretty good clue as to what her house will be like. Here that is less predictable. This student's large house was beautiful and colorful, many of the paintings the result of her own artistic talent. Comfortably furnished, neat but in no way perfect in the cold style of an interior decorator, I felt as privileged as if I had entered some exclusive art gallery.

Part of the legacy of my bohemian background is to have a certain ambivalence about such lovely and comparatively luxurious homes. As I sat on an elegant stuffed sofa enjoying delicious canapés and sipping wine, I thought about what your house might have been like, Mother Mary of Nazareth. Even if it was austere you might have owned a colorful hand woven carpet. A bright shawl might have been draped over a wooden room divider. And these would stand out even more against the simple backdrop of bare walls.

I hear you chiding me, Mary, for needing to see everything in contrast, either/or, rather than looking for what is common – a house to shelter familial love – in Nazareth during the Roman occupation or this modern city two thousand years afterwards.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Newspaper reports are coming out about the fighting in Israel. It tears me apart. I think it was around 1987 that we went on a trip to the Holy Land. In spite of many difficult features of the place, I will never regret that pilgrimage. For me the most important thing was being able to picture afterwards what that territory looks like as a backdrop for reading Scripture. The idea that Your feet, my Jesus, actually walked on that earth is so extraordinary. Also, at the very end of our ten days there I felt a kind of pull from the land, as if it was asking me to pledge to return some day. This sense was linked to the realization that it is not the buildings or the people that are named holy but the land: the Holy Land.

Among the disturbing realities of Israel were not differences between the time of Jesus and our era, but the similarities I found in many of the faces of the populace. A hard expression of fanatic conviction rather than friendly welcome could be seen in the faces of Chasidic orthodox Jews in their old fashioned 19th century European garments, Sabras – those contemporary Jews born in Israel, and in some of the faces of the Arabs in their fascinating dress mostly selling in the suqs – narrow bazaars with tables under covered awnings leaning against the walls in the streets. The only “normal” looking folk were children and the mainly Christian tourists.

This perception of hardness lingers in my memory when seeing pictures now in the papers or on TV of the tragic street battles between Israelis and Palestinians. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, St. James, St. Paul intercede for your people. St. Francis of Assisi, daring peace-maker going off to plead with the Sultan in the name of Jesus, help those blood-stained peoples to come to the peace that can only come with justice and forgiveness.

Glorious Mystery:

Signing the contract for the e-book, *A Summer Knight's Tale*, described earlier, I felt much satisfaction. My co-author Gene and I worked so hard on this book. Sitting thinking about the book and praying it will help zealous young priests to persevere, I had a sense that You, Jesus, were honoring all the labor I put into this and other books for the sake of truth.

Many years ago when my heart was still heavy as lead from the grief of the loss of my son, I was taking a nap during a long drive. I had a kind of mystical dream in which You kissed me on the forehead leaving an invisible white diamond shape like that sometimes found above a horse's nose. Occasionally when I am feeling happy at having done something for You I get an echo of that image of Your kiss leaving a diamond shape on my forehead, like a secret code between us.

Let those who experience Your love in other ways, but not in such fleeting touches, not ridicule as hallucinatory such charming gifts. Certainly melancholics know for sure we could not invent out of the snake-pit of our dismal thoughts anything so light and graceful as a diamond shaped kiss.

December 4, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

I get so upset when I give directions over and over again to my students for their study and papers but they pay no attention and then lose out. I helps me to remember, St. Augustine, that you, one of the greatest geniuses of all times, had even more recalcitrant pupils who sassed you and then refused to pay their fees (See *Confessions*). I need to show my love for my dear students who have such good will by patiently repeating instructions no matter how tedious this may be. Teacher saints Thomas Aquinas, Elizabeth Seton, Angela Merici, Don Bosco, De Salle, help me.

Glorious Mystery:

This is the time in my ethics course where we read and discuss John Paul II's encyclical *Splendour of Truth*. One of my goals in teaching seminarians and undergrads, who will one day be evangelists, is that as a result of what they study in the first part of the course they will be able to truly grasp the way the Holy Father synthesizes philosophical and theological truth in his encyclicals. When *Splendour of Truth* was sent out from the Vatican those of us in the loyalist magisterial part of the Church devoured it whole. Tears came to my eyes to see the deft manner of John Paul II's refutation of so many errors being taught by some confused thinkers in our Catholic universities.

My students are always astounded to see how these erroneous ideas have crept into their own minds without their realizing the origin or falseness of them. For example, how many post-Vatican II Catholics take it for granted that it is the intentions rather than the physical acts themselves that make something wrong. Accordingly, they believe that a couple who is using contraceptives because they want to have a large family later after they are settled in their careers couldn't be that wrong.

With consummate precision our Pope-philosopher shows the anti-personalistic bias behind such false teaching and practice. How so? Basically counting intention rather than act, is as if the body is separate from the soul. But God created the body as an expression of the soul. An act of sex during the fertile time - needs to be an expression of the total openness of love between the embodied persons of man and wife. (For a simplified version of this and other Catholic ethical teachings see my short book *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics* – Pauline Books – Daughters of St. Paul. It was reprinted by Franciscan University of Steubenville Press, and is now part of a compendium of mine called *The Way of Love* as the 3rd “book” called Making Loving Moral Decisions. This book is now published by Enroute Books and Media.

December 6, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today was the birthday of my grandson, Christopher. He was ten years old. He is a tough little baseball player, sometimes friendly to me but sometimes a bit gruff. When I called to greet him for his birthday his voice on the phone was so innocent and sweet. The Holy Spirit told me to keep showing love to the lad even when he doesn't seem too interested.

Glorious Mystery:

In the *Office of Reading* I find St. Augustine commenting on the words of St. Peter reassuring Jesus after the resurrection how much he loved him: “Peter had denied Christ three times and to counter this he must profess his faith three times. Otherwise his tongue would seem quicker to serve fear than love.”

Oh, my God, how much more often do I doubt that you will protect me than do I shower you with thanksgiving for “schlepping” me through so many thorn-bushes on the road of life. Right now, as I worry about the future here, I will pray as did St. Francis of Assisi “My God and my all” over and over again. I trust you for eternity and for time. Thy will be done. You will try me but you will not shaft me.

December 7, 2001

Glorious Mystery:

One of my motives for becoming a Catholic when I was twenty-one, after years of trying to find truth through philosophy alone, was to be certain of truth through the gift of infallibility to Peter and his successors. As an atheist I studied the contradictory views of many great philosophers. As a result, nothing could have been clearer to me by the time of my conversion than that

good-will and intellect is insufficient to resolve the conflict of ideas. The Holy Spirit who guides the Church is not a human philosopher but a Divine Person whom I can trust.

Today I was able to enjoy the benefits of magisterial teaching about the dispute between me and a seminarian. The matter concerned whether a spouse who is against contraceptives can tolerate a spouse who uses them. My conviction was that if a person is not using a contraceptive he or she cannot be blamed for the use of it by the spouse and that it would be wrong to refuse marital intercourse as a means of persuasion. But a famous theologian was cited on the other side on the basis that the non-contracepting spouse was cooperating with a sin and therefore sinful.

Getting conflicting opinions from several local experts, I called the USCC to see if there was a document from the Vatican on this. First the person I spoke to said she was sure I was wrong, but when she looked up the document she found an explicit passage from *Casti Connubi*, the encyclical written at the beginning of the 20th century when condoms and diaphragms were becoming more and more popular even among Catholics. There my view was clearly expressed. If the spouse who refuses to contracept tries to persuade the other one not to, but fails to convince that contracepting spouse, she or he should pray and try to bring the other to the light, but is still obliged to consummate the sexual act by virtue of his or her marital commitment. The non-contracepting party is to be considered not as a cooperating sinner but rather as a victim of the sin of the other. This has been the unchanged teaching for priests in confessional practice since then. Of course, this is not to say that a wavering spouse should take this teaching as a pretext for *encouraging* the contracepting spouse in his sin.

I was so happy to see this spelled out since it is a problem that arises quite often among those who return to the faith, confess their sins of contraception, but are unable to convince a spouse to give it up. At the time of their marriage, often neither thought following the Church's teaching was important, and many didn't even know what it was.

Thank you Holy Spirit for unraveling for us the intricacies of our moral problems. May the light of truth enlighten the whole world involved now in the even more tragic mentality behind abortion.

(Reading this now in 2013, we are more aware of how contraceptives are themselves abortifacient. That is, they are designed to keep the sperm from reaching the egg, but if they do come together, the contraceptive pill flushes out the tiny embryo.)

December 8, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

I realize that how much masculine anger frightens me even though I have never been subjected to anything like the violence so many women have endured in the course of history. At a university where I used to teach there was a rape reported on campus. A few weeks later the women at the college were obliged to go to a lecture by a policewoman. She gave us good advice about avoiding situations such as being alone in an elevator with a strange man or getting out of a car at night without first looking for prowlers. She also convinced many of us to take a few classes in how to use a gadget for spraying mace on an assailant.

The policewoman made a point that stuck in my mind. Because of the greater physical strength of most men, there is an unconscious knowledge built into the psyches of women that an enraged or crazed male could kill almost any female with his bare hands if so motivated. I think this emerges as a kind of gut level fear in women when men show unusual degrees of verbal anger even if there is no aggressive physical act accompanying the words. For example, even in situations where I know the men pretty well, if there is a lot of verbal anger in any situation, I find that my body is tense, as if fearing a blow.

Glorious Mystery:

The Vicar of our community gave a startling sermon at the Mass this morning. He admitted to sometimes getting sick of the burden of leadership and longing to escape to a Trappist monastery somewhere. Then he detailed the many graces he had received during his time as a priest of our community, especially at times when he was sent to missions he tried to reject. His frankness about his temptations made his recital of the joys of ministry all the more striking.

Thank you, Lord, for perseverance and obedience of priests! May I always support them with appreciation, understanding, and prayer.

December 9, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The highlight of a visit to the home of dear friends was the contemplation of their elegant Siamese cat. Of pets we had when I was a child and later in life, I generally prefer dogs, but to look at, I find cats even more fascinating. While we were talking and praying together I watched the cat roaming around the room, settling in the laps of its doting owners, rising with a yawn, stretching its sleek body, and padding softly in and out of the living room. Someday if I settle down to one definite place where animals are allowed, will I decide to have a cat of my own?

(I did, years later, enjoy the company of two lovely cats for several years.)

Creator God, over time I have come to rejoice in the shapes, textures, and movements of Your birds and animals more and more. Thank you for the relative leisure of this phase of my life with more time for soft wonder, tracing with my eyes the lines of Your artistry.

Glorious Mystery:

Earlier in *Face to Face*, I wrote about our Anglican-use parish here on campus. Again, that was originally designed for Anglicans who become Roman Catholics but want to retain a version of their own old English liturgy. Presently many who attend are not former Anglicans, just folk who want the greater formality and beauty of these rituals.

The priest who presides over the Anglican-use parish is a black convert from a Baptist background. A kind of contemporary renaissance man with talents as diverse as playing the banjo and singing grand opera, this priest loves high liturgy and

appropriate Church appointments. At this Anglican-use Mass there is an altar and some benches with hard kneelers but little in the way of other furnishings. Imagine his pleasure when it was discovered that hidden away in the abandoned gymnasium of the old prep school our college took over there was a huge wooden pulpit. Laboriously this was heaved onto a truck and placed in our makeshift chapel.

This morning for the first time we watched as our priest ascended the winding steps inside the pulpit to stand some ten feet above us to proclaim the Gospel and preach to us. He did so with appropriate flourishes as he looked way down at our beaming upturned faces.

One of my favorite things is watching someone when they get something they have long wished for. In our world so full of disappointments, thank you, Lord, for sometimes granting those wishes. As a matter of fact, this priest is the fulfillment of one of my unspoken wishes. It happens that my mother, though white, was part of the Harlem literary and artistic movement in New York City. Some of her best friends were blacks. As children, my twin sister and I loved the visits of people of this much more fun-loving, imaginative, soft-spoken breed. Later I would thrill to the music of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, the jazzy gospel singing of Mahalia Jackson, and read with pounding heart the vibrant shocking prose of such writers as James Baldwin.

As a Catholic I was at first not too sure about Martin Luther King, Jr. but, like so many others skeptics, after the death of this hero, I began to read him with amazement. What faith, hope, and charitable forgiveness of enemies! And how touching to read about our own St. Martin de Porres. Later I came to love the writings of such black women poets and novelists as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Best of all is a charismatic speaker and prayer leader, Babsie Bleasdel, with whom I shared the role of speaker at several Steubenville conferences. She rocked me in her large bosom for more than half an hour when I told her about the death of my son.

This black priest who got his wish for a high pulpit, dislikes being stereotyped even in a positive way, but for me he is the personal embodiment of all the qualities I loved in all those friends and famous blacks. Thank you, Father God, for giving him to me as mentor and friend even though I never asked for such a gift.

December 10, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Largely because of problems with my daughters when they were teens and young adults (they are now in their late thirties) and the death of my son to suicide at age nineteen, I have labored under the conviction that I am not good with young people. I preferred teaching seminarians, mostly older men. They are over the hump of the crises more typical of younger people. Today's joyful mystery came when some undergraduates in their late teens came to my office for personal counseling. Possibly now that I am more of a grandmother figure than a mother figure, I seem softer and less judgmental to them.

I confide these young people into the hands you, the holy family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. May any words of mine always be truly helpful and not only a projection of something from my own past.

Glorious Mystery:

A person I was in conflict with came to my office today. I was wary. When it became clear that my main gripes had more to do with someone else rather than with him, tears came to his eyes. I was flabbergasted. Here was his frightening tough guy looking like a little boy whose mother wasn't going to punish him after all. I gave him a big hug and sighed.

My Jesus, you want me to see the vulnerable side of men I am angry at or afraid of. Please let me remember the image of the tears in this man's eyes.

December 11, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

(The joy, here, is not in the topics but in the importance of defending Catholic teaching, which gives me joy where dissent makes me miserable.)

The subject of my ethics class today was on conscience. Specifically I lectured on the claim by some dissenters that since the Church clearly changed her views about slavery and usury we can be pioneers by accepting contraception knowing that, too, will eventually be judged differently.

Even though the students that come to us do not hold such subtle false teachings, they don't know how to defend the Church against them too well either. They were so grateful for a cogent explanation. On slavery of the past in the world and particularly in the United States, the Church has always taught that it was wrong, if it took the form of robbing the serving person of all rights.

In the Old Testament an indentured servant, now called a slave, had many rights and was to be freed at the jubilee. In early Roman times taking a person as a permanent slave was an alternative to death at the hands of the victors of battles. Tolerating an evil is different than calling it good. The example I give is how the Church teaches that all Christians should live simply and austere. How many pastors in any parishes, no less middle-class and rich ones would dare to preach this in the teeth of the relative luxury of so many United States Catholics? That doesn't mean that the Church approves of its members being so lacking in simplicity as to buy, for instance, so many garments to store in their closets they can't even find what they need each day. It is not good but it is tolerated.

I quoted documentation of how the Church condemned the slave trade and other associated atrocities throughout the centuries.

On the issue of usury, and in many other issues, we have to carefully find what was the principle behind a prohibition; in this case, unjustly gauging the poor when they need loans. Philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas, advanced as the main reason for

the wrongness of taking interest on loans that it was unnatural to make money from money rather than from sale of products. The ideas and writings of philosophers, no matter how great, are not infallible. It is to Peter that Jesus gave the keys. When new forms of banking were such that the banker would lose out on his just due by loaning without interest, the practice of low fees for loans was accepted. I don't know enough about economics to explain this any better. Usury as charging exorbitant interest on loans is still sinful.

An important point for Catholics is that it is necessary to research matters before blithely deciding that the reasoning behind dissent is correct. Cases where change seems like a contradiction in Catholic moral teaching have to do with developments rather than a denial of a truth of natural law. For example, natural family planning, making use of new knowledge about the fertile time of the woman's cycle is a development leading to a new application of Catholic teaching which insists that each genital act must be open to procreation but has never taught that couples cannot make love during non-fertile times. Post-menopausal women were not told they must abstain from sex because they couldn't conceive a baby. If you search on the web or ask your bookstore to look up materials from the Couple to Couple League founded by John and Sheila Kippley you can go further in understanding the reasoning behind the ban on contraceptives but the acceptance of natural family planning for serious reasons.

Holy Spirit, please strengthen teaching on these subjects at Catholic universities and catechetical conferences so that more will be in a position to demonstrate the splendor of truth.

Glorious Mystery:



I read a poem by Daniel Varholy dedicated to you, Holy Spirit. These lines you inspired him with were the most provocative or moving for me:

Forgetting You is our greatest sin of omission

How it foments and fumes with each swish of the heart

If we fail to be consumed by the tabernacle within...

We ache for you when we are anxious,

Desperately spread a table in welcome when decisions await,

But forget you in the travel and travail of daily movements.

We pity our solitude, painting and embroidering sorrows

Out of forgettings, doubts and faithless denials,

A memory as untrained as an unbreeched youth...

And yet You are there, suspended in the gentleness of holy composure...

O let us remember with each heart's motion, your holiest beating

Of wings and breath enabling our hearts to be hearts of flesh.

I was praying to Mary about my conflicts with authority figures. She said that she didn't have a juridical role in the early Church. She was mother. I need to follow her by being a motherly widow at the college, not in an authority role except in the classroom.

Glory is infused into the cover Kathryn Lively designed for the e-book *A Summer Knight's Tale* because it is like the Eucharistic sun that appears in Medjugorje. A sign that you like the book, Blessed Mother? You reply that you like it because it shows motherly love for zealous priests who are like the ones that you, Mary, loved on earth and still love now from heaven.

December 12, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am feeling pain and rage today about an unresolved conflict that involves male authority figures. Therapists have taught me to understand that fear and anger toward men surely comes from earlier childhood problems caused by my father leaving us when we were eight years old, etc. Are these old insecurities and resentments now exploding out of long simmering lava like the flames at the top of a volcano?

Oh Jesus, as an adult you must have seen in the faces of your persecutors the same hard sullen rejection you saw before in the faces of those around you as a youth? And yet you had not fear and rage but love and forgiveness as you waited for the climax of the apparent doom that was your crucifixion!

You pleaded "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do?" In my Recovery, Inc. language this is expressed in the slogan "They're not doing it *to you*, they're just doing it."

Glorious:

Tonight for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe we had a procession and then a festive Mass at the Cathedral. In spite of a dislike of long ceremonies and a wariness in anticipation of the fatigue of processions, I felt drawn by your grace, Holy Spirit, to make the trek.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all things will be added unto you." That is one of my favorite sayings of Jesus. There in the procession was one of the authority figures I am so afraid of. He greeted me with affection ... "Oh, ye of little faith," I muttered to myself as I joined full-throatedly into the songs of praise to Our Lady of Guadalupe led by the marvelous Cathedral choir.

December 13, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

We had a lovely Christmas dinner in our college cafeteria. How beautifully our young women administrators, Dean, Resident Servants, and others do up these celebrations helped by seminarian cooks. There was Kris Kringle fun and then a hilarious song with joking and praising adjectives about each student, staff, and faculty member.

Our Lady, the true founder of our small college, thank you for inspiring in us a spirit of fun and laughter. Some loyalist institutions that are surely courageous and staunch, still strike me as a bit sad and tight. Not us. Praise the Lord!

Glorious Mystery:

The last day of class my students showed me such love. I was deeply moved. A sense of fulfillment came with the knowledge that they did appreciate all I had poured out on them of myself and the truths I have learned.

It is part of the teacher's cross that sometimes the same readings and lectures work for one class but not for the next one. One of the worst fiascos was the course years ago that went fine with one group of students but bombed on the next group, both in the same semester. Since there is never a guarantee that students will love our classes, it is particularly heart-warming when they do and show it openly. Alleluia.

December 14, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Tonight we had Praise and Worship in our hall. This is a service offered twice a month featuring charismatic style music with loud electric guitars, simple movement to the singing, as well as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, benediction and a short sung rosary with slides of the mysteries. It begins with an extemporaneous prayer from the heart by the presiding priest.

Even though I also love silence and traditional singing, I find the joyful mood of Praise and Worship wonderful for lightening my spirit. Something about the sometimes childlike words and melodies releases me from my over-analysis of situations that is such a kill-joy.

When Pentecostal style music first hit the prayer groups in the 70's I was, at first, a bit skeptical. Was there something irreverent in Catholics clapping hands, jumping for joy, and hugging strangers? I have addressed this question earlier in *Face to Face*, concluding that revving people up for joy by loud music is, in principle, no more contrived than revving people up for devotion by solemn music.

Just the same, the pastoral ministers of prayer groups and worship services need to see for themselves what fruits are coming out of the actual practices of their specific gatherings. If the priest notices in the confessional an increase in men and women having sexual temptations after hugs, he might make some adaptations. On the other hand, the priest leader of a traditional Catholic group might notice if resistance to change begins to take the form of harsh judgments of practices of others, even when, like charismatic praise and worship, they are accepted by the Vatican.

(Rereading this in 2013, I want to mention that since the leadership to Pope Benedict XVI, documents reportedly from Rome seem to rule out more and more charismatic gifts at the Mass in favor of their use in Praise and Worship services outside the Mass.)

Once watching an incredibly vibrant Praise and Worship meeting at Franciscan University of Steubenville I had an image of St. Francis of Assisi interceding with the Holy Spirit to find some way to bring the youth back into the Church. Who but the Franciscans, followers of that wild spontaneous saint, would be open to the Spirit when the young people started flocking to services so different from quiet evening novenas of the past?

Interestingly enough, though, I see that novenas are now making a comeback in the year 2001!

December 15, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Working again with colleagues on the Catholic Arts and Wisdom course was exhilarating. Even though I love the professors I am working with, I still had some anxiety about the project, because not all friends can teach together. I recall a sparkling class with a woman I only knew slightly. That one went much better than another with a teacher I loved but with whom I clashed so significantly in the classroom that our friendship dwindled afterwards.

This afternoon I helped the Anglican-use people to decorate for Christmas. Always clumsy at such decorating, it seemed an indication of how close I do feel to these brothers and sisters that I could stumble around without too many inferiority feelings, as I learned the mysteries of glue sticks and wrap around greenery. I noticed that there was a comraderie in doing something with our hands quite different than the fellowship we find through dining table conversation.

Glorious Mystery:

In spite of hurried rehearsals, the carolers performed beautifully for our college community. There was such a dulcet loveliness in this musical response to the mystery of the Christ child. Dear Holy Family, how you must love to “look down” at your people and see them rejoicing in that greatest birth ever known on earth.

December 16, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

Our heroic seminarian, with cancer of the tongue, left today for long tortuous treatments. No use asking why you allow such sufferings, Jesus. Glimpses of the reasons come from time to time, especially when it is ourselves who bear the greatest pain, but still Your allowing such pain will always be shrouded in mystery. My godfather used to teach that if you put all the suffering and joy of life on earth in the balances, no one would have hope. It is Jesus on the Cross that tips the balance for us.

Glorious Mystery:

One of the presentations of students to the whole college involved acting out the encouragement a still born baby would give from heaven to the grieving mother still on earth. It was a remarkably poignant dramatic scene, reaching me personally because of my many miscarriages. Those who teach about healing of memories tell us we need to name those babies and to picture meeting them in eternity. Some of my seeming miscarriages involved what is known as hydatiform moles – a condition where cells multiply. Such a mole appears to be a conceptus but there is no embryo there. As a result it is hard to know how many of the six miscarriages involved human beings. When I prayed the healing of memories exercises for mothers of the miscarried I “got”

four names rather than six. To my surprise those four names came into my mind immediately. Someday I will know them in heaven.

I like to think that you, Mother Mary, took those babies into your bosom and brought them up in some way I cannot fathom. Let me ask them now to intercede for their family. "Little babes, now adults in the Lord, please pray for any of us in purgatory, and for we whose feet still touch the ground. We are such a motley crew of broken, struggling, pathetic yet noble creatures. Most of all, I beg you to make known to those of us who are skeptics that there is a life beyond this world with joy promised by Jesus for all of "good will."

December 17, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I had a conversation with one of our young women students. I believe this student is a representative of a certain new kind of young Catholic person. Brought up in a large devout family, she arrived fresh and wholesome with none of the tired "cool" of some teens in our culture. Her attendance at daily Mass, not obligatory, and at other prayer times was so regular and intense that some thought she might have a vocation to become a sister. During our lunch she confided that she thinks she does have a vocation, but to the lay missionaries of our community. Lay community members are formed to go out on world-wide missions. The families have to wait until there is a site that can afford the absolutely minimum expenses for the support of parents and children coming out as missionaries.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for enflaming young people like this one to want to give their whole lives to the Church. May the inevitable obstacles and disappointments not keep them from persevering in this so needed ministry.

December 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Our college men are part of a basketball tournament arranged for students at Christian High Schools. Usually these games conflict with my other meetings, but tonight I was free to go. Instead of sitting glued to chairs in classes or offices, there were our guys, staff, students, and even our priest-president out there on the court leaping about. Even though we lost, our group of spectators cheered valiantly. The students were so pleased that super-busy Ronda took the time to be there with them. I was glad they were glad.

St. John Bosco, fun-loving youth minister who gathered crowds by walking a tight rope in front of the Church as a prelude to inviting them inside, help me to loosen up a bit on my workaholic habits.

Glorious Mystery:

A few years ago I started donating money for the needs of our sisters in Central America. The original purpose was to help with the building of a new convent since the old one was too small and infested with rats. As it turned out, one of the young sisters was dying a painful death of cancer. Some of my money went so that she could get more relief from pain by going to the hospital. Thank you cards came from the convent for me. The superior was the blood sister of the one who eventually died. This surviving sister was called to our area for meetings and passed through the college. She came to my office to give me a big hug of gratitude. From this woman's rather thin chest came warmth like a furnace. It was a cool day. I think it had to be supernatural heat from the love in her heart conveyed by you, Holy Spirit, as a healing balm for my heart.

December 19, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

A seminarian said in parting for Christmas vacation that I was the best teacher he ever had. What joy! The pleasure is not because of the comparison, but because it takes so much out of us to be professors. When I was new to this beloved occupation the tension came from fear of failure. Now, even though I am a seasoned teacher with lots of confidence, there is a kind of inertia that comes with aging. Once in front of the students I am full of energy. But the work just to get out of bed in the morning! Mama mia!

(Reading this in 2013 when I am 75 years old, I was amazed I felt that tired even then. I have the same syndrome now – inertia almost overcomes me at the thought of doing anything! But, when it is teaching or speaking or writing, as soon as I get started I have plenty of energy.)

Or better, let me ask all the saints who in this life were elderly, sick or disabled to ask God to give me the strength I need to do His will and to lack strength to do anything that is my will and not His.

Glorious Mystery:

I got a fantastic e-mail from one of our lay missionaries who is in Siberia. She describes conversations with atheistic children on train rides so eager to hear about You, Jesus. Reading about her courage in evangelizing in this country numbed by years of terror and skepticism, I have such a sense of our generation of Catholics, and the one after us, passing on the torch to these incredible young missionaries. May all the saints of the Russian icons be with our people as they reach out.

December 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

One of our staff, who is evangelizing Chinese with intriguing methods, told me about a book she wants to write. I love playing the role of literary mid-wife to new authors. I think it's a fine role for a widow to play, encouraging of creativity of younger women.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Some fear of flying to New Hampshire for Christmas. Fear of flying comes a lot after September 11. Will that day ever be lost to memory? Not in our lifetimes! Lord have mercy on all those who lost that day much more than confidence in pleasure trips. Remind me, my guardian angel, to offer up my tiny fears in solidarity with the lasting trauma of those directly involved in family tragedy.

Glorious Mystery:

Quickly scanning the long written evaluations of my classes by the students in my classes this semester, I am greatly heartened by their praise. Whereas I had been doubting if I wanted to stay at the college if there would be fewer seminarians next year, these so personal responses by the undergraduates pushed me to seeing how needed I am. Besides positive comments about the course material, so many of them just put down spontaneously words like, "Never leave us, we love you." They know we don't get these until after the grades go in, so it can't be written off as flattery to improve their grades!

December 21, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Arriving late at night at the Manchester airport of New Hampshire I am full of joy thinking I will soon see my family again. Everyone was in bed when the shuttle bus finally got me to the door of their huge house in three acres of forest land.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Extreme fatigue from plane delays. During the time at the stop-over airport, usually Atlanta these days, I felt as if I would just die on the spot and never get back. I have never been able to figure out if this is mainly psychological, caused by resentment of the problems of air travel, or just the result of bad air, crowds, foods gulped down while running to catch planes, etc. I do better if I take a fat engrossing novel and lose myself in some other place and time. Usually the Holy Spirit reminds me of how hard travel was in ages past in covered wagons or mule trains, storm-tossed boats, with little hope of ever seeing loved ones again. I just need to resign myself to travel frustrations and to offer up the stresses and strains for important prayer intentions.

Glorious Mystery:

When I dragged my small bag up the stairs to the bedroom of my suite at around 1 AM I realized with gratitude that my son-in-law had remembered to turn the heat up for me. Since in former times we had severe tension between us, this was a glorious sign of how much reconciliation had taken place.

At 4 AM this time, on my Christmas visit, when I was just beginning to overcome the adrenalin rush of arrival and get to sleep, my daughter Carla bounded into my bed to greet me. Both my daughters, now almost thirty-nine, are wonderfully tender and affectionate. Thanks be to God for them and their dear families.

December 22, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I slept long into the morning. This is unusual for me. It felt good, free, unburdened. Give a little treat to brother ass, as St. Francis called the body. I was so happy to see favorite old pictures on the wall, especially Grunewald's Madonna and child – a rich painting of Mary in a red velvet gown with a very German face. The babe looks much like my own babies did and also some of the grandchildren. Next to it is an old crucifixion painting found by us originally in a flea market in Rome, Italy. For years my husband tried to find out if it was valuable. Finally an art dealer told us it was a copy of a Reubens, but since only a copy, worth nothing. Of course that doesn't mean it is valueless to us. Having prayed before it for now forty years, it is dear to me indeed.

I also found an old copy of the liturgy of the hours here. I love the psalms. I sometimes think I can do just as well praying the rosary, but not really. I am not such a pure contemplative that I can do without the stimulation of the words of the set prayers of the day.

Later in these journals you will read more about my visits to a hermitage. The priest formator of this group of hermits (note – originally hermits went off alone, but then some joined together to meet once a week or once a day but otherwise be alone and in silence). The hermit priest prays, without reading, for about four hours a day visibly in the little chapel. When I go there for retreats I feel drawn to prayer of simplicity – that is the kind of sighing aspersions such as Jesus, Mary, Joseph save souls, or the name of Jesus repeated over and over. This leads into a wordless sense of God's presence. Sometimes, as a grace from God, the prayer of quiet throws a mantle of deep peace over my soul.

At the hermitage I often find You inundating me with that grace of quietude in the chapel with Your presence in the tabernacle, but also even in my little room. Here in my daughter's house this has not happened yet. I want to be open to whatever You send, but surely praying liturgy of the hours, not as deep sometimes as quiet prayer, is a thousand times better than sitting brooding.

You seem to answer me to be less anxious and just pray as You lead me without concern about types and levels of prayer. As You have been telling me, prayer is a means. The end is the love-feast which can take place during any kind of prayer and any action as long as it is a good one.

Oh, yes. Simplify me, please.

Sorrowful Mystery:



Waves of homesickness for my community family back at the college. There is a whole different feeling being among so many devout and holy people there. A community is a kind of family, but really different. Family is so much tighter and interwoven psychologically and physically. Some of these relatives lived in my womb! But in a religious community there are these spiritual bonds, coming especially because so many offer their sufferings for graces for the others. Sometimes when I know who is praying for me I can practically “see” the grace coursing across the chapel from their souls to mine.

Jesus, You remind me of Your image of many mansions. You chide me for being too philosophical in the sense of always wanting unity, such as everything should be equal and the same, instead of appreciating the astounding variety of creatures and ways of being You have made. Even heaven will not be sheer oneness. I will be one with You, Jesus, but also united in a different way with whomever and whatever You choose to make my heaven.

“Be still and know that I am God,” You tell me as I struggle so fruitlessly to try to fit everything into my own brain.

Glorious Mystery:

Today I took the grandchildren to our country church Mass. I much prefer either completely austere monastic Masses or gloriously sung Masses in cathedrals. Just the same there is a special sweetness to a small Mass where only one hundred people attend on a Sunday, some of them little children. Our pastor here in Newmarket, New Hampshire is an old-fashioned Irish ancestry priest. His sermons are basic, orthodox, and heartfelt, without dramatic flourishes. He is a St. Peter type rather than a St. Paul, and I feel warmed by his fatherly care for us.

St. Joseph, were you something like him? I don’t have a clear image of you. The best comes from the Zefferelli film, Jesus of Nazareth, because he makes you so Jewish, but we don’t see you in that film when you were older.

St. Joseph, you seem to answer that you would like to be my father now spiritually. I could try praying to you not only for practical problems and family crises but also just heart to heart.

Yes!

December 23, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

When I went to Church this Sunday just before Christmas, the bright red scarves and hats of the parishioners were fun to see. The colors reminded me of Grandma Moses’ rural scenes. The small choir was doing its best to bring the beauty of music to us in this special season.

I was also pleased to find simple Christmas decorations of pine and a sweet unembellished nativity. How deep we are affected in matters of aesthetics by the values of our parents. Partly because of their Communist background, but maybe also just as a matter of taste, both my mother and father detested any kind of gaudy or luxurious show. Since they were atheists when we were

growing up, they rarely entered any Churches to make judgments on the ecclesial art, but the radical background ensured a hatred of anything suggestive of gauging the poor for funds to adorn statues or altars. Stained glass windows were okay, I guess because the beauty of them was so colorful and delightful as to numb the mind concerning costs. It was particularly anything gold or silver that was utterly taboo and that included, of course, personal jewelry of any kind.

This brings up a strange image from childhood: “the gilded ghetto.” The idea was that even if Jews got wealthy they still lived in a ghetto in New York City, since they were clumped together in certain neighborhoods and in those days still couldn’t crash country clubs or certain blocks on Fifth Avenue.

Atheistic Jews, like us, had a distaste, possibly a mixture of equalitarianism and unconscious envy, for upper middle class and wealthy Jews for what we considered ostentatious display such as mink coats, diamond rings, patent leather shoes, or Cadillacs. Since my classmates in Elementary and Junior High School were mostly upper middle class Jews I suffered much from envy of their cashmere sweater sets and clothing perfectly ironed by the maids their families could afford. My sister and I typically got an extra allowance before each school year to pick out one new outfit. The rest was from thrift shops. The ability to locate and comb second hand shops in any city of the world for cast off garments became a plus for the rest of my life, but in youthful days I felt a certain shame even as I boasted of my great finds.

I recall my mother, after years of living with a close eye on the pocketbook after my father left us, finally saving enough to buy a discount mink coat. It took her a year to actually buy one because of the conflict between love of the soft wonderful fur and horror of identifying herself with the despised gilded ghetto Jews.

In another compromise, during the last years of her life, she chose to live in a fancy mostly Jewish residence overlooking the ocean in Santa Monica, California, rather than some more modest place for the elderly. I was surprised but happy that she wore a large if decorative cross around her neck. She had become a Catholic at the age of sixty. The wearing of this cross caused some curiosity in the other Jews since her looks and mannerisms were clearly of their ancestry. After six months of gossip one of them got up the courage to ask her what she was. Airily she replied that she came from a Jewish background but that, “I like many things from different religions.”

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, how complex we are! I still feel uncomfortable in any Church, including St. Peter’s that is highly embellished. A whole village scene type nativity such as is found in the Churches of Italy delights me even though it is hardly simple, because it is folk-art. For myself, I cannot bear to buy anything I don’t need when that money could be given to the starving.

When I turn to You, my Jesus, for confirmation of my artistic tastes, you always tell me that even if simplicity is better in terms of asceticism and giving everything unneeded to the poor, you honor the intent of those who adorn your Church with gold and gems. Their desire is to give to You the very best, no matter what the cost.

Sorrowful Mystery:

This morning I awoke in the midst of a nightmare. It's message was amply clear. In it I had returned to the college. Instead of my small but pleasant dorm room and my large sunny office, I was in a nasty flat house. The symbolism played out in my mind as signifying that I do not feel sheltered in love any more at my place of work.

In this dream are you trying to tell me something, Holy Spirit? That the college might not be my final all-inclusive resting place?

Glorious Mystery:

My twin-sister, Carla De Sola Eaton, a sacred dancer, appeared on the cover of the oldest most well-known magazine of the dance world: DANCE. A copy arrived today. The photo was of herself, swathed like a nun, in the role of Mary at the crucifixion.

Oh, dear Mother Mary, how happy I am that it was in this pose and costume that she appeared to thousands of readers. You are one of the bonds between us.

Liturgical dance has a long history of acceptance in ages past but rejection, especially by the US Bishops, in our times. For centuries there was dance connected to feast days in the Catholic Church, some even devised for the Bishop. Today in countries such as Africa, dance is a completely integrated part of liturgical processions. And these dances are demonstrated with pride at Papal visits. In the United States, sacred dance began in New York City on the steps of Churches as choreographed by my sister and a group formed around her. Quickly taken up by post-Vatican II liturgical innovators, it spread throughout the country. My sister's company, Omega, dances with incredible beauty, never in a way to stimulate any kind of unchaste thoughts in the congregation.

Unfortunately, other liturgical dancers of less professional ability or discernment have managed to offend congregations with tight costumes and gestures more associated at times with popular dance motifs than the modern dance or ballet style of the originators. This led to a ruling against all dance in the liturgy followed by the obedient and defied by those who weren't inclined to obey anything coming from the Bishops or the Vatican if it was contrary to their own ideas.

A happy compromise came about with the use of the term sacred dance to include concerts and private prayer outside the Mass, and liturgical dance for that done within church services. My sister and her company do both liturgical dance and sacred dance. Since Carla's dances are sublime and of an ineffable spiritual inspiration I find myself defending what she is doing to the maximum, while deploring any dance at Mass or in concert that is truly distracting. Hopefully the many beautiful sacred dancers who conduct courses and workshops will eventually elevate this art to such a peak that no one will be able to object.

I turn to you now, dear Mary. You come from a Jewish culture where movement, not stillness, was the rule in public worship. Did you like to see twentieth century charismatics adding swaying raised hands to the liturgy of your son's sacrifice? Did you understand the motives of professional, sacred dancers as well?

I imagine you replying that you rejoice in all praise of your Son. I picture you loving rapt stillness for yourself and other Christians, but also loving ecstatic joyful physical expression. You also tell me that it saddens you if men and women are

distracted from the Mass, itself a kind of ritual dance, when performers move in such a manner that can lead to sensual images in the minds of the on-lookers or participants.

I seem to hear you in my heart asking me not to analyze the matter to death but instead to pray that in anticipation of the resurrected body in heaven we will all someday be united in both absorbed stillness and full bodily worship.

December 24, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Some musical pieces I love at first hearing. Others I don't find much beauty in at first, but they gradually win my heart. The latter is the case with Schutz' St. Matthew Passion. I have a distant recall of my husband finding this choral work wonderful. This visit to New Hampshire, I found the disc when going through CD's in my daughter's basement. Since it had a soothing effect, I am playing it now over and over again to absorb it. Schutz was a 17th century Protestant German composer who studied in Venice with Gabrielli. He also knew the composer Monteverdi. Schutz' Passion is shorter than Bach's and is without the hymns of the more famous composition. I think of those hymns in the Bach as the voice of the soul responding to the Gospel account.

I can never describe to my own satisfaction what it is about German religious music that is so different from the great French and Italian music with similar themes. Possibly the Catholic choral music written for the Mass is lighter with a greater emphasis on hope where the German is more a response of trust. I wonder.

The Holy Spirit is telling me, perhaps, to rejoice in the variety. Such differences are not accidental since he helped composers of many lands to make their music both universal but also to infuse it with characteristics of their own culture.

Glorious Mystery:

My son had a group of friends who adopted certain code words for their semi-secret society. 555 was one of them. I never knew whether it had much significance but some of us in the family and more than one of his close friends found the numbers 555 appearing more than would be usual after his death, as if to give a sign to us that he was okay. Today my daughter, Carla, saw it on a poetry board she was editing. I'll take it!

In the glory "department" I am also reminded this Christmas of Chesterton's conviction that there was no story in the whole world as touching as that of God become a baby. I always think of that when bringing the grandchildren over to the nativity to see this beloved scene. The antiphon for one of the prayer times says "Today you will know the Lord is coming and by morning you will see his glory."

Little infant Jesus, I know You are trying to reach me, to charm my maternal heart and drag me away from intellectualizing everything.

December 25, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

One of my daughters put together as a Christmas present for me a huge digital collage of photos of all the grandkids of the family at different times of their lives. We developed a tradition of collages in the family many years ago. It began with cutting photos out of albums and then pasting them on a board when my mother was dying. One of us thought she might like to see “this is my life” through photos. The next one was made to display on a board at my son’s funeral.

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for inspiring the invention of photography. Among the things I most treasure and keep, no matter how much I get rid of for the sake of simplicity of life, are photos of my loved ones. In a journal called *Face to Face* I need to meditate on the beauty of the human face, so much the expression of the unique personhood of each created daughter and son of God. What a blessing that we were not created with the proportionate but empty faces of Barbie dolls

Sorrowful Mystery:

Even though I find Christmas Mass enchanting, for many years, since becoming a mother I have a certain weird but probably more common than realized, sadness on Christmas day. I finally analyzed it as missing the carefree fun of being a child for the holidays instead of being a responsible adult. As a mother, naturally, I had to do much of the cooking and cleaning up. Even now as a widow with little to do, the feeling of burden lingers. Even writing about these sentiments makes me feel despicable. Why wouldn’t I take so much joy in the delight of the children and grandchildren opening their presents that it would overshadow any melancholy nostalgia?

Healing, Holy Family, help me! It is your holy day. Opening myself to this unresolved matter, I hear the voice of psychologists who claim that children of divorced parents sometimes take on too much adult responsibility and actually do lose part of childhood carefreeness. Hmmm. Maybe I need to forgive my parents anew for that portentous decision to separate. I’ve done it before, but maybe it needs another shot. I’ll try.

“Holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I come before you in the house at Nazareth and give you once again my childhood. I know that my mother and father suffered much at each other’s hands before deciding to break up. Since whatever wounds I was hurt by at that time, most of them unconscious, so deeply affected my heart for life, I need now to say, I forgive you Mommy, for your part, and Daddy, for your part, in that tragedy. May the balm of the forgiveness of God come to you now wherever you are, no longer on earth, on your spiritual journey.

Glorious Mystery:

My spiritual director suggested in a sermon just before I left the college that when we feel desperately sad we need to pray “Jesus, peace” over and over again. We need to become little children, trusting. Just as we can’t make many things in life clear to our own little ones, so God cannot always make things clear to us.

I read this fascinating paragraph about the masculine psyche in a novel by Anthony Trollope: “The blow to him was very heavy. Men but seldom tell the truth of what is in them, even to their dearest friends; they are ashamed of having feelings, or rather of showing that they are troubled by any intensity of feeling. It is the practice of the time to treat all pursuits as though they were only half important to us, as though in what we desire we were only half in earnest. To be visibly eager seems childish, and is always bad policy; and men, therefore, nowadays, though they strive as hard as ever in the service of ambition –harder than ever in that of mammon—usually do so with a pleasant smile on, as though after all they were but amusing themselves in the little matter in hand.”

December 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today I suddenly heard Prokofiev’s Classical Symphony on the radio. This piece we got to love just around the time of Charlie’s death. I prayed to his angel while listening to it. What a wonderful joyful piece for that composer to write in the midst of the Russian nightmare of that time. Is it a proof, of how You, Holy Spirit, inspire people no matter what the circumstances to provide beauty and hope for themselves and others?

Sorrowful Mystery:

The parish church in the town of Exeter where I went this morning, because it is our priest’s day off, was chilly. In his sermon the priest made a contrast between the warmth of the Christmas reality and the chill of the season. During the Mass I felt a need to forgive all those at the college who I am frustrated with. Some sense came to me of how it is as hard for them to change to meet my needs as for me to change to meet theirs. We find that difficult to comprehend. Of course, our own interior obstacles we know so well that we certainly know from within how deep-seated they are. With those whose faults are different from our own, we only see the failure; rarely the struggle. Lord, have mercy on us all.

Glorious Mystery:

I listened today to Vaughn Williams Mass in G. It is celestial. I was reminded again of Cardinal Newman’s famous observation that in the greatest music we are overhearing the angels singing in heaven. If this is true, may I thank all ye angels for the many concerts you share with us here on earth?

December 28, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I am visiting a dear family who have a summer and vacation home in New Hampshire. My hostess mentioned an idea she and her husband have of building on their property “casas di reposo” – rest houses for their elderly friends. Since these elderly friends include many of my favorite people on earth, I got quite excited by the idea.

Let me turn to you, Mother Mary, and ask you to calm this almost manic enthusiasm I have concerning ideal schemes for my future.

As I write, I think you would tell me that it is natural to long for perfect places to live since we are destined for a perfect place, called heaven. But it is almost a slur on that gift to try to conceive of finding that on earth. What makes heaven perfect is the full presence of God. No humanly devised place can give us that happiness. There is nothing wrong with considering possibilities. Widows want the shelter of a place to be with others of the kingdom, to share hope. What is bad about the way I do it is the desperation. Peace is a gift from the Father, not a result of perfect planning. When I feel that rising of bubbly joy I need to gently place myself into the arms of the Holy Family and ask that they give me the grace to accept whatever plan for the rest of my life God the Father has in mind for me.

Thinking about these truths, I realize that when a possibility is mentioned or offered, the fantasy that is in my mind is a composite of the peak moments of joy in the company or the setting I envisage, conveniently leaving out the negative features of my relationships with the same people or the disadvantages of that only seemingly idyllic place. To become more, not cynical, but realistic, I need to remind myself of the difficulties of the past with projects I thought to be perfect at the outset.

A woman I met recently says about the workplace she is in that she stays because of the vision and the bonds, not because it is perfect there. A scripture she finds helpful in this is from Habbakuk 2:2-3 "Wait for the vision."

Glorious Mystery:

It was thrilling to hear about plans of my hosts concerning a new college. What I especially like is the plan of an integrated program including farming. I, myself, haven't the slightest inclination to stick my hands into soil, but I hate the idea of dependence on vast and distant sources of food when it could be right at hand in a place with its own farm. I long for a modern way to live in what were basically circle cities in medieval times formed by lay people of many trades in close collaboration with a monastic center.

December 29, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

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Glorious Mystery:

I was reveling in fantasies about how to bring together different friends with similar visions about education. The Holy Spirit told me not get too excited about plans that involve others. It reminded me about how my Christian therapist has a motto about taking more control of one's own happiness vs. basing it on what others will do.

Typing this now six months later, I could hardly remember my manic scheme. It fell through almost immediately after I had set up a meeting which never took place, not just because of accidental circumstances but probably because it was a fantasy, not a reality.

Come Holy Spirit, guide my thoughts away from soap-bubbles into dreaming more possible dreams.

December 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today I visited with a friend who had been in a dire mental condition some time ago. For a year or so she was on medication and saw a counselor. Now two years since the traumatic events that caused the crisis, she is in such a good state of mind with lots of hope, trust, and adventuresomeness. Please dear God help everyone in stress to find the right help.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I had a phone conversation with someone I hoped would be a close friend. It seemed as if everything that drew us apart in terms of personality conflicts, had a last fling during this call. Afterwards I found this passage from Colossians 3: 12-17 and it calmed me down:

“Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. If one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you do also and over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection and let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you are also called in one body.”

Perhaps I have to give up on this person being a close friend, but I don’t have to wallow in bitter resentment of it. Just forgive and let it go.

(Reading this in 2013, I see that, in this case, I even forgot as well as forgave, since I can’t remember who this friend even was!)

Glorious Mystery:

At Mass there was a Christmas song new to me that was so beautiful. It’s called Laud by Montgomery and includes these lines, “Songs of praise the angels sang, heaven with alleluias rang, when creation was begun, and angels songs at Christmas, and then at the beginning of new heavens and new earth, and in between it is *we* who sing praise.”

Yes, we are allowed to join those angels’ songs! Alleluia.

January 1, 2002



Joyful Mystery:

I am staying with my daughter, Diana. A nickname given her by her twin sister in youth was Delicious Cheer. Now, as an adult, she has low times as well, but still is often outrageously funny and, therefore, able to lighten the mood of those around her.

Creator God, thank you for the gift of this daughter.

Sorrowful Mystery:

This morning on the way to Holy Mass I am heavy with the sadness that my daughter is not with me. Both twins left the Church in their teens. Sometimes, they let me see into their souls. They do pray and yearn for more of You.

(Going through these journals in 2017, I can tell how on the same day, the Feast of Edith Stein, the Jewish convert saint who died in Auschwitz offering her suffering for the conversion of the Jewish people, they both were drawn into the sacraments once more.)

Glorious Mystery:

How sweet on this obligatory but not usually fully attended Mass for the Solemnity of Our Lady to see so many of the old people delighted to have a holy place to go on the first day of the year!

Holy Mary, exalted widow, even though old in your days was much younger than in ours, I imagine you have a special place in your heart for older people. How happy you are to see us availing ourselves of the comfort of your Son, the only source of enduring solace for any person.

Diana recounted a moving story about her son, my grandson, Christopher, aged ten. For a long time he coveted a particular costly gift for Christmas. Just before Diana was about to buy it on the web she mentioned that a dear friend of the family, particularly loved by him, had no money to give any Christmas presents because of debt. Christopher agreed that Diana give the money allocated for his gift to her. She was so proud of him.

Little Infant Jesus, help us not to underestimate the hearts of children.

January 2, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Diana was cooking a pot roast for the large group of family the visitors including her husband Pete's grandparents. Something went wrong with it so that it was only barely edible. I was so happy that she was able to laugh the whole thing off instead of making a big deal out of it. When I was a housewife I used to get awfully tense and upset about preparing meals for guests, especially my husband's family.

If I think of you, married women saints, I can imagine you putting in plenty of effort and loving attention on your wifely duties, but not investing as much personal pride in the matter as to be devastated by small failures. Teach us, dear saints, how to balance loving conscientiousness in serving with a lightness of touch. As soon as we invest too much ego in all of this, our tension takes away from the conviviality that should come in family fellowship when there is plenty of mutual forgiveness in the mix.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I invited some friends to come with me to the monastery where my husband is buried. After agreeing to come, one admitted that he had a distaste for visiting cemeteries. This led to a theological discussion about salvation. These friends are Christians but not Church-goers. The man's idea is that he knows he is saved since he has asked forgiveness for his sins throughout life. It came out that many actions Catholics would think of as sins he would accept as just human nature or even good. I chose not to argue with him as I would have in the past. He knows I disagree. Something in the serious expression in his usually joking face made me realize of a sudden that whereas I am busy trying to "convert" him, he is thinking that his task as a Christian is to convert me to a more trusting acceptance of human failings. Don't I need to see how tolerant Jesus is of the attitudes this man takes for granted such as the legitimacy of sex outside of marriage? Interesting!

Jesus, I don't pray enough for the reunion of Christians. The breach is now so great. Your vicar on earth, John Paul II, claims that what is in common is greater than the differences. I suppose that he means that knowing You is such a boon that nothing else is as great. But I think that a Lord that allows as tolerable what we of the true Church know to be heinous sins is not the same Lord.

I hear You, Jesus, tell me to leave judgment to You. On judgment day I may see others repenting of sins they tried to pretend to me didn't matter. Won't I rejoice to see love covering that multitude of sins? And what about the different sins of my own I minimized? Perhaps these same people wondered how anyone so devout could indulge in such obvious transgressions? I recall now someone telling me they were horrified with how often I used the word "hate." Christians shouldn't hate!

In the meantime, while we wait in prayer for the reconciliation of the Churches, I can heal division just by being so loving that their caricature-image of Catholics fades. I can offer the pain of disagreement for that glorious reunion in heaven of all those of good will.

Glorious Mystery:

Today in prayer I saw the goodness of keeping this journal in a new way. The format keeps me dialoguing with you, Jesus, the other persons of the Trinity, Mary, the angels and saints, instead of limiting my prayer to desperate petitions. I am forced to stop talking and and, instead, to listen! Keeping the equivalent of journals was common to many saints.

Please, all saints who wrote about your lives, such as Teresa, Catherine, Blessed Julian of Norwich, intercede for me. May the "answers" I insert be divine answers, not just projected figments of my imagination but the truth.

A rueful thought crossed my mind just now. Even if this whole journal be a monologue with everything I think comes from above just my own ideas, aren't these writings a lot better than the jumble of broodings that usually preoccupy me? "By their fruits?" After all, those same saints prayed frequently for confirmation that their visions and locutions were truly from God. And, satisfied about some of them, the same question would still arise about the next one. If we were ever to be totally secure about such private revelations the Devil could pipe in anything he pleased and we would shout it from the rooftops. What is important, all the doctors of the Church say, is not that we trust ourselves but that we need only know that You, God, are all perfect, and worthy of trust.

Pondering these last paragraphs I see that it is a mistake to take on the role of philosopher in these matters. The Holy Spirit might precisely want to try to by-pass the Cartesian thinker part of me only interested in clear and distinct ideas. To bring me to a more particular sense of truth in daily life You, Holy Spirit, would have to provide something more like what is called the gift of *word of knowledge*. If I want universal truth, but never anything more pointed to the personal, would I not be then defining myself as pure mind rather than heart?

January 3, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

One of the intercessory prayers at Mass today was "Help families to come into a greater love of one another." There is so much love in my family now, thanks be to God. Much more harmony. Homer and Grandma, grandparents of my son-in-law, Pete, now in their eighties, were dancing together to an old favorite song "you make the world go away." It was so sweet to see them so happy remembering their initial courtship.

Holy Family, I think you rejoice to see love between your children. I sometimes picture you, together, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, looking down on earth – heads close together, excited each time you see love instead of indifference or hate. Wouldn't you have shared such observation of good in your family setting in Nazareth?

Sorrowful Mystery:

The Holy Father's New Year's message on the Net included these words: "There can be no peace without justice, and no justice without forgiveness. He wrote that forgiveness seems like a short term loss, like weakness. It demands great strength and spiritual courage both in the granting it and in accepting it. How many situations in my life could I apply these words of Christian wisdom!

But, my Jesus, how often even with forgiveness there is no justice. Then what? You reply, then there is no peace in the sense of feelings of equilibrium. But there is always redemptive suffering. You don't have to pretend it's all fine. Some will be called to inner peace in spite of the exterior conflict. Others will be called to fight harder for justice. Others, who can, will have to leave those situations to find either kind of peace.

How do I know which response You want from me? You seem to reply, “I want inner peace for everyone. If you can’t find it in unjust situations through offering the suffering or through fighting harder, and I give you a way out, I will be not be sad or angry if you take it.”

Glorious Mystery:

Today, going to the small Church in Hermosa Beach, California, I felt gratitude that the Mass is every place I go, as if you are waiting for me there.

In a situation of grave conflict I heard today that some fine mediators have been appointed. Lord, help us.

January 5, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I went to Mass, breakfast and then a long walk along the Redondo Marina with a beloved friend Paul. I have known Paul for more than ten years. He first appeared in my life in a most supernatural manner.

After the death of my son I wrote a book called *The Kiss from the Cross: A Saint for Every Kind of Suffering*. I was trying to find out through research on the saints how they endured the kind of excruciating pain that was ours because of that suicide. It was published much faster than is usually the case, and I gave a talk on the same theme at the bookstore (now called Pauline Books) of the Daughters of St. Paul in nearby Los Angeles. At some point in my narrative I looked up and there in one of the seats I saw a man who looked like Jesus. He was thin, with a long face, a straggly beard, long hair, and enormous luminous eyes, somewhat like those of El Greco’s Jesus, but blue. Stunned, I thought humorously, this is a first. It must be a pretty good lecture if Jesus wanted to come, too.

I concentrated on the themes about the saints, but at the end during the coffee and donuts, I made sure to introduce myself to “Jesus.” It turned out he was a local prayer leader. Often people exchange phone numbers with no follow-up but after a few weeks Paul did call me and I invited him for a visit to our home. My father had died recently and left a small legacy. I was planning to use this to rent a place to start my own prayer group and spirituality center. When I discovered that Paul was a strong leader, I invited him to become a co-leader of the new group.

He came dutifully to every meeting even though it was almost an hour away from his home in Hollywood and his only vehicle was a battered motorcycle. This man, some fifteen years younger than myself, but wise and sure-footed in faith, became a consolation and leaning post for me during the period between my husband’s death and my departure to teach at Steubenville.

Eventually he explained his striking unconventional appearance. Years back for some reason he got sick of shaving and cutting his hair. As his beard flourished into a dense growth covering the whole bottom of his face, he noticed that people started jokingly relating to him as if he were really Jesus or an apostle. It occurred to him that having to respond to such high

expectations of others could improve his spiritual life. Why totally disappoint them? Why not try to be the best imitation of Jesus that grace would afford?

Now after many turns in his life and mine he is a late vocation seminarian for the archdiocese of Los Angeles. He had to shave off his beard to be considered as an applicant. The first time I saw him without it I didn't recognize him. Even though we only see each other at most twice a year when I visit my daughter, there is a deep friendship love between us. This visit it seemed to blossom in the form of an idea for a co-authored book. As we walked along the beachfront the notion came up of something entitled *The Enigma of Darkness, A Spirituality for Losers*. Paul's concept was that really broken people just assume that books on spirituality are written for good, hopeful, together people, not wretches like themselves.

Writing about this now in July, six months later, I am forced to realize that the whole project seemed like a passing grace. The few hours we worked on it released a plethora of images, but the moment we went our separate ways with promises to communicate by e-mail neither of us could write a word! Maybe something for the future.

St. Paul, valiant writer, bless my dear friend of your name on his way toward the priesthood.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Part of the day with Paul, previously a systems analyst, was spent discussing problems of religious communities. The issue was whether mysticism can dominate even at the expense of day by day justice. Even though Paul, himself, is a mystic, he thought that if a system becomes too vertical in terms of everything being decided by the illuminations of the heart, then there is a loss of what he called "the appropriate economy for the household of God." Horizontal justice is not a luxury but a necessity of right order.

Glorious Mystery:

Off the e-mail today came a joint poem of my twin daughters. It is called *On Growing Up Together*. Carla wrote the first part from New Hampshire and Diana wrote the corresponding reply from California where I am visiting.

Here are some lines from these poems to each other I loved for their flair and guts even if I would never have written them:

Carla:

I've seen you felled and you have lifted me

so many times. We clasp and rise again

though limping, crying, sinking in debris

or humbling our swords to say amen.

I've entered through your merry burning eyes

That dare despair and win. I disagree.

You needn't be a genius in disguise,

Nor I a saint on genuflected knee.

...To be! It is enough. And if our cry

should startle every cloud by happenstance?

Leave most of us below to give reply,

"The best I've done is not by will, but chance."

Diana:

The best I've done is not by chance, but will,

Despite the tricky spokes of Fortune's Wheel

That masquerade as random kismet, still

It's discipline that sows the seeds, I feel.

...No, let us both be brilliant and be saints...

we are we, and that's enough!

We soar, we fall, we slaps and rise still higher,

Cling closer, darling, when the journey's rough...

When I read this I feel the glory that my children have never been complacent characters with no life-energy. In our family we've always fostered yearning, striving, appreciation, closeness. But for me all this, if not enfolded in You, the true great one, is a slippery slope to despair. O Jesus, may I one day, on earth or heaven see our wonderful daughters and our son in Your arms.

January 6, 2002

Joyful and Glorious Mysteries – today combined:

Today I borrowed Diana's car and went alone on a trip to Valyermo, California, the place of St. Andrew's Abbey in the High Desert where my husband is buried with a gravestone since he was an Oblate of the monastery. Some of my mother's and son's ashes lay hidden in the ground, the rest scattered to the sea.

All the Von Hildebrand circle who brought me into the Church were Benedictine Oblates – that is a group made up primarily of lay people who love the spirituality of a monastery and choose to be helping members. They go on retreats at their monastery, receive spiritual direction, and help in the support of the monks. When we moved to Los Angeles, far from any of my original group of Catholic friends, I got close to some of the monk students at Loyola Marymount where I was teaching. Soon I applied to become an Oblate of this delightful monastery founded on an old ranch. The chapel is a renovated farmhouse. I used to make a retreat at the end of each semester as a kind of reward for myself for all the hard work and a time of refreshment.

One of the most evocative places on the monastery grounds is the cemetery. I have described this place much earlier in this book, *Six Toes in Eternity*. As in the past I had a certain dread of visiting the cemetery not wanting to be reminded of the pain I felt about those family deaths. Once there, as always, it felt wonderful. I have a little ritual where I get out of the car, then prostrate myself at the grave and the place around a bush where I buried the ashes. I talk to my husband, mother and son a short while. A sense of the richness of those lives came over me along with the reality of eternity. My husband loved the German word "ewig" for eternal because of its use in Mahler's Eighth Symphony, his favorite. It seemed that he was repeating this word, engraved on our wedding rings, today.

I ask you, angels and saints, to give me a greater conviction that these dead family members, at whatever stage they are at in their journeys on the other side, are truly sheltered in the heart of our Savior.

After my pilgrimage to the cemetery I had a fine time talking to Fr. Gregory, my dearest monk friend. He was one of those young students who came to my classes so many years ago – more than thirty years ago!

This visit I found him enduring painful chronic illnesses – fibro-myalgia being one of them. Just the same his eyes were shining with mirth as we exchanged stories from the last few years.

Dear St. Benedict, thank you for all the graces I have had through the years at your monastery. Let me never forget to pray for these monks whose sacrificial lives open a place where you can be so present to all guests.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I had promised Diana's family that on my return from St. Andrew's I would treat them to the Lord of the Rings – released for the Christmas season at a movie theatre in a large mall in Redondo.

Often, on social occasions, I long to leave the world and hide in the back of a Church for the rest of my life. Since I was fingering the rosary in my lap while chatting with the family it seemed to me I heard you, Mary, telling me that you love all these people. You want to teach me how to pray in depth for others wherever providence sets me down.

I loved the way the producers did the settings of Lord of the Rings and the wizard, Gandolf. Frodo was disappointing. "My Frodo" would have been more of a quirky character than this perfectly formed youthful hobbit. Mostly the crashing overwhelming sound track upset me, as it does most older people.

January 7, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I am reading a pocketbook my daughter had around called *Dreamland*. It is about the seamier side, actually the criminal side, of Coney Island in the first half of the 20th century. In case you don't know, Coney Island is the beachfront amusement park of lower New York City. In the past I might have heard of the gangs and professional crime behind the scenes, but not about people actually being thrown into snake pits for the amusement of audiences!

What is joyful about reading it comes partly from nostalgia since we used to go to Coney Island as children and teenagers. Another part might be interest in understanding what was behind those hard faces that surrounded us on those occasional sprees. One of the things I like best about reading fiction is getting behind the facts to the motives. No doubt, also, many of us, including me, get a certain pleasure in thinking "at least my circumstances aren't that bad!"

Father God, You knew all this was going on in my city even when I didn't. You tolerated it, and brought good out of it that I won't see until eternity. Thank You that You didn't allow those horrors to happen to me. If asked, though, would I choose the less physical and more emotional sufferings that You did allow to happen to me? Possibly I would since there is a particular dread I feel about being eaten by beasts (such as those snakes) that little can rival. Yet, with Your grace, many martyrs walked singing into the jaws of lions!

I can't recall if I inserted this line from a poem of John Paul II that helps me with accepting that such things actually do happen. The verses come out of the Pope's time working in a quarry lifting heavy rocks during World War II.

"When I bare an equal weight of horror and hope



then no one will accuse me of simplicity.’

I think he means by the second line that doubters of the faith tend to brand believers as naïve. That impression can rarely be erased by anything short of heroic suffering.

So, my Father in heaven, show me how to follow the lead of the head of your Church – to suffer but not to doubt.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I woke up this morning with a flu bug. Since I had a lunch appointment with friends I had not seen for a long time I decided to go anyhow, hoping things didn't get worse on the way. I made it through the three hours without undo humiliation, but had the rare experience for me of having to eat dull toast and tea watching them enjoy a gourmet brunch.

I am so ashamed, dear penitential saints, with how upset I get over the slightest discomforts. Blessed Angela of Foligno, St. John Vianney, holy missionaries, pray for me to at least accept involuntary physical crosses out of love for Jesus and souls.

Glorious Mystery:

I am always happy to visit this couple, the Haninks – Jim and Elizabeth. I met them more than twenty-five years ago. I was influential in Jim being hired to teach at Loyola Marymount because I admired his Ph.D. thesis defending the personhood of the unborn child written for the philosophy department of a secular university. He and his wife are so good that it would take a page at least even to list their virtues. Why not? They came from a Catholic Worker background. She is a nurse.

After getting married they adopted five children, some of the kind least likely to be competed for because of mixed racial backgrounds or difficult physical problems. Two are godchildren of mine.

Without any outward flourishes, their relationship with each other emanates such deep respect and love that people like to visit just to see that this is still possible in our world. When I started making notes about our lunch, I made a list on the margin of the page of other wonderful Catholic couples. I came up with a goodly number. If you tend to focus your mind on the less than happy couples you know, making such a list of good ones might be refreshing.

The Haninks donate much time, money, and energy to pro-life work in front of abortuaries and behind the scenes. They are presently members of the lay group of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. I think I would feel intimidated by these friends were not these virtues interlaced with so much humor and understanding that I always leave them feeling consoled no matter what dreadful tales I've recounted about my own jumpy life.

Dear Holy Family, bless all couples. May those in trouble turn to you. May those whose conflicts are minor praise God every day for the comforts of love, especially the long-term kind based not on illusion but on long-experience and forgiveness.

January 8, 2002

#### Joyful Mystery:

Today I visited one of my closest woman friends in the world, Cathy and her family. They live about two hours from Los Angeles. It was a long drive but passing through many areas of the outskirts of the city where we used to live was full of the richness of nostalgia.

Cathy and her husband, Harvey, are both Hebrew-Catholics. Cathy converted first and brought the children with her. Harvey came in much later but after years of going to Mass with the others. There is an understanding that comes with having the same cultural background that is palpable. I observe it in others, for example the way the seminarians who come from Texas relate to each other differently than they do to us Yankees.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph – we sometimes forget that you were all Jews. Certainly the culture of your time was vastly different from 21st century USA and yet...! We of Jewish background who have found You as our Messiah and Savior wish that all our people knew You as well. Let us offer as prayer any feelings of alienation we experience among non-Jewish Catholics. But love of You is a spiritual bond that draws all believers close in a way we can never feel among Jews who do not know You. We who have made the leap across the barriers of centuries have problems hard for others in the Church to fathom. On the other hand, we also have the privilege of being linked to the Holy Family, the apostles and early disciples in ways that carry a special blessing.

#### Sorrowful Mystery:

Once settled in for a two day visit, we began our long sharings of where we both are at since the last visit six months ago. Cathy is a meticulous housekeeper, so the way we talk is that I follow her around with my knitting in hand as she does her cooking and cleaning. The sorrowful part is how lonely she sometimes get. Even though full-time moms choose this over working in the world because they don't want to neglect the family, most of them do feel an isolation, especially since few neighborhoods have at-home Moms in them!

Family saints, Elizabeth of Hungary, Thomas More, the Martins of Lisieux, please intercede for our Catholic spouses and children. Help them to find the companionship they need to grow in holiness.

#### Glorious Mystery:

Near my friends' house there is a retirement/convalescent home with a Mass we sometimes attend in the late afternoon. I decided to check it out for my own future. There is such a tug toward finding a final place to be after so many interim solutions. Walking around with the woman in charge of applicants, I got such a sense of being essentially a consecrated person, not at all at home among older lay people. The gathering conviction of this difference filled me with joy.

There are many problems in the Society I belong to, but there is something deeper that makes me more like the sisters than like a laywoman. Since I have some doubts about this vocation of consecrated widow it was important to me to have this experiential confirmation that I didn't feel I belonged among the laity at this stage of my life.

Being a maverick personality, of course, also made me feel I didn't fit with what seemed to be a rather normal group of people at the residence. Probably my reactions were more complex than I can put into words. I am leaving out the question of perhaps not wanting to be sequestered with the elderly.

Holy Spirit, you seem to be telling me simply to trust my intuition on this. I may be tired but not ready for so complete a retirement from the world.

In retrospect, typing up these notes, I realize the Holy Spirit was preparing me for a quite unexpected and different venture.

January 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Years ago I was in a devastating car accident. Even though I was not personally hurt, it left me afraid to drive. I got behind the wheel anyhow for a year, then stopped for three years except if absolutely necessary. This vacation in Los Angeles I have the use of my daughter's mini-van. The trip from my friend's house up the coast back to Los Angeles was a good two and a half hours. For the first time I had no fear at all. Possibly since the accident was in Arizona, driving on routes I used to take often years before revived the happy driver in me, alleluia.

Thank you St. Maximilian Kolbe. Since you loved technology so much, I always pray for your intercession with my mechanical phobias. One of the greatest joys in life, I think, is when my fear is overcome, probably more times through grace than I realize.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A funny thing: my friend used to be a nurse. When she noticed I was aimlessly poking my crochet needle into my ear she screamed her outrage. "You could break an eardrum, you idiot, use a Q-tip!" The sorrowful part was explaining why I don't use Q-tips. Just before my husband's death he bought at a discount at Sam's Club some three thousand Q-tips. It took me about five years to use them up, always with a sense of the loss of him accompanying the loss of whatever was plugging my ears! As a result I hate them now.

Most widows talk about the way the oddest things become symbols of the previous presence of the spouse and now of the lack of that presence. I find it even harder to listen to cello music since my dead son was a cellist.

I hear Mother Mary scolding me for tossing off these last three paragraphs as if it was all comic. "Just lay your head in my lap, Ronda, and tell me how it feels not to have a husband, a best friend nearby always, a son who is as far away as eternity."

Yes, Mother Mary, in some vague way I realize you missed St. Joseph, the only one who knew the day by day revelation of the identity of your Son. And you missed Jesus when he ascended. He was both son and best friend to you as well as Savior and God.

You want me to feel my loneliness and also to empathize with my daughters who miss Martin as father and Charlie as son. They have wonderful husbands, but that doesn't mean there isn't a hole in their hearts.

Mary comforts, "When you feel that loneliness call on me. 'Am I not your mother?'" And she adds, "Don't be afraid to yearn for Martin and Charlie and picture that great reunion partly mediated by your faithful prayers for them. Do you think they are not in my arms because they might be in purgatory? Do you think that I am not in purgatory?"

(This locution was "confirmed" by a priest who mentioned in a sermon that there is a belief by some that Mary visits purgatory every first Saturday to bring some out with her!)

Glorious Mystery:

Driving down Sepulveda Boulevard of Los Angeles, I had a sense of the richness of the past. What is nostalgia, anyhow; the enjoyment of the past minus the petty trials of real life?

January 10, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

On the way to the airport my daughter took me to a gourmet supermarket where you can get delicious snacks and sit outside and enjoy them. We got paninos (Italian rolls) with mozzarella and tomatoes inside and cappucinos to drink.

It was such a merry occasion because it is probably the first time of a visit without the slightest argument no less full scale battle. We attributed this victory of love to a previous visit where Diana let out rage she had been storing for twenty years. At the time I got the grace to listen without retaliating and that seemed to break down her hostility.

Thank you, Father God, for the providence of bringing us to longed for goals by routes usually much more painful than we would accept if asked. Thank you for my darling daughter back, if not to your Church, at least to my arms. And thank you for all the love that is in her for me, her family, friends, and even strangers.

Sorrowful Mystery:

On the way back to my college, I went to a conference in a mid-Western state where I gave a talk. There was a mix up about my ride from the airport to the hotel. At different times in the last decade I have given up speaking for good because of the seeming inevitability of so many inconveniences and real miseries associated with travel. Jesus, you alone know what these trips cost me

physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Please let it be placed in the account of grace for the participants in conferences who are most in need of Your comfort or mercy.

January 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Hotel pools! Wow! How soothing to my aching body to let myself down into that cool clean water. It felt as if having given to God the problems of travel, I got Caesar also in the form of a modern-day version of the Roman baths.

I like to think that You, Holy Spirit, had a big hand in helping inventors make things that would ease our lives in this “valley of tears.” Thank You for whoever concocted indoor swimming pools.

Sorrowful Mystery:

I was surprised when I looked at the conference program to see that I was to give not one but two speeches. I had not been told this in advance. I quickly decided it would be good to do one on my book *Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging* handily displayed on the table of the publisher, Jim Gilboy, President of CMJ Marian Publications, who was showing all his books at the conference. Just the same I felt angry at those running the conference for being so disorganized, or whatever, as to put a speaker through such a sudden adjustment.

I hear you, Jesus and Mary urging me to forgive. The conference team is doing a tremendous job with tiny resources.

Glorious Mystery:

Once the conference began I had a wonderful sense of you, Mary, gathering your people. There was a black preacher, Alex Jones, who became a Catholic out of a Pentecostal background. It was thrilling to hear how in starting a new Pentecostal Church and researching the nature of church he came to see that what he wanted already existed but it was called Catholic. Since I love black preaching in the traditional form, it was an incredible treat to experience it with Catholic themes.

All you black saints, Martin de Porres, Moses the Ethiopian, Henriette de Lille (?) and others less known to me, please bring your people to the fullness of truth.

Typing this up six months later I can't even remember what my talk was about. I do recall feeling that my way of speaking heart to heart was complementary to the modes of address of the other speakers. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for giving me the openness to

do public witnessing that came with the other graces of charismatic renewal. I think hearing the famous early speakers such as Bobbie Cavnar and Ruth Stapleton increased my sense that there is nothing that stays longer in the minds of listeners than the true story of how God touched our hearts and brought us from hellish pain into his kingdom.

January 12, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

The response to the talks was different this time. Instead of coming up to tell me that they liked what I said, people said “I love you!” Others started giving me their possessions – a splendid wheeled backpack for my trip back, old used candles!

The impression was that they were so grateful for how much I gave of myself in the talks that they had to give me something of themselves in return. Oh, God, how could I possibly doubt that these trips are Your will when it meant so much to so many of your dear children.

Then there was the joy of sitting at the booth with my publisher, Jim Gilboy and his wife, Mary Ellen, and their adult children who help at conferences. Jim, the President of CMJ Marian Publishers. got his mandate to turn his printing business into a publishing company from Mary at Medjugorje. He actually takes the incoming manuscripts one by one to Eucharistic Adoration. If you, Mary, give him a sense that you like the book, it gets published. If not, nothing any author can say will influence him. Happily you, with a few exceptions, tell him to publish or reprint books of mine, so we get along famously.

Thank you, Mother Mary, for honoring my hard work in writing for your Son and His Church by giving a revived life, through this publisher, to out-of-print books and birth to several of the new ones.

Sorrowful Mystery:

By the evening the exhaustion was total. There was a long line for dinner. I couldn't even stand up. Mary Ellen suggested I sit down at a table and then sneak back into the line when it had reached the smorgasbord table. With tears in my throat I kept muttering “I can't do this anymore. I can't. I can't. I can't.”

When I reach this point of fatigue and hunger, in spite of tons of snacks between meals, I vow never to put my body through this again. Then I get an invitation that seems compelling and I forget how bad it was the last time.

Other speakers, mentors and friends usually advise me that rather than giving up speaking all together I need to limit the number of trips. That is what I am doing, but who knows how long I can stand it. “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

When I look into the sad eyes of the El Greco version of Your face, Jesus, I seem to feel You affirming me for the sacrifices of the past, giving me permission to stop, but still glad if I keep going sometimes out of love for our poor Church.

Glorious Mystery:

Since I had heard the witness story of one of the speakers before, I dawdled over breakfast and came in late to his talk. I sat in the back row of the large hotel auditorium. As I looked up there was his enlarged face on the TV monitor. Urgently he was proclaiming the need to make sacrifices for the Church. The holiness in him shone from his face as he told parts of the story of the graces of his work.

He slowly made his way from the lectern through the hands extended in greeting in the audience to the back of the auditorium, I was so happy to praise him for the wonderful talk.

January 13, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

The last morning of the conference I ran to the hotel pool for a quick swim. In the jacuzzi was a man and his son of about eight years old. They were not part of our conference. The father had no interest in conversing with me when I told him I was a speaker at the Marian conference. I figured he was probably somewhat anti-Catholic. But his son wanted to talk about life with me! I was surprised and delighted with this short dialogue.

The reading for today's Mass included the words of Isaiah, "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me...to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken...I exalt with joy in Yahweh...like a bride adorned in her jewels."

Yes, yes, yes.

Sorrowful Mystery:

An interesting line in a story by a writer called Claire Davis about love between women and men, "You think you only want a little kindness, but you really want someone's undivided attention all day long." It made me smile. There is a kind of gluttony about love until it resigns itself to what human beings can give in spite of their limitations. I am reminded of the song from Cabaret where the older woman belts out in a bitter tone of voice, "And you learn how to settle for what you get."

Ah, Lord, You are the one who is ready to give us Your attention all day long, if we but ask, and mostly we ignore the offer. Why? For the reasons I give in the first page of this book: why is love not loved? Because it's too messy, demanding? You say that is one reason You want me to write this book – to show how good it is to talk to the one who is perfect love.

Glorious Mystery:

One of the volunteers at the conference told me there was a Franciscan priest trying to find me. He turned out to be a spiritual looking younger bearded priest with a gentle manner. He seemed like an image of St. Francis. He told me that when I was speaking I appeared to him as an image of you, Mother Mary. What higher glory?

He was looking through my breviary for some citation and came upon the holy card for my son Charlie's funeral Mass. He asked me more about this death. I told him how much my son loved St. Francis and the priest promised to say a Mass for him. This was such a consolation in the midst of my problems with fatigue and food.

Beloved St. Francis thank you for still inspiring men and women to follow the charism Jesus gave to you. Help me to become like you not only in freedom of spirit and simplicity but also in penitential sacrifice.

January 14, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Back at my college. When away I forget how much I love everyone here. I had a sense of this being my natural habitat, my turf.

Thank you, Father God, for bringing me here, all round the best place for me to teach I have ever had. Let me soak in how few people have the gift of working someplace where their talents fit what is needed so well.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Since our Dean may leave for another post, several people have suggested I might be the next Dean. Even though I have lots of gifts for organization I am absolutely grade "D" when it comes to the sort of diplomacy required for administrative work. When I think of the fights I could get into every day I am appalled.

Mary, woman of the YES, I am sure you also had to say NO many times as well. Help me not to be such a people-pleaser that I say yes to the things the devil has set up to drive me crazy. Help me not to be so romantic, in the sense of spacey, and grandiose, as to imagine that I can do anything important even when I clearly can't.

January 15, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

First day of class for the Spring semester. What a joy to see the dear familiar faces of my students. I find the second term much easier for they are more used to student routines and I don't have to go through the struggle of accustoming them to my eccentric character. They were glad to be there, too. Christmas vacation helps them remember that the world is even more imperfect than our college.



Clearing off my desk after such a long time away, I remember that St. Ignatius of Loyola spent his last years not on exciting missions but clearing a desk of the letters from his followers as well as the much less interesting matters involving the finances of the order. So...?

All saints who had to do plenty of tasks *contre coeur*, intercede for me so that I am do these not with a disgruntled irritation but with a humble smile.

Glorious Mystery:

I read about a woman who lost in an accident a child, a husband, then later another child, then two other sons, but remained trusting and holy to the end.

The story got me thinking of how many people at my college seek holiness, openly and sometimes almost desperately. How much easier to feign mediocrity of intent so that the gap between wish and reality would not be so obvious and beckoning of critique!

Here I am, Jesus, your failure. But, no matter what, never let me set my sights so low that I cannot fail.

January 16, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

More talk that one of my closest friends in the Society is transferring from the college to another site soon. Grief and insecurity. I invest a lot in friendship so the pain is greater at their loss than those who specialize in acquaintanceship. Do they do so precisely to avoid pain? Probably.

Jesus, you tell me that there is no way to avoid the cross, but crosses coming from love are the best. Would I rather have fewer friends?

January 17, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

My students are responding beautifully to the course I devised on Philosophy of the Human Person. The standard Catholic syllabus on this would involve heavy concentration on issues such as body/soul, free-will, knowledge. I include a month of the basics, but use the rest of the time to go into topics such as gratitude, anger, love, addiction.

Thank you Holy Spirit for making me an idea-woman open to creative approaches. I love to improve my classes each year, and especially to come up with new ones. It takes lots of effort, but how dead it gets when I get lazy and lecture from old notes without any innovations.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A different way of doing things to make life more efficient at the college I suggested appears to have been stone-walled. No matter how often I try to explain why my plan would be better it is snagged on the reality that the persons who would have to do it are over-extended, and *they* won't let me take over such tasks, I guess because they find me abrasive to deal with.

Glorious Mystery:

Conchita, the Mexican grandmother saint I have quoted before in Face to Face wrote that God told her that the reason for the creation of the human race is that God didn't want to be happy in Himself without men. "I am a God of peace who delights in making you happy!" He told her.

Yes, Lord. Please let me know this in my very bones.

Tonight there was a lecture about Islam by a priest of the Community of St. John from Laredo, Texas, of a part French and part Arabic background. I think because of September 11 we were at the edge of our seats trying to understand more about this religion. He pointed out that the mystical branch of Islam, the Sufis, reject politics and holy war.

January 18, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A student who is discerning a vocation to the priesthood was telling some of us of his fear that in spite of the prospect of a well-paying job in the summer he would not have enough money next year for tuition and expenses. I said I would give him a scholarship. He was so overwhelmed that he suddenly grabbed my hand and kissed it. (Later, he didn't need it.)

What joy that just by living simply I can afford to give money when it is needed. Thank you Father God for giving me the talents and health to have earned a good living in the past, doing a job I love, and now have a pension plus social security.

Sorrowful Mystery:

My dear friend Jeannie Hughes made a comment today that rings true. She said that people who complain a lot feel unloved. Since I am an expert "kvetch" – that's Yiddish for complainer – I pondered her remark carefully. Do I think that things would go smoothly if only everyone loved me more? In some ways that is probably true.

What bothers me no end is where there really is a way to make things better, but it is not done because the key persons appear, perhaps, just not to care enough.

Someday, with your grace, Father, I will be able to take such disappointments lightly because faith in my own ascent someday to heaven will be greater. Would engaged couples resent small difficulties since their minds are floating in the bliss of the soon consummation of their greatest desire?

It seemed that the first person of the Trinity replied “So, I’m not a good enough father for you?”

Several times in this book I have entered rather humorous replies like this from members of the Trinity. Since as a Christian philosopher I am focused on the august sublimity of the divine, I usually doubt such words in the heart are from really from them. However, recently I have been reading the locutions and visions of a canonized mystic. These include quite a surprising number of humorous ones. More about her later in Face to Face. Even if God is sublime, surely I am not, so why shouldn’t God lighten me up a little from time to time?

It might fall under the Thomistic truth “everything is received according to the nature of the recipient.” Since I am a funny person who giggles often and causes others to laugh a lot as well, maybe that is why the truths God wants to reach me with sometimes come out with a humorous twist.

Glorious Mystery:

Two friends from the college and I drove to a retreat place for the weekend. I have written some already about this hermitage in previous entries. This visit I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the old chapel, a renovated kitchen of a building from the nineteenth century with the tabernacle in the hearth. There is a mystical sense of grace in it that touches my soul because of my love for poor, simple but aesthetic religious places like Franciscan sanctuaries.

Jesus, You seemed to welcome me with the words “See how I take care of you!”

January 19, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

At the retreat center, on Sundays there is a communal pot-luck. I undertook to make one of the few dishes I do successfully – a minestrone with fresh vegetables. A couple of hours are required if it is to feed a large number.

It was a pleasure for me to ladle out a portion ahead of time to a former dentist who has been exceptionally kind to me, who was also making a retreat. When he arrived as my philosophy student, at the college, I told him of all my miseries with “cruel” dentists of the past. He winced in class every time I used dental pain as an example to make some philosophical point. I found out that his own dental work was mostly with the poorest of the poor and accompanied by prayer and holy cards and medals.

In an act of consummate sweetness he said he would come with me to my next appointment and sit in the waiting room and pray for me. Over the year of gum diggings, extractions and other “outrages” his comforting presence before or during has resulted in an almost complete healing of memories. Watching him enjoy my nourishing soup satisfied my need to recompense him in some way for his tender charity.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A tiff with one of my favorite seminarians over scheduling for the day. On a scale of one to ten concerning planning ahead I would be ten for total minute by minute programs and he would be about one. In spite of our love for each other when it comes to ordering a day as I try to insist he commit to any plan, he becomes rudely nasty to the point where if we didn't separate abruptly we would say such things that split friends forever.

Well, even saints didn't always get along. Happily my friend is such a big warm bear that all I had to do is find him a few hours later and humbly say, "You're mad at me, right?" to get the healing hug I needed.

Creator God, You made people with such different temperaments and quirks of personality. No, I really wouldn't like a world with all clones of Ronda!

Glorious Mystery:

I asked the head of the retreat center if I could come on weekends more often. Gingerly I approached him with the statement, "I'm sure that I'm supposed to stay on campus in spite of all the things that agitate me there."

To my surprise he said that I should consider in prayer whether if I was less upset I could teach better and give more to the students in personal conversation. Yes, I would be welcome to come on weekends whenever I wanted to. I danced out of his tiny cell-like office singing to myself "He gave me permission to be happy!"

God of surprises, I tend to box myself unnecessarily into situations that prove to be too difficult for me. Thank you for giving me a chance to escape without renegeing on my essential duties. My last Christian psycho-therapist insisted there were oceans of joy beneath the surface soon to overflow my convoluted worried soul. Now?

Sitting in the chapel after this happy conversation, I gazed steadily at the exposed beam above one of the doors. The inside of the room is white stucco. I tried to figure out why the sight of this old log spanning the top of the door was so appealing to me, as do all exposed wooden beams in architecture.

A theory that came to mind was that it was as if the wood were growing out of the stucco and would someday come alive and re-take the man-made building. I like the theme of communion of man with all other beings expressed so often by the Holy Father in his talks and treatises. If I were more of a poet I could do something with all this.

January 20, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A lot of the entries here from now until the summer will concern areas of conflict at the college it would not be good to detail. Instead I will describe them in the most general terms, concentrating mainly on leadings of the Spirit that any reader could apply to similar problems in his or her own life.

Glorious Mystery:

A priest of the college gave a moving sermon today on the theme of who is Jesus in your life. He said to look for those who are kind, understanding, forgiving and who tell you the truth with love. So many of us would have on our short list this very priest as well as many of the people sitting in the pews.

Dear God how is it possible that You have showered so many gifts on me and I am yet such a wretched, desperate woman? The response I hear in my heart is that it doesn't matter how old we are, what counts is that by the time of our deaths we are full of gratitude for Your mercy and full of love for everyone, even those who have hurt us most.

January 22, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A joyful dinner out with the Francette and Michael Meaney. There is something about French intellectuals, such as my friend Francette, that I find fascinating. She takes greater joy in being a wife, mother and grandmother than in philosophical or theological pursuits, but just the same her mind is active and subtle so I always learn from being with her. Though Michael is an American through and through, from studying philosophy so many years in Paris, he seems almost French in his sensibilities – a kind of refined appreciation of nuances of character and attitude.

I am grateful, Father God, for those cultural dimensions, like many flavors of ice-cream to enjoy.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today is the grim anniversary of Roe vs. Wade. After dinner we went to a Mass at the cathedral in commemoration of the infant martyrs. I grieve for them, for their parents with all the previous disordered choices they made that finally made that worst choice seem inevitable. Also I feel shame for our country that we who fought so hard against Nazi and Communist atrocities should now be killing our own babies in the millions.

Lord, how long? Too little family love, too little virtue, too little hope?

Glorious Mystery:

At the Cathedral Mass we joined with Sister Anne Sophie, the daughter adopted in adulthood by the Meaney's. Having suffered abuse of one kind or another as a child and young adult, Anne began a ministry to people suffering in many different ways: the dying who are not reconciled to family and Church, isolated people who are ill, prisoners, and the list goes on. She started a religious community with this mission that includes a vast number of lay persons ready to help with emergencies.

I helped Sister Anne by editing a book she wrote about her work called *On the Front Lines* published by Queenship. What makes the stories exceptional is the direct, fearless, approach Sister Anne Sophie brings. She walks right into the hospital rooms of the

dying and confronts the family. “Why are you watching the soaps instead of praying the rosary?... You’ve forgotten how? Here’s one for each of you, let’s do it.” Or, “Your sister hasn’t talked to you in years because of an old feud? What’s her telephone number? Hello, this is Sister Anne Sophie. Your sister’s having trouble dying because she thinks you hate her. I’m handing the phone to her right now. Tell her what you need to say!” And it works, over and over again. They are able to die in peace.

Sister’s work seems to me so incredible that even seeing her in the distance in her blue habit and white veil gives me hope for the Church in our new century.

Please, Jesus, always remind me that no matter how broken a person may be, you are waiting with open arms to save him or her and use that now saved one to help bring others closer.

January 23, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

My notation for this day under joyful mystery reads “Abby getting me meat.” It sounds as if I were a wolf. When I gave up sugar because of a diabetes diagnosis I became ravenous. Either for nutritional reasons I haven’t researched or for psychological ones, I never feel fed until I eat red meat. At the college, though, many have given up red meat for health reasons and others seem happy enough with the predominance of chicken in the diet. We do not have enough volunteer and work-study help in the kitchen to provide separate meals for individual members of the community.

When Abby, a lovely peacemaking young woman, took over ordering for the kitchen, however, she decided to find out about special needs. Beaming she came up to me in the cafeteria and took me to see a shelf in a back fridge with hamburgers and steaks divided up in cellophane bags for me to cook whenever I wanted them. If there is anyone around the kitchen when I am cooking I always invite them to share, but they never do. Red meat must be really out.

I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Since then every day when we don’t have red meat served at the counter I make my own treat in the afternoon. Instantly I am full of energy for the rest of the day.

It is evident from Scripture that the Old Testament people and Jesus were not vegetarians. Even if fish is mentioned frequently, lamb was evidently so well-liked as to be a banquet dish. Thank you, Father God, for the provision of nourishing and tasty food to give us joy and strength.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Chronic fatigue, not as a syndrome, but as a state of being, unfortunately is my usual state. Most of my doctors come up with stress as the cause. Today it was worse. In the readings for Thursday Week II of the Office of Readings I found this related passages from St. Paul:

“We groan in pain as we await the redemption of our bodies.”

Then in the prayer it says “Help us to find a life of peace after these days of trouble.”

Holy Spirit, thank You for inspiring the writers of the Bible to touch on so many themes of our daily lives. When those passages leap up at me that concern the very things bothering me it is a comfort to know that You know what we go through. You don’t urge us to Stoic detachment so much as to lifting these cares up to the God who cares for us.

Glorious Mystery:

Watching one of our black priests, raising the Eucharistic Host up at the consecration today at Mass I had a new thought. In the early Church Africans were among the priests. I believe the most well-known country would be what is now Ethiopia. But here in the United States how many years did You long to see black hands holding You up at the consecration?

January 24, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A beautiful insight of one of the Brothers – the Holy Spirit is like a deer. He only comes to quiet, peaceful places. Even though we certainly experience him coming to us in loud praise and worship, in personal prayer it is true that He most often comes when we become still enough to hear His still small voice.

I decided today to try to get a cheap used car so that I can get to the Retreat Center without depending on a ride from others who might have different schedules. This is a breakthrough for me since I resisted getting a car for years because of the accident and the aftermath of anxiety for years afterwards. There is finally something so important to me that I want to commit to it in this way.

Jesus, I feel such a powerful call from You in the blissful sense of You I get at the Retreat Center. Thank you for this incredible gift. You know how much I hate spending money I could give to the poor. I guess I’m aware now that my own poverty of spirit requires this expense.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A desire has been growing to get away from the conflict here at the college totally. On the other hand I would hate to relinquish the mother role I have to the students. My spiritual director, said I should stay at the college and trust. He affirmed the plan to spend weekends at the Retreat Center.

Typing this up six months later this conversation shows itself to have been pivotal. I have always gotten significant advice from spiritual directors. I am so grateful for that since I have poor judgment about prudential decisions. Holy Spirit, it is to you I must give praise for working through the minds and hearts of these counselors.

Glorious Mystery:

Today was a red letter day because I made contact with the representative who will process my social security payments to begin April 24th. I have been getting widow social security but due to my husband's disability, his amount was about half what mine will be. The glorious part was that the social security representative turned out to be a strong Christian. We had a fine conversation and she accepted my offer to send her one of my books as a gift.

Dear Father God, those of us raised by parents who lived through the depression know better than younger ones what a change that initiative made in the lives of lower and middle class people. Never again the need to save desperately for one's elderly years or the specter of starvation. Thank you for inspiring those in government to devise this plan, however faulty in some respects. True, few middle class people can live on social security alone in a style they are accustomed to. It is my theory, possibly flawed since my needs are different than those of others, that living in a large house with an empty nest is not necessarily so desirable for older people. I would prefer to see us in studio apartments surrounding a common area for fellowship. In Your providence, God of love, please help us to find ways to overcome the terrible loneliness of so many in our present-day culture.

Another glorious mystery:

I am reading *Chicken Soup for the Jewish Soul*. Since so many Jewish people are atheistic or agnostic my focus generally is on how to reach them so that they may find their Messiah, You, Jesus. This book mailed to me by my Hebrew-Catholic godchild Rosalind Moss, emphasizes the way Jews who are still deeply religious experience your graces in daily life. The most striking was a story of a couple who had been the butt of a vicious anti-Semite. They decided to find out more about him and see if they could be instruments of God in his life. In spite of his protests they succeeded first in starting a telephone friendship. When he was struck down with a disabling disease, they took him into their house and nursed him through his last year of pain. Eventually he broke down completely and witnessed to his change of heart.

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let me never forget that You still love the people of Your election and want to help them toward holiness even if they are blind to the fullness of Your plan.

Joyful Mystery:

One of the greatest wishes came through today for someone I am in conflict with. I was glad of the spontaneous joy in my heart to see him so happy. Later in the same day I got to enjoy him having fun playing a game. That activity is not one I participate in so it was particularly evident that my delight was for him. Since I am poor indeed when it comes to forgiveness of those who I



see as obstacles to my goals, I think this is a way that you are leading me into greater solidarity with such persons. If I was totally locked into seeing them as enemies, how could I rejoice for them?

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am reminded of the phrase of a novelist: God is a potter who works with mud. Our dreams are so beautiful but our projects bog down in the mud of our failings and limitations. Still God, You bring good out of all these evils. Let me pause in my swift typing of these words and make a list of all the good you did bring out: a goodly number of vocations; many students experiencing personal love as they could hardly have found in a larger college even if it was as orthodox as ours; increase in understanding and compassion among those at the college. Lastly, let me admit that many of the same people I fought with have been kind to me always in my personal struggles.

January 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A beautiful pink sunrise – like the novel “The Color Purple.” I would be glad to have lived just to have seen that color. Visited a friend whose children are shy when she brings them to our school. At their home they are full of fun. I was so happy to see them happy. I went to her deck on the gulf. Lovely flowing water.

Glorious Mystery: I woke up to the Holy Spirit saying I would be less burdened if I didn’t live so much in the future. O, “Be still and know that I am God.” Help me dear God to slow down and savor what You have each moment and not live in despair of possibility – the term used by Kierkegaard. (In his book, *Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes various types of despair as contrasted to trust. One is living in fantasies (possibilities) vs. living in what God is giving you now.)

January 27, 2002

Joyful: Today at the Sunday Mass a Southern white man served at the altar for a black priest. I was so excited at the progress on race relations. It reminded me of Sartre’s terrific reflections in his book *Portrait of an Anti-Semite* where he shows how an average non-Jew who has little to boast of can feel superior just because he/she isn’t a Jew! That is the pleasure of anti-Semitism. A good thing to get away from for sure, especially in the Church.

January 28, 2002

Joyful: Suddenly laughing in the midst of heavy conversation about problems at our school. What is that laugh? Hopeless, helpless and feeling that it doesn’t really matter so much, after all; that the wink of mirth in an eye maybe weighs more?

St. Philip Neri, you, such a humorous saint, help us to laugh!

Glorious: Office of Readings: Angela Merici: “You ought to exercise pleasantness toward all...not by force, for God has given free will to everyone and He forces no one.”

I remember reading about this saint, how light and pleasant she was, enjoying the good and not being outraged by the bad.

January 29, 2002:

Joyful:

I told my class of my joy in their positive evaluations of the class since it proves that I can teach people their age. I need to accept that they are not so expressive as I am in their body language in class. Are they trying to be cool? Can I forgive them for that? They are still awkward. I need to have more compassion for them.

Glorious: In class we listened to De Filippis’ tape of parts of St. Augustine’s Confessions – such passion!

Extra: I turned down the potential Dean job gently – our styles don't blend – my total openness vs. the President's cautious prudence. My motive in considering it, I admitted with a laugh, was like Frodo and the Ring – wanting the power to fix everything.

January 30, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A holy young Sister asked during spiritual exercises: "Do we want to be a community of martyrs or of marshmallows?"

January 31, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Felt joy today praying for the people who upset me at the school. Dreaming of what it would be like if I could melt them with love. Even though that didn't happen exactly, the prayer wasn't a waste since it makes me better able to love them.

February 8, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Fr. Benedict Groeschel's book, *The Cross at Ground Zero*, about 9/11 is terrific. He quotes Claudel "Jesus does not come to take away or explain suffering but to be present to it."

February 9, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Beauty of the community ordination of priests: laying down their lives; their great smiles.

February 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I realize I haven't had a co-dependent friendship in more than a year. (A co-dependent friendship is like the ones described earlier in these journals where there is terrible fear of rejection and bitter anger when it happens.) Still remnants of it – over anxiety that some friend doesn't really like me or will leave.

Sorrowful Mystery:

(After many struggles and attempts to accept problems at the college I am, at this point, coming closer and closer to the decision to leave my residence at the college and live at the Retreat Center, commuting from there to teach at the college without being

part of the community. The philosophy of the leaders of the community I find most difficult, in the end, is that they think that victims of injustices in the institution, must choose to bear the cross rather than fighting for change. I had been praying to the Little Infant of Prague. He seemed to tell me that it was more childlike to do what I can to spend less time here vs. fix everything by battling giants.)

Glorious Mystery:

I have some wonderful friends here: The Ridley's: Claire and Jim. Claire wrote some thoughts:

"The tabernacle is small but holds all eternity.

I want to shrink to fit in there –

I want to be so small I could be held

In someone's palm and not be recognized.

I could get lost in the ciborium and tossed onto a paten –

Chosen out of all the other hosts

Not because I was so much more

Delectable but because I was

Utterly undetectable.

An indistinct wafer consumed by love of God."

February 12, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Fatigue from not sleeping well. Anxiety about more people going next year.

Dear Jesus, you have given me a more stable home for the weekend at the Retreat Center to help me with this insecurity. Thank you.

Glorious Mystery:

I accept now all the crosses You, my God, may send or allow for the whole rest of my life for the sake of the conversion of those most in need of your mercy. St. Teresa of Avila, weary old saint, pray for me. St. Faustina, pray for me. St. Paul, pray for me.

Little Therese, pray for me.

February 13, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

So sad, always, to participate in our prayer in front of the Abortion clinic! So many years of this peaceful protest.

(Note to readers: eventually every abortion clinic in Corpus Christi closed!)

February 14, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

My daughter Carla's Ash Wednesday Poem

(such a poignant description of what lapsed Catholics feel)

Mountaineer

Here's the hollow made to hold my head

When I was giant also, where I slept

before I left you. Here's the place I wept

The day I started shrinking when I fled.

I wonder, can you feel my thread-thin feet

Come skitter where my head once rested? I

Am just another ant who wonders why

You never chased me. Pointless to retreat.

I'm prodigal: at least, I've slept with swine.

But nothing works, not logic, loss of pride,

Nor climbing back despite the dark inside,

Annihilating darkness, undefined.

I hope. It happens sometimes that I grow

For minutes, even hours. Then I stride

Uphill on legs of light you may provide.

At any rate, I hope but cannot know.

At times, I sneak the trodden path instead,

Behind both light and darkness, tiny limbs

Beneath a premise bowed, a beast of whim.

I find this nook again. I rest my head.

February 15, 2002

Glorious Mysteries:

Jesus, You seemed to ask at Holy Communion: “Why not concentrate on holiness vs. setting new deadlines?”

(The reference here is too a bad habit I have of setting artificial deadlines and then getting tense meeting them as in “I will finish this new book I am writing by April 10th,” but the deadline is not required since the book will not be taught by me until September.)

February 16, 2002 At the Retreat Center

Joyful Mystery:

Anne Lassiter, a nurse, now a Catholic widow and a TV crusader for the faith, lives in a house at the Retreat Center. She has the kind of goodness I like in women – not too sweet, weak or smothering. She is somehow vulnerable but gutsy and humble, needy but not hysterical. I am trying to take it very slow because I need such a friend at this point.

Glorious Mystery:

Here at the Center I felt such a longing to be in the chapel in the middle of the day. Jesus seemed to say, “Curl up like a snail in the shell that is My embrace, my poor, tired little old bride. Rest! A bride is all openness and warmth; not tense work mode.”

I let the Spiritual Canticle poem of John of the Cross waft me into the depth of Your heart, You seem to tell me to offer Your grace to staunch the wounds of priests who have lost the desire to meet You in the Mass every day. I made the image into a little poem:

Lick the bloody dust of the via dolorosa

Staunch the incurable wounds of My priests

Not with stinging taunts

Rather with a Mary-kiss of compassionate love.

February 17, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I love having the earth under my feet here at Center: grounding vs. pound the pavements?

Looking again at the exposed rock and wood of the chapel here I see it is a contrast of something raw vs. wall paper. A flight from the artificial? Memories of the Portiuncula in Assisi and at Franciscan University.

Sorrowful Mystery:

The topic of discipline came up. Discipline is so needed, but not too tight! Otherwise, without discipline, just pure laxity and people wind up like Oblomov (the famous “hero” of a Russian satire). The Holy Spirit seemed to say that we must be transformed by love, not just to avoid laziness and disorder, but so that we do more out of love.

February 18, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Quiet peace at adoration., revival of carefree mood – Office of Readings Exodus “You were the slaves to Egypt but I will take you as my own people.” I am a slave to workaholism. God wants to free me to become slower and more serene.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A Sister I respect at the college said that to be proud, impatient and judgmental are 3 vices of converts!

February 19, 2002

Rabbi Zolli, the famous head rabbi of Rome who converted partly under the influence of Pius XII, in his book about Jesus says that Jesus would have sung his sermons!

February 20, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Suppose purgatory is when I get to feel what my victims did when I was hurting them, but then they forgive me and they get to feel what they did and I forgive them? Total healing of memories.

February 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

I made a commitment to pray the Mercy Chaplet every day. I am thinking I should also do something merciful for others. To have mercy on slower students? As Von Hildebrand wrote – you can only dispense mercy when you are in control. I could devastate them, but I can choose instead to see them through.

February 24, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Chesterton says that God tell us to love our enemies and our neighbors because generally they are the same persons!

February 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Final decision to be an adjunct at the college. I pray: Jesus, is this good with You? You seem to say yes. Then you add “now don’t rehash it, just rest in me and let me work many works of love in you for the students, staff and faculty and even those you have the most trouble with. (Reading this in 2013, I am thinking of how several spiritual directors have told me that I don’t belong in community. I keep trying because I want so much to belong, but it never works.)

February 27, 2002

Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries:

We made a trip to the ocean today. I gave You, Jesus, the sorrow that it didn’t work to live in the community and teach at the college full time. I tried.

Then I looked at the glorious sunlit ocean. I thought, let me be truly sonlit with You, Jesus. Let me be like you, Mary, a hearth of warm understanding for all, not a dragon lady. Jesus promised He would send me the human love I need. Let me trust in that and hope vs. trying to force those to be my friends who I am in conflict with just so I can feel more secure.



Mary says: There is no security on earth. Come, live with us. Now be carefree! Don't worry, be happy.

A reading in today's Liturgy of the Hours from Psalm 81 reads "I freed your shoulder from the burden; your hands were freed from the load. You called in distress and I saved you."

March 1, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A dear friend in the community left for a site he has been dreaming of a long time. I am happy for him but there is a grief in me. Since he came from the New York City area there is also a sense of one less person who understands me in that way. Even John of the Cross had trouble going from Northern to Southern Spain in terms of culture shock.

Glorious Mystery:

Sister Anne Sophie's book *On the Front Lines* came out. I have described her and her work before in this journal. There is such a joy in seeing something published. It is just not the same as reading a manuscript, not only because of the wider range of readers, but just that a book is a certain kind of product that needs to certain way of being presented.

March 2, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Spring Break at the Retreat Center

What is Your joy, My Jesus? You say that just as I take joy in my children in spite of their flaws, so You take joy in me.

In the Spiritual Canticle John of the Cross, #19 wrote "I no longer tend the herd, nor have I any other word now that my every act is love. If, then, I am no longer seen or found on the common, you will say that I am lost: that, stricken by love, I lost myself, and was found."

Reading this I thought, already now I can begin to let go of the world, just live part of my life here. The Retreat Center is, in a way, an outer symbol of going out of the world to live in Christ.

March 3, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A long talk with the priest head of the Retreat Center. His theory is that a sensitive child, as I must have been, can take refuge in the mind as an ego defense, not because she is superficial, but because she is afraid of exploding with emotion. Now it is my time of life to recover the sensitive child part as mother to others. To empathize with their sufferings and joys, but not in so close as to explode?

March 4, 2002

John of the Cross poem suggests that the Father loves us for loving the Son whom He so loves. In a circle of friends we love one we know less, just because he has “the good taste” to love the one we love more.”

In the book *Literary Converts* by Joseph Pearce, p. 369 he is writing about Schumacher, the famous writer of *Small is Beautiful*. Pearce quotes Schumacher as saying that those who work for the good society without God become Machiavellian, they become disheartened or muddleheaded, fabulating about the goodness of human nature and the vileness of one or another adversary... Optimistic ‘Humanism’ by ‘concentrating sin on a few people instead of admitting its universal presence throughout the human race,’ leads to utmost cruelty.”

Contrast – forgiveness in the Our Father prayer presupposes the universal presence of evil, especially in me.!

Pearce quotes Belloc p. 319 as writing “The Church is not something that men fall in love with, but it is home. This was a need. It is the very mold of the mind, the matrix to which corresponds in very outline that outcast and unprotected contour of the soul.”

March 5, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Concerning co-dependency: having been made in the image and likeness but as creatures, it was inevitable that we could be tempted to want to be like God ourselves. Part of the Fall is that our God-willed love for each other would be always in danger of being twisted into distorted co-dependency loves. But God uses the neediness to keep us from still worse prideful independent pseudo-god-likeness.

We want to pretend to need no one. Instead He lets us have a foretaste of heaven in the good part of friendship – walking hand in hand through Mordor - battling demons alone would be worse. And then He comes to heal and forgive the bad part, bringing good out of evil. I should just take in the pain instead of being bewildered by the bad part and wanting to flee. I should run to you, Mary, and ask for your heart and then be like you, a mother to all, in their miseries. O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.

If I put up less resistance it would help. I could try whenever I get angry to immediately run to you, Mary, and let you expand my heart to allow room for that fierce but sweet compassion. That will be an important part of my spiritual work at the Center.

The Psalm prayer for Tuesday Week 3 says “Mercy, Lord, our misery is known to us. May no evil desires prevail over us, for your glory and love dwell in our hearts.” All these problems drive people to me and my arms are open.

There is a hilarious story of the house I am living in on the Retreat Center grounds. The priest head was passing by a street scene where a man was expostulating with a moving company that they were moving his house off the property instead of the house

next door they were supposed to haul off. But it turned out that the angry man didn't want the house. Father said he'd take it for the cost of moving and he plopped it at the Center for a guest house!

I sang the mercy chaplet alone in my guest house. That felt wonderful. Singing to the Father – just myself!

Pere Thomas Philippe, a Dominican priest wrote in *The Contemplative Life* “There is a great temptation to lower our ideal so that it will not stand in judgment over us. This is the sin against the light. To sin against the Holy Spirit is to lower one's ideal, to renounce it, to allege that we are not made for that, that there are other things to do, and so forth.

For the first time I am enjoying being alone – like Kierkegaard's accepting myself transparently before God?

March 7, 2002

Feeling Jesus bringing me into rapturous prayer, I asked, “Jesus, why so long to bring me back to You in this bridal way?”

I hear You say “If I had brought you deeper before you would have quit teaching and I want you to teach. Now you are in a place where you could finally drop full-time teaching and I can come to you and make Myself the true center of your heart without losing your work which I need for my Church.”

(I am reading this in 2013 after what I sometimes call a long “gray night of the soul.” I am thinking that now, so much older, where inertia alone might make me drop teaching, if Jesus needs me to teach I would be reluctant to keep teaching if I could experience the great joy and peace in Him that I had at the Retreat Center.)

March 9, 2002

Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries:

Anxious about what effects on my life will be of hiring a new chairperson for philosophy. Jesus tells me: “It won't affect your life because I am your life. When you go back to the college continually pray “Jesus I trust in you. Mary, this is your college.”

Pere Thomas Philippe in *The Way of the Cross* says that like Veronica we should venerate the Face of Jesus in the suffering faces of those we encounter. Another meaning of Face to Face – not to avert the eyes?

Pere Thomas says that Mary has a priestly heart since she is the mother of souls. Does this explain why the widow in the image of Mary, has a special affinity with seminarians? Like Venerable Conchita of Mexico who helped found the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit?

Pere Thomas says that after many falls we should know that Jesus respects our temperament and doesn't simply change it. He wants us to be sweet and kind to ourselves in our falls and then also to others, even more, the more often they fall. Not to discourage others by having no hope for them because of their faults and sins.

Pere Thomas on the contemplative life: For the contemplative God alone is enough.

Today is the last day of our long retreat at the Center. I ask you Jesus, what am I afraid of when Your perfect love casts out fear?

That this peace is just a phase? Too good to be true? Something terrible will happen.

What do You say, my Jesus?

“Now curl up into a little ball and let me hold you in My lap and rock you. All of this is to help you live in My heart where it is safe so you don’t fear change so much.” Amen.

March 11, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

This Psalm turns out to be a real favorite – these lines from different parts of it are perfect for my plans to be more and more at the Retreat Center:

“What else have I in heaven but you?

Apart from you I want nothing on earth.

My body and heart faint for joy.

God is my possession forever...

To be near God is my happiness.

I have made the Lord God my refuge.” (Psalm 73)

(Who says the God of the Old Testament was only stern and forbidding when David wrote these lines?)

March 15, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

I went to confession. The priest said I should go to Therese on giving up gossip and detraction to grow in virtue. Of course it costs me because I am lively amusing person. I should ask for the gift of light humor instead.

I realize that humor is a saving grace all my life but two edged since it means stuffing a lot. (Fleeing from pain into anecdotal humor about the same situations where I felt wounded.)

That following Sunday we talked about saints and relics instead of Church politics. What a relief. Thank you little Therese.

March 17, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

I am looking at the picture of the weeping St. Francis and realizing now I can live more like him at the Center. I am praising God aloud. Tears of joy. The right to be poor! "It's a joy to be simple, it's a joy to be free." – Quaker hymn

St. John of the Cross: Silence is the speech of God.

March 20, 2002

Glorious Mystery

Pere Thomas Philippe: complexity comes from trying to be something vs. a simple child.

March 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Birthday of my twin girls. I am thinking of their real birth-day with joy and gratitude. (For more about my family see *En Route to Eternity – The Story of Ronda Chervin.*)

March 24, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

At the college we had a wonderful Christian Passover service. A funny angle was that the head of the order that founded the college has a rule against any alcohol except at planned parties. So, most of us got high very quickly on Manischewitz wine for the ceremony.

March 25, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Listening to Monteverde's "Two Angels"

Thinking of some women I know who are immersed in disordered passions. St. Mary Magdalene seemed to tell me that they don't have Jesus as their lover. Pray they may know Him with passion and you, too, Ronda, know Jesus even more. Pant for Him. Eros needs to be transformed not repressed.

March 27, 2002

Pere Thomas "The religious habit represents the protection with which the Church envelops us." I read this as applying to my need to have consecrated widows (or later dedicated widows) wearing this simple blue denim garb.

March 28 Holy Thursday trip to Retreat Center

Sorrowful Mystery:

Here begins a straight journal of responses to the Holy Triduum rites.

When I came into the small chapel Jesus threw me immediately into prayer of quiet. I had a feeling of my dear contemplative saints, Magdalene, Teresa, Therese, Edith Stein, Conchita bringing me here.

Holy Thursday: It seemed as if the priest head was washing the interior souls of the despairing, not just the exterior feet.

Good Friday we had a dramatic procession through the outdoor stations with a priest who has cerebral palsy staggering down the road carrying a cross.

A poetic sequence for the empty tabernacle Good Friday to Holy Saturday evening:

Do You play dead in the tabernacle

Until one of Your lovers come by

And You resurrect for us?

Jesus says He is pleased by everything we do for Him in the Church. Like I would be if a grandchild did a picture of me, even if not very good. It is right for me to appreciate it if it is very artistic, but not to get so upset if it is not. As if it were an end not a means. The end is the I-Thou union.

Carla wrote a poem for Good Friday called

Purgatory:

In the domain of stumblers and stones,

His body waits for me like a cross,

A thing to cling to

When twenty shades of hell

Slant down to cover stalwart faces

Lit by hope.

How many slips and sobs till Paradise?

Here, where sorrowful mysteries circle,

Round for sliding feet,

His tongue cries light,

Flies it with the ravens of this night,

Faint as the shine of feathers

Growing wings.

From a Good Friday poem of Jim Ridley:

In your dread thurible of parted Flesh

Let now my timid immolation start.

Throw on the gore-sopped wad of rag, my heart;

Or nail it to the beams of that blazing Tree,

Scrap torn from the flag of the enemy.

Burn this sullied ensign of my surrender

Into the banner of Your Victory, Your hidden Splendor.

Pere Thomas Philippe: "Someone with a voluntaristic or willful attitude is able to love, but does not let himself be loved. He closes himself in order to drive ahead. A certain weakness of littleness is wanting to him." This reminded me of a locution I received once when exhausted from being over-extended: "It would be easier for you if you were smaller."

Pere Thomas: The vow of chastity supposes a very great detachment of heart. It allows God to determine the order among our friends. Instead of having personal preferences, we adopt our Lord's choice and are free to love those He asks us to love."

"Religious life in community is animated by the charity of hearts that are free."

More of Pere Thomas: "Poverty suppresses the attitude of private ownership that 'incarnates' a person in the world by the extension of himself in his possessions."

"We don't need to get settled in; we don't rent our cell."

Pere Thomas "God doesn't want His Son to come to earth without being wanted. Mary's longing provided for this."

Jesus says when I shudder at this: "I want you to live in My heart. Here is the deed!" I have freed you from property not so you could settle in at the Center. You are here for a while our second honeymoon." (Dedicated Widows are brides of Christ.)

More Pere Thomas: "Mary was always in someone else's house in a state of dependence." (St. Joseph, St. John)

I was watching the video Teresa of Avila. It was so moving to see her old age. I ask you, Teresa, what do you want to tell me? You say, let Him love you to folly and then you can love Him and everyone else to folly."

Easter Monday

I am reading Seward about Icons:

Gregory II wrote against the iconoclasts that since the Son could become incarnate everything should be painted. He wishes that every creature could by words, writing, and pictures show forth the Savior.

JPII, 1994 Pontifical Council of Culture talks of "A voice made peaceful through contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery, like the calm breathing of a soul that knows that it is loved by God."

Mary wants to rescue her brethren from the suicide of sin and so lets her Son plunge her into co-redemptive compassion." Be like her.

April 1, 2002 Easter Monday

Glorious Mystery:

St. Francis and I made it to Medicare!!!! (A few years before I turned 65, I had no insurance with Medicare 2 years or so off in the horizon. Because of my breast cancer years ago, insurance would cost me \$1,000 a month. That would be about 1/2 my income. I prayed and prayed to St. Francis and begged him to make it so that I could use that money to give to the poor (on the basis that Mother Teresa's poor who are dying need it now, whereas I just need in on spec) but not have any big health problem before the 2 years were up. It worked!)



April 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I gave a good class on Edith Stein. I realize the best of my person is in teaching where I articulate the truth mingled with love.

Glorious Mystery:

In a spiritual exercise, a late vocation seminarian, said that he puts his anger at the foot of the cross and lets Jesus' blood drip on it and then lets the water flow as mercy and peace in proportion to the mercy to show the offender.

In a sermon a priest said of Nicodemus that he was afraid of being burned by the fire in the heart of Jesus.

April 11, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

"Don't hardboil others in their sins," says Julie Loesch Wiley, the pro-life activist. I need to see the wounds of those people I want to judge so harshly.

A priest wrote: "We don't reject the needs and weaknesses of others, their limitations and woundedness, but embrace them, take them upon ourselves and offer the wounds of Jesus for their healing, strength and redemption."

April 14, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Worried scruple – do I want to lean on the rich while being poor. Is that really being poor? St. Justin Martyr is quoted in the Office of Readings (p. 540) as saying the rich help the poor and we are always united. Also helping widows. Widows need security and shelter. That is not wrong.

April 15, 2002

Jesus seemed to say "You are my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased" and that he is proud of all my projects.

April 19, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

A writer, Lermontov, describing a beautiful mountain scene "there was peace in heaven and on earth. It was like the heart of a man at morning prayer."

Lermontov says “We can’t help becoming children as we leave social conventions behind and come nearer to nature. All life’s experience is shed from us and the soul becomes anew what it once was and will surely be again.”

April 21, 2002

Sorrowful:

A friend I saw when giving a talk in another city told me that all communities have similar problems. I shouldn’t try to be a mother, but a grandmother, who has little power.

Glorious Mystery:

Jesus says: “Be My merciful love in the world wherever you go. Take all you have learned from life, literature, philosophy and the saints and turn it into love – I-Thou – Face-to-Face or, rather, let Me turn it into love.” Sense of com-penetration - invisible stigmata.

April 25, 2002

Jesus, how can I get out from under this busyness?

“Do less and do it the simplest way, without any false deadlines. Now rest and be carefree ’til you leave vs. finishing everything on the desk. When you get tense about everything say My Jesus prayer.

The goal this summer, Jesus says, is to really make Psalm 73 to be your closeness to me so that nothing rattles you.

April 26-28 – general journal of weekend at the Center:

I come into the chapel alone to say “It is Jesus, You are waiting for me!” Such an intimate feeling. You say “Everything that is Mine is yours. Of course, because you are my bride.”

Scheming about doing an Institute here. The Holy Spirit helps me to see that then it would become a place of work. Jesus wants this Retreat Center to be for me as a place of rest, foretaste of eternity; no pressure.

The Holy Spirit seems to say: “You think you are worried about finishing up your work, but really you are afraid not to have the work, as if an abyss of nothingness would open if you really stop!”

Again Jesus says, “Take it slowly now. Nothing you have on your list has to be done quickly except if you worship efficiency more than Me? Closure? Death is the only closure! Right now I want you for My saint, to be full of merciful love. Don’t postpone that till you finish your work. Pray for those you are in conflict with.”

Jesus says, "Poor little red shoes girl. Stop and let me kiss your bloody feet." (The reference is to the film *The Red Shoes*, where the heroine can't stop dancing and finally flings herself down a long staircase into death. One of her admirers kisses her bleeding feet.)

From a sermon: "There is so much anxiety because we feel so separate vs. the Trinity is One."

April 29, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am tense about work. Martha, Martha. O Jesus, when will You no longer have to chide me Martha, Martha vs. Mary sitting at Your feet?"

"When you trust Me and give up your idols."

April 30, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

In a class we prayed over a young woman with lupus. She said it was one of the most beautiful moments of her life to have us praying over her! (I don't know if it was also physically healing since I left shortly afterwards but I do so wish, charismatic style, we would always lay hands on people who are suffering.)

May 1, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

This is a funny sorrowful mystery. Today the workers put up the iron dome of the new Adoration Chapel that is being built for our college. Before classes a bunch of us stood outside watching the awesome procedure with huge contraptions clapping and lifting the dome. The President, was set up with his hard hat to go up in a crane lift and say a special blessing over it.

He came down safe and sound and beaming with joy.

A beautiful paragraph from Michael Meaney's manuscript (Dr. Meaney is a philosophy professor and dear friend): "Failing to concentrate on God's love for us tends to reduce our faith to a catechetical acceptance of a set of dogmas about existence, attributes and demands of the Supreme Being, ultimate end or great ideal towards which we ought to direct our lives. However well-motivated this may be, it still radically underestimates Christian life by reducing it to the truest and highest of all ideals. ...Instead of being one ideal among others or even the Great Ideal, Christianity is an Ideal Person. A God-man actively and personally loving us, cooperating with us and incorporating us into the light, life and love of the three Persons of the Trinity. This transcendentally true and peaceful experience of profoundly harmonious light, life and love is what we are all hungering for from the innermost recesses of our being."

May 6, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Bernanos, the great French Catholic writer remarks in a play about Pharisaism: "Pious erudition can keep the Pharisee "from ever being surprised by one's own God."

May 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

To see Carla, Peter and the kids.

May 10, 2002

After sorting things out, finally sitting down to pray. Jesus, I want to belong somewhere and stay put. You say: "I want to wean you from places so that My heart will be your place. Don't fear. My heart is the best and only safe eternal place. Remember I said in Sedona after you crashed with your own plans, that I want to be able to take you anywhere with me, not alone! Be of good cheer, you are rich bride because you love My poor." (I interpret the last line as referring to that even though I live simply and give a lot to the poor I keep visiting places that are full of what for me would be luxuries.)

May 11, 2002 Break before Summer School with the family in New Hampshire

Sorrowful Mystery: You say that every day there will be things to agitate me. When that happens stop and throw yourself into My heart. Breathe in My name. I have given you this non-pressured time so you can learn to come to Me more readily in agitation.

May 12, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Mahler's love of life in the Songs. Like Martin loved Mahler's music so much, now when I hear Mahler it is as if Martin were singing to me. I told Peter I was sorry for irritating him. He smiled and said I didn't irritate him. Surprising. Maybe I have become much more old and humble through the years, I suppose.

Glorious Mystery:

Kazantzakis' St. Francis. I forgot how I love it. Kazantzakis was a tortured soul who wrote some demonic things that are hateful, but in the first flush of a conversion he wrote a terrific book about St. Francis.

May 13, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

I have a sense that Bishops and administrators have to be sanguines (hopeful temperaments) for that role and that can factor into the problem of cover ups of scandals!

Beautiful light of New Hampshire, beautiful green of forest trees in the breeze outside. Starting to read St. Matthew's geneology. It was a plan that long geneology but it didn't seem that way, just as our lives don't seem like a plan.

Jesus said that if I slow down He can show me so much each day, "Each day as you slow down you will be able to see more, blind one!"

May 14, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Sometimes Jesus lets us decide wrongly and then bails us out. He let Joseph think badly of Mary but then changed it around.

May 15, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Two women in Church had some problem with each other. One asked the other in front of us other daily communicants what was wrong. This was before the Mass. It was clear that there were still bad feelings. At the kiss of peace time, one walked way down the aisle and said, "Let's forgive and forget." It was so beautiful to see.

May 16, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

From a letter I wrote to the head of the community I was in:

"The consecrated widow part seems just right and very fruitful. It is not that. What comes to mind most as I experience so much turmoil in my heart and soul is not only bad experiences at the college, though they certainly play a role; but more that being part of any religious community is somehow too complicated for a person like me of such an analytic and justice seeking bent. I see that others, who are less analytic, and more seeking of pure love without a need to seek justice (a need I believe is God-given to me); are able to offer up the problems with confidence that Our Lady will solve them. I, on the other hand, feel called to be part of the solution...

"In prayer I get a sense that the community is full of holy people, the sacrifices of whom have benefited me greatly. I am deeply grateful, but I would like to take a leave of absence, teaching at the college as a lay person with a private vow."

May 17, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Reading Matthew – first the Lord told the Joseph to go to Egypt and then later Nazareth. Messages are indications, not rigid and exact – follow A and at B you’ll see C better, is more like it?

May 19, 2002 – Back at the college as a lay dedicated widow teaching summer school.

Glorious Mystery:

E-mail from Russian mission of the community. It is wonderful to see how seemingly useless old people in Russia are taking care of abandoned children.

On another subject, great seeing how some here in the US have lead rosaries in front of abortion clinics for decades, indefatigable and still doing it peacefully.

May 21, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A very loving member of the community left. It feels like trying to swim in an empty pool. How much did he sustain us. We could hardly talk in sentences we were so devastated. I thought- I try to be authentic, but he has heart. Now the heart is gone and authenticity feels, well, heartless!

Glorious Mystery:

Looking at the beautiful ocean, Jesus said, “I want to dazzle you.”

May 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

St. Bernard p. 207 Office of Readings. “Where can the weak find a place of firm security and peace except in the wounds of the Savior?”

Office of Readings p. 211 “The spiritual man who has been illumined does not limp or leave the path, but bears all things...he is not saddened by the things of time.”

A priest suggests asking God to relax each part of you, then breath in His love and breath out the pain and resentment.

Lines from David Craig’s poems based on the Gospel of Matthew:

“Our sin...starts to fall by degrees, though with Jungian shadows of Death that unclutch our wills so slowly you’d think the darkness charged a fee!

“He is what lasts, the sun will blink at His look; the stars, no doubt, will lean into Him and learn. But add to this – His power of speech, His deeds! Like he could defeat it all, without bruising a reed.

“In her (Mother Teresa) we saw Jesus feminine Albanian face, could stable there, in the Wounded Heart she bore. Self-consciousness had no place in her daily rounds. She wanted Jesus to be both fore and ground.”

“Let the work of dishonest men rumble past you with their engines. You have nothing they’d want to steal. They are you in better clothes. Love them, each new and cluttered landscape, a bane that keeps you real.”

“Hypocrites...they inspect their hands in the morning light, get used to wrinkles....How else will they ever get it right.”

(speaking of a priest who died) “The giants who go before us we seldom see. They’ve lost themselves in the masses at Calvary.”

“When our houses collapse, we break into a trot.”

“And now nothing beyond the God who has us here. And duty? It sounds like jazz to wakening ears.”

“Whoever spoke like this? Like the world was His own...He spoke, not about what might occur, but of things that would happen BECAUSE He spoke – in the face of lies.”

May 24, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

En Route to Retreat Center, my new base: Jesus, you seem to say, “Well, we’re moving.” Just like a husband would say. Mary says “This is one of my houses, too. Nazareth was like this.”

Jesus telling Nicodemus that he had to be born again. I am thinking that old age is related to this. I should be uttering little helpless cries like a baby. I need to become little not by thinking but by becoming small and with more heart.

May 28, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

I am working on plan of life for being a Woman of Jesus. Jesus says “What is most important is that you be with Me every moment of the day: not your prayer schedule! I want to be with you to make you a bride widow saint., So just relax, rest in Mary’s bosom, so soft and sweet. Mary says she will help with my garb.

(After styling myself as a dedicated widow or, temporarily a Woman of Jesus, I wore different simple blue outfits).

Confirming scripture: “Remain at peace and attend to your own affairs.” (1 Thess. 4: 10)

May 30, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I am editing a novel I wrote about widowhood called Last Fling. (It can be found as a free e-book at En Route Books and Media – click on free e-books.

Glorious Mystery:

I am reading about the heroic life of Joan Andrews an Operation Rescue warrior.

May 31, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A book I am reading called Cold Comfort Farm has this crude farmer/seducer say that “Women pretend to be interested in a man but all they really want is “a man’s blood and his heart out of his body and his soul and his pride and after she’s got him and he’s trapped by his longing for her, she wants to eat him up. He has to defend himself by eating her up instead.” Half truth? Freud asked: what do women want? He thought the answer was that women want a man to control.

Do I like male students because I can control their wildness and they have to obey me?

What do you say, Jesus?

“That is what it is like without the God of love. I don’t tell My people to pretend evil isn’t there; but to overcome it with love.”

June 1, 2002 Journal from Franciscan University of Steubenville Women’s Conference:

One of the conference organizers said that there was something for everyone. In my trip fatigue I muttered to myself cynically – sure they’ll even have classical music! (I love charismatic music, but classical even more.) In the morning I walked in early to the center and Bach was being piped into the hall. By the podium was a statue of Our Lady of Fatima I could use as an illustration of my talk.

From the Conference sermon: God said He keeps you in His heart; not His toe! The priest said to think of our worst worry, and then realize Jesus can take it away. I thought: fear that everyone will reject me.

June 3, 2002



Blessed Angela Foligno shames me with her love of suffering. I am not she, but I wish to love You in my paltry way. Is that worth something to You? A widow's mite? You seem to say it is good for me to see how far there is to go, but that it is grace, not nature, to love suffering. Rest patiently in My love for now. I want you to love holiness not for fame but for bliss.

June 8 and 9, 2002

Jesus seemed to say that the work on Face to Face is very important.

June 11, 2002

Gandhi fought for justice with love; not hate, not vengeance. That is what I need to do.

June 14, 2002

Sorrowful:

Feeling of fear that I cannot cut down on my work because I am too much involved ego-wise with it, and/or need for applause.

(Now in 2013, editing this journal I think this description is a typical example of a self-deprecatory trait that the devil loves to augment. Of course there is that element of ego in my work, but the largest element is simply love of truth and of the kingdom of God.)

Glorious Mystery:

Teaching John Paul II, Love and Responsibility. It is so wonderful.

June 15, 2002

I have overwhelming gratitude to Jesus, Mary and Joseph for finding me a new home at the Retreat Center. I asked the priest leader how he, so monastic, can stand me around, such a floppy woman. He said it is part of their vision to have charismatic lay people around. They have to be more monastic as priests and nuns. I could be a member as a dedicated widow hermitess – sort of like Beguines, or St. Angela, wear cheap simple clothing.

Advice for ministry with the family: call on the angels. During their trial the angels had to go from pure intellect to the service of the heart. The angels are clear. Cultivate them as an intermediary. Pray to the angels of family members to help me see how to help. Conversion goes through sensibility, heart, then intellect. The angels can reach people through dreams, poetic imagination. Angels can bind subtle images.

Pere Thomas says that the spirit is the free-floating imaginative part. The heart is deeper. Be sweet grandma and influence them through prayer. Angels can intervene in the world of creativity. Artists need to be purified from demonic manipulation.

Don't try to fix things but just pray to the angels. Don't trust myself. Trying to fix things is workaholism. I need to move through contemplation. I have to pray more and talk less. More spontaneous vs. going through logic.

In social situations share anecdotes vs. teaching. Be more playful.

St. Thomas said you cannot know a person through analysis of the mind. You have to love in order to know, because the heart goes deeper.

June 24, 2002 Visit to daughter, Carla, in New Hampshire

You say that You want me to trust. Nothing can happen that You cannot bring good out. You know the proud hearts of everyone, but still not closed to love. I cannot save them, but I can stop talking about it and feel their pain and give it to You. May each one find true love in You and let You expand his/her hearts and souls and minds.

Glorious Mystery:

Notice new things in Liturgy of the Hours, Saturday Week II, Day time "may we live our days in quiet joy." vs. perpetual turbulence? Blessed Angela says the world is pregnant with God.

Prayer here is better than ever before if not as wonderful as at the Center. I am not wafted into prayer of quiet as I am in the chapel at Center.

In a way I feel exiled, but in another way I feel closer to the contemplative way because I am very much alone with Jesus in my suite in my daughter's house. Contrary even to my own expectations, I succeeded in clearing the decks of all required projects before leaving.

I also have with me writings of the saints we will use in our team taught Catholic Arts and Wisdom class next fall. Blessed Angela, I forgot, was a kind of Beguine like hermit, Franciscan style living in Foligno. She lived with a woman in a hut. She was a widow who lost husband, mother and 7 children probably in a plague. She had been a sinful wife, probably adulterous, so she was extremely penitential. I have read her a few times and always find her a door to new graces for me. Compared to her passion, I feel like a pretty cold fish. She used to scream out in pain whenever she saw a crucifix.

With the family it is working to "bribe" the grand-kiddies into catechism by simply setting up a routine where first we read a chapter, then they get ice cream and then I play a long game with them of their choice. I bet you, the reader of these journals, would be surprised to see me shooting baskets with them or "lowering myself," to playing simple card games.

Talking to Jesus: I want You to take me to an old place I knew at the illuminative stage (the traditional formulation is that there are three stages in the spiritual life: purgative, illuminative and unitive. The illuminative is full of beautiful insights. The unitive

is more wordless.) back in 1977, but suppose You want to take me to new places? Jesus replies that what matters is not that someone is canonized, but that My love is appeased. Rapture. Eucharist as visible tip of the iceberg of My invisible presence.

Compline: "Under his wings you will find refuge." Jesus seemed to say "Turn 'His' to 'Mine' in the Psalms and address it to yourself. "Ronda, under My wings you will find refuge."

June 25, 2002

I was reading about St. Francis and I decided to make a list of what I really need vs. things I don't need, in order to be more like St. Francis:

Absolutely need:

Credit card

Food

Bedding

Spiritual reading

Biographies

Rosary

Paper

Liturgy of the hours.

Sack purse

Phone card

Toiletries

Pens

Checks

Course materials

Addresses

Copies of my books

Suitcase

Clock

Winter coat

Boots

Umbrella

Rain coat

Birkenstocks

5 summer outfits

5 winter outfits

Watch

Glasses

Calendar

Underwear, socks

Manuscripts

I could gradually delete the car, computer, and fiction books.

It gave me great joy to make the list but now typing this up in August I see that what goes under things like Course Materials is so much as to fill practically 6 boxes to mail just from New Hampshire back to the college.

June 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

In the novel *The Empty Shrine* by Barrett were these words “(he) conceives truth to be a liquid which one pours into the jug of his mind. His mind is a good jug, but truth will not take the shape of his container, because it has a form of its own.”

Sorrowful Mystery:

More anxiety about family problems. Jesus seemed to tell me that “You can’t save them, but Jesus can save them.”

June 27, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

A read a lovely passage in Lloyd Douglas about an Anglican Gothic cathedral – how everything in it forces you to lift your eyes and thoughts upward.

June 28, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A fantastic moment took place in the midst of all the conflicts going on. Peter, Carla’s husband, loves gardening. One night he decided to make a huge fire in the backyard to burn up all the branches lying around. The older grandsons were helping him pile up branches for the fire and whooping it up in the dark of night. Peter wanted a beer, so he yelled to the 2 year old who was watching on the porch to bring him one. The sight of this tot standing at the porch door, naked except for his diaper, grinning and holding out the can of beer, with a huge fire spurting up to the skies was just hilarious.

June 29, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A quiet time with the youngest grandson. They say you can’t really understand a child when he/she is with the whole family. You need to be alone with the child.

July 3, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Jesus says I am trying to detach you from family and friends to be closest to your heart, not just mind and soul.

John of the Cross Canticle Stanza 3 “Those who seek God and want their own satisfaction and rest...will not find him.”

I am old and tired. Holy Spirit, angels, show me what to do better! “Talk less,” came the answer immediately. Jesus seemed to add, “Only by letting Me inundate your soul with a My love can you stand not to project your personality so strongly.”

July 4, 2002

Jesus, make me a peacemaker vs. a time bomb.

Glorious Mystery:

I ask El Greco's Christ what does He say about injustice? He says, "I allow it because it weans people away from this world, but I bless those who thirst for justice. It is a seeming paradox. It requires trust – not your greatest virtue! Lack of trust in Me is unjust!"

In the Introduction to the Writings of St. Gertrude, Sister Maximilian Marnau writes: "We have a detailed record of God's dealings with a soul, the personal relationship for which the Creator is willing to stoop with his creature. It is a picture of the Lord as she knew him, including not just his character, his goodness, and his love, but also the manner of his dealings with mankind." God said to Gertrude that He wanted her to write about how He worked in her that others may desire such graces for themselves. July 5, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Dear Jesus, I am nothing like sweet, sweet Gertrude. How can You love me?

You say, "Do I love Teresa less, or Mary Magdalene less? I would like every person I made to be that close to Me. Don't try to be her, but try to be you more in relation to Me!"

"Yes, How?"

"Talk to me about everything. Give me the discomforts, little slights, rancor, moods".

St. Gertrude refers to St. Bernard on the Song 52, 5 "You are mistaken if you think you will find outside your own soul a place of rest, secluded solitude, unclouded light, the dwelling of peace."

Gertrude speaks of some fit of impatience shown in her words. Jesus says He consumed it in the fire of His love. I need to meditate on how "love covers a multitude of sins."

July 6, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Spiritual Canticle John of the Cross Stanza 10 "The soul that desires nothing but God will not go a long time without a visit." Yes!

To be a saint I would need to entrust every worry and trouble to the heart of Jesus so my burden would be lighter.

This night I got a sense of invisible stigmata. Then it seemed You wanted to know what I would like You to be for me, if I would admit I want You to really be my second bridegroom.

Would I like to see the lilies of the fields of Israel; to see the beauty of Your mother's face so much more beautiful than the statues?

Then You said that You cannot delight me because I have put You in a box in my mind just as Gertrude tried to. You are free, and You want to free me. First the box was philosophical categories, then I wanted You to be the same for me as You were for Teresa or Catherine or Gertrude or Edith Stein.

“But, no!” He seemed to say, “I want you to be Ronda of Jesus, someone free and laughing and deep and empathetic at the same time. Hebrew Catholic: Russian, Spanish style. There is so much I can do for you before you leave this earth.

“Write Face to Face with great confidence that it is Me and Mine trying to break into your tight little heart.”

July 7, 2002

I found my old CD of the Missa Criolla and danced to it.

Glorious Mystery:

Thinking of last night’s locutions, sweet hope of greater happiness. Half sleepy I lay down on the bed and fell into a sort of floating in grace prayer midway between quiet and rapture.

It might be good to write an article about aging and contemplation about how this is a gateway to heaven and that we need to overcome the feeling that since we think of ourselves as ugly old toads that means God thinks of us that way. Old saints still had contemplative graces of union like Teresa of Avila, and JPIL.

July 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I had breakfast this morning with a couple of friends here from the parish. I knew they were going through some heavy trials involving under-employment. The husband quit an excellent job because it had become so impersonal and unsatisfying, thinking he would easily find another one. After a year living on severance pay, it is clear he can’t find another good job. He is working for \$8 an hour in the meantime selling fish at a supermarket counter. It looks as if they will have to sell their main house and move into a bungalow type house they have in another state just to avoid the mortgage payment.

Since this couple are devout Catholics eager to be saints, I felt it was okay to talk up the joys of simplicity of life. I thought they might take umbrage, but they actually seemed to love hearing about ways to live more simply and austere, such as making totes and handkerchiefs out of old clothes, washing things by hand, etc. Ideas for less clutter such as saving only the best of what the kids did since first grade vs. all of it, they liked also. I suggested that they ask St. Francis to help them divest. Emanating my own tremendous joy in cutting down for the sake of giving to the poor made it less didactic. Thank you St. Francis for inspiring me and letting others be inspired by me even for my so meager efforts at loving holy poverty.

Glorious Mystery:

I am still pondering a line I have read a thousand times from Night Prayer of Sunday from the hymn, “A quiet night to rest in you.” Somehow I never noticed that it meant that for Your children, Jesus, sleep is resting in You! How sublime – like a sort of rest in the Spirit, a phrase for going into a kind of trance after being prayed over that many of us charismatics experience from time to time.

A long e-letter from a friend of the family, Gabriel Meyer, writer and journalist relating to some of the current problems.

He said “The concept of ‘happiness’ keeps coming to mind. Popular American culture, from Gershwin to the soaps, keys people into the notion that personal happiness is the paramount aim in life to be distinguished from living a useful, productive life.

Happiness in the modern sense is focused on the idea that another person can “save” me, that another person can provide the basis for my own personal fulfillment, that a relationship with an ideal person will solve the problem of my life and place me in a new life condition of happiness and fulfillment. (i.e. through him or her, I will finally get what I really want)....

“But my experience is that happiness does not work that way. First of all, people can’t save each other. What they can do, and this is beyond price, is to help each other (the biblical ‘helpmate.’ How long it takes to realize that friends, not lovers, are the best things in life! And to have the possibility of both in their due and deepening seasons, as committed husbands and wives can...”

(Shades of Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina: what she wanted from Vronsky was a kind of passionate salvation, the ultimate lover, and, at some point, when the relationship is settled, he turns into another husband, not totally different from the one she fled from to him.)

“Secondly happiness is not a permanent or stable condition; it is a sense of well-being and beatitude, and, this side of the world to come, it is (in my experience, and by its very nature) partial and elusive (there on Tuesday, overwhelmed by events on Wednesday; glimpsed in a recalled memory or on a stroll; or in the satisfaction of some accomplishment, or in the delight of a beloved; but elusive, a perception, a gift, a ‘find,’ not a possession, not a state of affairs.

“Paraphrase - in marriage people need the stability of balance – artists need grounded practical people around. Otherwise if you try to find a similar person you come up with brief ecstasy of mutual identity and then chaos when neither is willing to do the dishes.”

July 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

When my husband and I lived for years with Carla and Peter, they did the cooking marvellously and I did the clean up. Then, at various colleges I mostly ate in the cafeteria. In certain ways having cooked for the family some twenty-five years, and not very well at that, I loved any meal prepared by anyone else no matter whether it was gourmet or scraps.



It was only a year ago here in New Hampshire where I have a separate suite with its own kitchen and at the Retreat Center where I also have my own stove that I've begun gingerly to plan and cook my own food again. Maybe you know the joke about the man who is ushered into his heavenly quarters by St. Peter. The first evening he looks down to hell and sees a magnificent banquet being served. St. Peter brings him bread and water. This goes on for three days. Finally our new arrival complains. St. Peter replies: "It's hard to cook for one."

I love to eat but dislike cooking, so I've been buying the simplest things to cook such as chops and steaks and adding stir fry vegetables. This morning I was chopping up the veggies into a pan while a chicken was defrosting in the microwave. It suddenly occurred to me that if I added the chicken pieces to the pan with the tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, carrots and celery plus some water and boullion cubes I would have a sort of chicken cacciatore dish. The thought of variety gave me so much pleasure the time must be coming to venture forth into more experiments.

It probably has to do with a principle my last therapist was eager to get across – take control of your own life. Now, this summer, having decided not to fill every extra moment with writing projects, I have plenty of time for so-called self-nurturing. Offering some of this fare to the grandkids is fun, too. Even if they sometimes sniff at it with disdain since it is not the way Mommy and Daddy used to make it, other times they gobble it down with relish.

Is it, perhaps You, Holy Spirit, that drenches a culture with phrases that may seem far-fetched at first, but really conceal natural wisdom such as "be self-nurturing" or "seek balance," or "brokenness needs healing"? I think so. I find that each of these originally obnoxious sounding ideas emerges into popularity because there really is some pervasive syndrome out there that people are struggling with poorly. Ultimately God's love is the answer, but I don't think He minds using human insight as a bridge.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Writing about pop-psychology phrases, there is one that came to mind today: "avoid stuffing pain." I tend to do this. I replace sorrow over something real with worry about something future that might not come to pass.

Glorious Mystery:

Today is our wedding anniversary. Martin and I were married in 1962 in an old monastic church in Rome, San Onofrio. The reason was that the American Friars of the Atonement presided at this Church and the Vatican wanted the marriage to take place at a place under United States auspices. We had waited quite a few years before marrying waiting to see if we could get a dispensation from Martin's previous secular ceremony taking place in Tijuana, Mexico. At a moment in the proceedings where it seemed it would be impossible to get such a dispensation, my Jesus, you gave me a special grace to say I would choose the Church over what seemed all earthly happiness. Shortly after the permission came through. If you are interested in more of this story you could read my autobiography, *En Route to Eternity*, Miriam Press.

Today I am remembering only the beautiful times of our marriage, sensing that his soul is watching over the family left behind. Martin, Martin, wherever you are on the paths of eternity, pray for us. Forgive me for all the ways I disappointed you in life and after your death. You always said I would realize only after your death how much I lost. Well, I do. We will have an eternity to make up for all those feuds. A grace perhaps from you, Martin, for me was to savor all the lovely qualities of our children today rather than worry about their problems.

I received a moving e-mail from my daughter, Diana, in California. She said that nothing I have ever written about the faith or told her impressed her a bit. The only thing that has given her faith in my faith is that I came through cancer, the suicide of my son, her brother; and the death of Martin, my husband and her father. Glory be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and especially Mother Mary so close to me in those sufferings. Surely that was sheer grace.

The head priest of the Retreat Center wrote an e-mail saying that if I needed to come back sooner than planned he would be happy himself to install a better air-conditioner in the guest house I use. I am overwhelmed. It is a long time since any man in authority has considered any physical needs I might have. How generous he is. Praying gratefully about his offer I thought that it is part of his nature and your grace that he wants to be a refuge for others.

July 10, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Now, let me take the time to rejoice in a healing, possibly miraculous, of a possible cancer a dear friend was worried about. Our Lady of Lourdes, to whom I prayed especially, thank you. I wonder how you can stand interacting with us on earth, Mother Mary. We spend so much time begging and then almost no time in thanking, as if drawn by a magnet to the next worry.

It reminds me of Kierkegaard's analysis of resignation and hope. He claimed that hard as it is to resign oneself in detachment from some dearly longed for wish; it is even harder to hope. But without hope we are not ready to welcome the gift of receiving what seemed impossible to obtain.

In contemporary psychological terms, resignation, I suppose, involves some degree of control by the self. I may not be able to get what I want but I can decide how to react assuming I lose. Hope demands a surrender to the person who is beyond our control: God. So even if I get what I longed for, since it was not within my control I can immediately start thinking suspiciously that something worse may be just down the road. Better to hope for nothing than hope in a God whose ways are not our ways?

To end this joyful mystery, I decided write to the recovered friend a long e-mail. In that way I exemplified my hope that this cure is real.

Sorrowful Mystery:

My daughter and I had a discussion yesterday about family rights in the case of adults. Do parents and siblings have a right to pressure adult children and sisters or brothers on decisions? Of course, the specific matter is Carla's immediate choices. It is characteristic of Jewish ancestry families, when they are tightly knit, to meddle without scruples in any matter perceived as dangerous to physical or psychological well-being of any member.

After a few hours of talk, I realized that even if I have a right to express deeply believed convictions based on God's truth at least once, and to pray up a storm, I probably don't have any right to apply constant nagging pressure. I surely need to spend some of my time here "letting go and letting God" as the 12 step people put it so well. If I keep commending her soul into your hands, Jesus, I should become less agitated.

I had a hard time during quiet prayer time this morning, too restless and anxious. I decided to try later, but I was left with a doubt as to how much of a true contemplative I am called to be. Living on the weekends at the Retreat Center does not really entail a decision about this. We are all called to be saints, and it is impossible to be a saint without infused graces of prayer. If I can sit still and let You love me, God, for two hours a day it will surely do me no harm. It could be that I need a year of refuge, at least on the weekends, from activism, to come to apostolic work in a different mode now and in the future.

"Martha, Martha," I hear you chiding me, Jesus. "Worried and troubled about many things, and now this new concern, so soon. I wanted this to be a time of such peace and joy for you. Don't fill it with needless anxiety. Open yourself to the graces I send and trust, trust, trust."

Glorious Mystery:

Today after the regular morning Mass, here in New Hampshire, while I was sitting quietly in thanksgiving for Holy Communion, a second visiting priest came slowly toward the altar. I would guess his age to be about ninety. Though he was not hunched over, his head drooped low on his chest and his walk was halting. It soon became apparent that he was saying the old Latin Mass but facing the people. I was the only one in the Church but he didn't seem to see me or hear my responses and he didn't ask, as sometimes is done, whether I wanted to receive or not.

Since I was in no hurry, I decided it would be pleasant to stay and place myself in solidarity with all those lovers of the Latin Mass who bewail the infrequency of its celebration. I became a Catholic a few years before the vernacular so I am familiar with the words even though I've never studied Latin. The priest said the Mass extremely slowly whether because of his age or his devotion or both. This gave me ample opportunity to simply gaze at the aesthetics of the thing. There was this grey face surrounded by a circlet of white hair. The oval of his head seemed like a whitish ball that swung the bright red vestments as he turned it from the sacramentary to the chalice back and forth. That white of his hair perfectly matched the white sleeves of the chausable? that protruded from the vestment. Later the white of the host slowly lifted up in his gnarled hands completed the contrast with the blazing red garment for the martyrs whose lives he was commending.

Further contrast was provided by the swaying motion of the vestment and the altar cloth in the breeze coming from a fan some three feet away and the swift flight of a small bird trying to find its way out of the church.

The Mass took a good three quarters of an hour without any sermon. At the end he intoned the beginning of the Gospel of St. John and then knelt at the foot of the altar for the St. Michael prayer. In a loud voice I made the responses to these prayers. As he hobbled off holding the covered chalice I took a chance and very unlike any pre-Vatican II person, yelled out, "Thank you, Father." He turned around and looked at me in the front pew for the first time. With a beatific smile he said, "Thank you for staying. That was the Mass!"

July 11, 2002