

## **Six Toes in Eternity**

### **Book C**

### **Heart to Heart**

**2003-2005**

*Heart to Heart* is a sequel to *Face to Face*, excerpts from my spiritual journal that stopped at the end of August 2002. I cut off that book because I had reached the turning point of moving from the college I was working at to living fully at the Retreat Center I had been visiting on long weekends. Let me begin this part of my journal with this quotation from St. Therese of Lisieux:

*"I think that the Heart of my Spouse is mine alone,*

*just as mine is His alone,*

*and I speak to Him then in the solitude*

*of this delightful heart to heart,*

*while waiting to contemplate Him one day*

*face to face."*

May 18, 2003

A lovely poem by my daughter, Carla:

Laudate

My trees are huddled tightly in their groups –

They're listening. They wait for the chirroo

Of this last sunrise. Every trunk is full

But they are not departing. They have roots.

The first slight golden drops begin to fall

Like floating carpets. When the wrecking ball

Smacks thicker waters from this praying sky,

This bleeding sky, this cracking sky, then I

Will have to lift my feet. Because I can,

I cross myself and mumble my amens

Just as the egg breaks. I can almost hear

The willing barks receive the dawn. "No fear:

We'll follow," whisper leaves so I might know

Their promise to remember when I go.

May 20, 2003

Today I had a thirst to just live with Jesus as an anchorite, to stay in my hut as much as possible for the year and not leave except when necessary. I was thinking of a real anchor-hold walled into the church here. It turned out that this was not possible, for interesting reasons. One is that it would cost more than I have to build such a self-contained hut, mostly because of the cost of putting in a plumbing line and electricity. However, I think that dreaming about such an enclosure was a symbol of wanting to be more and more alone with God.

June 1, 2003 (letter from a trip elsewhere)

Dear Father,

Working on *Taming the Lion Within: 6 Steps from Anger to Peace* has been cathartic and enlightening – especially the research. Most of the Christian psychotherapists I read think that anger is a cover for vulnerability. I have finished the 99 page first draft of

it and am eager to share it for teaching and input. (Since then it has come out as a shorter book. (Originally published by Simon Peter Press, it is now distributed by En Route books. Click on popular spirituality.)

I want to be small and silent. It seems clearer to me how my exaggerated humor and nervous chatter is a defense mechanism and how only absorbing the love of God for me in contemplative prayer can make me feel safe enough to be smaller and quieter so that my energies can go into being a blessing to others and not to “the defense fund....”

June 10, 2003

On an unbearably long journey with 3 airplane changes and 6 hours of waiting in airports between flights I decided to cancel all further trips. I felt that I would die right in the airport I was so exhausted. Between osteoporosis and hemorrhoids, I just can't deal with travel. When I called to cancel my speaking dates for a long enough time in the future so they could find someone else, most of the people said they felt the same way now about travel, and they understood.

(Reading this in 2013, I see that I needed that hiatus. This was the only time I ever cancelled any speaking dates. But after a year or so I started back to speaking but with much fewer trips.)

When I got back to the Retreat Center, I felt drawn into the Mass and the Sacred Host. Jesus, You seemed to say, “Now, just rest in Me. No more rushing around. I will do great things in *you*, not so much in *your works*.” St. Edith Stein, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux, dear other beloved sister Saints, make me worthy. I realized that I want to be here because of You, You, You, dear Jesus.

June 18, 2003

Now that I am not going anywhere, as if to show that I am not really cut off, more and more people are coming or calling me for some kind of consultation. Thank you, Holy Spirit for showing me so soon that withdrawing from active life doesn't mean I will be totally cut off.

June 22, 2003

Busy and troubled about all sorts of trifles, Jesus asked me, “Do you want to be a fuss-budget or a mystic?” Tears. Yes, I am so fussy because I am trying to get security from ordering externals – how pathetic: rows and rows of knitted wool, sorted out books, completed projects, always wanting closure. Instead of closure, I should enclose my heart in Your Sacred and Immaculate hearts, Jesus and Mary.

The phrase “hibernate in My heart” came to me today. My priest mentor at this Center said that I am trying to get security desperately by making it depend on moving into a smaller hut vs. realizing that the insecurity must have become in earliest babyhood, maybe even in the womb, for me to be so wounded and agitated. There is no security except in God, interiorly.

June 30, 2003

I am getting a lot of peace from having turned back the door of the mirrors on my bathroom cabinets. In this environment I don't need to check my appearance. I do my hair automatically. The result of having the inside wooden panel showing instead of the mirror is that I am not having this periodic dialogue with my face, trying to see how ugly I have become, or improving that ugly image by my smile. I am amazed what a difference it makes not to have those little dialogues. Much more seeing myself only in the loving eyes of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Thank you Holy Spirit for this inspiration.

July 3, 2003

At Mass in a sermon the priest mentioned that the one day old spontaneously aborted (miscarried) babies are really persons beloved of God. I had 4 miscarriages. But also, every fertile woman, immediately if she thinks she might have conceived, will be thinking of the being of that teeny little one, awaiting each month proof of whether it was conceived or not, and even thinking of names, so we are very close to that mystery.

(I started working on a book about hermits. I never finished, but some of the pages that follow come out of this research.)

July 4, 2003

I feel so close to my twin-sister who is in the hospital with undiagnosed pain. Please Padre Pio, help her.

Great joy in the move to the little hut. I had been in a guest house with several rooms. Now I have a tiny foyer with a hot plate and small fridge and one big room divided into all-purpose space and an oratory blocked off by the divider of books. To have all I own in the world in one room! Well, that's closer to St. Francis than hitherto. Alleluia. I have no car and the walk is about 5-10 minutes on the dirt road to any other places here. I feel better with the exercise. Out of laziness I used to drive the car even to go one minute away!

It actually feels good that no one will come to my hut. Private. No need to arrange anything with the views of guests in mind. The silence is like a swim in a cool lake. Never without your grace, dear God, could such a one as I ever come to love solitude and silence!

I used to hate the shaved heads of the males members of the community. It reminded me of prisoners or concentration camp residents. Suddenly I had a different image. Their heads are like baby's heads – you can see the hard outlines but there is the soft fuzz in contrast. I used to love that texture of my baby's hard heads but soft covering of hair. Are shaved heads an unconscious symbol of the monk or hermit as being like a child?

July 10, 2003

To have the Eucharist in a monstrance in our own individual hermitage is like winning the prize in the Catholic lottery – nothing less than A SYMBOLIC FORM OF FINDING THE HOLY GRAIL!

June 10, 2003

Concerning having a dislike and distaste for my own body, my priest said that if one didn't feel loved enough as a child, or loved in a wrong way – too physically based – then one sometimes has a deep inadequacy reflected in a sense of the body being ugly.

July 11, 2003

Going to confession for harsh judgments and rage about a 9 day telephone company glitch, I was afraid the priest would say I needed to leave here if I had to shame a religious community by making scenes with strangers at the telephone company. Instead he laughed and said I should get a medal rather than a penance for insisting on my rights. I realized that being afraid of being sent away from here comes from the devil trying to work on my fear of rejection.

July 12, 2003

Dear little Jenny (my oldest grandchild),

I am thinking of you as very little because I am remembering the day of your baptism! But first, as a college teacher, I congratulate you on your fine SAT scores which will help you throughout life. Even though as a Christian, having a big heart is even better than having a big head, still it is a gift to be bright. Someone said to me recently whenever you can do something easily it proves it is a gift from God...

July 14, 2003

More problems with the phone company getting in long distance from my new smaller hut. I can get calls but can't call out. I wondered if you, Jesus, are trying to tell me not to call out so much, just answer the calls of those who call in. Symbolic? You seemed to smile and say, "You have a direct long distance line to me!"

My priest said that we don't have to do penances, life is so hard nowadays. To just take each day as it comes is enough. For me it would be paradoxically penitential to shoo away chronic worry about the future!

July 16, 2003

Dearest Diana (daughter in Los Angeles)

Of course I realize it is out of love for me that I have only to mention some frustration like the phone-line glitch and you are already imagining that I am miserable and this latest adventure in living at a retreat center will not work.

I am thinking that it is because I am not a poet like all the rest of the family that I can't describe what I love about it here beautifully enough for you to see it. So I woke up praying for an hour long poet's gift to describe it better, especially since it is unlikely you will come soon.

First – dawn. From my windows I can see nothing but the short mesquite trees and the sky...The sky is huge - a whole scape of space as a backdrop for life. So exotic for a NYC gal who was hemmed in by the backs of filthy tenement houses as a child.

The weather is so real here, especially now that I gave up my car. This morning at 6 AM after the non-storm I could see the black clouds of night scudding across the horizon and a damp freshness in the usually torrid summer air. It is only a five minute walk to the chapels and the main house. As these are fully air-conditioned, this serves as a fierce contrast between the blazing heat and then the blissful cool. I walk around with a tall thin pilgrim stick – picturesque and a little theatrical, but actually a stick does help older bones to promenade.

My house is made of white stucco, which reminds me of the bright white of the casitas in Capistrano (where we lived when my twin daughters were 4-5 years old). The inside is like a cabin. It is all white stucco with wooden window frames and an A-line ceiling of wooden planks. It feels cozy, enclosed, safe.

My dislike of crowds – when did it start? Not as a child. I found NYC crowds full of interest and fun. The first time I remember disliking a crowd was at a conference where I was a speaker. There was a slight feeling of agoraphobia after the talk was over, of not wanting to be surrounded by even friendly strangers. It has grown and grown. I loved the college when there were just about 20 of us, all well-known. When we reached 40 and then 60 I started not liking eating in the cafeteria with 60 people around me, many of whom I knew only by face and casual greetings, not in a really intimate way.

If you walked in the door to my tiny foyer you would see on the wall your painting of the cat in front of the orange rug, always a favorite. It doesn't feel like a picture of a cat. It feels like it's you as a cat. Then there is an old print of Greenwich Village in one of my father's unique speckled frames. And the collage of photos of all the grandchildren at all stages. The foyer has a 3 by 3 foot fridge and a hot plate. I cook a variety of tasty foods, expanding as I go along because I prefer these to the less meaty meals the others have for lunch. The one communal meal at the retreat center is optional. At first I loved going to it, and I still I love being with the others and listening to them, but have tired of listening to my own voice, always needing, it seems, to dominate the conversation in the same way my mother used to do with spicy but not particularly edifying anecdotes.

Enter the main room, I guess about 15x15 square with wooden bookcases blocking off the oratory. Unlike in the past, the bookcases are not stuffed. I have greatly diminished my holdings, donating them to the college and the retreat library. Some shelves have pictures in them instead. It's a bright room with 3 windows. The short trees I see from the windows have delicate leaves that blow in the slight breeze.

The oratory has in it a wonderful Mexican crucifix – about 4 feet tall, the wood about 6 inches wide thick ridged dark wood, hand-carved. The face of Christ looks older than usual – easier for me to identify with, not only the pain but the fatigue in the face. There is a Hispanic wooden tabernacle with metal nails in a design. I sit on the floor on a mat to pray. How the words of the Psalm “like a dry weary land, my soul longs for you, O God” resonate in this dry weary desert-like land that surrounds me. I spend about ¼ of an hour here in the morning after breakfast and before Mass, another period after siesta, and different times run

in to talk to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the angels as my day proceeds. In the evening 7-8 we pray together before the Blessed Sacrament, but in silence.

It is fantastic not to have the pressure of any work or other schedule. I do about 1-2 hours of helping – cooking which I'm getting to like again after the long hiatus after becoming a widow, sorting the library books, shopping in town. In the late afternoon I work on writing projects, but none have deadlines. Once a week I have a long conference with my priest mentor, the moderator of the center. Since I am well formed in quiet prayer of the heart already we mostly talk about externals but also about the underlying anxiety he sees as coming from deep childhood insecurities. He is convinced that no one gets security from anything external. That is all a detour. Only in deep absorption of God's absolute love, experienced in the depth of our hearts can we find peace. Since I do experience this blissful love oftener here at the retreat center than any time since the period of mystical prayer I had in the 70's, I am easily convinced he is right. I also pray a lot for the family – those who have gone on to eternal life and those living."

July 19, 2003

Reading about St. Seraphim of Sarov and how his monastery was being restored since the end of communist rule, I had a wish to see it. Then, in prayer I had a sense that I don't have to go anywhere because everything is in me since I am in God now. Then it seemed all the places of the world converged in my heart.

July 21, 2003

This morning, of a sudden, I felt a fire in my throat and coming out of my mouth with a smell of toxic fumes, such as burning chemicals might emit. It lasted for about 2 minutes and frightened me. I thought it was demonic. I jumped into my tan dress, to match the color of the regular members of the community, and went to my priest who thought it was a demon of anger and did a deliverance prayer over me.

July 24, 2003

As I start to read John of the Ladder, the great ascetic, I think, what about me? So weak. You, Jesus, seem to say "but Mary was the greatest of saints and you don't read about her fasting or flagellating herself. For you, right now, just to take one day at a time without all the fretting and worry is enough. Fast from fretting and worry. Be carefree and joyful and when you are not do your Jesus prayer."

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote "A soul that indulges in useless thoughts and desires scatters its forces. It is not completely under God's sway. Its lyre is not in tune, so that when the Master strikes it, it cannot draw forth Divine harmonies; it is too human and discordant."

July 26, 2003

Today I had a sense of how Fr. P. is configured to my soul just because we are so different. Perhaps I would never grow if surrounded only by people who thought I was fine just as I am.

July 30, 2003

After a minor spat in the midst of an optional project, I had a strong feeling of being pulled away from projects. I had read in an article about discerning the contemplative life that being too much excited about projects is a counter-sign.

In the night a word came to me that everything only exists because of love. Only love counts. Like in John of the Cross, who says at the end of our lives the only thing that counts will be love. So even though projects can be an expression of love, I don't need to give them so much weight, as if they were the end rather than the means. I thought that when we are young we have to try to make things as good as they can be, but when we fail nonetheless, the residue is love, mostly forgiveness love.

This concept expanded today as I thought about how the contemplative life is about direct if obscure love in the heart. The other things such as books, meals, building houses, politics, should all be expressions of or forms of love. When I write a book that expresses my love of truth in a particular area, the real purpose should be that my readers may be benefited by that truth. Or, a fiction work expresses love of life, love of particular characters, desire to set a mirror before unloving ways of being. A poem? The beauty of life in the midst of all the pain?

Contemplatives, being much slowed down, have more time to understand such realities.

August 4, 2003 Sermon of my Priest

The scripture was where Jesus says that He is the bread of life and that all who come to Him with never hunger or thirst. Father said this requires some explanation. Most of us still feel that we hunger and thirst even though we come to Jesus. Father gave an analogy to little babies who are deeply anguished if their food and drink is delayed. We need to see that we need Jesus every moment that same way. I, Ronda, thought about breastfed-on- demand babies in tribes who live on their mother's breast and also breastfeeding at night in our times vs. old way of letting baby cry itself to misery and finally give up on night feeding. Also I thought, why would I want to do anything without Jesus.

Father says when we feel bad it is because we don't feel loved and then we seek compensations of all sorts. Instead we should be like a baby who knows it needs its mother all the time. Like a babe in the womb who gets everything from the mother's blood. If we don't understand this, then Jesus' words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood are shocking and not understandable. In obscure faith we need to eat and drink of Him and He of us in a certain way, too.

I thought of how the constant Jesus prayer expresses this. (This is the Russian orthodox traditional prayer that goes either Lord Jesus, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner, or is sometimes shortened just to saying the name Jesus over and over again on Jesus beads or just in one's heart silently.)

More August 4th – I am feeling more feminine because I am cooking more for the community at this Center. Sense of since it is voluntary, it is not like in so many families where no one thanks the cook but only criticizes her.

August 9, 2003 (After my priest left on a long trip.)

“Dear Father,

I thought I’d do a running letter of God’s graces and inspirations since surely you are praying for your little remnant here.

Unexpected problems here. Sudden physical fears about someone who didn’t come to Mass – maybe he’s had a stroke and is lying helpless in his guest house, etc. I felt ashamed of being so fearful, and lay down to take a nap. As if to make sure these fears wouldn’t become a major problem in the next 6 weeks, God put me into a 2 hour trance of peace and reassurance of His love and that nothing else mattered but that love. This seemed like a proof that God wants me here.

I also thought maybe I should write a separate book with the theme: The Captivated Heart: from Co-dependency to the Embrace of God. I like the main title, not the sub-title, but I’m just getting across the idea for you. Please let me know what you think of this idea.

(I wrote a book like this called *Healing of Rejection*. It had a strange history. A large Christian publisher was interested in doing something of mine since I am a well-known author. I sent the manuscript but they didn’t like it because they thought it was too sad. So it has been published now, in 2017, by En Route Books. Click on Popular Spirituality.)

I told you I was reading this manuscript about the unborn Jesus in the womb of Mary by George Peate. Now published by Life Cycle. Here is a fantastically beautiful image relative to what you were saying about interior touch. The author writes about how “Jesus in the amniotic sac could have been straining forward and reaching out His tiny finger towards the inner heart of Mary His mother – as God touches each human heart from deep within.”

I have been listening to more tapes about the spirituality of Fr. Thomas Philippe. I don’t know why, but for me it was totally new to think of the purpose of the dark nights being to die to the ego, not the true self. This puts it so clearly. I am wondering if having gone through quite a lot of dark nights already, the last dark night is the detachment from my “professional self.” People seem to think I am more humble than most in terms at least of not being arrogant professionally as a teacher, speaker, writer, but there is still plenty of love of fame and applause, as you have detected and occasionally make fun of in a gentle way. I had the feeling that God allowed me to fall on my face in a personal sin many years ago to get rid of the vanity of thinking I was on the road to holiness vs. just wanting mercy. We can talk of this more when you return.

You used the word “schmuck” in one of your tapes of a few years ago. I laughed. You see, being refined atheistic Jews, we never used Yiddishkeit in our house, but my husband was steeped in it and I loved the earthy humor of it and took it on, to the horror of my very refined sophisticated mother.

You often use the word modest to describe our little efforts and that word is one I seldom use though I hope I am literally modest enough, but schmuck – to think of myself as just a schmuck would be very helpful, especially in contrast to being in my mind some sort of heroine in the melodrama of each day.

I am finding the set of tapes that consist in your answering questions, mainly of one of the brothers, very helpful. Most of the time in spiritual direction in the past I have had such seemingly catastrophic problems in family and work that I never focused on the interior life as such. Most of the interior part of my prayer came from the friendship with Charlie Rich (the wonderful Jewish convert contemplative many of whose books I edited. See a link to him on [www.rondachervin.com](http://www.rondachervin.com)). I am happy to say that now when people confide in me I am more inclined to tell them to go to Jesus in Adoration and that I will do that also for them and then see what God might be saying vs. only coming out with a stream of analytic advice.

In one of the tapes you mention that it is sad but true that very few really want to be close to God. I was pondering that when God seemed to ask me, “Don’t you want to be with me alone? I am so beautiful, more beautiful than the ocean or Niagara Falls or a horse, or music.” Ah, yes, of course.

August 15, 2003

An interesting fact is that, according to Pere Thomas Philippe, St. Thomas and St. Bernard were uncertain about the Immaculate Conception before it was proclaimed, because that would be ensoulment at conception which contradicted the philosophy based on Aristotle that ensoulment came after the body was more greatly developed. The Gospel of Life encyclical, of course, confirms immediate ensoulment.

From a letter of a contemplative co-author of mine, Mary Neill, O.P.:

“My meditation daily is Jesus’ answer to Teresa of Avila when she asked, what do you want of me, and He said, ENJOY ME. How relentlessly I must put aside my ego’s inflated worries to let that enjoyment flood in.”

She wrote me about a workshop she went to where someone said that worry comes from an inflation of the ego – as if I could save the world if only I worried enough?

My priest teaches that whereas on a rational plane we can justify non-forgiveness, people are so miserable that we have to forgive them.

August 30, 2003

For two days now much deeper trance like prayer where I feel that I disappear or die, but come to, not as if I slept, but deeply rested. I feel more drawn to Jesus in the oratory at all different times, rather than going there “on schedule.” This seems related to not having any work I have to do that would be “on my mind.”

This trance-like prayer is not like ecstasy which is much more emotional and full. It is more metaphysical, "on top of the mountain, nothing," as St. John of the Cross puts it.

September 4, 2003

I was talking to a friend who says the minute she walks into the presence of the Eucharist she goes into prayer of quiet, or even deeper trance, but she didn't know that this was good.

September 6, 2003

I got into a royal snit over various frustrations. In the end I said without humor "even the simple is impossible." Then I laughed. What a remedy laughter is for defeat in trivial and maybe even in deeper concerns!

Later, praying frantically Jesus, help me. You seemed to reply "I want you here. Just stop initiating anything. Don't get into anything you don't have to. Apply 'love and do what you will,' unless someone else needs you to do something, not something you think they might need. Stop being helpful and just withdraw until I can saturate you with My peace."

I spoke to Father on the phone from Europe. He said my motherliness makes me want to help all the time, but I can't help, because I'm too nervous, so I should stop helping!

September 9, 2003

My daughter Diana wrote a poem about people in the family. Some lines I loved

"We are teardrops in the sand,  
we are splinters in the cross,  
we imagine we are choosing,  
we are on our way to loss.

...

We are everything, and nothing

But the memories we leave,

We imagine we are choosing

We are choosing to believe....

We are splinters of the cross

And the man who said, forsaken,

That the Father who had left him

Would return for what was taken.

We have not that long to go

There are mountains shouting "Leap",

there are rosaries we cling to

When the monsters haunt our sleep.

Sept. 12, 2003

A nice scene at the Center where we had a huge thunderstorm, which makes lakes of mud on our unpaved road. One of the male monks drove me at high speed through one of these lake-like puddles. We skidded to an inch of the fence and then wound up with a flat tire, with about a mile's walk back to where the key was that could unlock the place of the spare tire outside the back of the SUV. To avoid wrecking my lovely old Birkenstocks, I removed them and tried to get traction walking on the side of the road, but got thorns in my feet, so I walked in the mud puddles, very carefully but finally fell into the mud. So now I have wounded feet and a backache. It was tiring, but it brought me closer to this very quiet monk, especially when he managed to change the tire and also drag the same car out of the mud later in the day by stomping on the back of the car.

How sweet after the horrendous 4 AM storm to see the "church mice" (this is a somewhat derisive term used by priests to describe daily communicants) all come to the parish daily Mass at 7 AM anyhow. We all smiled at each other with great pleasure.

Sept. 13, 2003

Feeling rattled by all the stuff with the storm and the mud, You reminded me that life is an unfolding drama, not a solid state (eternity) or a syllogism. Through the prayer of the heart You are trying to pull me into the hearth that is warm and secure so I can stand change better.

Today is the feast of St. John Chrysostom. When he was being dragged through the mud of the city by his persecutors, the Church looked about ruined. And he was able to write with such confidence that there was nothing to fear:

“The waters have risen and severe storms are upon us, but we do not fear drowning, for we stand firmly upon a rock. Let the sea rage, it cannot break the rock. Let the waves rise, they cannot sink the boat of Jesus. What are we to fear? Death? ‘Life to me means Christ and death is gain.’ Exile? ‘The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord’....I have only contempt for the world’s threats, I find its blessings laughable. ...I am surely not going to rely on my own strength! I have his promise...that is my staff, my security, my peaceful harbor...’Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.’”

September 14, 2003

Today Jesus seemed to say, “Ronda, I love you, with all your knots and ups and downs and snarling. I want so much to just drown you in My love. Stop fretting about the future. Just know that I will be with you and it will be good even if life is not perfect and if you fail often. So don’t think you have to copy anyone. Just be you and let Me love you into a better you”.

Charles Williams wrote in his novel *The Greater Trumps*, “Nothing was certain, but everything was safe. That was part of the mystery of Love.”

Sept. 28, 2003

I prayed before the Sabbath dinner to let my guardian angel lead me in conversation. Instead of trying to be center-stage or make smart funny remarks I listened to others, cooked and cleaned and showed Daisy, a little girl, how to braid yarn. It felt very peaceful.

An author, Roy Schoeman, sent me the last draft of his book, *Salvation is from the Jews*. It is a masterpiece of synthesis for Jewish/Christian relations, especially for Catholic Jews. I felt after reading it and writing to the author about the review I am writing that I must go to Israel. But when I prayed quietly Jesus, You seemed to say, “I am equidistant from all places; live in my heart.”

(Years later, however, I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Roy as part of the group.)

Sept. 29th

For the second time after the Latin Mass I went into a sort of trance. This time longer.

A friend tried being a Carthusian hermit. He left shortly. Here is how he described it: “It became very clear to me, living at the monastery, that the primary form of the devil’s attack on contemplatives is mental – in imagination, paranoia, self-image, discouragement, etc. – and I DID NOT have the strength to survive such attacks in the long run (I barely survived a few weeks.) He suggested I take note that bad thoughts in my head were often planted directly by the devil.

October 7, 2003 Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

Meditation on Littleness

One who is totally vulnerable becomes invulnerable

because there is no pride left to squash?

As under the heavy tread of the giant tire,

the tiniest of the ants escapes from the hill?

The strutting tyrant,

The bravado tongue

Becomes a handful of dust

While the tiny soul soars into Light?

God became a babe!

The second person of the Trinity a circle of bread!

While the rustic maid becomes the Queen of heaven!

If everyone is seen as but a poor little thing

Even I, I, I,

Will Thy kingdom come?

October 9, 2003

Feelings of love for Martin, my husband, on the 10th anniversary of his death. I "talked" to him. Of course I loved him in spite of all the squabbles and deep wounds.

I read about Arafat – “he finds it difficult to live without a cause, a struggle, a grievance, and a conflict to define him.” I wondered, is this part of why it’s hard to be a contemplative – no cause to define me? Also in marriage – sometimes a woman’s identity becomes grievance at her husband.

October 12, 2003

There was a hurricane warning here. I was angry because someone seemed to despise me as a wimp for being afraid of hurricanes. Later I realized I think of hurricanes as involving people on the roof of their houses dragged off by helicopters whereas he is thinking in inland hurricanes which are minor.

In his sermon Father talked about how there are all these structures in the Church in formal communities, but actually Jesus formed more of a rag-tale band around him. What counts is to be intimate with Him.

October 14, 2002

Just when I was feeling despised, I came upon this Psalm (119)

“Although I am weak and despised

I remember your precepts...

Though anguish and distress have seized me,

I delight in your commands...

If you teach me, I shall live.”

October 15, 2003

Drawn into deep prayer, I had a sense that all the schemes for different apostolates I have been having are coming from a desire to escape the contemplative life, to return to the “firm” ground of activity, but that I am called now to the contemplative, and must drop all schemes. This was confirmed by Father who nixed totally trying to combine any fixed apostolate with living at the Retreat Center.

October 19, 2003

Dear Father,

Do you remember I said a few weeks ago when you returned from Europe that I had a sense you were going to say something that would change my life greatly.

Well, I think I know what that truth is. It ties in with a seemingly off-hand comment you made about my needing to be less serious and also, another day, about the disciples being a rag tale band – not highly structured.

Here it is: IF I, LIKE YOU, FATHER, WERE TO TAKE JESUS TOTALLY SERIOUSLY, AND ONLY CLOSENESS TO HIM SERIOUSLY, THEN NOTHING ELSE IS REALLY SERIOUS – not structures, not books, speeches, daily organization of physical tasks around the place, not you, not me - ONLY THE BELOVED. “I belong to my beloved, and he belongs to me....On top of the mount, nothing.”

What a change in me if I were really to believe and live this! Gratefully, Ronda

From a letter to a friend:

I am reading a long bio of Disraeli - a fascinating character. There is an incident where the Jewish politicians were refused a seat in the English Parliament because they had to make an oath on the N.T. These Jews wanted to make the oath instead on the O.T. Disraeli, born of Jewish parents but baptized in the Anglican Church and a believer in Jesus and a regular Church-goer, rose up and said since Jesus and the first Christians were all Jews the Parliament qua Christian should accept Jews. It took about 10 years for him to win on that one.

Dear Cathy,

I notice there's now a travel alert to US people not to go to Israel. That may be the end of our idea of making a pilgrimage. It looks more and more like war to me.

I decided to contribute to bullet proof vests for Israeli soldiers. That doesn't sound abortion related. (I wanted to show solidarity with Israel without any contribution being siphoned off, say, to Israeli women soldiers getting abortions.)

I have bad feelings about that issue in Israel. It is a bit like our situation with Hispanic undocumented. If the Israelis (except orthodox Jews) are contracepting and aborting themselves to a low population and the Arabs multiply, do the Arabs have more right to that land, as I think the hispanics do here? The Jerusalem Post (on the web) has writers who keep throwing in that issue of demographics - that the fence barring Arab immigration has to come in before the Jews become a minority in Israel. Any ideas?

October 28, 2003

Letter to a friend,

In preparation for meeting maybe 10 secular poets, my daughter's friends, coming to the reunion, I picked up a bio of John Donne off the shelf here. I love very easy poetry such as Emily Dickenson, Tagore and Francis Thompson but find more difficult poetry hard to understand. Still I love certain lines - like from the actually rather difficult to understand poetry of John Paul II, from whose writings my favorite line is

“When horror and hope are equally balanced in my soul, no one will accuse me of simplicity.” (Meaning, I take it, that people think strong Christians are naïve, but not if we have suffered enough and still have hope.)

After Charlie's death (my son's suicide) no one accused me of naive Pollyanna-ish formula spirituality. I radiated grief and so that line jumped out at me.

Here is a great line from Donne's sermons:

“God...hath often looked upon me in my foulest uncleanness, and when I had shut out the eye of the day, the Sunne, and the eye of the night, the Taper and the eyes of all the world, with curtaines and windowes and doores, did yet see me, and see me in mercy, by making me see that he saw me.”

Isn't that stunning? Shalom, Ronda

In the famous Myers-Briggs personality test, sensates are those whose senses are very alert and therefore usually do very well with anything requiring close observation. I am a zero on sensate functions. I was writing to a friend about all the adjustments so hard for a zero sensate during my life time – culture shock:

Driving a car vs. subways and buses

Washers and driers vs. in the sink

Airplanes vs. trains

stereos

Tape recorders

Computers vs. typewriters – and then e-mail and net

Microwaves

TV remotes,

Hair-dryers

CD's

ATM's

Cell-phones

Praying about it, the thought came – well I survived, even if in a humiliated state.

October 29, 2003

My daughter Diana has a friend living with her, a woman who used to live in a Hindu ashram but is interested in becoming a Catholic. She wants me to be her godmother. While looking for a suitable nearby Church, I am writing for her a pre-catechumenate contemplative approach booklet. Here is the first part:

#### THE DIVINE LONGING FOR THE HUMAN HEART

A Contemplative Introduction to the Catholic Faith

The Center of Reality

Images:

A spinning ball of earth in a void of space.

or

A huge heart with myriad rays of love –  
one ray beaming into a heart with your name on it.

Scripture:

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, of nakedness, or danger, or the sword?  
...For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers,  
neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus,  
our Lord.”

Meditation:

Go some place where you can be alone with the phone shut off.

Ask God to take you into the place in your heart of the deepest longing for love.

Dwell in the pain for as long as you can.

Then cry out, interiorly or out loud, “If you are a God of love, fill this place in my heart.”

Wait as long as you can. If you don’t feel anything, repeat this meditation every day along with the others suggested.

November 2, 2003

Feeling weak and frightened as I prepare to leave to visit Carla and the family in N.H. Suppose I am not supposed to stay here at the Center. Suppose everyone thinks I'm a liability (because of being so inept, so unsacrificial, weak and fragile, needy, etc.) and prays I will leave. So I asked one monk friend, "Given that I'm nothing like the rest of you, who are holy, silent, austere, sacrificial, why should I be here?" He answered – "Because you're different – you have so much love for us and you show it all the time." Of course this brought tears to my eyes. That is my gift except with people I am in conflict with. I generally have lots of appreciation- love, even if not as much sacrificial-love.

Later: I just had an unusual experience at the dentist. The dentist is a very suave drop- dead handsome hispanic of about 45. He started asking me about the Center - our mentor is one of his patients. He asked me how I got there. I said I was teaching in a nearby city and coming for retreats and liked it so much I decided to stay. I said I needed help to heal the agonies of my life.

So while he was putting the novalcaine in and pulling out the rotten tooth he started telling me that he could use that, too. That he has a dark side to him, and then that he goes to Church for 3 months and then stops, he doesn't know why, and that CNN had a program about the Catholic Church that in spite of the priest scandals we are growing rapidly!

November 5, 2003

Dear F.,

I happen to be rereading a few books written by the family friend, Gabriel Meyer, we are thinking of for your godfather. He is an extraordinary man, presently writing a book about the Sudan where he flew in helicopters risking his life to villages with the exiled Bishop to help prepare texts and videos to convince US Senators that they needed to aid the Sudanese, where Muslim fanatics kidnap and enslave thousands of little children. He comes from LA where he was brought up by Christian parents who adopted him – but it seems he had a partly Jewish background – anyhow he was a musician and went to Boston University, there converted to the Catholic Church – tried being a hermit monk in the very monastery in Big Sur. Gabriel left the monastery and became a leader of the charismatic Catholic prayer groups in L.A. where I met him and he was Martin's best friend.

He wrote a book about St. Joseph – fictional – that I am rereading. Some things about sin and redemption struck me as relevant to your questions, so I am typing them out for you:

This scene takes place in Egypt where Mary and Joseph fled with Jesus to avoid Herod killing the child. They are sitting around a campfire and Joseph is known for telling parable like tales.

The tale is about a king who has one son only, a beautiful child full of joy. Even greater than the king's love for his son, however, is his love for his people who are being devastated by bands of vandals who plunder the towns and countryside. The country is now full of widows and orphans and refugees. Nothing he does is successful in getting rid of these thieves.

An angel comes to the King and tells him to place his son, his only son, in the midst of the thieves. Finally under great pressure he agrees, hoping the boy's goodness will win them over. He places the toddler in satin clothing, with gems in the seams of the garments on the road where the thieves operate. The thieves decide to take him with the idea one day of getting ransom for him.

The king's son grows up among the thieves and becomes a cunning daring thief while the king weeps, at night with no lamp in his house until his son should return.

Finally the angel comes again and tells the king that his sufferings are over and to proclaim a feast. The bandits with the lad come to the feast. While everyone is drunk on the king's liquor, the thieves figure out how to get into the bedchamber of the king to steal his treasure. The thieves lift the boy up to the window of the king's chamber with the idea that he would enter and then open the palace doors to the thieves.

The boy gets through the window and stumbling about in the dark of the room falls over the father. "His fingers graze the contours of a fine noble brow and then onto eyelids that moved like gates of gold in the darkness. The lofty cheekbones reminded him of something he could no longer name, but the high thin line of the nose he grazed made him think, strangely, of his own... But it was when his fingertips happened upon the figure's lips that the word came to the child's mind: Father, he cried."

The thieves are captured and sentenced to a terrible death. As the King read out the degree, the prince stepped forward and asked his father for a favor. The Father says, any favor."

"Spare the lives of these men and pass the sentence on me instead." – The boy realized that someone had to pay for the evil that had been done."

The king protests that his son is innocent. "Yes, father, that is true," the boy replied. "But you have accomplished more than you know: If you have created me the son of a king, you have also made me the brother of thieves." This the boy said, because he loved the bandits (who had saved his life and fed him.)

Finally the king realized what the angel had meant when he was told to place his son in the midst of thieves and all would be well," for after the death of the boy, the people collected his innocent blood and poured it out on their crops and never was there famine, or disease again in that land. On the anniversary of the prince's death banners of the color his blood were paraded in the cities and villages to remind the people of the price that had been paid for their happiness."

The story in the book is much longer but I just took out the salient points of it. Later in the same book Gabriel has someone explaining what repentance is – "Christianity is meant to impart to us a progressively greater capacity for Life, that life which the Apostle Paul daringly characterizes as "the power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead'...the power of indestructible life."

Sin diffuses our ability to grasp, indeed, finally, even to hope for that life. Sin narrows our focus, withers our human capacities, limits the range and scope of our desires and, ultimately, denies us access to ourselves. Grace breaks into that slumber, to dispel

the blindness, and to create capacities for truth, for reality – for life in union with Life....Repentance does not only mean sorrow or regret...but teshuvah – Hebrew for turning to God, like the Prodigal Son, turning away from darkness to open out one's life.”

From F. to me:

I began reading the Catholic Catechism and have skipped through it at bedtime...The one compelling thought that has resurfaced through my reading (for I've had this thought about Christianity in general for a long time) is this: so much of the scripture and the "reward" for believing in Christ seems tied to an avoidance of death... we are supposed to be resurrected ourselves, our flesh intact, and live in the kingdom of God. The emphasis on resurrecting our physical bodies disturbs me, not from a Catholic point of view but because I've always felt that our bodies were nothing more than containers for our souls here on earth, and once we leave them, our souls rightly go to join God. So, why all this emphasis on having our "container" go with us?

Dear F.,

On the body and soul. This is a hard one not only for Hindus but for others influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition. In both of these the soul is the real core of the self and the body is like a container or a jail said Plato. In these ways of thought, at death the soul sheds the body and either merges with the divine or enters it when purified by reincarnations in some way.

Because we believe that God revealed that He Himself made the human person, as a body/soul composite - Adam and Eve (we don't read that he made their souls separately and then cast them into bodies but that he formed the clay into Adam. The soul doesn't pre-exist the body). Examples - you don't say about a photo of you at 10 - that's a photo of my body at 10 - you say - that's a photo of me at 10 - it is a photo of the embodied you.

Since God who is by essence spiritual and immaterial assumed a body in the incarnation and rose in it to heaven, etc. the concept is that the body is part of the nature of the person. When it dies and the soul goes to its particular individual judgment, with the exception of Mary whose body was assumed, it waits until the general judgment for the completion that will come with being reunited to this other part of the self that suffered with it on earth and is then resurrected. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that even though the beatitude of the soul takes place in heaven before the reunion with the body, because we are created as a composite, there is still a lack until the reunion.

November, 2003

I composed this poem to send to one of my monk friends.

Monks-why's

Eremitically sealed,

medicine?

scent?

liqueur?

no, you?

Packed by God alone,

sealed with wax embossed

with inscrutable runes,

only angels read.

Demons dance round

look through stained glass

under altars at transparent coffins

hope to shatter and defile

peer at a heart

swathed tight in grace

The curious tap the pane

they hear no echoes

or human sounds

mums the word

of pregnant silence

Human love that wants to give

finds no entry place

where only the heart-beat

of the divine beloved

can be heard.

Alone pure need

can melt the seal

releasing healing balm

for the wounds of

poor little ones.

November 20, 2003 before the big family visit to New Hampshire:

What a victory it would be for grace in me if I can really just pour out love and not get into wrangles defensively!

I think at the root of it, in divorced children, as we were, is the sense that people who disagree enough split - so there is a fear of losing the love of these family members because of all our differences.

December 10, 2003

Letter to a friend:

So happy to hear from you. I am so happy you liked my funky afghan. A Ronda original. Sometimes I think that when I get to the pearly gates instead of mounting to heaven on the prayers of my intercessors or my mountain of books and articles, Mary will extend a huge connected rope of all the things I knit for people out of motherly love and a wholesome way to deal with nervous tension! Anyhow, I thought it came out a little garish and you might not like it, but it seems as if you do!

You asked about depression and solitude? I have been researching the hermits for a good year now and my sense is that those living in relative solitude when depressed need to do one of these things:

- manual labor - tough - Seraphim of Sarov thought it absolutely essential!

- talking to one's spiritual director. If your present one doesn't help you enough, he might be meant to be more of a spiritual friend than a mentor. I can't remember a single time when I was feeling depressed that talking to my director didn't help immediately if not sooner.

- work on a new project. I find that even if I am thinking - no, start the project after I get back from x or y place, in fact, since I am a creative person, I don't do well only praying and doing busy work. I need the challenge of something creative to work on.

Well, that's plenty of unasked for advice from your new spiritual friend.

December 12, 2003

From F. about Our Lady of Guadalupe:

I love the mystical/miraculous aspects of all religions; I believe them to be God's version of hitting us over the head with a two-by-four to get our attention, people who once needed a burning bush every other day in order to believe, I appreciate the supreme compassion of the Lord in providing "signs" at every corner.

The Virgin Mary seems to be the great mover and shaker in Catholicism –at least so far as visions and conversions go. For reasons inexplicable I myself have always found her the most accessible between Jesus and God the Father; truly, out of nowhere in the past I would find myself saying a compromised version of Hail Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come and blessed art thou amongst women..."

Dec. 13, 2003

Dear F.

We're a lot alike. I believe that everything good, as the Jungians say, has its shadow side. So having an active analytic mind means that one's distractions are more interesting and convoluted whereas a less analytic mind is distracted say by the desire to eat a hamburger next.

Being a helper personality - that is a large part of mine - has great benefits to others but the shadow side is looking for ways to help that no one wants. I miss teaching because I was needed by the students to help them through whereas now here I am not needed at all, except for manifesting love.

Today I make minestrone soup for our Sunday brunch and let it simmer away. It is one of my only 2 regular jobs - a 2 x a week mail run to the town and making the main dish for Sunday brunch the only optional communal meal but one where guests who have come to Mass come.

I will pray for your meditation times to grow tranquilly - maybe pray on that rosary more.

Letter to another friend:

Dear I,

I have been praying for you during the night and now this morning listen to this from the Office of Readings from St. Ambrose.

"Do not imagine that you are displeasing to him although you have called him, asked him...no, for he allows us to be constantly tested. Even if it seems to you that he has left you, go out and seek him once more. Who but holy Church is to teach you how to hold Christ fast?...How do we hold him fast? Not by restraining chains or knotted ropes but by bonds of love, by spiritual reins, by the longing of the soul. ...be fearless of suffering....Maintain the house of your heart...sweep out its secret recesses until it becomes immaculate...Christ comes again and again to visit, for he is with us until the end of the world..."

December 17, 2003

Today I started one hour of week of tutoring an 8 year old daughter of a friend of the Center. The mother is a great devotee of the infant Mary and so I dedicated this work to you, little infant Mary. It was such a sweet feeling to be close to this little girl, and teaching her to braid wool as a preparation for knitting.

Excerpt from a letter to older in-law relatives:

"Well, this is the first Christmas ever at my monastery instead of with the family. It feels strange. I am praying that this will be a special Christmas for you in some unexpected way, because God loves to surprise us especially when we feel "over the hill" as I do.

"Mostly I am surprised at how unimportant things take on so much flavor now that I am less busy. This week at the monastery we slaughtered a deer – we rent out to hunters on our property here. The head of the hunters imports deer all the way from Canada and then feeds them up in hopes of winning a prize for the huge antlers that come from lots of protein in the diet, apparently. The deer wander to our side of the 1,300 acre property, perhaps because it is further from the gun shots. Anyhow they don't like to carry the meat back over 5 States, so they give most of it to the poor, and one each time for us. One deer yields enough meat for the 6-8 monks for about 3 months.

"The first time I saw the carcass being sliced up I had to force myself to help since it was so new to this NYC gringo type, but this time, seeing all the money on meat saved I really got into it and it's kind'a fun to see monks plunging knives into hunks of meat and laughing their heads off. Thought you'd like this description.

December 20, 2003

Excerpts from a poem my daughter Carla wrote about her father, a writer, who died ten years ago:

The Broken Pencils

“A writer writes” the old man said to me,  
while legends struggled from the furrows  
on his hunted brow,  
unwritten yet, unwritten even now  
except in nightscapes: there, the pencils crack  
like thunder, but such pencils have no lead.

...! Do not fool around!

You have to give  
up everything.  
to talk with all your heart, you first must find  
your heart. It's drowning in a midnight sea,  
it's speechless: give it breath, force it to be

a swimming triumph: off the boat, to shore...

I'll dream,  
and should I see that lion whom I loved,  
not yet succumbed...

I'm coming father! Wait for me! I come.

-----

What a tear-jerker! Eh? Oh my Jesus, ten years later I miss my husband more than 1 year after his death. Understandable really. I think I didn't cry all my tears yet - busy with earthquakes, moves – busy! Now that I am not busy they can flow at the drop of a poem.

December 21, 2003

I am thinking about the prayer posture, curled up on a ball, during adoration that many of the monks assume. It is so touching that they make themselves so small to feel God's love. O my Jesus, make me small even though I can't assume that posture with my creaky old body.

Most faces look greatly different smiling or in repose. In the case of sanguine, hopeful people, I think that even in the unsmiling face, the smile is almost waiting to come out and so it is almost foreshadowed in that face even in repose. On the other hand, in the case of melancholics, the normal sad face is almost totally different from the smiling face which comes forth almost like a miracle of grace.

Some holy people strike me as beautiful but inaccessible. They will do anything to help others out of charity, but do not wish to be close to them in a heart to heart manner. Others, the teddy-bear types, are warm as can be but less sublime or inspiring. I asked Jesus why He sometimes sets such people seemingly one-sided people in my path when I so crave the combination of the sublime and the close. The reply that I heard in my heart was: so you would appreciate how beauty and intimate love are in Me perfectly combined. I am a jealous bridegroom.

(From a letter to a friend hoping to become a consecrated widow. She had a wonderful closeness to her husband and wants her consecration to reflect that rather than seeming to be going for something "better" such as religious sisterhood.)

"I am thinking just as in spirituality in general you have the negative way - go to God by seeing the limitations of all created things - and the positive way - go to God because of your gratitude for created things as foretastes of heaven, so...

in the widow walk - you have some widows a) going to Jesus because of the limits of their husbands and some because of b) the virtues of their husbands. Probably I am mostly 'a' and you mostly 'b.'

My friend who I am instructing asked if it were true that Mary was a god. I replied: Look it up in the Catechism - people are very confused about doctrine right now because of various rifts in the Church. There are, for instance, South American liberal theologians who want to see Mary as the 4th person of the Trinity for feminist reasons - they see the Trinity as too patriarchal, etc.

Since Mary was planned to be the Mother of Jesus, the God-man, she was freed at her conception from original sin - the tendency to choose evil. She still could have but she wasn't as drawn as we are. This does not make her God.

The reverence Catholics give to Mary is based on her being the Mother of the Savior, full of grace as the Archangel Gabriel calls her when he comes to tell her about the incarnation. Who else is *full* of grace? We only get some.

This reverence is not worship. Technically we do not pray to Mary but ask her to pray for us. As in the rosary, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Because she was so close to Jesus and suffered incredibly with Him during His life (when you reread the Gospels you will note his own villagers wanted to throw him off the cliff as a madman) and also suffered so much under the Cross, she is considered to be a mediatrix of grace - I see it like a dance where God involves as many people as possible in the giving out of graces so that in heaven we are already when we get there, if we get there, interwoven in loving gratitude to many saints.

In terms of feminism, Mary's unique role, as the poet said "nature's sole and solitary boast", provides the feminine archetype of motherhood, virginity, widowhood of what is it to be holy both for women and men. Many men who have trouble with God the father because their own fathers were less than fatherly in terms of loving protectiveness, etc., are drawn to Mary.

(I found journal notes from November – December 24th 2003, not in sequence – which I will append on this page)

I came back from the trip to N.H. with back pain and horror at the mountains of errand and desk work. I took a nap and woke up in bliss, feeling as if Jesus, Mary and Joseph wanted me to feel cherished. Maybe this was a foretaste of a heaven that is not as far off as I usually think. Jesus seemed to say "I will not abandon you! Isn't My heart much bigger than yours?" Later, I got the same message from St. Therese of Lisieux who likes to help me. Jesus also seemed to tell me to work on improving my conversations – that everything should be edifying or funny. After I get this down then he could work on attitudes like hopelessness and lack of trust. Typing this in September 2004 I saw that he did just this – first helped me to be a little better in my speech and then started in big time on trust.

"Be like a little ball of Ronda so that I can mold you into St. Ronda" Jesus seemed to say.

Our priest teaches us to be more affective than effective.

I was frantic over how cold the chapel was. Jokingly I suggested to Father that I could run into the chapel just for Holy Communion, or did he have another solution. He laughed and offered a spot heater in the chapel instead. I thought the incident indicated how much better it is to display vulnerability than to be angry.

From Office of Readings Thursday, Second Week of Advent quoted from St. Peter Chrysologus "God comforted Jacob ...encircled him with a wrestler's embrace to teach him not to be afraid but to love him...in all the events we have recalled, the flame of divine love enkindled human hearts and its intoxication overflowed into men's sense. Wounded by love, they longed to look upon God with their bodily eyes. Yet how could our narrow human vision apprehend God, whom the whole world cannot contain?...Love does not reflect; it is unreasonable and knows no moderation. Love refuses to be consoled when its goal proves

impossible... whatever reward they merited was nothing to the saints if they could not see the Lord. (It inspires us to long to see His face.)

December 24, 2003

It is so different here at the Center than in a family Christmas setting. Because there are so few decorations each one stands out – each day one more candle is lit before an icon. At 7 PM adoration there were many lit candles around each, especially an icon made by Sr. Catherine of the Nativity. And suddenly the poinsettias appeared and the little simple crèche.

During prayer it seemed as if Mary offered me to hold her baby a few minutes, as a regular mother might. Thank you Mary for this moment where the baby Jesus felt so very soft and sweet and reminiscent of my own babies in my arms.

December 25, 2003

In his sermon our priest mentioned someone claiming that the first “liturgy” could have been, in effect, Mary’s gestures with the baby Jesus.

December 28, 2003

Father said in a sermon “Father’s house” is the “Father’s bosom.” It reminds me of the old black spiritual “Rock-a-my-soul in the bosom of Abraham.”

I asked a locutionary, about whom I will write more later, if Jesus had any message for me. Here is how she (Anne of Direction for Our Times) replied after praying for me to Jesus:

From Jesus: “I would have her joyful but even more than that, I would have her at peace. I can place peace in the hearts of my servants, but as you have seen yourself, only if they are disposed to accept my gift of peace. As you are now attempting to accept this gift from me, I would have her also accept my gift as I extend the same gift to her. She must meditate on the newness of each day in My service. I will remember all of her actions for heaven. I will forget any human mistakes she has made. I am like this with every soul who serves me so beautifully. You may send this, of course. My servants intercede for each other with such energy that I cannot but answer each prayer. This causes me great joy... Your ministering to each other is another illustration of Me within you. It is I who respond so rapidly and passionately to the pain of a hurting servant. For this day, detach even more from all around you. You are with Me. That is all you need be.”

After reading this message I felt floods of peace and also a clearer sense about my future. I had been ricocheting back and forth peacelessly about here vs. other possibilities, not just work places, but my daughter’s haven in New Hampshire. I am mostly concerned about my growing disabilities. But after the message and the graces of peace that followed I felt confirmed and peaceful that since here I have so much more peace, I should stay here as long as I can.

December 30, 2004

Much is happening here. On January 7th for 3 months comes our French hermit icon-writer, Sister Catherine, the one who did many of the icons we see in the little chapel. She is coming to visit and also to fresco a hermitage in Mexico we are building. She is supposed to be a real free-spirit Holy Fool who sings and dances spontaneously in chapel!

January 1, 2004

From a letter to a friend having difficulty with parents who don't understand him:

"My godparents, who were German, used to speak of the German verb "bejahen" which means "to yes" as in affirming someone. They thought one of the deepest needs of the human person is to feel "yes-ed" in their very being and that this was part of the gift of love. Jah is German for yes."

It is a great gift to have parents who understand and affirm one. Rare, I would say. Yes, many have parents who will affirm something about a child but not so often the ultimate inner nature of him or her.

It occurred to me that Jesus was not very understood by his own villagers who wanted to throw him off the cliff as insane because he dared to make himself God. Perhaps you are not that familiar with that Scripture passage.

At 66 I am happy that anyone understands any part of me.

Years from now you may be able to forgive your parents even if for now "keeping them in outer boundaries" is the best strategy.

Sometimes, when feeling rejected, I would think - "well, would I be willing to be like the ones who rejected you in order to have their affirmation? No!"

I wanted to tell you about a practice many modern Catholics are now doing called Healing the Family Tree. You write down on the "tree" grid the worst traits that impacted you of each family member and then you have a Mass said for healing, and then other exercises like writing letters that you don't send to each one about what you felt and they "write back", as it were, through the Holy Spirit, what they were going through when they hurt you. It's terrific.

Written to another friend: You know widows go through many processes and some want to be more alone vs. others who want family close, close, close.

At first I wanted to rush off and do my own things that I couldn't when Martin was alive because of his health such as teach in Ohio at this great Antioch like college in a climate he couldn't have taken, but then later I wanted to be with the kids. It's not a steady state being a widow.

Regarding the question of the Pope being allegedly divine, perhaps it would help to make these distinctions: sacred, holy, divine:

Sacred is something set apart for God such as a sacred space for the altar not used, say, for ping pong, or sacred vestments not used for the swimming pool.

Holy = sometimes synonym for sacred as in "the holy altar": but about people it means saintly (incredibly good in a heroic way).

Divine - absolute perfect being

"I had a divine hot fudge sundae is a cute saying but a hyperbole like "awesome"

Now, the Pope being called The Holy Father - this is more like, sacred, set apart.

His doctrine on faith and morals is infallible, which means that the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to keep him from leading the flock astray on faith and morals. That does not mean on policy.

Some Popes were also saints, such as John XXIII who body is incorrupt (did not fall apart like normal corpses) or St. Teresa of Avila. Some Popes were villains. In the case of sinners who became saints like Mary Magdalene or Augustine, their saintliness is dated from the time of their conversions.

At least this roughly describes how a Catholic understands it.

January 8, 2004

Sister Catherine arrived. I liked her immediately. Here is how I described her in the preface to her life tale as told to me which I started writing after I got to know her better: "an older French woman, short of stature, wearing a simple sweater and long dark skirt, and beaming with joy appeared at morning Mass in our simple monastic chapel."

January 19, 2004 from a letter to a philosophical seminarian

Celibacy - is a gift. Even if hard it should be joyful - a comparison, when I do most menial tasks it is hard and not joyful, but when I do things like writing or teaching even though there is some sacrifice and hardness basically I feel joyful even making those sacrifices such as, say, digging up some fact for a class on the web.

Of course celibacy goes much deeper into the soul than research. All Christians love Jesus. And many are in love with Him, but the celibate has to be in love with Him to make the sacrifice. You could ask Jesus to either woo you into being in love with Him or give you a clear sign you are to not be a vowed religious or priest. Of course that leaves out the single life, but most men

who want to be married find someone to marry.

Every vocation has lots of sufferings, as I always told you. If you decided you crave marriage, you would need to find a wife who loves being with kids because it is hard for philosophers to raise children. It's not hard for us to love children, but to spend all the time they need for their nurture and growth, so it would be very difficult if your wife was also a heady vs. an earthy person."

January 20, 2004

My new friend, a widow who wants to become a consecrated widow wrote this beautiful passage about her marriage and God:

"There was a time, when T. was still living, that I was open to some of the stuff I read regarding other lives and reincarnation. But to sit and watch illness take the life of one you love, well, that changed everything. Love in the uniqueness of Tom's being and mine grew closer and closer in those days. I also remember thinking, years ago, how it might not be so difficult to live through T.'s death because God was the source of my love and focus. But that has so changed. God is still the source of my love and focus. What stirs in my heart though is this thought. If God is truly a loving and personal being, He would know how much and how important love and communion of being is. After all we hold that that is God's very own life--relational life and being. I can't possibly believe all of that (love) is for nothing. It would make love nothing more than a scientific energy that responds to chemicals in the brain! I remember the look of love...not sexual encounter...but the real look of love in the days when death was knocking at our door. It was deeper than brain chemicals and transmitters!!

I responded:

I like the way you relate it to the experience of love as death draws near. Since my husband died suddenly, it was different for me, but I think that perhaps a mysterious sign of having completed purgatory is that the soul of the dead person is more united after purgatory to the spouse on earth.

An analogue concerning widows who think of consecration as a continuation of their human spousal love and those who don't, might be that Jews who become Catholics but love their Jewish identity like to called themselves completed Jews when they become Catholics vs. assimilation; so widows who remained in love with their husbands see consecration to Jesus as a completion of their spousal love vs. as an opposite.

About Walker Percy, Paul Elie writes

"His faith, he insisted, was not about order or community or permanence. It was an act of desperation, made true by his stubbornness in maintaining it. Why believe? 'what else is there?' Why not scientific humanism? 'It's not good enough.' Why isn't it? "This life is too much trouble, far too strange, to arrive at the end of it and have to answer, 'Scientific humanism.' That won't do. A poor show. Life is a mystery, love is a delight. Therefore I take it as axiomatic that one should settle for nothing less than the infinite mystery and the infinite delight, i.e., God. In fact I demand it. I refuse to settle for anything else."

January 24, 2004

From Michael O'Brien's novel *Cry of Stone*:

"poems are frozen inside all words, like ice waiting for the sun."

I am wondering about whether child-likeness, as in going to the heart, isn't different in some respects in the feminine vs. the masculine.

For example, today when I brought her groceries up to the kitchen, Sr. Catherine ran up to me and kissed my cheek and said "you are such a nice Mommy."

It was so disarming and charming and childlike, but no man would make such a gesture, not because it is child-like but because he would seem effeminate. Isn't this because being affectionate and vulnerable is more feminine than masculine?

So, say, if a male saint were to walk up to an enemy soldier and whistle a brave little tune, that would be childlike but masculine, sort of like St. Francis of Assisi. A woman would not likely do such a thing.

January 28, 2004

O'Brien's novel *A Cry of Stone*, regarding the death of a beloved:

"He was alive, he had not gone out of existence, he had merely been carried to another station of the journey, beyond the reach of the eyes but not beyond the reach of the heart. In her heart she carried him still, and her love for him continued and grew. So the heart's loss was also, strangely, the heart's gain."

Also from that book "The interior castle, cannot rise unless the bastion of pride is leveled. The stones crumble, and only weakness is left. Then He comes."

January 30, 2004

Since December I have been in touch with a locutionary. She sends me words she has received. Of course, as Catholics we are not obliged to believe or follow private revelations of this sort, but because I think hers are genuine, I am excerpting parts I found spiritually helpful. (These have since been published by CMJ Marian Publishers under the title *Direction for our Times* by "Anne." Something that may startle you is that she has locutions from different well-known saints. You may think that she is quoting from the writings of these saints, but she is not. She believes they are speaking to us in our times from heaven.)

August

From the Blessed Mother:

“Children, I know it is difficult for you at times. Remember that I lived the earthly life and drew much comfort from faith. I was often unsure of what the future held for my Son but I knew it was suffering. I lived that reality, despite which I remained cheerful, dutiful and joyful...I constantly asked our Heavenly Father to sustain me. When I felt the grief of my Son’s future, I stopped whatever I was doing and made an act of obedience to our Father. Whenever you feel unsure of yourself or afraid, make an act of Obedience. Say the following: “God in heaven, I pledge my allegiance to you. I give you my life, my work, and my heart. In turn, give me the grace of obeying your every direction to the fullest extent possible.”

August 13, 2003

Blessed Mother:

My dear consecrated souls, are you listening to your mother? Are you letting my messages reshape your soul and your direction? Perhaps you are angry at your mother. Tell me, dear little wounded soul. You may tell me if you are unhappy. Only through communication can we get to the root of the trouble and heal your pain. I do not want any blockages between us. So you must be honest. If you have healing that must be done, look around now. I will send you a holy soul to assist you. You will know this soul and with the help of this comrade, you can discover the source of your pain and we can lance any wounds that continue to take you from your mother. My child, injustice exists in your world. But injustice is not allowed in heaven. There is only love and celebration. Let me tell you about heaven so that you know and understand the glory of your destination. Heaven is filled with souls who love God. These souls, all filled with joy, explore every facet of the Divine. There is great knowledge to be had and anything you want to learn, you can learn. Imagine exulting in the accomplishments of all of the saints, both those who are known to you and those who are known only to God. In heaven, your accomplishments will be celebrated. Your faults, your sins, do not make the journey and are not only forgotten, but incinerated. Can you imagine, dear ones? Do you begin to picture this? Let me continue. In heaven, there are vast spaces, filled with every bit of beauty ever created by God. If, on earth, you create something that is divinely inspired, and this is what we want from you, it will endure in heaven, to be admired and explored by your brothers and sisters. Your spiritual relationships will also follow you to heaven. Every memory of your sins will be erased because you could not enjoy heaven if you were constantly annoyed by the memory of your mistakes. This is a mercy of God Himself and a good illustrative example of the character of your God. Please consider that more. He is never spiteful, never vengeful, and never punishes to punish. God, your all loving Father, moves only for the benefit of you, His creatures, created in love and hope. Children, I say to you with love, let go of your pain. I will help you. Ask me, please, and allow me to wash away the past hurts inflicted upon you by troubled souls. I wish your wholeness, your wellness, your confidence. Your healing is here, in my hand. I extend my hand to you now and place it in your heart. Be with me, dear one. It is to you, I speak.

“Consider those with whom you are comfortable. Do you not see that those souls carry true love within them? It is safe to be with them because they carry a seed of God in them and that is what generates that love. It is that seed you respond to when you feel comfortable and safe with a person. Well, dear ones, I have to tell you that fewer and fewer carry that seed of love and that is why so many of your fellow brothers and sisters have fallen prey to diseases of the mind. Man was not meant to live without love

in his life. He should walk through each day and experience a little love in this person, that person, and ideally, through every soul who has contact with him. ...Now a man can survive quite nicely if he is nurtured by divine love. ...But few souls are accepting divine love.”

February 17, 2004

I did an interview for Zenit about the theme of my article on the Joys of Being a Woman of the Church from the book on The Gift of Femininity published by Servant, edited and assembled by Christine Muggerridge. I got a letter from a Canadian priest saying that he liked the article so much that he Xeroxed it for all the girls and women of his parish and had a Women’s Celebration Day around it. It brought tears to my eyes to see how much witness stories help others. I saw how Jesus wants to use me this way, because he has given me the courage to give my witness.

Jesus seemed to be telling me He would use me wherever I go because I want to bring His truth and light and love, but that He wants me to have the deep quiet time with Him at the Retreat Center also.

March 5, 2004

I have been thinking about how some angry people are more angry at strangers and some at those who are close – but behind the anger it is the same false perfectionist stance and flight from the cross of the limitations and sins of others. “Except for you, my life could be great, so I want to annihilate you with my anger.”

Seeing THE PASSION – it felt not like a film but like an intervention of God forcing the world to come to grips with what Jesus suffered for us. My grandson Nicholas was very impressed. I thought it was terrific in terms of apologetics in the sense that no one could think that without the Resurrection the disciples would risk such a death.

March 12, 2004

If you “don’t fit in” somewhere, do you try to “stand out” or “hide”?

Unrelated – I was reading the famous old novel USA by John Dos Passos. He has this glamorous, charming, young woman who had many abortions getting into her late 30’s, notice that she is growing old. Her husband is preparing for her to go for the abortion when she decides against it, saying, “I want the little brat!” This reminded me of choices some women I have known made when feeling the clock ticking down.

March 15, 2004

From JP II The Way of the Cross

“The cross is raw crudeness and horror, barbarity and ignominy, the place on which, atrociously, dies the Incarnate Son of God. Let no one dare to violate or cover up the atrocity of pain, the place in which love reveals itself and life gushes forth in abundance, the icon of mercy without limit, and beyond all human expectation.

O cross of Christ, which shines out tragic and brilliant in the night of human agony. By your light is illumined every dark step of sorrow.... You lead humanity back to its original splendor...our one hope, the safe anchor in the storms of life.”

March 18, 2004

Response to “Anne” concerning an entry in the journal of her locutions. Here is what she wrote as she heard Jesus speak in her heart:

“Jesus: Well done, little soul. You see how the enemy seeks to negotiate with you. I want you to record many things for Me on this day. We will begin with your experience in Church this morning. We will then move to your suffering on this day and then I will return to you here.”

*I am drawing a complete blank on church this morning. I have been in the garden since yesterday. To be honest I've had a terrible time thinking that I just want my life back. I can't earn a living, I'm tired of being broke, I'm tired of feeling like a nut, and I'm tired of not knowing what is going to happen to me from one day to the next. I have these feelings and I make acts of obedience because, despite all, I know that I am going in one direction and that is toward heaven. Nothing will knock me off the path of service to Jesus. Nothing. I will do whatever He asks me, whenever He asks me and that is my decision. I decided to overlook these feelings and not torment myself any further as Jesus understands humanity and the pull of the world. He wants me to know what I am giving up and I feel so beaten down anyway that I do not have much energy to entertain myself with reproaches and the drama of self-loathing. So I am complaining at times. Whatever. I would like to shake the hand and congratulate the soul who would do this and not have the odd moment of crankiness. I cannot remember what happened in church, that's how much impact things have on me so if our Lord wants it recorded, my sweet Saviour must please remind me.*

*Okay. I think I have it. I was doing this kind of resigned complaining. My hands and feet hurt terribly, and after Mass I did the Stations. During the stations and in contemplation of His Passion, I made yet another act of commitment to Him and to suffering this Passion for Him. (Please believe that I get the barest taste.) He made me understand that my little acts of obedience in the heat of the temptation to rebel give Him tremendous glory. They are more powerful than the most poetic and joyful praises of love sung to Him at times when we are in the spirit of unity. Now, do not be discouraged and think that there is no point to our joyful outbursts of love. They, too, give Him glory. It is simply that dedicated duty in the face of complete and total flatness of spirit is a good thing and we must see it as the opportunity for God's glory that it is. God is good to give me this opportunity. I'm nearly laughing as I write that because the words and the sentiments have been scraped pitifully from the bottom of my barrel of faith. Once again, intellectually I know it to be true far more than I feel it emotionally. I am in a pretty dry state of spirituality right now.*

*Regarding the suffering today, I'm glad it is over, I will say first of all. Secondly, the devil now attempts to divert me with a new pitch. He offered me millions of souls if I would cease this suffering. He said he would give the kingdom millions of souls. He then asked if I heard him. I am attempting not to dialogue as our Lord does not want me to talk to him. As he was asking me this I felt as though he were ripping something from the inside of my chest. My heart, I suspect. This went on. He said give me the suffering and I will trade you millions of souls. You will have served Him well and saved millions. You can have them through the messages. You want God's glory? Make the deal. This was at the end of the suffering and he, the devil, then said, relax, you're done. Get up. I remained still because I work for Christ and only Christ tells me when I am done and when to get up. Sure enough, I wasn't. He was trying to get me to excuse myself early and leave some of the suffering behind. I waited and he then said, I'm leaving you to think about it. I will be with you until tomorrow and I'll help you to think about it. I'm willing to hand you millions of souls through the messages. All you have to do is give me this suffering you hate so much. What's to think about?*

*Well, reader, I will tell you what's to think about. He is not the one who decides what I do and do not do or decides what I suffer or do not suffer. Despite my continual and unabated complaining, I suffer willingly for Jesus Christ and His mother, whom I love with all of my heart. I was then told by Jesus that I was finished and I rested. Our Lord explained to me that of course we would not negotiate that deal or any deal with the enemy, because, as Jesus said,*

*We do not deal with evil, first and foremost, because evil never looks after the interests of heaven. Never. We can rest in that statement because as My goodness is never changing, the evil of the enemy never changes. The goal is always darkness when one is dealing with those who work for hell. Now, little soul, I tell you also why we do not make such a negotiation. What if the evil one agreed to give us every soul in the world but one and that one were yours? Would I hand over My cross, accept the compromise and merely shake my head at the loss of your soul? You see My smile in your heart, Anne, because you know how ridiculous the very suggestion is to Me. I could no sooner do without you than I could do without the whole of the heavenly kingdom. You are Mine and I am yours. Each soul is equally precious to Me and you know that because I have revealed My heart to you. You will be given flashes of what the evil one offers you today. I have no fears about your ability to stay on an uneven and narrow course as you have often proved your reliability to heaven. Be at peace as you keep Me company in the Garden this evening. All is well and I want to tell you, My little friend, that My stay in the Garden was made bearable by contemplation of little acts of courage like you made this morning in the church."*

I, Ronda, wrote this back to Anne: "This dialogue was so beautiful. I go through minor feelings of confusion, come to think about it, usually after my nap, which is near to the Crucifixion time. I offer it up when I remember to, but this locution more than any other will get me to be sure to see this is how the devil works on me. It brings tears to my eyes. I really like the gutsy way you write your part, just the way it comes. I think Jesus honors that vs. flowery memorized prayers when those, even if beautiful, don't match your real feelings.

March 25, 2004

Dear Tom,

(Concerning frustration in prayer)

This is just guess work, but I think that creative Catholic intellectuals sometimes get so wrapped up in the sense of Jesus as a symbol in our religion that we can lose the most basic sense of Jesus being who He says He is in the Gospels and proves Himself to be in the intimate I-Thou of the sacraments and mystical prayer.

When we read the proofs of St. Thomas closely we realize God is the center of all reality and not dependent in the least on my concept of Him in a subjective sense. Then adoration makes sense vs. floating in vagueness during prayer.

So, when you review C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* where he says in those famous WWII radio addresses - look either Jesus is a madman, a liar, or he is who he says he was. In Hebrew tradition to say I and the Father are one is a divinity claim. So, don't think of Him as a prophet or an archetype but either as really God or as only a philosopher who cannot save us from our sins. And so, if He is really God, the living personal God, pray to Him with that sense in your heart.

March 26, 2004

Dear Tom,

By extreme hermits I mean the ones in early Egypt Christian times who ran out to the furthest reaches of the desert in rags. Others took a ciborium with the Eucharist with them to little huts they built and or met on Sundays for Mass.

I can't read 58 pages of anything right now. I am due to give a talk for Pax Romana in the parish near the UN where UN people are invited. I leave next Wednesday and return Sunday so don't expect e-mails during that time.

Doctors of the Church - I love the Office of Readings - full of strong teaching, but especially for apologetics Augustine and Thomas. There are nifty little compendiums of Thomas that just hit the highlight and not all the controversies he is answering. I bet you could easily find one on used books Barnes and Nobles cheap.

"Hating not being a saint yet!" I understand. I am appalled. When I became a Catholic at 21 I thought maybe 5 years would do it. All of these feelings have to do with proudly wanting to be an ambassador vs. a child of God. We want to give love, not receive love. What makes us more holy is being super receptive to God's love as did John of the Cross, Teresa, and Therese. Somehow, big hearted as we both are, we think receiving love is a bit sentimental. Project-itis fits in very well with this.

How about - on the way into Mass each day, as well as thinking of all the people you need to help with this and that, say a prayer such as

"Jesus! I am the one who needs to be saved. Here I am the humble publican confessing to -----(whatever your main weaknesses are.) I am poor and needy. Help me. As you fill my body with your precious body and blood, please make Your love percolate into the marrow of my painful body, heart, mind and spirit."

April 8, 2004

I spent a few hours reading this short book about Marthe Robin (pronounced Roban) a French woman of the 20th century who after becoming paralyzed for unknown causes in her early 20's never ate, drank, or slept and bore the stigmata on Fridays. She was a holy soul and foundress of Foyer de Charite - retreat centers and a whole movement with 60 of these centers world-wide by 1980's. Probably more today. She founded these things from her bed by means of priests following her inspirations.

Here are two lines that struck me:

"All of life is Calvary and every soul is a Gethsemane where all drink in silence the chalice of their own lives."

"My real joy on my sickbed is profound....What a labor! What growth God has wrought in me! But what leapings of the heart, what death-struggles of the will it takes to die to self."

Easter Triduum:

Dear Carla, my sister,

So many lovely things here. First of all an older woman who is trying living here does the decorations, so she picked beautiful simple wild flowers, a magenta colored cactus blossom for the altar of repose.

Then the stations, after the men carried the cross (about 4 feet high) about 5 yards each from station to station, a little bit of a woman, visiting mother of a monk, offered to take it. I felt ashamed. Even though I have a bad back, etc. etc., I figured it couldn't be that heavy if she carried it, leaned against her shoulder, so I gingerly volunteered for the next to last Pieta Station. I figured Father would say no if he thought it was risky. But he didn't.

I felt very brave and noble and was congratulating myself on my courage, when we turned the bend on our long road, and there right in front of my station was reclining a huge black cow. It was so funny, totally cutting the ultra-serious way monks do these rites - total silence always, not little whispers, as most lay people including me tend to.

The cow moved away when I arrived. When we got over the little rise to the last Resurrection point, there was the whole herd waiting for us: 6 cows and 5 calves. I suppose some were steers, I didn't check. It felt like they wanted to be with us for the Resurrection.

During the whole procession our mother cat who just gave birth to 5 kittens followed us meowing.

I have been having a lovely week. I am feeling since NY, that I am just in the right life and place. By the way my back is better since I stopped sitting on the floor to pray and now sit in a stodgy chair with the cushion instead. So travel is a bit easier. It just seems that it is just right to have long periods of quiet contemplative prayer and then go out on a speaking date, but not more than 1 a month, and spend time here writing, not counseling but just affirming people.

Jesus seemed to say in my heart, "Yes, Yes, Yes."

A line from one of the sermons - we need to love others in the place of their greatest need which they will only open to us if they feel we love them.

I love Taize hymns.

I am going to play the St. Matthew Passion while cleaning up.

Love to you and Arthur in the place of your deepest needs, Ronda

Some things that Jesus allegedly told Anne about my soul:

I wish My little servant to respond yes to Me in another area in the area of trust.

(Addressed to me):

I desire unity with you, dearest, but you pull away because you do not trust your Jesus.

Would I ever fail you? Would I ever send you a plan that was detrimental to your spirituality and your unity with Me? You know that I would not because My desire, like your desire, is unity.

I want to draw you directly into My heart, and I want to do that now. You need do nothing, only trust. Tell Me you trust Me all through each day.

You desire My happiness and you seek to comfort Me. I will be comforted by unity with you. That is what your Saviour desires.

Ask Me to give you heightened trust. Practice trusting Me. Ask yourself, what would I decide to do right now if I totally trusted Jesus?

The answers will come to you and you will struggle less with doubts and anxieties. These things are not from Me and they hinder Our progress.

I love you completely. Let us remove these final little blocks and be together so you can serve Me with abandon."

(I felt greatly moved by this locution which cuts with a two edged sword for me. Afterward, reading it over and over on a busy confused day because my computer screen seemingly died – as if the computer was overwhelmed that Jesus came right through its old being? – I felt driven to rush to buy a replacement – when I finally got back from the store and went to bed early I had a sense of Jesus trying to melt my heart and of Mary's sweet presence hovering over me as I prayed the rosary falling asleep.)

April 13, 2004

My computer monitor went into death throes. In my usual exaggerated way, I immediately thought – this is a sign to give up writing and e-mail and the net! I felt depressed as soon as I decided that. Then Jesus seemed to give me an answer – he is weaning me from lots of loud speech through the relative silence of the computer. I should get a new monitor and not worry about being addicted at this point. Slowly but surely I will be able to put prayer before projects so that I would come to the projects with peace.

April 22, 2004

I went to confession about an argument I had with someone about Israelis and Palestinians. I see that it is a Recovery, Inc. type of thing (the international group I often lead little meetings about for overcoming anger, fear and depression) in the sense of we get a rush of symbolic victory overcoming enemies in argument since we can't win on the ground, especially in political arguments. Such arguments are spiritually dangerous. Even though infallibility doesn't cover application of Just War to particular battles, , since the Vatican is preaching peace, if I start a campaign about the Israeli side I could be agitated a lot of the time.

A Jewish convert friend wrote concerning the Israeli war that he thought the Pope's views were just misinformed and came from his thinking the Arabs are the underdogs.) Not that it shook my faith, of course, since these matters don't come under infallibility.

I spend many hours in my oratory pondering how Hebrew-Catholics, Jews who became Catholics, should deal with the current dilemma of our loyalty to Israel. After all, Israel includes plenty of pro-abortion atheists – Sharon (the Prime Minister) is an atheist at least up until recently and I haven't heard different. Just the same we cannot help desiring that Israel be victorious. Then, what about the claims of Christian Arabs against Israeli treatment of them? (I read a wonderful book *From Time Immemorial*, by Joan Peters trying to show that these claims are bogus. Another wonderful book about Israel was by an English journalist, Sennott, *The Body and Blood*. Each chapter gives the point of view of a different group, Jew, Muslim and Christian (Lebanese). In each chapter you sympathize with that point of view, but then he shows the negatives of each when they have power.)

We had a sermon today about poverty of spirit for contemplatives. Father said that especially for contemplatives we want to avoid a kind of problem many academics have which is that they infallibilize their own opinions, so they are rich in half-truths and can't listen to anyone else. Not that the half-truths aren't true but that a kind of arrogant assertion of them is not in the spirit of Jesus.

I immediately went to confession. I analyze my tendency to be this way as coming from feeling weak because I cannot win on issues such as Israel with other Catholics, so I want a symbolic victory by debating them into the ground meanwhile ignoring that after all Israelis aren't exactly saints either. My Jewish convert husband, who was much more pro-Israeli than I, still thought the sabra soldiers looked like Fascists.

April 22, 2004

I visited the home of a friend who has teen girls. What a delight to hear them giggling in the other room. I miss that aspect of family life in my Retreat Center.

I was thinking about how long people live nowadays: to have more time to recover from their lives?

Unrelated – a very loving woman I know was being scolded by her husband for being messy. I asked her: "how many times do you see the word "neat" in the Gospels, and how many times do you see the word "love"? And even I, who love neatness, do value love more.

April 30, 2004

Dear Father,

Today in your wonderful sermon you spoke of the comparison between a babe nourished by the blood of the mother and then the milk, with the Eucharist.

They didn't show mothers how to breastfeed when I had my twins but I did breastfeed my son and it gave me such a wonderful feeling about my body. I had previously experienced it mostly as an ugly encumbrance on my soul. When feeding my son at the breast I was overjoyed that of my very bodily substance I was giving life to my son's body, and I felt it was analogous to the Eucharist.

Sunday Sermon on May 2, 2004 for 4th Sunday of Easter

(Note: This was taken down by me in shorthand. Later when I put some of this on our web-site I included a note about these sermons being designed for contemplatives here, so that they would have to be modified in some ways in the minds of actives.)

"In the Gospel reading from St. John Jesus speaks about our eternal life. He and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one in our spiritual life. Even though we have distractions and troubles that make us fear to be "snatched out of the Father's hand," as Jesus explains, we should not fear. We can think that the devil is snatching us out of God's hand sometimes. We feel as if we are not in God's hand or his arms, as if we have been stolen away from our hopes about our spiritual life.

But, despite sins and betrayals, Jesus says that ordinary people like us will not be snatched out of God's hand. He wants to talk to us in our ordinariness to assure us that it is not true that we are snatched.

In the face of great problems that could have discouraged humans and even in the midst of persecution, we can live a sublime life and each of us is called to live that.

The Gospel speaks of the "voice" of Jesus. The Holy Father has been speaking a lot about the "face" of Christ, but here it is His voice that is mentioned. John the Baptist rejoiced to hear His voice. According to St. John of the Cross, the voice is the interior voice heard in silence. God speaks in silence says St. John of the Cross.

We need to be gathered into the hand of God by our recollection (gathering ourselves) not through logic and reasoning, but being touched by the voice of love even more intimate than sight. The auditory is closer to love than sight, which can be deceived easily as by seeing "lights" or tricks that come from bad spirits.

Hearing the vibrations from the voice in our own hearts that are attentive to that voice we thrill as it responds to the longing for the voice of the Good Shepherd. This is an affective hearing. In order to hear that voice we have to have the gift to be gathered by recollection. It is hard if there is too much exterior noise.

We confide ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mother of the poor to take us into her arms to be gathered into God's hand.

We have to dispel the conflictual voices and distractions. Just as St. Paul talked louder to overcome the voices of unbelieving Jews, we have to "talk" louder than the persecuting voices. Sometimes we need the courage to speak over the voices of bad spirits telling us that there is no use trying to be contemplative because we are hopeless or that "this is just not your line of work." I used to have such temptations in the beginning years (of being a monk) I argued these down so that now, even though I feel just as inadequate, I have talked myself out of giving up.

When you are starting, you have these persecuting voices and it is hard to hear the inner voices. Jesus knows that and so we need a spiritual resurrection of our little hearts that need to know that none of us will be snatched away.

It is a major truth of this Gospel, because some of the most subtle temptations are where we feel snatched out of His hand into the chaos of our minds. The Father is greater than all this.

Let us dedicate ourselves as little people to our spiritual Mother Mary to renew faith and hope in the resurrection, when we feel deluged and have a hard time gathering ourselves together.

Recollection comes through a special grace as we are drawn up into a hidden spot necessary for the contemplative life. St. Teresa of Avila says that before a great mystical grace "I was in a great recollection when it happened." The prelude to the mystical is recollection.

We need to pray because each of us knows how poor we are in terms of distractions and troubles. We need to pray for recollection so that we can hear that voice in our heart.

May 4, 2004

(In answer to a letter from someone thinking that Judaism is as good as the Catholic religion):

Jesus said He came for the Jews first. Every reading these last 2 weeks is about how the apostles went first to the Jews. Throughout the centuries many Jews have converted. We are a universal Church - the catechism repeats this often. One and true doesn't mean other religions are completely wrong but we have the fullness of truth. I like the way JP II puts it in Threshold of Hope that there is a main light from God and then other religions see shafts of this light. Jews rush to join Jews for Jesus and Messianic Judaism partly because they stand the street and preach.

Letter to someone asking about what the term spiritual gluttony means, I replied:

On spiritual gluttony, there is a certain clear way of distinguishing. If you are a spiritual glutton you go around from place to place looking for spiritual highs and detest the lows and flee from them into escapist mechanisms such as addictions including co-dependency on perfect people. If you are a fervent woman desiring to be purified you accept, with struggle of course, the crosses God sends or allows, offering them for others and begging to be purified through them. That does not mean asking for crosses or not trying to eliminate them when possible, but it means accepting them when you can't change anything

Reflecting gratefully on the mentorship of the priest here: I have always thought that the more a woman is a Catholic leader, the more she needs a stronger male mentor. I see this is Alice Von Hildebrand for whom Dietrich was everything, but now she gravitates toward Fr. Benedict Groeschel who lives nearby. Also, of course, almost all the women saints, and maybe all, but we don't know of it, had strong male mentors to help them grow.

June 12, 2004 (back on the East Coast)

Visiting St. Scholastica's Priory in Massachusetts to pick up boxes of Charlie Rich tapes and letters, I was almost in tears over the discombobulation of travel, cold and heat, and desire to be finally settled in one place. I reread the locution Jesus seemed to have sent me through Anne and realized once more that unity with Him counts more than unity of place. He does have a plan for me and it will be good for me. Right now all I need is trust. Meanwhile Jesus told me to thank Him for having so many options.

June 30, 2004 – written to an atheistic friend.

Dearest Emily,

I will pray for your surgery. I am delighted about your new grandbaby. Just looking at her must be a great joy even if you can't help much.

About purgatory. Here the basic way I see it is that at the time of death everyone sees Jesus. If they love light and goodness they move toward Him. Now, to be in heaven you have to have nothing but love in your heart. But sins of the past constrict the heart and leave pockets of cold, resentment, non-forgiveness, hate, etc.

Purgatory is a place of purification - I call it stretching the heart to love more and purifying it to get rid of those pockets mentioned above. You can tell even in this life that repenting, forgiving, etc. is painful.

The pain is mainly spiritual and immaterial since souls do not have bodies, but as a condescending to our earthly viewpoint it is described by Jesus and shown to visionaries, including Dante, as physical pain. There is no fixed Catholic doctrine resolving the conundrum of how souls without bodies can be shown as suffering physical pain to visionaries.

Here is how you could "pray"

God, if there is a God, I am very sorry for all the sins, defects, etc. of my life, especially those that directly hurt other people. Please forgive me. I offer the sufferings I have been going through with Parkinson's and all the ones in the future as a penance for those sins and defects. Also if Christians are right in what they believe, show me clearly.

Can't hurt. Chesterton said the reason he became a Catholic was to get rid of his sins.

Love, Ronda

Letter to a member of the Hebrew-Catholic Association Board:

I guess I would think of a Hebrew-Catholic wanting to support Jews living in Israel as the first plank. How would we support this concretely? Obviously trying to refute those who make out that the Jews simply grabbed Arab land and deserve to be flung into the sea. But what else? Should we send money to support an army that probably does abortions for the female members?

Should we advance some kind of support by Hebrew Catholics in a public forum just with some kind of manifesto, say from the H-C Association? Would this manifesto be published simultaneously in an Israeli paper or web as well as in some US paper?

Just floating ideas at this point.

(Nothing came of this but years later someone started an organization like that of non-Catholic Christians who support Israel. This is called Catholics for Israel. It is wonderful. You can find it by googling it. I also started giving donations to a group called EFRAT that is like Birth-Right, where they support women to keep their babies.)

July 7, 2004

Franciscan University of Steubenville wants me to do a show for their TV Forum shown on EWTN about my book Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace. Talking to them about this program, to be done in October when I am giving a

workshop there on this topic, I started pushing for a tape of it, as well. Jesus seemed to laugh at me and say, "So reaching a million people on TV is not enough for you?" I laughed aloud.

July 8, 2004

Regarding Jesus seemingly laughing at me about the Taming stuff at FUS, I am thinking I DON'T TAKE IN THE GOOD, BUT JUST LEAP TO THE NEXT WORRY! He wants me to soak in all the good He is arranging for me.

July 9, 2004

Went to the ordination of priests from the community who ran the college where I used to teach. If felt the Holy Spirit urging me to go to celebrate with some of the ordinands who had been my students. I prayed and prayed to be able to feel love for those administrators I might meet I had been in conflict with. Sure enough I saw one in the opening procession and had the grace to jump up onto the kneeler, and wave with joy to see him. He seemed delighted to see me also. I realized that even though we experienced such severe problems we have been praying for each other. I thought, what joy will there be in heaven when we have forgiven every single person who ever harmed us!

There was a wonderful moment during the ceremony at the point where all the priests attending give a hug of peace to the newly ordained. A very thin, shorter, priest who was previously a High School wrestling champ, grabbed a huge newly ordained friend of his and lifted him up into the air horizontally above his own head! It was such a marvelous dramatic unconventional gesture. It reminded me why I loved this community in spite of all the problems we had.

July 12, 2004

From the book *Star Children* by Clara Asscher-Pinkhof about the Jewish children in concentration camps:

"We were permitted to bring my dead father to the gate. Two men carried him on a bier covered in white... We walked behind until the gate opened and two men passed through with their load. My father entered into freedom, but the gate was closed for us..."

"Oh, he received death in a friendly way; he knew that only death could open the barbed wire and the gate. He nodded to this space, this freedom, in the days of his illness, and now that they are open to him, he has greeted them happily... what happens to his body is the secret of the little brick house there in the distance. What happens to his soul we will know and understand all the rest of our lives; the good, which is imperishable... it is not death that has to open the barbed wire and gate, but the soul itself, grown until it is unassailable, which can rise above the impediments created by harsh hatred and mightless might. You can live and be free however tightly your mortal remains are wedged."

July 14, 2004

Coming to see that my conflicts about where to live in the future revolve around a perfectly understandable widow's need to be protected by strong, just, men. Unconsciously, as I waver, I am probably weighing up how much I can trust the men in each locale to take care of me. In the Psalms, though, it is written "put not your trust in princes." When will I truly believe that God the Father is protecting me?

July 15, 2004

Father told me today that all the monks say that they are disturbed by the way I look around during prayer from my perch at the front of our little chapel. He suggested I might consider sitting in the back instead.

At first I felt numb, but then deep prayer of quiet came over me. Even though I can see what they mean, I still felt rejected. I look around because I love them so much and in a motherly, and also former teacherly, way, I want to check out how they are doing. They say teachers have a terrible time retiring because they are used to being center stage directing everything in the room.

I talked to Cathy, one of my oldest friends. She thought that the men here need to bond like a family – they are younger and will be close for the rest of their lives. However, she thought it possible that I need to be some place where I can be more central. That might not be so much ego as just my character which is not introvert.

July 17, 2004

I had a long unusually intricate dream where I was talking to St. Edith Stein who was visiting and speaking at the college where I used to teach. She was like Alice Von Hildebrand, very intense and compassionate.

I couldn't remember what she said, but I woke up wanting to offer all my sufferings for the conversion of the Jewish people.

My friend Roy Schoeman who loves Edith Stein so much thought it was not a dream but a real interaction where she was giving me instructions.

An interesting quotation: "The guardian ego is a scriptwriter, tagging moods, experiences, behaviors, and things as "me," keeping a record of its biographical inventory, which is stores in memory. Since it is a mental function, however, all it can really come up with is an *idea* of the self, which it eventually fashions into an *ideal* – and unfortunately too often into an *idol*. Its attempt to feed and keep the idol intact is narcissism in its purest form – the worship of the *self-idol*."

Dear Hebrew-Catholic friends,

Looking forward to the novena before the feast day of Edith Stein in August, I am thinking that some of us might be called to make an offering of this type:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, you know how I love the Jewish people and wish that all of them would know You, at least as well as I do. I offer to you the little and big crosses of my life now and in the future for the enlightenment and ingrafting into your Church of the Jewish people.

July 24, 2004 Feast of St. Birgitta widow and pilgrim

I have been in great turmoil over what I should do in the future. I got so upset I decided to insist on some kind of answer:

Should I just stay at the Center and cut out all the outside works

or

plunge into the outside works leaving the Center for someplace else

or

try to balance the two in some ratio that would work?

Jesus seemed to answer me this way:

"You don't belong anywhere. That is your cross. I have told you before not to join any group but just be Ronda of Jesus and let me set you down anywhere in my Church.

"I don't want you to make any decisions regarding active/contemplative. I want you to follow the Holy Spirit by doing anything good you want to do that is offered and I will be with you all the time whether in your oratory or away on work in my Church.

"Don't push, don't strain. Enjoy the beauty here, and the excitement of other places. Offer the fatigue, or the heat, or the cold to me without TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO ARRANGE YOUR LIFE TO AVOID CROSSES. DO INSTEAD WHAT MAKES YOU JOYFUL AND ACCEPT THE CROSSES THAT GO WITH IT."

"I love you and you love me and Mary, Joseph and the saints and that is all you need."

Sounds pretty right on to me. Cuts like a 2 edge sword through all my dreads and fantasies.

July 27, 2004

About my future, how wrong could it be to want to be in a place where I can love and be loved in an appropriate but still more naturally extrovert manner? Like Augustine's "love and do what you will" concerning choices between goods?

July 30, 2004

I had written a letter to Bishop Burke of St. Louis about consecrated widows and the status of this emerging vocation at this time. Here is a part of his reply:

"At present there is no rite for the consecration of widows.

A widow can live a life dedicated wholly to Christ and she can make private vows. It is not proper for a widow to wear a habit or a veil since these are signs of belonging to an institute of consecrated life. A consecrated virgin living in the world should not wear a habit or veil either, since these are signs of separation from the world, and the vocation of the consecrated virgin is lived in the world. With the approval of the local Ordinary, a member of the faithful may have a suitable oratory with the reserved Blessed Sacrament. Some consecrated virgins...have such an oratory, but not all of them do."

(In the meantime an interesting possibility arose to visit and check out a lay Catholic village in Arkansas where one of the leaders is a very happily married older man who is a Jewish convert from NYC. He would be happy to have other Hebrew Catholics nearby.)

August 4, 2004 Letter to Marty (the leader mentioned above) in Arkansas:

I want to ask you and Irene and Ariela (a Jewish convert sabra from Israel, married to an American gentile convert) to pray for me during this exciting but difficult time. It would mean leaving a situation where there are many ardent, holy, people.

By comparison the reasons for leaving seem trivial such as the fact that monks are mostly silent and I need much more interaction and have trouble with inconveniences. All this seems worth it when the priest mentor is present but when he's away very often and long it doesn't seem worth it.

I have been here only 1 1/2 years full time, the rest being long, long weekends for 2 years. Part of me is eager to look into a big change, and part is afraid of nothing working out anywhere."

Jesus assures me He will be with me wherever I go.

August 7, 2004 (letter from a very old family friend, Gabriel Meyer, the journalist and writer of beautiful books about St. Joseph and also characters in the Holy Land)

Ronda:

Shalom!

On the Retreat Center situation: Not being able to talk about all the particulars in person, I wouldn't hazard an opinion on whether or not you belong where you are. However, in that this isn't the first time you've found yourself in a similar situation -- feeling that a particular setting is not your spiritual home, after all -- it's worth looking at the whole question of Finding Where I Belong.

What you describe in your email seems, at least at first reading, like the annoyances, inconveniences and, indeed, disappointments that are part and parcel of any situation -- including one to which you'd been called. As Cardinal Newman so memorably wrote: Everything this side of heaven, everything born of earth -- even the best -- finally disappoints. (That's a paraphrase.) It's a hard truth, but a salutary one, I think. On a fundamental level, there's no way out of feeling lonely, because we are alone, with all our constitutive hungers that cannot be satisfied, met or even addressed short of God. Lonely in the best of marriages; lonely in the best and most vital of religious communities; lonely even, God help us, when we get to be the center of attention and everybody thinks we're wonderful.

As for the other things you list (and I'm sure there's more to it than you had time to sketch out): they sound like the stuff of life (mismatched schedules, discomforts due to weather, not getting enough of something you imagine you want or need, etc.)

I'm not saying you shouldn't move on, or that the hermitage is right for you. What I am saying is that there is no perfect or ideal community where everyone is available to you just the way you want them to be, or where everyone (or even anyone, for that matter) understands. If that were so, should we ever find such an ideal community, a sensible person should run as hard as he or she could from it (as old St Macarios urges). It would be a spiritual trap, precisely because such a community that so thoroughly meets our needs would allow us to remain focused, centered, grounded on and in our (chaotic, unappeasable) selves, and the dreams we wish to foist on others, instead of wrested (as the classical spiritual writers say) from such a life dominated by the self precisely by the demands, inconveniences and incomprehensions of others, through the work of loving and serving them.

Commented [R1]:

I know you know all this; but it's all I had to offer by way of advice at this point. I have always found these truths exhilarating in the abstract and hard to take in real life.

And, for the record, I like talking to you.

August 10, 2004

Pondering the trip to Arkansas for a visit to see if I liked it, I was feeling very confused about whether I need to stay here at the hermitage, for the sake of my soul. Perhaps, after all, I am called to be a victim soul, as seem to be some of those here.

Then at Adoration I felt Dietrich Von Hildebrand, who was my great intellectual mentor and dear friend, trying to help me from the world beyond -- to tell me I am more like him with this exuberant joy combined with inescapable sufferings. I realized that Gogo had a spirituality not just a philosophy -- though they were intertwined and this spirituality was in his person even more than in the books and formal talks.

I called Alice Von Hildebrand and she said that my gift is that I have so much joy in spite of the terrible sufferings of my life. She thought I absolutely was not called to be a sacrificial soul in that sense.

August 11, 2004

Draft letter to the Retreat Community (I did not send this after all, but spoke out portions of it to different people here in ways that fit my relationship to each one. However, again, I am keeping it to remember how I felt at this time in my life.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the pathos and humor characteristic of my "tribe" I am writing this letter about a painful but possibly not unexpected decision.

Yes, even though I love, love, love having the Eucharistic Jesus in my oratory, and I revere you, Fr. P., as a holy priest, and I love my holy brothers and sisters here and do believe that everyone here loves me with true Christian charity, I am planning to leave.

I am anticipating that some of you will think the reasons are obvious and bad, such as:

"She's a wimp when it comes to even tiny physical hardships and even more when it comes to spiritual warfare." Or

"She's an ego-maniac, so she can't stand not being center-stage."

Actually I think there is some truth in the above, but probably even more significant are factors that are undramatic and more humbling such as:

I am old – Adios amigos, companeros de me viejez.

Old people like things to be steady and structured with few changes. It took me 2 weeks even to adjust to changing Mass to 7 and Adoration to 6 let alone going off to a parish Mass when Fr. P. is away.

Old people like to see the same faces every day. This place is a kaleidoscope of people coming and going and coming, sometimes unpredictably.

I am a widow –

Most widows crave the protection of men who are strong, like those of you who are brothers, are, but we want you to be near, preferably in sight, and always in the same place. You could easily add up how many of my very annoying demands have to do with not knowing if I can get help in practical areas of my ignorance.

I am an extrovert –

Extroverts gain strength from fellowship and get weak from solitude. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are great supernatural friends and I feel their love most of the time, but still...

I thought, and so did Fr. P., that these difficulties might be overcome by taking off for speaking trips. That is enough, when I can come home to a stable base, but not when many are not here. But there are such very good reasons for you not all being here a good part of the time that there is no way I can even imagine that changing.

So, where is the old holy fool thinking of going? For years and years I have been dreaming of some colony or complex for older people, not yet convalescent, that would be Catholic, ardently so, but also have in residence creative and/or intellectual types. Well, it exists. There is a group of about 30 families plus widows living in Northern Arkansas in the country with condos to rent for \$350 a month and also home-school families on the same property. It has a 24 hour adoration Church a few miles away. It has a Latin Mass (St. Peter's Society) on Sundays. It includes a few charismatics, Schoenstatt people, lots of Operation Rescue people, lots of Marian devotion, and one of the leaders is a Hebrew-Catholic Writer and Evangelist who hopes more Jewish converts will settle there to help him with his outreach.

Of course it is probable that not a one of these people will be as holy as you'all and then my big attempts at holiness by osmosis will go by the board! If you're not smiling yet, I got you wrong.

Perhaps you will wonder why I didn't consult you more about this decision. I guess it is because it would be too painful to hear your spiritual reasons why I should stay and still want to leave because of my more trivial but still real reasons.

I promise to pray mightily for you and recommend this hermitage far and wide. Please pray for me and accept my undying gratitude for all each one of you have done for me in prayer and deed, and let me make retreats from time to time. And when you think of me...perhaps, instead of thinking of me as a failed contemplative, think of me as, actually, I have always been, your favorite category of person: a poor little thing, Ronda

August 16, 2004

Feeling insecure before this trip to Arkansas for 3 days, I thought if I trusted in you, Jesus, I would realize You love me and You will be with me wherever I stay or go.

If I decide to go because I am just too stressed when Father leaves, what is so awful about that? In Recovery, Inc., it would be putting my mental health first. (This is a tool in this system for anger, fear and depression. It means that we must not stay in situations that we are not obligated to stay in because of some ideal or the opinions of others, if it is causing us too much misery or stress.)

August 17, 2004

I decided I ought to talk to Father more about Arkansas. He said I am not a contemplative or a nun but an active with contemplative inspirations and that if I don't have enough outlets then my energy gets skewed. It is perfectly legitimate to think about my retirement needs and maybe I should try Arkansas for a couple of months to see if the fantasy checks out, naturally and supernaturally. I could always come back and forth.

I did go to visit Arkansas and did like everything about Mary, Star of the Sea, the Catholic village. Nothing seemed ecstatic about it but more like Goldilocks finding a chair and a bed that fit. Maybe it is easier for me to fit with lay people who are trying to be holy than with monks who are holy. The little condo I will rent so cheaply seemed like a kind of snug hobbit house. I came upon a reading from Ezekiel on the feast of St. Bernard: "They went astray in the desert wilderness. In their straits He rescued them...to reach an inhabited city."

Jesus seemed to be showing me all the great good it was for me to live at the Retreat Center and how all the people here helped me and I helped them, but that He allowed the part that was so hard to help me now to leave for another place. All I need to do is trust and hold on tight.

Before leaving for Arkansas, one of the most delightful of squeezed in events was doing Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace at a local prison. I had never done any prison ministry. There were 40 men who are in a Catholic RCIA program run by a wonderful warm, insightful, sister, who invited me to come because of the many anger problems in the prison.

To my surprise I fit in very well! I think it is because prisoners are not into denial and the desperate way I cling to Jesus in the midst of problems such as anger, resonated with their desperate way of clinging to Jesus in the midst of their anger and resentment. Somehow the NYC street girl came out full force in my lingo and passion, different from talking to students or parish people. They loved it and invited me back.

August 27, 2004

The Bishops in Germany during the Nazi time are now berated constantly for not being even stronger condemning Hitler in the political forum even though some of them did instruct Catholics not to vote Nazi. There is no way 50 million aborted babies balances out with deaths from capital punishment, etc. I know that many Catholics vote Democratic because they think that party is better on social justice, but 50 million babies killed is the hugest social justice issue ever in this country since slavery, just as the murder of innocent Jews and Poles and handicapped was a social justice issue in Germany.

How any Catholic can vote for a candidate who was actually against banning partial birth abortions is beyond me. How a Catholic democrat can live with that platform is beyond me, etc. etc.

I am delighted a great priest will be able to enunciate some of these pointers to hispanic voters.

August 30, 2004

Thoughts about father/son being different from father/daughter.

If a father figure is trying to help in the healing of a son-figure – of course with God the Father as the supernatural healer, it seems, as I have heard, that separations are necessary, since part of the process is the father figure letting the son experience going elsewhere, with his unconditional love in the background, the "son" can be independent, at least at intervals.

But the archetype of father-daughter involves the father eventually giving away the daughter into the hands of the new male protector, the bridegroom, without essentially any independent time in between.

By the way, could female promiscuity of college girls be related to this? They have to leave the father but the bridegroom is not yet in sight?

If this is true, then daughter figures experience separation from the father-figure mentor as much more painful, unless she is handed over to another protective male figure.

September 2, 2004

Long talk with Father about my new venture in Arkansas. He thought I should pray Abba a lot as a healing of the father wound. Pere Thomas taught that the Trinity wants to be everything to us: father, friend, brother, beloved. The Holy Spirit is the Father of the poor.

I am wounded about "home." I want to have a home. I need to pray that the interior insecurity is healed in the home of the heart of God. Our ultimate home is heaven. We need to pray that the heavenly Jerusalem will touch down in our earthly homes so that we don't feel like refugees. In prayer we have a foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem – of our supernatural home.

In the heavenly Jerusalem we have the feeling of being the beloved and we will have sisters and brothers and friends and we will be fathered, but this is only possible in the Trinity.

Since I have these anxieties from childhood, natural security props are good, but they don't provide the ultimate security in the Trinity. Even if I have every natural security in Arkansas I could still feel insecure if I don't enough cultivate the supernatural. God can allow me to feel insecure in order to draw me into the supernatural security of my absolute home in the bosom of the Trinity.

September 7, 2004

Letter to Marty Barrack (the head of the little Hebrew-Catholic group there).

I am terribly excited about coming to Arkansas. I have some interesting things to do before I come. This weekend I am doing my Taming the Lion workshop in a parish. After that I have a mini-course with seminarians at my last little college on my book *Battle for the 20th Century Mind* with 3 very bright seminarians.

September 8, 2004

After a nap I awoke with such a feeling of bliss, I thought it was Mother Mary's kiss. I had been reading about how some of us find it hard to be close to Mary because we think of her as so perfect. Maybe she wants to overcome this barrier by making her presence felt. It helps me to imagine she is like Lily Von Hildebrand – so pure but so warm.

September 9, 2004

Letter to a friend who suffers terribly from feeling a failure in life.

As a penance for your sins of despair please make a big poster with this written on it

CHRISTIAN SUCCESS = HAVING LOVE FOR GOD AND NEIGHBOR IN YOUR HEART

I will try to remember that every time you call, the first question will be: how did you experience love for God and for others in your heart today?

September 9, 2004

(This back and forth involves an Orthodox Jewish family man in Israel who is moving toward Christianity in the Catholic Church and writing on the Hebrew Catholic Assoc. dialogue board. By the way many non-Jewish Catholics like to dialogue on this board. If you like what I quote from it, look into lurking or writing on it. And please pray for these Jewish seekers!)

From Richard R.

Subject: [AHC] Jewish Christian/the paradox and the mystery

Hi,

After reading Colleen's last post, so candid and beautiful, I decided that I wanted to tell you about an experience I had yesterday.

I went shopping with my family to Home Center (Yes, they're here in Israel, too). I looked around me at all those THINGS under those awful florescent lights, and the girls walking by with shirts too small and pants too tight...I had started saying the rosary silently on the journey there. I said to myself: keep going. And then it was as though all that emptiness and darkness yielded before a light. . Every word of the rosary carried me beyond my immediate environment and I was in the vestibule of someplace I hope to be forever. I felt sorry for people who were so pre-occupied with just which color plate they wanted. I wanted none of it.

And, this morning, my morning prayers, my Jewish daily prayers, opened to me as though arising out of the words I had addressed to Mary and the meditation that revealed the glorious mysteries in new ways.

My recent posts have not, perhaps, reflected this deepening Jewish Christian experience, coming as they have, out of my concern to restore the continuity of Jewish and Christian religion. I am afraid they sound cold, reflecting more the side of me that is deeply inspired by scholastic philosophy and is restless until I submit my mind to God, rather than the side of me that is restless until I submit my heart to God.

For me, the issue of how to be both a Jew and a Catholic (to me, Christianity is Catholicism. Protestant theology makes no sense to me when it is not positively offensive, and the inwardness, mystery and dignity of Catholic liturgy is in perfect harmony with my personality.) is a pressing existential issue. I must have both! Which is perhaps a bit greedy. But I have experienced in my own life the redemptive power of Catholic faith, even the small faith I have come to so far.

My father fled the holocaust from Nazi Germany in 1938. I fled to Israel from the spiritual holocaust of America in 1970. In that year, I applied to a yeshiva. When I was accepted, I burst out crying. I was home. But that was just the beginning of a difficult journey. Now, I can't imagine living without a mezuzah on my door, without kosher food, without the Sabbath, without the High Holidays coming up. For the life of the Torah has redeemed me from the culture of darkness and placed me in a culture of light. And it has taken me to the threshold of a new light that is its own light, though it shines forth from the eye of a child it has disowned.

Yet I am wary. For I know that I am one of those who would have chosen to remain in the desert rather than enter the "real world" of the land of Israel where manna would be replaced by wheat, where days spent in prayer, meditation and the contemplation of God's word would be largely replaced by farming, where faith would be tested by the burden of coping with materiality and the moral ambiguities of political life. I would fly from this world with too much relish, for there is nothing I want here anymore. And sometimes that makes me want to cry. Recently, as I was meditating on Christ carrying the cross, I realized that he didn't suffer that passively. He had to put his energy into carrying the very cross on which he would be crucified. In a small way, that's what life feels like, all the time, except the times when through meditation and prayer the seal of this world is broken.

I was consoled when I heard Fr. Groeschel talk about the hope of heaven. Yes, yes! I want to go to heaven. Jews don't talk much about heaven. They talk about taking care to do God's will in this world. Perhaps, if I were a better Jew I wouldn't need the consolation of hoping in Heaven. Perhaps, if I were a better Jew, it would be enough to know that I am serving God right here. Ah, but then, it is the very hope of heaven that has given me a patience for others I never had before, and it is the mystery of Jesus that has renewed my appreciation of Judaism.

Paradox imprisons until it is sprung by Mystery.

All the best,

Richard

Dear Richard,

Even though your letter was addressed to Colleen since you posted it on the Association of Hebrew Catholic Discussion Board I would like to respond -

Even though I am a woman, I was brought up by an atheist feminist mother to debate first and love later. My first interest in God was that He was Truth and it took me awhile to catch on that Love was His first name.

Wanting heaven is wanting to receive and give God and neighbor perfect love. Worldly selfish people don't want to go to heaven, because what's in heaven they would want? Or, to use Buber's wonderful language - God wants our response to His I-Thou love. I saw lots of love for God and eternal union with him in the Chasidic mystics Buber introduced me to.

I loved this post of yours because it revealed more of your heart to us.

The last line is a gem - a poet lives underneath the scholastic.

Regarding patience and mystical experience of God's love - to which you referred, Richard:

I am presently devoting most of the time I am not either at Mass or prayer, or writing on the Board, to giving workshops entitled

Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace.

The gist of the book is that when we don't feel sheltered enough in God's love with the hope of heaven (Augustine says the only happiness on earth is hope of heaven - there is all kinds of joy, of course, from experiencing God's gifts on earth but not the solid happiness of hope for heaven where God will dry all tears...etc.) when we don't feel sheltered in His love our vulnerability to harm, frustration, rejection, etc. makes us either hotly angry or coldly angry (long term resentment - cold-shouldering those who frustrate our plans, etc. etc.) Feeling vulnerable because we are too weak to bring about paradise on earth on our own terms, we either lash out IMPATIENTLY or withdraw COLDLY to lick our wounds.

Raging lion-like anger is a vain attempt to feel strong when frustrating events make us feel weak.

It took me 9 years of a secular anger-management free group that, by the way, has a branch in Israel - free but donations appreciated - called Recovery, Inc. - not 12 Step, plus psychotherapy, plus hours of contemplative prayer a day to become more of a lamb.

An olive wood statue of a lion with the lamb made by Christians in Israel graces my workshops!

Please pray for these workshops - some I am doing now in prison ministry.

September 13, 2004

Response to a woman on the Association of Hebrew Catholics' Discussion Web who thinks abortion and contraception are okay in many circumstances.

Dear Debbie,

When I prayed about it I was torn between logic and what I could read between the lines in what you wrote - or thought I could.

Let's start with logic. If we say that right and wrong depends only on feeling, then the feeling of the date rapist that he knows "she really wants it no matter what she says," counts as much as the feeling of a woman that she needs to use contraceptives. Feelings are indicators only when a person's emotions are a response to genuine intrinsic realities vs. mere reactions and sometimes over-reactions to past wounds, etc. Statistics I have read show that raped women who do keep the baby do better psychologically than those whose own hurt pushes them toward hurting the innocent child - same with incest.

I believe almost all cases where the life of the mother is at stake are now double-effect instances - though there are still a tiny percentage where it is one life against another. The way I explain this in ethics classes is this: the ship is sinking - people are clinging to life rafts. Do you have a right to push someone else off the life raft to increase your chances of survival? Sure, you are less blamable if you do it than if you could kill someone in cold blood, but still it is not right to do it. By the same token, killing your baby to save your life is not right even though much less blameworthy than abortion on demand for trivial reasons.

Enough logic. Between the lines I read that you have been hurt by ways you have felt treated in the Church and all of us have. I like to do my best to try to change ways of dealing with people in the Church that are less than loving. These may be intertwined in experience with ethical issues but they are separable in the sense that only if there is authority for moral teachings can we avoid anyone justifying anything by false logic.

I would be happy to dialogue further with you on any of this.

October 4, 2004 Star of the Sea - Arkansas

It has taken me almost 2 months to calm down after the throes of moving, even though I had so little to move.

November 5, 2004

Dear new friend,

(a member of our Hebrew-Catholic fellowship group who wears the Jewish traditional garb at Mass)

That is so wonderful that you were able to pray over people in this charismatic way with your Jewish prayer shawl! Alleluia. That's a Hebrew-Catholic development that I can totally get behind.

What a bond we have on fear of rejection. I like to say in talks - how ridiculous is it to go into deep depression because someone didn't smile at me when he or she just happened to have a migraine at the time.

You are giving me fuel for my back burner book on co-dependency and contemplative prayer based on the idea that only drinking in the love of Jesus in depth in prayer can heal those of us wounded in the heart. I was thinking of some title for the book I am writing about this like "Hole in the Heart" but it sounds too much like a murder mystery!

Of course you know the saying of the famous Pascal (discoverer of the vacuum) that "there is a God-sized vacuum in our hearts that only God can fill."

(This book is called Healing of Rejection with the help of the Lord and has since been published under that title by En Route Books and Media.

Actually I was amazed that anyone with an orphan background (which this man had) could be so openly warm to strangers as you are. That is certainly a grace.

Obviously it is worth being wounded to reach out to others warmly - isn't that the life story of Our Savior?

Dear friends,

A prayer for Hebrew Catholic meetings:

Yeshua, Messiah,

coming for your people,

now as then -

As we join in small

and large meetings,

we Jews,

who have let

You find us,

want to sing our fulfillment song

to 21st century Jews.

Help us to teach this song, also

to our non-Jewish brothers and sisters

in Your church,

so that Jews may hear this melody

from their lips, too,

and take hope.

Our Lady of Zion,

and your entourage

of Hebrew-Catholic saints,

lead our chorus,

in a Magnificat to

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia. Amen.

November 15, 2004

When I wake up I sometimes think, "I can go to daily Mass to receive my Jesus because this priest made the sacrifice of celibacy to bring Him to me."

November 24, 2004

The transition to living here in Arkansas was much more stressful than I imagined – not because of setting up house which only took 2 days but because of recurring computer glitches. On the shadow side, I feel ashamed of being so addicted to it that its failure causes me to go into a tailspin. On the positive side, after all, I am a communicator and in a new place writing to many old friends on e-mail and tracking the details of speech dates has to be important and quite a cross when it is not possible.

The people are wonderful – very interesting, diverse and lovingly friendly to me.

There is a hermitess here, building her place slowly. I feel such a pull to her and to her land. Even though my condo is wonderful – beautiful wide view of Arkansas hills and trees, much more spacious than my previous little guest hut at the monastery, there is something in me that can't stand conventional living places. I could when I had to for the family, but now....

Mostly I have been trying to see how to get a balance between prayer and working on ministries here and speaking in the wider world. I did a few EWTN shows on *Taming the Lion Within*, and as a result I am flooded with requests for talks near and far. On the one hand I am delighted to be wanted and on the other less and less able to handle the proliferation of details surrounding each speaking engagement which usually include either visits of local people at the place I go to who know me and want to see me and also trips to the family when these can be piggy-backed.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seem very, very near all day and night but in a different way than when I was at the monastery where spirituality was much more intense. On the other hand, I feel more comfortable as an ardent lay woman than as a highly deficient contemplative.

I am meeting the Bishop to see about becoming a consecrated widow. This feels just right at this point. Also, since consecrated widows are not allowed to wear a habit I am veering toward the blue denim outfits lots of the women here like to wear with a suit and blouse for talks.

I had been praying for the gift of counsel. It turns out that God does give it me when it comes to anger problems where I feel highly competent because of years of Recovery, Inc. and the synthesis in *Taming the Lion Within*.

December 2, 2004

I had a lovely experience just now. I go to the jail for Legion of Mary to minister to the women there. Today I went to the courthouse to pray for one of the women we visit in the jail whose case was coming up.

I left the key running in the car, but carefully locked it with the button in the window ledge. When I came out I realized I didn't have the key in my purse but congratulated myself on the spare in the magnet box under the bumper. Alas, that key didn't work. I walked over to the Conoco gas station. Seeing the huge cross I wear around my neck, the man asked me if I knew the Mahoney's who he thought were the most Christian family he'd ever seen. They live at Star of the Sea. As a result of this tie in, he asked a cop friend to open my car so I wouldn't have to pay the locksmith! Hurrah!

Dec. 5, 2004 About my daughter Carla's 5th high risk baby conceived on Martin's birthday.

Last One

O little childlilah

conceived late fall

when the branches

of the trees

had already said goodbye

to their leaves

How have you,

but a month old,

made yourself

so fiercely loved

that large older ones

pledge their lives for yours?

and over-the-hill

grandparents,

biting their lips

as they face

the dark night

laugh again

will we see you here

dear babe

or only in eternity?

Dec. 29, 2004

Great line in Michael O'Brien's *Strangers and Sojourners*: "I began to find it more important to forgive my enemy on the day I found out that I am my enemy."

February 1, 2005

Dearest Carla (my daughter)

Maybe it will pass, could be a week of a bad cold and sore throat after 3 weeks out of town, but I am so depleted that I just feel I have no fight left in me for ANYTHING!

At the moment my only concern is to go to Mass and live somewhere where it is warm in winter and cool in summer (i.e. adequate heat and A/C.) So far my little condo is pretty good for this.

What is going good is *Taming the Lion* on which I make no profit but I get lots of hits on the web from another round of TV programs based on the one I did at Steubenville with celebrity theologians and priests. It showed today and I already am getting e-mails and a huge old codger ran into me at the Catholic coffee shop and shook my hand with pleasure because he's just seen me on EWTN. It felt very nice.

Love, Mom

Feb. 17, 2005

Realization – because of charismatic renewal with its emphasis on witnessing about Jesus, I can talk to Bible belt gals in prison – singing Amazing Grace and witness from the heart better.

February 23, 2005

"Life has an eloquence greater than any sermon." - Kierkegaard

The Holy Spirit seems to say: "I want you to let Sr. Judith (the hermitess) teach you how to be compassionate -not just to minds, but to bodies in old age who are undergoing my Passion as a purification - now all bravado has to go and they have to become weak and in need only of My mercy. Will you be My merciful hands? If you bring compassionate love to those in most need - body and soul, will I not send you just such compassionate friends in your time of gradual bodily demolition?"

March 1, 2005

(Letter to a friend who spoke of missing Mass because of despair.)

I was praying for you and this thought came to mind, hopefully from the Holy Spirit:

It is not wrong or evil or unspiritual to say to God "I am in such mental, physical, emotional, spiritual pain, that I wish I was dead. Help me now." I have prayed that way on several occasions. I lie down on the floor and beg Him to help me any way He wants.

It is not wrong to say I wish I had a husband, a career, a way out of debt, or I wish my father and others in my family showed me more deep healing love.

What is wrong is to say - This is what I need God and you deliver or I'll go on strike by missing Sunday or Holy Day Masses - of course it's okay if you are utterly exhausted from your pain.

I love you and pray for you and that is REAL EVEN IF YOU ARE TOO MUDDLED FOR NOW TO FEEL IT.

March 1, 2005

Dear Ronda:

(her answer to the above letter)

I have not gone on strike. What's more, it's quite clear to me that I am full of pride and arrogance and really am rotten interiorly - hateful, angry etc. I simply don't know, and really struggle with whether I actually have faith at all. It is all quite unreal to me. I do go to Mass, but it feels empty and meaningless. I simply go through motions, but really am not sure if I believe at all.

Thank you for your prayers.

Dear friend, (answer by me to above reply of my friend)

Of course we feel hateful when we are angry. I think the anger has been long bottled up and it is scaring you when it comes out.

I think you are in transition on this to see that people don't fall over dead if you challenge them as in "Ronda, you're not listening."

Neither will God fall over dead if you tell him in prayer and at Mass that you feel awful and you feel as if you got a raw deal in life, etc. etc., but you hang in because you do think He is your only hope even if you are full of doubt.

March 3, 2005 from Anne (locutionary of Direction for Our Times – if you read this and like the way she writes in her own voice and in later citations from Jesus, Mary and the saints, go to [www.directionfourtimes.com](http://www.directionfourtimes.com))

"I feel my mission is to persuade people to find their path and begin the ascent. How on earth can we make this palatable to souls who do not want to suffer, do not want to sacrifice, and do not want to make changes in their worldly habits.

"Well first of all and most importantly, we have to show joy. These people are not stupid. If we are miserable nobody will want to join our ranks. And if we are not joyful, we should be.

"Secondly we need to set an example of climbing. If we are standing still on our own path, looking around and pointing at all the others who are not on their paths, we discourage people from finding their little lane up the mountain. We who stand still on the path take all of our credit from simply finding the path. Even a demon knows how to locate the path. The holiness comes from the ascent.

"Next, we need to illustrate to souls what is at the top of our little lanes. Is it worldly acclaim? A clear credit card account? A 2005 model car? A big house in a nice neighborhood? None of these things are at the top of the mountain. Only Jesus is there.

"Why is He to be desired? Well, He is the best therapist, the best friend, the best doctor, and the best accountant all rolled into one. He is omniscient, He has prepared your place for eternity and He is the only one with directions on how to get there. Souls must stop asking all of these other, equally directionless people for illumination when only Christ has the information they seek.

"I do not want to wade into the world and tell people that the road to heaven is steep and harsh. This message is too grim and dreadfully inaccurate. I will say this. The road to heaven has been marked out for you. You may view it from where you are standing and feel fearful as it looks difficult. Here is what you do not know. When you get to the foot of your little lane, the one personally labelled with your name, you will find Jesus there, waiting patiently, with total love and acceptance in His eyes. He is clean and clear, like beautiful mountain stream water. All is Light and Truth and Joy with Jesus. He will take your hand and up you will go, like the roller coaster car as the chains grab it and pull it, high, higher, and higher. You will quickly get so high that you will abandon your hold on your destiny and simply enjoy the view, allowing Christ to take you.

"Now, with regard to the steep drop that comes after you feel you have reached the top, it is only an illusion. You feel a sense of fear in your companionship with Christ at times, but it is only when you look straight down, forgetting that the car is underneath and the loving arm of the guardrail is safely holding you in. My advice to souls is to continue to enjoy the view, despite the down turns where you feel the wind on your face and the fear in your stomach. Jesus has you. You are really still on your little path, and the next ascent will come swiftly. The only difference in a worldly roller coaster and the heavenly mountain is that you end at the top with Jesus, not the bottom."

Night of March 6, 2005

Sudden words in my head, "I am looking for the hands of the one who will bury me."

(Many years after when I signed a funeral arrangement with an undertaker who was also a parishioner in the same Church as mine, I laughingly looked at her hands and said "I like looking at the hands that will bury me.")

March 7, 2005

Went to confession about envy of a beautiful woman who lives in our parish. I realized that even though I choose to be counter-cultural and not wear rich clothing and make up I could still be envious of those who do.

I am thinking of the meaning of that peculiar curse word, "mother-fucker." I have often wondered at it. Of course Freud must have loved it as exemplifying his theory, but in a related sense, is part of male sex the urge to re-enter to woman-womb and be released from the tensions of adulthood. In a book by an Indian writer called *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* by Vikram Chandra, right after a young lad insults another boy by calling him a mother-fucker, a prostitute claims that sex unites and makes castes equal "In love our hearts have mingled like red earth and pouring rain."

The insult symbolizes the taboo? Because God sets up sexual energy as a way to cross into new bonding with new families and children coming from that attraction, rather than all huddled and incestuous and ingrown?

Draft article March 14, 2005

#### Linguistic Cleansing

When you think of sins of thought, WORD, and deed, probably under the title "word" you are confessing curses, calumny, detraction, or harsh judgments.

But there is a need of purification in our words that does not involve sin per se but would also make us better Christians.

Examples:

Use of the words "all," "we," "some". I have an opinion about something but I am in a minority. By enunciating the opinion with the word "we," or "all," instead of "I" or "some" people, we are pridefully bolstering our side.

Use of demeaning descriptions such as bums vs. street people. It may seem artificial at first to change a common word to what could seem a euphemism, but it is also a delicate form of charity to avoid a word associated with disdain.

Not using words that are affectionate as a means of withholding love, such as never or rarely affirming others when they deserve praise.

March 15, 2005

I wanted to have a special prayer time before leaving for NYC so Sr. Judith gave me a Scripture:

"Cast your cares on Him." (Letter of Peter)

Jesus seemed to say, "You know, Ronda, you need never be anxious again, if you choose to trust in Me."

Dear Sr. Judith,

I was feeling pretty carefree and then 2 hours later came this painful but healing insight about the clothing issue (that is my concern about what I should wear as I move toward becoming a consecrated widow)

After Martin died, I put on lipstick and wore, for me, gorgeous hippie style colorful outfits and flirted with every single Catholic man I could find and after 12 of them rejected me I decided I wanted to wear no make-up, and only blue simple garments and just live for Jesus.

I thought that Jesus might be mad being chosen last, sour grapes, etc., but He seemed to tell me He didn't mind at all, and He scooped me up into His embrace and He still does, but since I associate the being scooped up with the blue, grey, tan dresses, it

still looms as an issue. In fact, the more loved by Him I feel the more I long for blue, charcoal and tan.

Eh?

This memory came up:

When we (me and my twin sister) were about thirteen we first put on make-up and wore tight clothes. Since our parents had divorced, or rather separated as they never were married except common law, our father used to pick us up on Sundays to take us to the movies, etc.

The first time I wore lipstick and a tight sweater to this Sunday meeting my father called me a slut and made me go home and wipe off the lipstick and change into something more a-sexual.

Now then, when I met Dietrich Von Hildebrand, the great philosopher and my new teacher, when I was 21, I was wearing lipstick and attractive clothing. None of the close- in members of the Von H set wore lipstick. Once there was a Christmas party. I was planning to wear a bright red dress kind of crepe with some back showing. Shortly before the party my godmother told me it was not modest to wear at a party where there might be priest guests and suggested I should not wear it.

So, of course, I identify being a beloved Catholic woman with not wearing make-up or red.

March 15, 2005

Got blue dye to change the color of my bright red A-line dress and it came out plum! Nice compromise.

Diana, my daughter who lives in the LA area, sent a box of NY Jewish food – lox, bagels, herrings, sturgeon, white fish. We gobbled it down – I commended her for being so lavish.

Tears listening unexpectedly to hearing the Kol Nidre on the radio (cello piece played at Jewish funerals that my son, Charles, who committed suicide played in concert). I called, my daughter Carla, asking “why did he do it?” She says she thinks we should credit him with free will and look at his suicide letter. (See En Route to Eternity, the chapter, ‘Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee’ where he explains that he doesn’t want to be an adult. This book is still published and sold by Miriam Press off the Association of Hebrew Catholic web-site, click on bookstore.)

March 22, 2005 – My sister Carla wrote about all this:

Dear Ronda,

Whew. This is a brief message of love to say I've read it (my letter about the teen experience with our father and make-up and sexy clothing). Yes I do remember the day, and about the Hildebrand set. You looked so beautiful in the dress Diana gave you - I believe it is a mauve color. It has flowing lines. I was fascinated. Isn't there a good balance between 'slut' red and drab gray or tan or blue? Dad definitely had problems - torn between his mother and father's different ethos. (My father's Dad was a Don

Juan Hispanic married to a puritanic Christian woman). But kids do need guidance - too bad though such kind of guidance leaves such wounds. I believe I got away from Dad's wrath because of my thinness. But now, be a beautiful bride of Christ. Bright clothes do not have to be provocative - just let them say, I'm for life! Love, Carla

My reply:

Dear Carla,

Thanks for writing in your busiest week. I had a funny answer right away. I bought dark blue dye to dye the bright red dress. It came out a lovely plum color.

Your affirmation means a lot to me. I am going to just go to the thrift shops and look for dresses that I like. The purple one, unfortunately, had tassles which got all grungy. So I cut them off, but it doesn't look that good any more for talks. So I will buy a few more.

I was part of a conference on Jews and the Church in NYC. NYC is like hell! The hotel was on 45th Street - those gigantic flashing signs and hordes of people - 1/2 hour to go 8 blocks in the rain in a taxi, garbage all over the streets.

The conference went well but I was delighted to get out of there.

Non-heated Church basement for the talks 60 degrees inside - hotel like our apartment years back with clanging radiators, peeling paint, walk down 10 flights because of a broken elevator all for \$144 per night! Plus painful bleeding hemorrhoids! However 180 people mostly over 60 sat for 12 hours in the cold basement listening to us! And the wonderful woman who sponsored the conference, Nona Aguilar, gave me a big stipend, more than agreed on, to compensate me a little.

I am making a vow that unless conditions improve drastically I will stop out of town talks after April 2007 at 70 years old. Want to make a pact?

Love and prayers, Ronda

From Nona, the conference organizer:

Dear Ronda,

Thank you so much for your contribution at the "Jews and the Church" conference. I heard from someone who is a friend of Alice Von Hildebrand's who told me that she came to the conference unwillingly (only because of her debt to the Von Hildebrand's) She was considerably more unhappy after she arrived. She reports that she settled down to listen in what could only be described as THE WORST FRAME OF MIND. But before dinner on Saturday, you turned her around completely. Yes, she learned a lot from Roy and from Father Koterski, but you were -- are! -- the star in her book. She had long heard of you from Alice Von Hildebrand, but never met you. She thought you were wonderful, funny, and utterly terrific. She quoted you

extensively, in fact. She concluded by telling me that yesterday, for the first time in her life, she knelt and prayed for the conversion of the Jews. "And I will pray for that intention from now on!"

Fondly, --Nona

Dearest Nona,

By the time I landed in my bed last night after a whole day of hemorrhoids and nausea on the plane, I actually thought I was going to die, no hyperbole. And now this!

Maybe to win the conversion of the stubborn Jews it takes just this much redemptive suffering! Tears of joy, Ronda

March 24, 2005

While praying the Mercy Chaplet today at 3 PM for Terri Schiavo I felt an urge to put down some thoughts from the standpoint of a former atheist though of Jewish background.

Cardinal Newman once wrote that it would not be licit to commit one venial sin even if the consequence would be the elimination of all the suffering in the world. Only a person who believes in eternal happiness could write such a sentence.

Nothing is more common to atheists than the view that the worst evil is suffering and that it is to be eliminated at any cost to others that is legal.

The only reason an atheist might think that some rights are inalienable is because in his/her mind the violation of rights such as the right to liberty would involve greater sufferings in the long run such as a hugely greater amount of slavery.

Ergo, if in the perpetrators mind the suffering of a husband in having a bed-ridden wife where she cannot help monetarily or in other tangible ways, would easily seem to outweigh 14 days of starvation. The sufferings of a baby in the womb from a saline abortion would be much less than the suffering of 24/7 care of a baby. According to most atheists, only because some people love their babies would that sacrifice of care-taking of babies be worth it.

The reason we don't think this way is because we believe that doing evil is worse than suffering. Someone could believe this is true even as an atheist just on the basis of the intrinsic negativity of evil, but it is unlikely. Plato tried to prove this in the Republic, namely that irrespective of any divine perspective to do an injustice is much worse than being a victim of an injustice. Why? Because it hurts the soul to do evil and the soul is more important than the body. But most atheists don't believe there is such a thing as a soul!

Most religious people can stand to take suffering rather than do evil because we believe that in heaven we will be blissfully happy.

Accordingly, if we really want to see an end of the horrors of anti-life sins in our times, we need to pray and pray and pray for the deep conversion of sinners and also against our own, perhaps, smaller sins of choosing evil rather than sacrifice.

The smallest avoidable sacrifice that we undertake out of love for God and neighbor is a witness that sacrifice is better than selfish choices to avoid suffering - if only letting someone get ahead of us on the freeway without bad-mouthing them, or getting ahead of us on the supermarket line!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, save souls!

March 25, 2005

There is a man here in Arkansas, Marty Barrack, who likes to say - "if anything I do annoys or puzzles you, don't waste more than 60 seconds before talking it over with me." Well, at first I didn't believe him but I have tried a few times and it worked out very well. He actually is humble enough to hear about glitches and not get so bent out of shape that others would never try again.

A friend of mine wrote this about Terri Schiavo:

"When the Law of man, which by nature is at the service of Life, retracts its plighted troth to Life and proudly vows allegiance to a new master whose name is Death, the Law, by Death's courtly sorcery, is transmogrified into a savage idol. Like all false gods, it demands of its worshipers human sacrifice. Terri Schiavo will not be its only victim any more than the first of the unborn to be lawfully aborted has slaked the appetite of Moloch for human flesh. In her graven images, Justice is depicted as being blind. Blind indeed has she become. There is One who can heal her blindness. He offers His Light to her darkness, but she tightens that black rag around her eyes to keep His muddy spit from getting on her painted lids, which flutter in coquettish anticipation of Death's sweet kiss."

March 27, 2005 (A poem I wrote about each of my daughter Carla's pregnancies. This was written before the birth of the 5th who were worried might miscarry.)

YOUR FIFTH,

Our Fifth

No more!

I can't!

No more!

I can't!

Only the

daring

take

risks!

The first

your

breakthrough

The second

your

praise

of

motherhood

in the valley

of the

shadow

of death

The third

your

triumphant

love

of

the

surprise

of personhood

The fourth

fear

hope

delight!

The fifth?

fruit

of

new love

And we

husbands,

brothers,

grandmas,

grandpas,

aunts,

uncles,

get to

lick

the

cubs!

Easter Sunday, March 28, 2005

Letter to grandsons age 9 and 5

Dear Maxie and Zacko,

Ever wonder why we celebrate holidays at all? The word "holiday" comes from "holy day". Ask your Mom what "holy" means. Well, why do we celebrate birthdays? It happened so long ago, your birth. You don't exactly get re-born on your birthday, do you? But, in celebrating your birthday, we are remembering the day you were born, and helping you see how unique and wonderful we think you are.

Same with holy days. We are celebrating a great event. Easter we are celebrating how that Jesus who died such a painful death on the Cross, rose from the tomb to go up to heaven.

If you are not sure what this was all about, ask Nicholas or Alexander to put on the Resurrection scene from the movie Jesus of Nazareth.

March 28, 2005

Fr. Define, (our wonderful Latin Mass, Society of St. Peter priest here in Arkansas) quoted Pope Gregory saying that our response to the events of Easter is unrestrained joy. (This parish has a combination of usual parish Catholics, charismatics, and Latin Mass people.)

I looked around. "Unrestrained joy?" The congregation appeared to be so grim. Of course they had joy inside, but certainly not unrestrained.

I am thinking of infusing this topic into the Readiness to Change talk (out of Von Hildebrand's book *Transformation in Christ*, mentioning how far from being ready to change most of us are. Most of us hate change, become very defensive at the idea of it, and dig in totally against the slightest criticism. I could use as an example how readily Latin Mass people would show unrestrained joy at Easter Mass and by contrast how many charismatics find it unbearable to listen to 1 1/2 hours of Latin. If asked to change we would resist greatly. Happily I, personally, am straddling enjoying both the English Mass and the Latin Mass, but in other areas, of course.....I am just as reluctant to change.

The goal would be not that all Latin Mass people would dance on Easter Sunday or charismatics go to the Latin Mass but that we would respect each other's freedom of choice.

I recently read a saint story about a Norbertine Saint who lived in the 12th century -- during the Crusades. Life was extremely depressing in those days and the saint story was filled with one depressing episode after another (about death, the plague, poverty, fear, doubt, etc). It was an inspiring saint story about faith in the midst of hopelessness.

But I try to think of such depressing stories as more reason to "count our blessings."

April 2, 2005

The dying Pope. My daughter Diana, not a practicing Catholic again yet, responded this way to a report that the Pope told his aides "Don't weep. I am happy. Pray with joy.":

Sister Judith wrote this lovely, loving poem:

THOU ART PETER

Peter hangs between earth and heaven

as his children pray for his soul -

God is calling him home.

Our father, our brother,

for he is Peter and servant

of the servants of God.

Our hearts cry our eyes weep,

we are losing our moorings

for he is Peter

The world mourns,

even the most hardened

is moved - for he is Peter.

Heads of states, heads of

nations, all recognize

this man is Peter.

Now he returns to the

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

from whence he came.

For he is Peter.

Sister Judith

From Carla my daughter in New Hampshire also not a practicing Catholic again yet:

Re: John Paul II's end of life-- priest, sportsman, poet, MAN

I shall miss a great friend, one who wooed me with that extraordinary visage when I was even further from the apses and naves than I am today. This pope is an astonishing figure. He will ALWAYS be alive, a galloping amazement, a tall white column, or just a man with a face borrowed from some eternal guidebook labeled "this is how they look when they are real."

(then Carla about this Quote from John Paul II from his death bed, some think addressed to the youth in the Square, others think addressed to Jesus and Mary):

"I have looked for you. Now you have come to me. And I thank you."

I think this sentence may not have been directed at the youths at all. As a statement uttered from a deathbed, can one imagine anything more joyous? No matter in whom I believe at the point of my own death, I suppose I would give my left arm now if I could be sure of saying the same.

Goodbye, shepherd. I had looked for you, oh, in many ways. I will miss seeing your crook on the mountains."

April 2, 2005

Amidst tears of joy that dear John Paul II is having a hand in drawing my daughters back to the Church, I thought "I will honor him by working for the Church until I drop dead" vs. always thinking if it is too physically hard to travel, etc. then I will stop, certainly by age 70!"

On quite another subject:

Letter to my sister Carla

I think you have always been very realistic and stoic about physical pain and I have always found it unbearable - as in dental pain, etc. I wonder why? Am I more sensitive to it, or just in general much more self-protective? Alas!

April 2, 2005

Pope Left a Message for Divine Mercy Sunday (Read by Archbishop Sandri in St. Peter's Square)

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 3, 2005 (Zenit.org).- To the surprise of the faithful attending the Mass for John Paul II's eternal rest, a Vatican official read a message the Pope had prepared for Divine Mercy Sunday.

"To humanity, which at times seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, egoism and fear, the risen Lord offers as a gift his love that forgives, reconciles and reopens the spirit to hope. It is love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much need the world has to understand and accept Divine Mercy!"

April 4, 2005

Little article for godspy (a web Catholic magazine. They didn't publish it even though they asked me for it):

"Most of us could write a long article about everything that we loved about John Paul II's impact on our lives. As a philosopher, I had a special joy in teaching his thought. Married to a playwright with daughters who are poets, these facets of St. John Paul the Great also delighted me.

"The line from his poetry I quote the most often comes from his rock quarry labors as a young man:

"When horror and hope are equally balanced in my soul, no one will accuse me of simplicity."

“When my son committed suicide (RIP) I thought - how can I teach or give speeches? If I couldn't save my son, who could I help? Instead, what I found is that surviving the horror of the suicide of a child gave me experiential credentials for all those I taught who had suffered in excruciating ways. They would not “accuse me of simplicity!”

“John Paul II was an active saint with a strong contemplative side - a third order Carmelite priest. He wrote his doctoral thesis on faith in John of the Cross. One of his themes is this: we long for and cherish mystical experiences. But no human experience can encompass the infinite God. This is why faith is even more important. Supernatural faith is a gift from God that reaches the infinite eternal God.”

Interesting talk with a woman philosophy prof. at Lyons College, Dr. Martha Beck who writes about Plato's dialogues. She wondered how I wrote so much. I replied:

“Well, you are younger than I and still have time. My guess is that you are trying to write perfect insights perfectly, like Plato did, whereas I write, like Kierkegaard, as a desperate person conveying saving insights to other desperate readers!”

April 10, 2005

Quotes from Pope from the Ghetto by Gertrud Von Le Fort:

“Justice exists only in hell; in heaven there is grace, and on earth there is the cross. But the church is here, that she may bless those who bear this cross.”

“He whose love for Christ is not yet perfect, is loved so much the more perfectly by Christ.”

“It is better for a person to die of the truth which the Lord has created, than that he should continue to live on the illusions he creates for himself.”

April 11, 2005

Sisters of the Cross

Dear Sister Cecilia,

Here is the preface (to a new book by Venerable Conchita of Mexico, the grandmother 20th century saint who founded 5 different orders/groups in the Church and probably will be soon canonized. Google her to find out more).

“When you listen to a beautiful love song, do you examine each word? And if some lyrics manifest a pathos or a joy that goes beyond your own, do you turn down the volume, not to hear the melody? I doubt it.

For those of us nowhere near the height or depth of Venerable Conchita's union with Jesus, there may be a moment when listening to her love song that we want to close the book because the pathos and joy of it is above and deeper than our own level. We find that we can't drop it. Why? Because it is too beautiful.

When reading Holy Hours, I seemed to hear my Jesus tell me not to give up because my prayer is so inferior to Conchita's, but rather to sing her song for now, only in a "lower key." For example, when Conchita asks Jesus for more and more sufferings, I could just ask for the grace not to make such a fuss over the sufferings that come along unbidden.

Meditative reading of Holy Hours speaks to a place in our hearts we don't always want to go. Why? Perhaps because there is a part of us that does not want to be too intimate with Jesus. "Love is not loved" Saint Mary Magdalene dei Pazzi used to proclaim.

Conchita's spirituality is precisely a proof of the depth we all could go in experiencing the love of Jesus were we to surrender totally.

Don't we not want, just as Conchita did, "to kiss those pale and mute lips, which spoke only tenderness and breathed only charity...?" (Holy Hour, 3)

Don't we want, just as Conchita did, "to try to think inside of Jesus, not just live, but think with His very thoughts, so saintly, so immaculate, and as transparent as the sky without clouds...just and non-judgmental...?" (Holy Hour 7)

Don't we want, just as Conchita did, "to perform our works in a supernatural manner...(rather than) routinely, thus, lazily, without stirring up fervor, scattered and without spirit.?" (Holy Hour 13)

Don't we want, just as Conchita did, "to make our lives a tapestry of acts of love that may serve as both wrapping and life for all our virtues.?" (Holy Hour 14)

Don't we want, just as Conchita did, "to hide in the depth of the rock, to be cured and become happy.?" (Holy Hour 17)

Don't we want, just as Conchita did, "to cheer up, and be brave!?" (Holy Hour 21)

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Now, as you begin to join the heart of Venerable Conchita in her Holy Hour prayers, ask the Holy Spirit to make you at least long to long for the transforming union that was hers.

I had such an unexpected experience this evening. A woman friend wanted me very much to go to her concert in Batesville. There wasn't enough room in her husband Buddy's car and she had to go early to rehearse, so she said I should hitch a ride with a friend of hers, a widower. My letter to her tells the story. I think it is because of the green dress vs. my usual dull rags.

Dear Anne,

Maybe you're a Catholic yentah (matchmaker)? This Paul man, who obligingly drove me to the concert, who, by the way, is 90 years old, on the way back described it as his first date since becoming a widower 7 months ago! When I told him that it was not a date and that I was trying to be a consecrated widow, he replied that he had decided when his wife died not to remarry. But then as I was getting out of the car at the Church he remarked, while inviting me to visit him, that even though he was 90 he still could do a lot, such as still drive very well, and concluded with "well, now you have a chance for a boyfriend!"

He seemed to me to be a dear fellow, full of humor and New Yorkese ways, but he didn't seem to get it or was that just his way of being friendly?

He is probably more lonely than he divulges and just wants to have more feminine friends?"

April 30, 2005

Dear friends,

Not sure yet but I have been invited to apply for a co-host job on a Catholic radio station (also on the web) for a Catholic Woman to Woman show. It would be a paid job and I could do it out of my house so I could phase out all travel except to family and friends and reach potentially 26,000,000 people a day! It is a paid job so I could pay someone to do all my errands, etc., maybe even eat a rack of lamb from time to time.

I would become the Dr. Laura, Dr. Ruth, of the Catholic Church - Dr. Ronda!

If it's not God's will it will crash quickly, I hope.

(As it happened, they never got back to me because the person in charge decided not to have a woman to woman show at all! I felt deflated, especially having sent the above letter to all my friends and acquaintances. Since I had shortly before done a program for EWTN which reaches 50 million, Jesus seemed to joke with me: "So 50 million isn't enough for you, you need 26 million more?"

May 1, 2005

Dear friends,

Even though we are not supposed to discuss politics on the Association of Hebrew Catholic discussion board, there is a related philosophical issue with regard to attitudes toward Israel.

Just on an ethnic level, people who live in a country have a right to love it and want to protect it. This does not mean they should defend it in the sense of "my country right or wrong," still one can't say that a person of Jewish ancestry whether atheistic or

orthodox or anything in between doesn't have a right to hope that the land of ones people would survive just as US Irish Americans want Ireland to survive.

For instance, Germans fought for their Fatherland even if they were anti-Nazi just as we would fight for the US in spite of our horrible abortion laws! Or, maybe we shouldn't???

May 1, 2005

(Message of Jesus, alleged dictated to Anne – Direction for Our Times:

Be at peace, dear children of heaven. There is no reason for anything but a peaceful countenance. I am working in your soul if you are allowing Me to do so and you will come closer and closer to Me. You see that I am calling you to do this. I want you to behave like Me and even to think like Me. You will be gentle and kind to those you meet in your day and they will then consider what it is that makes you different. And there is a contrast between those following Me, and those following the world. The closer you come to Me, the greater the contrast. I would like to see a multitude of souls drawing closer to Me. You can help with this project because you represent Me. I am calling everyone and I use each of you to do this. So be My voice in your world and cry out to your brothers and sisters. Tell them of My love for them and tell them of My wish to draw them closer to Me. If you allow Me to work through you, I will do so. If you practice loving all souls and being merciful to all souls, soon you will be speaking My name to them. You understand that if you are not merciful and kind, it will not matter what you say because souls will be repelled. It is only through your love, inspired by Me, that they are moved. So be gentle as I am gentle and souls will be drawn back into the safe pasture of My Sacred Heart.

May 3, 2005

Dear Carla (when she was pregnant with her 5th child).

In a speech Pope Benedict gave in 2002 about the nature of the beautiful he contrasts the Greek Adonis type notion with the Christian notion in which the disfigured Christ on the cross is the most beautiful because it is the great demonstration of love.

This paragraph made me think of beautiful non-pregnant Carla and beautiful pregnant Carla so I thought you might like it:

"In the face of the Shroud of Turin so disfigured there appears the genuine, extreme beauty: the beauty of love that goes "to the very end."

(Now, since 2013, that same daughter, Carla, suffering with lymphoma, sees the Agemian painting of Christ based on the Shroud of Turin come alive, and He speaks to her also!)

May 8, 2005 (letter from my daughter, Diana)

Happy Mother's Day!

Thank you for being a tiger when we were little, and letting us ride you and brush your hair and flying us in the air. Thank you for loving every scribble and jot of paint and words I ever created, and instilling in me the knowledge that I was special and valuable.

Thank you for showing me (by following your model) how to be passionate about what you do, and to try hard even when it's difficult to do your best. Thank you for suffering with such enormous dignity that it's difficult to know you're in pain.

Thank you for believing so much that faith flies like white heat from your fingers. Thank you for doubting so little, even when tested like Job.

Thank you for sharing your warmth and generosity. Nobody I ever knew gives so much and so easily. Thank you for your joy in small things like a lovely beach and your marvelous gratitude for small gifts.

Thank you for letting me ride (figuratively) on your tiger back as you age, marveling at your courage and strength. I pray that I can be the extraordinary woman you are at your age.

I love you, Mommy.

Diana

Dearest Daughter,

I love you so much. It is nice to think that you think of me that way, even if it is not true. You paint me in strong colors and I feel weak and shaky a lot. Is it because I really am stronger than I think, or because you want me to be strong and think that if you tell me I am strong I will be stronger? If the latter, you are probably right.

Perhaps I suffer big things with dignity and humor but I am a captious little foot stamping dwarf about every day frustrations which you deal with much more humor and grace.

I think of myself as tight and miserly even if having bouts of generosity and you as easily generous.

If I would paint a portrait of you I would have strands of all the colors of the rainbow moving from the circumference of the edges of the picture into a close swirl that will tighten up to become your final personality, something so strong and focused.

Love, Mom

From: Diana

Huh, I think that the weak-shakiness is the core of strength, paradoxically. Know what I mean? It's the denial that creates the black stuff. And we're all on our way to where.

I'm having fun with my new relationship with Mary Magdalene. (She prayed to St. Mary Magdalene for a special favor) I had such a beautiful day yesterday ... fun moments with my husband, Pete, dancing around scattering rose petals and telling me I was the most beautiful vision he ever saw! I never asked for much before, and God is giving it to me in spades since I asked. I feel beloved.

Funnily, I picture you the same way (the rainbow thing) but muted a bit because you are so afraid to grab life with both hands and just lap it up. So is Jen, I fear. Generations skip.

I love you!

May 12, 2005

From a letter written to a "recovering homosexual," from one who ministers to Christian homosexuals trying to become chaste:

"...This whole issue of "remembering" the "good" times. There is no mistake about it, there were some good times. In fact, many of those "good times" look a whole lot better than the moment or situation we are in right now. To say otherwise would be "double speak" and the ultimate denial.

"Fact is, not everything we experienced in our bondage days was totally awful. I can remember the good times, just like anyone else can.

"So could the children of Israel when they were dusty, dry and hungry in the wilderness! We imagine that the bondage of Israel must have been nothing more than brutality and torture. Thank you Cecil B. De Mille for that!

"In fact, the Israelites owned property, in Goshen. They also had really nice vegetable gardens...hence the longing for garlic and melons, when all they had to eat in the desert was "this manna". They probably had some good fishing days in Egypt also.

"And yet, the Scripture clearly says that God heard their cries and moans for deliverance. No matter how nice the fishing might have been, or how plenteous the produce, Israel knew that they were called to be free men, not slaves. Servants yes (of God), but not slaves (of man).

"Deliverance came...miraculously. Through the Red Sea Israel passed. Freedom! Next God led them to some very bitter waters. YUK! Who could drink THAT??? Moses throws some charcoal in it and it's made sweet. Next, it was just a short 7 mile walk to the most beautiful Oasis you can imagine. This Oasis had 7 Springs! Ever been to Mammoth Springs? Imagine 7 of those. WOW. And the water was not only plenteous, but sweet too!

"Now why in the world didn't God just take Israel from the Red Sea and lead them directly to the Oasis?

"Next stop, a huge rock! Not a drop of water in sight. Man did the people complain about that! "Better to be in bondage in Egypt", they said, "than to be brought to this wilderness to die!" Moses strikes the rock and, VIOLA!, water comes out! Paul tells us that that rock was Christ!

"Oh, it was SO much better in the old days! We had garlic! We had melons! We had homes and a favorite fishing spot! This freedom thing is too much work, and the rations leave a whole lot to be desired too! We should never have left Egypt in the first place. Woe is us!!! We wanna go back!"

"Sound familiar?"

"So, why didn't God just lead Israel to a cleft rock with a spigot in it in the first place?"

"The answer to both these questions is the same.

"They never knew the character of the Father! God had to teach them His character. I think this one object lesson went something like this.

"Trust Me. Bondage may appear sweet. Freedom may "appear" bitter.

"Only the Power of your Father can make this freedom sweet. Once sweetened, you WILL be nourished and saved by it."

"Never think that today is "it". Times of beautiful refreshment await...just a few miles down the road...just over the next sand dune."

"Nothing, not even solid rock, can prevent your Father from meeting you, and showing Himself strong on your behalf."

"Although it might seem like a wilderness that you're in, remember that it is your Father Who has brought you to it. Can it get any better than that?"

Oh yeah, one more thing. "You can't drink and complain at the same time! Do you wanna gripe all day? or start drinkin'?"

"I had a very deep and long lasting relationship. It was so beautiful that it almost killed me! Talk about co-dependency! If I'm honest, I can see that the relationship was sick. No matter how "good" the "good times" seem to have been. A slave is still a slave, no matter how good the fishing or abundant the produce.

Anyway, this is what I have learned about remembering the "good times".

June 10, 2005

Dear Sister Judith, (concerning the question of what I should do to foster a movement for consecrated widows in the Church)

I prayed about this during the night and this morning. I got back a mixed message, as it were.

- To think of *myself* as a woman of Jesus, a widow dedicated to the Lord -

June 15, 2005

*Kiss from the Cross: A Saint for Every Kind of Suffering* is going out of print. It seems like the end of an era to me. It sold some 15,000 copies over its 15 or so years of existence. May God bless all who read it and took hope. Many thought it my best book.

“The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job)

(Many years later, to my joy, it was published in Korean by means of a priest whose vocation, he claimed, was saved when he read this in the seminary. He translated it into Korean many years later. And the book in English has been republished by Sophia Press under the title *Avoiding Bitterness in Suffering with the Help of our Heroes – the Saints.*)

June 16, 2005

I found this note of mine in a file for the book on overcoming rejection I am working on. The note didn't fit the manuscript but I want to save it to ponder it: - it was a propos of Freud saying women want to control men.

I asked myself if I am part of this battle of the sexes for power. If I meet men in authority positions I can't control, do I grow to hate them? I do become anxious, such as dealing with the type of priest who charms women into being willing slave-like helpers? Do I like male students because I can control their wildness and they have to obey me?

June 17, 2005

Dear Anne, (I was asked to write an endorsement for Anne's series of locutions entitled *Direction for Our Times*):

“I started off reading Anne's *Direction for Our Times* in a sceptical frame of mind. The Church's teaching on private revelation is that you don't have to believe any specific alleged account of locutions or visions. It's not like Scripture and Tradition that every Catholic must believe. And, in fact, some alleged messages don't ring true to me at all.

“When I started reading *Direction for Our Times*, I was charmed. First I was delighted with Anne's honesty about her own failings, struggles and doubts. Then I was delighted with the “voice” of Jesus - so loving, compassionate, yet firm and authoritative. Then I was delighted with the way the words attributed to Him touched my own heart.

“Why do we need these messages now? I can't say for everyone, but for many of us old-timers (I'm 68) who have been faithful for decades there is always need for renewal of hope and joy in the Lord. We need to know that He understands how hard it is for us to see all the dissent in our beloved Church. We need to know that He understands how hard we try not to be among the lax and sinful, but how often we fail. We need to know that He forgives us and still honors our attempts to please Him even in the midst of our distractions.

"I love all the Volumes I have been able to read, but Vol. I, with the many dialogues between Anne in her life as a wife and mother, spoke to me especially as a woman in the Church. I read excerpts to a mothers' prayer group in a parish. They were so moved. After my talk, within 15 minutes the volumes were whisked off the book table by eager hands.

"Private Revelation is not infallible, but what I am sure of is that I am being inspired through these readings to greater trust in the God who is our only hope."

June 21, 2005

Images of the week:

Listening to rap music at a restaurant, I wondered, is this the pop version of talking in a musical beat in opera?

Wonderful last stanza of an Auden poem about what's wrong with romantic love:

"Stand, stand at the window

as the tears scald and smart

you shall love your crooked neighbor

with your crooked heart."

Thought before getting my upper dentures: After I am de-fanged I should be a less aggressive person! Smile.

May 30, 2005

Direction for Our Times, As Given to Anne a Lay Apostle

(This part is about the discernments that were made concerning Anne's apostolate and the writings by authorities. If you are not interested, skip ahead. I am including these endorsements because I do think these messages come from Jesus and they are having a good influence on me, so I will be quoting them frequently throughout.)

In July 2003 Our Lord indicated to Anne that her journal was to be published and disseminated:

Jesus: "These words I bring to you are more Good News. I want you to share these words, as you would share the Good News. If you prepare a great banquet, filled with the finest of foods, you do not sit down alone to sample and enjoy it. You invite friends and loved ones to share and celebrate together. In the same way, I want you to share My words. I will secure the necessary permissions and then you must obey the promptings I place in your heart. All will be seen to. I require only your obedience. I send these words to call humanity back to the Light."

A sister who works closely with Anne delivered these messages to Anne's bishop and asked him to read them. Anne began to meet regularly with her bishop and parish priest.

In August 2003, Jane Gomulka contacted Jim Gilboy, the President of CMJ Marian Publishers and asked him to consider publishing this journal under the name of Direction for Our Times. Jim indicated that he does not publish private revelations. He explained that his ministry stems from the Blessed Mother's messages in Medjugorje, and he did not want to detract from this work. He ended the conversation with "I work for Our Lady so drop them off and I'll look them over." Jim reviewed the messages and met with Anne.

After careful discernment in prayer Jim made a decision to print the series of messages in December 2003. Jim requested and was given permission from Anne's Bishop to print the Volumes.

#### Rome and the Personal Messages for Pope John Paul II

In January 2004, Anne took a series of 12 personal messages for Pope John Paul II. Per Our Lord's instructions, Anne asked Jim Gilboy to deliver them to the Holy Father. Jim agreed, although he had no viable connection to Rome at this time. Soon though, a series of connections opened a path to Rome. Jim and his wife, a Sister who works closely with Anne, and Jane Gomulka met with Andrzej Maria Cardinal Deskur, retired Director of Communications at the Vatican, and long-time friend of Pope John Paul II.

On Holy Saturday, April 10, 2004 our group met with Cardinal Deskur and presented to him what is now Volumes One through Four of the series entitled Direction for Our Times as Given to Anne, a Lay Apostle. Jim and the group explained that Anne received 12 personal messages for the Holy Father contained in a sealed envelope. Cardinal Deskur received the group warmly, asked many questions about Anne and her obedience to her bishop, the Church, and the mission. Cardinal Deskur was given the following message from Jesus which Anne received before we left for Rome:

April 5, 2004

"I would ask my servants to present these words as words from heaven. I have a great mission that I wish to accomplish through these messages and I have attached graces that are unimaginable to human minds. Those who read them will understand if they have been called to participate in this heavenly project. I want these words disseminated the world over. I will see that this is accomplished. Ask me for guidance in this matter and guidance will be available to every person who pays attention to My will. Good and holy children of God, understand that these times are not like other times. These messages are not like other messages. I am trying to save many souls at this time. Do not think this can be done in the future. It must be done now. I ask that you treat this work according to my heavenly request for urgency. Your reward will be no small thing, even though I know you serve from love, not personal interest. Feel My graces flow through these words to your soul. Feel my truth as I convey it to you. All is well, as I am directing all, but I need many yes answers at this time."

Cardinal Deskur agreed to take the 12 personal messages to the Holy Father the next day at their brunch on Easter Sunday. Cardinal Deskur kept a copy of the four Volumes as well as Anne's personal journal. Cardinal Deskur directed Jim Gilboy to take a copy of the Volumes to Cardinal Ratzinger's office. Jim left the copies with Cardinal Ratzinger's secretary since the Cardinal was out of the country during our visit.

On Easter Sunday our group was privileged to sit on the same platform as the altar for Easter Sunday Mass. We enjoyed the liturgy celebrated by Pope John Paul II, from the third row behind the priests and altar boys. After Mass, we saw Cardinal Deskur moving toward his van to attend brunch with the Holy Father. The sisters accompanying him were carrying the sealed envelope containing the messages for Pope John Paul II.

The following Wednesday, April 14, 2004 our group had a personal audience with the Holy Father following the general audience.

#### Publishing the Volumes and Disseminating the Message

By the end of May 2004, Jim Gilboy had completed publication of Volumes One through Four and began disseminating them to religious bookstores and the general public.

In September 2004, Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans, Louisiana began reading the Volumes. He was so inspired by these words from heaven that he decided his FOCUS Worldwide Television Network needed to play a role in getting these Volumes distributed quickly. He enlisted the assistance of Sr. Briege McKenna and Fr. Kevin Scallon to discern the [content of the ] Volumes and make contact with Anne's bishop. After reading the Volumes and speaking with Anne's bishop, Sr Briege was deeply touched. She encouraged Archbishop Hannan to proceed. Archbishop Hannan also spoke with Anne's bishop, met with Anne and filmed a series of interviews with Anne and her team. These programs launched the mission throughout the United States.

In October 2004, two Sisters returned to Rome to deliver the remaining sets of Volumes to Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Deskur. Cardinal Deskur met with the sisters and was given copies of Volumes One through Ten. The following Sunday, October 31, 2004, the sisters were granted a private audience with The Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his papal apartment.

In October 2004, Volume Six was published.

On October 15, 2004 Anne recorded the last message for Volume Ten. This completed the recording of Direction for Our Times as Given to Anne a Lay Apostle. Our Lord indicated that this body of work, The Volumes was complete.

In December 2004 Volumes Seven, Nine and Ten were published.

Currently Volumes Five and Eight are not in print. Anne's bishop will decide [discern] when these Volumes should be printed.

(Volume Five was only printed in 2012 or 2013).

...On Christmas night, December 25, 2004, our Lord revealed to Anne that she would receive a telephone call asking her to go to Rome. He instructed her to say yes, and that she would be traveling with her husband. In January 2005 Archbishop Philip Hannan called Anne to ask whether she and her husband would travel with him to Rome to meet with Cardinal Deskur. Anne, her husband and the Archbishop meet with Cardinal Deskur. Following the meeting, Archbishop Hannan was taken to Cardinal Ratzinger's Office at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Archbishop Hannan met with the priest responsible for investigation of mystical phenomena. Archbishop Hannan was confirmed in his discernment. He was told to continue His work with this mission.

Jesus to Anne: February 9, 2005

"The Church is aware of this mission of mercy and is assisting through the cooperation of your bishop. It is I who wills this mission and it is I who directs its course."

Other notes from these explanations: Our Blessed Mother has indicated that Anne is to remain anonymous at this time.

Blessed Mother to Anne: April 16, 2005

"I want you to retain your private life as a mother and wife. In order for this to be possible, souls must obey my instructions. Anne, you will speak for Jesus and represent this mission. When you are speaking, you are Anne. When you are working for this mission, you are Anne. When you are serving your family at home or away from home, you are a mother and wife and you belong to your family. Souls must be respectful of this because your vocation must be protected. If the situation arose that you were serving this mission and your family was suffering, we would take you from the mission. You have a heavenly duty, Anne, so please advise souls to be respectful. You will bring great graces to others but only through obedience to heaven. I will help you with each situation but we are serious about this distinction of service. Your family will not suffer. I am personally appealing to each soul to respect this woman's anonymity."

On January 31, 2005 Anne's bishop, in Ireland, wrote the following letter:

"To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Anne, a lay apostle, is a Catholic of my diocese in good standing. She is a wife and mother of small children who is devoted to her husband and family. I know her to be a deeply spiritual and committed person. In recent years she has felt called to a more public role in the Church while remaining anonymous. She is at all times insistent that whatever she does in the area of public witness to her faith is done in obedience to me, her bishop, and in accord with the authority of the Catholic Church."

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The lay apostolate started by Anne involved different pious practices. I wondered why daily Mass wasn't one of them. I asked Anne to ask Jesus about this and here is the answer He allegedly gave:

Jesus says, "Many of My most beloved servants come to Me in the sacrifice of the Mass each day. This loyalty delights Me and I use these graces for others without cease. Indeed, it is through these graces that many of My lay apostles will be called. I know that many lay apostles will be inspired to do this, also. But I am not insisting that they do. This apostolate is for everyone and not everyone will be called in the same way. I have carefully selected the actions that will be necessary for Me to preserve these souls in My grace during the time of transition. All is well. I do not make mistakes.

Talking to Jesus about this, here is what I, Ronda, seemed to get:

"Daily Mass could be analogous to giving everything to the poor that is not a necessity. It is an invitation not an obligation. That doesn't mean I, Jesus, would not prefer these practices, but that I may lead certain of My people by a circuitous route to these decisions at another time. Just because they may not yet be willing to do "x" doesn't mean that it isn't great that they are doing "y." And since they don't want to receive the grace I would give them to do "x" I am happy they are doing "y."

Well, that's my kind of philosophical way of analyzing what He means and I will ponder it further to see if I am missing something I need to understand.

It's enough to keep me in unity with the movement though I don't think I am called to be a lay apostle in this movement. Many times Jesus has told me not to belong to anything but the Church. I think it is because this analytical bent just gets me upset with something or other that is happening, and then I upset others needlessly.

I have been pondering this since that time. Now, in 2013, when I am editing this part of my journal, I have another idea about it. Could it be that there are very devout Catholics who have such critical minds that were they to go to daily Mass without fail, given the problems in the Church today, they would become overwhelmed by noticing these problems and not more holy necessarily?

June 7, 2005

I was amazed by my daughter, Carla, loving my toothless look when I take out the dentures. She immediately brightened on seeing me without the teeth or dentures and said that it is my real self, full of joy. Before I looked unhappy and angry most of the time according to her. She just laughed and laughed looking at me. I presume that being de-fanged I think there is no point (pun intended) in expressing anger!

June 22, 2005

Dearest Emily, (my friend slowly dying of MS),

As I write I am watching deer that come to inhabited land because of the draught, I suppose getting moisture from the lawn sprinklers. I am listening to a favorite – Dvorak's Trio in E minor.

Since in my anger-management system the psychiatrist is constantly inveighing against romanticism I have become slightly wary even of my love for romantic music! Low, the psychiatrist, defines romanticism very broadly as any unrealistic feelings that everything could be perpetually perfect or beautiful in life – as in people wanting to think their own views of how to do things are always right and therefore they can critically chew everyone else out over any other viewpoint! A startling but eventually compelling thesis – namely that being opinionated, in this manner, is a fatal obstacle to daily contentment.

Actually I am writing you now because I am marveling at your pain tolerance. I just had my upper teeth removed and a denture put in and the pain killer seems to me to be quite inadequate, so I am on strike not adding the denture, which feels like a steel orange, into my already sore gum mouth and feeling inferior for being unwilling to bear pain. Without the denture I look like an amiable old crone – so I will have to figure out a solution – other than being, of course, a hermit!

You asked if I liked Graham Greene. He is a sort of sinner Catholic. I feel ambivalent about him. I find his serious novels fascinating but don't like some of the lighter ones at all – and of English Catholic novelists - much prefer Evelyn Waugh in general. If I had to analyze it I would say Greene depicts the type of Catholic caught between a sense of obligation to God and religion but not enough fervor to surrender to God out of love or reception of love. Therefore these duties become unbearable when they involve sacrifice of human happiness (whether real or imagined).

I am reading a fascinating series of Civil War novels by a man called Shaara – they are written as if he could know the intimate thoughts of Lee, Grant, etc. I picked them up to try to understand both Southern historical viewpoints (since I have been living in the South quite a while now) and men's power struggles to understand better the men in power in situations I have left. I am so ignorant of history that I didn't even know that States had the right to secede. Is that true? We read history only from the total Northern point of view in High School.

Shaara, who is a Christian, eventually, 500 pages into each saga, comes up with the view that the nobility of war is not the motives or politics but the heroism of men willing to die for each other.

Any day Carla's 5th baby – a girl, will be born after high risk and lots of pain. I will go to New Hampshire, July 4-21, to see little Martina. (The baby was born on July 9th with terrible labor pain. I thought about Jesus suffering for us to go to heaven as like the mother suffering for the baby to come into the world. "How can any child think his/her mother did not love him/her watching a labor!")

July 8, 2005

Long talk with Carla the night before the birth of the baby about how people know that their friends are pretending what they both know is not true. Why? Issues have to do with lots of shame and fear. She thinks I call myself an old hag even though we all

know I am attractive in my own way. Why not admit that I look like an old hag because I don't wear make-up and dress well, instead of hiding my relative attractiveness under an old hag look? I saw she was right, but woke up still wanting to be a dedicated widow, dressed very simply for many reasons. One of them is not wanting to be annoyed and fighting all day with a second husband, if a prospect turned up, unlikely - but more importantly, because I am in love with Jesus in a mystical way and He doesn't care if I look like an old hag because He is interested in my soul.

June 24, 2005

From Anne to me:

I was praying for you this morning, on this beautiful feast day, and our Lord allowed me to feel His love for you. Ronda, Jesus delights in you. He delights in your mind, in your need to understand, and in the way your mental meanderings always bring you right back to Him.

Dear Anne,

I watched the last 2 videos (out of some 8) of this beautiful real drama of the life of Teresa of Avila. It is not a documentary. It is marvelously done by a great Spanish actress - in Spanish with English titles.

(I have been showing it to classes ever since. I regard it as the best religious movie about a saint ever produced. Google it!)

June 25, 2005

Dear Jesus,

I am touched by Your words to Anne about You being delighted with me. At first I thought, who knows if it is really Jesus, but it has begun to sink into my self-deprecating psyche that You really do delight in me.

Of course everything good in me You put there and everything bad I put there, but still I had to let You put it there - not the natural gifts but my use of them for Your kingdom.

Ahh. Somehow the de-fanging of the upper dentures has made me different inside also. Maybe because of all the acute pain during the transition?

I woke up this morning 3 days after the surgery feeling rather happy. The words that came to me were "Just you and Me, babe," due to disappointments with various strangers and friends. I think You are strengthening me to see that my compulsive concern about where I live is silly because You really do want me to be a kind of free-lancer - a free spirit to send to different places in Your Church and this passionate desire to settle down and put in roots and belong is just my idea and doesn't work because of the too-critical side of my nature. I am battling it in Recovery, Intl., but meanwhile and maybe all my life I will be a pilgrim for good and bad reasons - "You shall love your crooked neighbor with your crooked heart."????

Anyhow for this moment let me enjoy the freedom of this thought.

Jesus, I love You passionately. You are greater than all my crooked psyche woundedness issues. Yes!

June 25, 2004

Dear Anne,

Hope you never have such a problem. I was signed up for a talk today at the parish. Didn't think the pain from the tooth extraction Tuesday would last that long.

I was faced with - cancel the talk or wear the dentures impinging in a crucifying way on my raw gums or take out the dentures and give the talk looking like an old hag.

God gave me the grace to address the audience this way:

Dear friends, I had this option. I decided if the dentures hurt too much I am going to remove them. When I do, instead of gasping with horror at my old hag look - blow me a kiss. They laughed and laughed and when I finally took out the dentures they blew me kisses.

It was very sweet. A grace-filled moment few will think of opening themselves to. I felt kind of liberated doing it.

Concerning my grandchild coming soon, a friend wrote: "Oh, you can't think of anything when you are about to be a grandmother, you feel as if all heaven is holding its breath."

From Anne

Heaven Speaks about Addictions

July 27, 2005

Jesus

My dear soul, you are chosen to serve in the Kingdom of God. Nothing can refute this statement. I am Jesus and I need you to help Me. There is a temptation to believe that you will have many days in which to serve heaven. Because of this temptation, souls feel they can languish at times, certain that while they do not serve as fully as possible today, they will do so tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is not what I am calling you to. I am calling you into this day, today. This is the time to let go of any habit that is pulling you away from Me and pulling you away from service to Me. Dear apostle, you must give Me your addiction. It can never be a good thing to be overly attached to something that dulls your ability to love. Look into your soul right now. You will find that I am looking back at you. You know that I am asking you to put aside this addiction. You have known this for some time. The day is today. I am not looking for service in tomorrow. You may never see tomorrow because that is how life on earth

is designed. Man never knows when he will be called home to heaven. There is a part of you that is fearful. You fear that you cannot be happy without this addiction. Will you believe Me when I tell you that it is quite the opposite? You cannot be happy with the addiction because it is numbing you from experiencing Me. I am in other people. I am in your loved ones. But you are putting this addiction in a place above Me and consequently, above your loved ones, as well as others. Dearest apostle, I will take this addiction from you. I will do this for you, if you let Me. But you have to be willing to accept My grace in your soul. I will do all of the difficult work, the work that you fear. You will remain in the present, in each moment, and you will have grace enough to walk away from this dependence. That is My promise.

(Now in 2013, rereading this locution to Anne, I am thinking my addiction is to working at too tight a schedule vs. being wide open to people who may want to see me in a relaxed context. And now, in 2018, I am thinking another one is talking too much, especially about myself. I laughingly suggested to a friend that we start a movement called "talk-a-holics anonymous.")

Heaven Speaks about Abortion

August 1, 2005

Jesus

My children, you are all so precious to Me. There is a temptation for souls to believe that if they have made a grave mistake, they are not welcome in heaven or that they are not suitable companionship for Me. This is not true. And this temptation must be fought against. Sin is forgivable. All sin. I want to direct attention here specifically to the sin of abortion. This sin has become so commonplace in your world that some souls have come to believe it is not serious. Well, dear little soul, you must understand that it is the enemy of all things living who has spread this error. This is a trick, a master deceit of such proportion that it has resulted in the slaughter of many. Now, you may wonder at My feelings on this. I will share them with you. I am grieved, in the extreme. I am sad each time I welcome a rejected little one back to Myself. And they are welcomed home, believe Me. I am all mercy and love and these little ones are in no way at fault so heaven gives them great joy upon their return. In the same way, we will welcome you home, regardless of your sins. Be at peace. There are many souls in heaven who have committed sins of this magnitude. You might say heaven is filled with sinners, My friend, but these are repentant sinners. Would you like to repent? I know that you would and it is for this reason that I have come to you with these words. You are forgiven. I have many things to share with you that will help you to understand your situation. Rest your wounded little heart against Me now as I show you how to return in completeness.

St. Mary Magdalene

I send the most loving greetings to my friends on earth. I am delighted that Jesus allows me to speak at this time. There are great things happening in the world and the renewal makes its way bravely from heaven to earth and from soul to soul. We are watching and helping from heaven. One of the signs that the renewal is necessary is the number of abortions that are occurring. My dear sisters in Christ, this is an abomination. We cannot allow it to continue, neither you, nor I. We have to help our sisters to

understand that there is a little life nestled in their womb, a life sent by God Himself. To think any differently is to become a plaything of the enemy. There must be no discussion about this point in the sense that you must never allow yourself to consider, even for a moment, that a pregnancy does not equal a life, a person, a divine plan. Do not back away from this fact, this irrefutable truth. I want to speak to the women who have had abortions and allowed their children to be taken from them in this way. Dear woman, if you think you have committed a graver sin than me, you are wrong. Jesus loves me tenderly and I am a close friend to the Saviour. And yet, I would repel you if you knew how I had lived a part of my life. We are all the same in that we are all sinners. Nobody in heaven looks at anyone else with anything but love and understanding. This is because we all understand that given the right set of earthly circumstances, we could make grave mistakes, such as you did. Your circumstances contributed to your decision. I know this. Jesus knows this. All of heaven knows this. You must accept this, too. If you were in different circumstances, it is likely you would have made a different decision. But it is over and Jesus makes all things new. Let Him make your soul new and you will give Him far greater joy than you gave Him sorrow. I would not tell you something if it were not true. If you return to Jesus with your heart and ask Him for forgiveness, you will have forgiveness and He will forget your sins. He has certainly forgotten mine.

St. Mary Magdalene

My sisters in Christ, allow me, please, to help you. When you are caught in a web of guilt, it can be difficult to get out. It is actually impossible alone. The problem is that you can think so badly of yourself for your mistake that you begin to lose sight of your dignity and heavenly value. Jesus needs your help and you have to respond to Him. You know this. But before you can respond to Jesus you must allow Him to heal you. So put your hand out and Jesus will give a mighty pull. He will release you from the grip of pain that has held you captive. Jesus looks into your soul and He sees everything. He understands. You will face Him someday. It is inevitable. So face Him today and look closely. All you will see in His beautiful face is love. Jesus does not condemn you. It is the enemy that tells you these things. Jesus is all mercy, all understanding. Let Him take your pain and replace it with heavenly joy. Dear sister, do you think for a moment that the darkness of sin in the world has not claimed others in this way? You know that many have fallen victim to the falseness and the distortions of truth. You are not alone, by any means. Many women work hard for the Kingdom and give Jesus great glory. They, also, have allowed their children to be taken in this way. But they returned to Christ in sorrow and He forgave them. He offers this to you now. We will surround you with heavenly grace and then you, too, will work for Jesus and for others. You will give great comfort and joy to these children of yours in heaven if you return to the family of God. There is nothing that should stop you. Come back to the heavenly side where you are cherished, and may I say, so badly needed.

August 2, 2005

St. Mary Magdalene

Dearest sister in Christ, this is the time to heal. Jesus is sending this period for all souls to return to His Sacred Heart. His healing graces are never ending. There is enough for every bit of spiritual and emotional healing that is necessary for every soul who has

ever been injured in any way. I am urging you to take advantage of this now so that you can return fully to the family of God and work for your brothers and sisters who remain in darkness and loneliness. So many are unloved. If you spend this period of time working for other souls, in your life, wherever Jesus has placed you, there will be joy in heaven. You will give glory to Jesus and to your children who have come before you. They will be proud that you are their mother because you serve them on earth by serving Jesus. Do you believe me, my sister? I speak the truth. We in heaven never exaggerate and we never tell untruths. We speak carefully and our words are backed by God, Himself. Your children love you and have complete understanding of the fears that moved you to your decision. You will see them and you will spend eternity with them. There is only joy in heaven. Surely you understand that there will be no recriminations and you will have no grief in this divine land. You will be reunited with all of your loved ones and together you will explore the Kingdom of the triumphant souls, who have conquered the world and their humanity. So there is no reason for you not to be joyful and peaceful. Jesus loves you. All the saints love you. The angels work tirelessly for your return to complete joy. And your children wait to be united to their mother.

St. Mary Magdalene

Sisters, I thank God for you. Your kindness to other women will bring more souls home to heaven. I never judged another woman after my conversion because I understood why a woman would make the choices that she made. Some choices are wrong. We all know that. Who can say that all choices are the correct choices? Here in heaven, we look at events in the world. I, in particular, see women who are assaulted sexually. I am familiar with the emotions that can erupt in a woman after such a thing occurs, either in childhood or in adulthood. These emotions, if not brought to heaven for healing, can result in bad choices. Perhaps you understand what I am referring to. Our bodies are intended for the most beautiful service to the Kingdom. The sexual relationship between a man and a woman is holy and right when it is blessed by God.

(If you think these locutions are really from heaven be sure to go on the internet to Anne: Direction for Our Times for more topics that have been addressed.)

Return from Steubenville (Where I was giving Talks)

August, 2005

Praise the Lord. Steubenville is wonderful. Somehow the openness of the Franciscan spirit is wide enough to hold in embrace the liturgically tradition minded Catholics and the charismatics. I enjoyed very much singing old charismatic songs at top volume from the music ministry. The first night the "conservatives" stood stiffly but by the next morning they somehow decided it was okay to enjoy it and blend with the "charismatics", as they think of us, lifting their arms and swaying. Fr. Michael Scanlon, President of the University, seemed like old Gandolf leading the hobbits. He witnessed to an extraordinary grace up in a para-sail when he thought he would die because of a screw up in the contraption but felt God the Father saving him.

August 7, 2005

Dear Fr. Michael,

It was such a joy to listen to you again. It happened I had a somewhat similar para-sail experience. I should have known my husband was close to death when he just shrugged his shoulders and walked away when I said I wanted to go up on the para-sail so I can see what the Ascension and the Assumption felt like!

Once above the Pacific after noticing how beautiful it all was, panic set in. "I don't even know these mechanics down there in the boat and I signed a total waiver before getting on this!" Then came certainty of death by heart attack from fear, and last prayers for everyone I ever knew and "into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

It was only 7 minutes but when I got near down to the boat they said we can give you another lift up if you like. I was shaking with fear.

August 9, 2005

(More from Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

My children, why do you hurry so? Why do you feel you must move so quickly through your days? This is not the way I intended the children of God to live... I want My beloved apostles to move more slowly and thoughtfully through their days. I want you to make decisions on what I am asking you to do and what you are busying yourself with that is not from Me. I want your way of life to change and I am asking you to make this change now. In the next week, think about each activity and decide, with Me, if it is something I want you to do or something you want to do. My dearest apostles, I ask that you begin to remove activities that do not further My will..."

From Joseph Conti, *Holistic Christianity*, "Before union, by three veils I was veiled from God" by the veil of my bigness, the veil of my hardness, and the veil of my cleverness."

August 14, 2005

Out of a letter to a friend concerning a conflict:

A good part of being in my anger-management group is that instead of enjoying conflict I now feel the underlying pain more. Or, with no fangs left, I feel less powerful and have less confidence I could win in any conflict, not that I used to win, but I thought I could.

Ha! Ha!

August 14, 2005

Concerning Consecrated Widows, which some bishops world-wide are experimenting with, in reply to my telephone messages Archbishop Raymond Burke called me on a Sunday evening to apologize for the delay in answering me. He said it is not helpful to direct widows to their Bishops. The Vatican is working on a rite for consecrated widows and needs those interested to write to them of their desires.

Write to

Cardinal Francis Arinze, Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 00120, Vatican City State,  
Europe

August 18, 2005

A hilarious moment. A box shipped to Marty Barrack involving parts for an Entertainment Center, somehow got dumped on his street near some grazing horses. He asked me to drive him down to take pictures of this box to prove to the Company that sold him the Center that the box was there. Anyhow while he was taking pictures I switched on the radio. Sometimes a piece of music exactly matches what is happening in life but sometimes it is the opposite. This was one of those. There was Wagner's Liebes Tod from Tristan and Isolde - one of the most romantic pieces ever written, accompanying Marty traipsing around this box on the road!

August 18, 2005 letter from Jim Ridley

Dear Ronda,

In a rare spasmodic attempt to practice detachment through the unpleasant discipline of mortifying my errant proclivities towards the hoarding of rubbishy ephemera, I was heaping into the recycling bin today the bulk of my precious ancient collection of Catholic newspapers, when one of the doomed issues suddenly escaped from the stack. It was a Sunday Visitor, dated August 27 (Claire's Birthday), 1995. I thumbed it open as the pangs of impending separation from my earthly treasures threatened to diminish my virtuous resolve and chanced to read on page six the following paragraph: "Fr. Gruber invokes the Benedictine tradition of peacemaking as he directs retreats and conferences on gender issues, welcoming those who are disaffected and those who are perfectly enchanted by Church teaching. He has been joined by BRILLIANT CO-DIRECTORS, including philosopher RONDA CHERVIN..."

Dear Jim,

When I read your scintillating rambunctious outrageously funny epistles I want to insert you and a word-processor and printer into a cage and force you to write Catholic style books to rival Wodehouse - and I would throw in a banana every time you sent a page of this stuff through the bars of the cage.

I guess I'd let you have a porta-potty and a cot in there as well.

Remember this image! When Watershed begins I will slowly manipulate you into the cage! All for the greater glory of God.

Believe it or not such Providential moments as you finding the OSV piece about Fr. Gruber's retreat cheer me. I am such a melancholic that I easily think my "time is over" and the next talk should be my swan song, etc. etc. and so each of these compliments jerks me out of that state.

Dear Anne (concerning Hurricane Katrina)

"I am so sorry you are going through these trials. Here is my take for what it is worth.

"I think Jesus allows horrible natural events to take their course because of the many that will rush to Him in prayer in their fear.

"But Catholics usually don't say that Jesus or God caused the event. Why not? What is the distinction?

"Some natural disasters do not hit places riddled with sin such as abortion-America. Some natural disasters hit poor good people as when some earthquake had as its epi-center a Mexican Church with people at Mass.

"The way I prefer to put it is this: America full of abortion and porn, etc. etc. is certainly due for disaster and liable to Scripturally described outcomes. Jesus in the N.T. talks about disasters falling on the Temple and Jerusalem, though He doesn't directly say this will happen to punish the bad. (At least I don't think he does - correct me if I am wrong) When disaster hits everyone should examine their consciences and go to confession and realize "you know not the day or the hour" and repent. Those directly affected by disasters we certainly hope made general confessions on their way to their deaths and certainly ought to pray for the reform of their cities, countries, etc. etc."

September 3, 2005

Jesus

You will be with your children today, quietly editing. Anne, push the booklets forward because they are an important component of all I intend to do. I would like them printed with an imprimatur, if possible.

I have many things to say about the hurricane that has wrought so much devastation. The first thing I will say is that I was merciful, even in My chastising of the earth. I was merciful because I took many souls to heaven with Me, cleansing them Myself. This mercy is very great and souls on earth will not understand the nature of this entirely. I wished to compensate these souls for participating in this time of darkness, a darkness that comes, not from Me, but from mankind's cooperation with the enemy of goodness. Anne, we are moving into a new time, a time of obedience and holiness. Ask souls to come to Me now. Ask souls to reject disobedience. Do not allow the unborn to be slaughtered. Speak up for Me, children of God. If a soul is following Me, they have nothing to fear. There should be a calm acceptance of the Father's decision to reprimand His children. Apostles, your brothers and sisters must come to understand that I am God. I am the God of love and kindness, but I do not see love and

kindness on My earth. I see souls being hurt. So I am going to assist My children in understanding how I wish them to live. Look for My example in the Gospels. Be alert for My direction and be humble. Under no circumstances do I wish souls to judge others for these events. All men are sinners. Be humble and teach love. Apostles, this is time for service. You have been prepared. And I am with you.

Anne, I wish that message to be disseminated. The following message is for you. I understand your hesitance and fear with regard to prophecy. Nevertheless, it is part of your role. You will be given strength and assistance, both from heaven and from earth. You should state openly that I have given a sequence for the beginning of the purification. Nothing more. If asked about this event, you can say that you saw it in a vision, along with the other events. There should be a calm attitude in every talk. You will be joyful, of course, and model heavenly peace. If souls ask you directly about a region, you must say that apostles have nothing to fear. There is great work to be done. Even given the difference between earthly time and heavenly time, time is short. This is all good and necessary. I can only will what benefits My children. You have all been prepared and you have all been told that this period would come. If you feel fear, bring it to Me and I will eradicate it immediately. Fear is your enemy in this work but I can easily remove it for you. Anne, do not feel guilty if you feel fear as it is understandable. But do bring it to Me immediately. In answer to your question, I would prefer you do not discuss regions but give you permission to do so with your spiritual directors or bishop if you are feeling heavily burdened. The reason I prefer you to avoid this type of discussion is because I want everyone prepared. It is not only the regions affected who are being called to renewal. All are being called to renewal. As you know, I am available for all of your questions in an enhanced way during this time. Yes, you should send this to your bishop and ask for his permission to post the previous message.

September 13, 2005

(Answer to a query letter about Consecrated Widows):

The Czech consecrated virgin who is working on the adapting of their rite to one for widows in conjunction with the Vatican Office of Rites - sent me a packet of materials.

How my heart leapt with joy reading as well as I could in my very poor Italian, French and Spanish accounts of actual rites of consecration already in place! It one part of Southern Italy they count about 20 widows in various stages of consecration - they have a whole formation program in place. The rites are beautiful to read.

Here is a song that 1000 Indian Widows from some movement called Hope and Life composed:

We are widows of Bombay

with hope and life

We no longer mourn and whine

in hope and life

In the past we were full of care

Now in our lives there is joy and prayer

We share our miseries and woes

Our sufferings on the Lord we throw

We spread his light, we spread his light.

I tried to read a very scholarly account of Rites of the past in Italian. It appears up until the 9th century there were rites and blessings of consecrated widows including blessing of their habits in Italy and France.

Gradually widows were encouraged instead in Medieval times to go into monasteries instead of remaining in their own homes.

Oct. 6 2005

Tired from speaking trip to Canada - Vancouver is beautiful and refreshing. I had a great time but exhausting trip.

The dentist said I had the lowest pain tolerance he had ever witnessed! Good part is that he gave me a refund of \$820 on my lower plate since he says I will never be able to tolerate it! My secure thought is that God will bless me specially for all the dental pain since it is the worst apparently!

October 11, 2005 HEALING AND WIDOWHOOD

Working on healing I got the sense that the healing was related in some way to the consecrated widow question. That Jesus wanted me to put being a consecrated widow first. It seems as if he meant in regard to my location, i.e. to go wherever I can best get approval from a Bishop for this vocation. But this morning I woke up with a more comprehensive sense of healing and widowhood, for me, and in relation to working with other widows:

I was brought up to think old = ugly. My parents ridiculed my paternal grandmother for being old, sick, and ugly as well as eccentric and crazy.

My mother, being a counter-cultural bohemian by choice, never dressed elegantly as did the upper middle class Jewish women in the neighborhood – West Side NYC – but wore interesting colorful pants and jacket like tops. When much older she compensated for her aging features with lipstick, powder, and colorful outfits.

My father left my mother and us when we were 8 years old, and married a young woman, more beautiful, with flowing long hair, wearing dresses vs. my mother's short hair and more masculine look.

Hence conflict for me. I loved the little pink dresses and black shiny shoes other girls were allowed to wear. We had to wear overalls.

When I was older I always wore long hair and dresses to look less like my rejected older mother and more like my father's 3rd more beautiful wife.

I married an older man – a father figure – with terrible feelings when he preferred beautiful little twin daughters to me. After their birth I seemed no longer to be beautiful sweetheart, but like an old seemingly unattractive Cinderella to serve the little beauties (he called the daughters his little beauties)

Becoming a widow I tried lipstick and long flowy dresses trying to attract a 2nd husband unsuccessfully. Then maybe partly as an over-reaction to feelings of rejection, I wore habit like outfits when trying out different forms of consecrated life.

In speeches I make jokes about when you are aging, look in the mirror and don't say "More and more everyday I look less like Marilyn Monroe" but instead say "Everyday I look more and more like Mother Teresa."

Being determined not to try to hide aging with make-up or attractive as possible clothing, is partly my mother's inherited counter-cultural approach; partly "if I don't even try, I am not being rejected for being ugly." Eagerness to get into some kind of consecrated look in clothing – blue denim, brown. But in my novel about widowhood, *Last Fling*, (you can find this on En Route Books and Media) I have the heroine wearing simple but colorful dresses.

Denture crisis brings up these issues. I thought the pearly toothed denture would improve my looks – instead because of the pain of them so that I don't wear them very often, I am now cast into this unexpected much worse, to my mind, old crone toothless image.

Finding out that in the US consecrated virgins and potential consecrated widows would not be allowed to wear any kind of habit at first depressed me – no way to escape into a "higher" status where plain same dress every day would solve the conflict of how to escape my dinned in early family sense of old = ugly and totally rejected.

(Note from 2013: I couldn't find a Bishop who wanted me as a Consecrated Widow. A spiritual director suggested I call myself a Dedicated Widow with a private promise not to re-marry and my own rule. In this rule I don't wear a habit but different blue denim or other simple blue dresses.)

Healing images in light of all of this –

To totally experience Jesus' love for me depends on bringing all of this to Him and seeing that He really loves old women – such as the old widow saints and His mother as a widow.

Jesus as the second bridegroom is a healing image for the consecrated widow even if she had a less convoluted familial history about ugliness.

I got a sense of how each individual widow needs to decide without pressure from other widows how to dress. Old black dress – forever! European widows wore those black garments forever by conforming to that cultural pattern. We don't have this now and so have more anxiety about it. Choices: noble older look; funny slightly masculine look (perm but pants); bag-lady look, etc.

Oct. 11, 2005

I had a beautiful day by the water fishing with the Winstons at Spring River, Arkansas. Lots of time to stare at the water and this is what Jesus seemed to tell me about all of that misery I vomited out this morning in the healing of memories about aging and ugliness:

I am your savior at every time of your life. Stay away from all those past miseries and just love Me and do what you want to do; be my pilgrim and don't let anyone put you on a guilt trip – "life is a cabaret" - see the humor, the sadness, the grief, and I will give you each day what you need because I am your groom.

Alleluia.

October 12, 2005 Healing Image

Now I look more like a funny little creature "smiler McGee (a name my daughter, Carla, gave me when she saw me without the dentures, laughing when she saw me without my teeth or dentures? vs. a noble philosopher. This makes me more approachable, less intimidating, goes along with de-fanged.

October 24, 2005

I sent the long healing reflection about childhood ideas of aging being awful to my twin-sister Carla for a reaction. Here it is:

"Dear Ronda,

Sigh, sigh...I think mother's great fussiness over what to wear (which bandana, belt, etc.) is a mix of much insecurity and a desire to be attractive. I also go through too much fussiness and feel insecure. What I try to find to wear is with half a nod to "looks" and the other half to something that will help reflect an inner look. The "costume" helps sustain an inner sense of beauty, and usually I want to wear something that will flow, but I've noticed I'm actually happiest with camping or walking the dog clothes...it's not the clothes but the situation that is conducive to really forgetting myself.

I remember being puzzled as a kid when there were disparaging remarks about grandma - I didn't really understand them I think. I'm sorry we weren't taught to respect older people. We need to cultivate our inherent dignity. I must consecrate life like sacred dance. (My twin-sister is a Sacred Dancer). I wish you could have snuggled up to Martin (when he seemed to prefer the daughters) and said, oh Martin I need your love, too. I was speaking about what to wear to a woman I know and she, offhandedly, waving her hand said, "Oh what do you care?" Healing, good. All for now....hope you get your teeth FIXED. I think you needn't have had to go through all this and it must be terrible. Your sense of humor is a life-saver."

From Ronda: Another image about the teeth issues: I used to say in speeches, instead of thinking of admired others as idols and then fallen idols; think of them and yourself as funny little creatures. De-fanged I look more like a funny little creature. Yes.

October 25, 2005

I gave a workshop based on my book *Taming the Lion Within* at Pecos Monastery in New Mexico. During that time I had a session with their healer Sister Miriam. Here is her advice:

She took my two shoes and laid them in a T shape with one horizontal and one vertical. She said the vertical cross is strong Ronda, the speaker and truth-sayer, etc. The horizontal shoe represents the needy desperate Ronda who wants father figures, who is lonely, etc.

That second shoe doesn't need an actual father but needs me myself to love her: The weak part is not the true Ronda but is a part of me. For healing I need to say that I love that weak Ronda just the way she is; she is mine. I need to be Jesus to that part of myself. No one told little Ronda as a child that she could just be herself. (Barbra Streisand song: people who need people are the luckiest people in the world.) It is not wrong to be needy. I have to tell the weak Ronda that I will take care of her. (Very Jungian of course - not quite the way I would put it but I think there is something in it.) The strong Ronda needs to say to the weak Ronda that she doesn't have to change for me to love her – that I will carry her into eternity. The strong Ronda is a strong speaker because she tells of her weakness. I should not be afraid of weak Ronda. She is part of the gift. Like St. Paul rejoicing in his weaknesses. See Jesus looking at that weak Ronda with love. I need to adopt that orphan Ronda vs. saying to her that I want to get rid of her. I need to give that part of me a home.

I reply: the consecrated widow is known for hospitality. I need to be hospitable to that part of me. But the Scriptures also say that the widow needs Church men.

Then Sister Miriam told me a parable about an ancient woman full of wrinkles who builds a hut in the black forest. Her mission is to put a light in her window in the darkness to welcome those who are lost. An old man is lost whose lantern went out and who is fainting from woundedness. As he is dying he lifts his head and sees the light and drags himself to the doorstep of this woman. She picks him up as if he were a baby and she rocks him and she pats him and says "there, there," and he gets younger and finally is a new born babe and she lets him go. He is the rising sun and he brings her warmth.

I reply: the consecrated widow is a wisdom figure, a rock of comfort for the needy.

I need to rock the world and say "I love you. I need to embrace the whole Church even in its darkness?"

I don't need to do anything but love. God does the transforming. Go to the Ronda who went through the death of Charlie and say "I love you." I will not abandon you – I will not abandon the Ronda who suffered that way.

The strong Ronda has to embrace the entire darkness of life.

Sister Miriam gave me more of this image of an old wrinkled crone living in a cave in a dark forest with a lantern. Weak miserable desperate people find their way in the dark to the cave where she rocks them and comforts them back through their lives until they can see the little child God created them to be and become re-born.

(Reading this at 80 years old in 2018 it fits even more graphically and literally in the sense of being a spiritual mother as a widow for many others who, if not miserable and desperate, nonetheless need something I can give, perhaps clarity of faith.)

October 27, 2005

My godfather used to say that I was like a little dog attached to a chain who leaps about happily until he feels the chain and then leaps up into the air with horror feeling the pain of the chain. So I am either up or down with no in between stability. This is still true after 45 years!

Climbing the Mountain

From Anne October, 2005 for me to edit, these are excerpts (The publisher of Anne's autobiographical books and locutions asked me to go through to check on any theological difficulties. This is a lengthy section. You can skip if you don't like anything about this style or writing. I included it because I think it is extremely helpful.)

"If Christ is in each one of us, and this is of course what we believe as Christians, then we must venerate Christ in every soul...

We do that with respect and gentleness. Some might say, yes, this may be true but I see souls in error, in mortal sin, living far outside of the heavenly Kingdom. Well, dear fellow apostles, this is when the call to treat them as Christ is at its most profound. If Christ has indeed been driven out of a soul, through serious sin and a spirit of rebellion in that sin, then the call to illustrate our unity with Christ is compelling. How does Christ treat that soul? How does Christ view that soul? I will tell you. Christ does not glance at a soul and see the sin, although He is acutely aware of the sin. Christ glances at a soul and sees the wound that both caused the sin and was worsened by the sin. So in order for the Kingdom to come, and it must and it will, we must treat each other as Christ would.

Sometimes a soul living outside of the Kingdom is bitter. This bitterness is like a sore. When a soul in bitterness views Christ in us, it can be like salt in the wound or sore because our unity with Christ (shows) their isolation from Him. This is good. The soul then comes closer to an understanding of what it lacks. Our experience of this may not be pleasant. It may be necessarily painful because in its pain their soul may strike out at us. This can be understood as an almost instinctual lashing out or crying out in the distress of their disconnectedness from Christ. We must accept these strikes as beneficial penance and part of standing with Christ as a companion on the Way of the Cross.

To translate, I am driving in traffic and I make a mistake perhaps, or commit a deed that inconveniences someone else. I give the other driver an apologetic wave. He responds by swearing at me and shouting, threatening, or what have you. This is shocking for

a holy soul. We must offer this to Jesus. We must bring that soul to Jesus in prayer and petition. Our prayer will obtain critical graces for that soul. We must look at this person and see the wound, the sore.

To be more specific to the call to bring Jesus Christ to souls directly, consider a soul who is estranged from the Kingdom. Perhaps it is a family member or neighbor. It is possible that they may be unkind to us because our holiness is an irritant to them and to their wound. Is it then acceptable to be unkind in return? Not for an apostle of Jesus Christ who seeks to bring His love to them. Remember that it was after the crucifixion that the Centurion said, Truly, this was the Son of God. The soul only saw Christ through the manner in which Jesus accepted suffering from the offender's hands. Note this parallel.

A soul may be tormenting us but for this soul to experience Christ, we must accept it as Christ would. This should be in flashing red lights. We may be praying for this soul and beseeching heaven for the conversion of this soul. So we must not complain at a little suffering for this soul, particularly if it comes from the hand of that same soul.

It helps to examine our motives. Do we want this soul to be saved for the sake of the soul and for the consolation and glory of Jesus Christ? Or do we want this soul to be saved so that the soul will treat us better and make our life easier. I think perhaps it can be a bit of both and this is acceptable. But as we begin to lean more to the benefit of both the soul and the Kingdom and we will become more willing to accept the occasional bad treatment for the purpose of the greater good, which is the salvation of the soul and the consolation of Christ.

We must bring souls to Jesus, but we must not take Jesus and bash souls about the head with Him. We must bring Jesus in the spirit of love, not condemnation. The message is that Jesus loves the soul, not Jesus disagrees with the way the soul is living his life. Is it true that Jesus disagrees with the way some live their lives? Yes. Certainly Jesus was not always pleased with the manner in which I conducted myself. But it is best to let Jesus convey this to the soul. Jesus judges. Apostles are not called to be judges but delivery people. If we deliver Jesus to souls He Himself will correct them, tutor them, and illuminate their path on the mountain. You might say that the most profound thing we do for a soul is show them the mountain.

As in everything, the most effective way to teach something is to set an example by doing it so that others can emulate us after seeing how a thing is done. This brings us to the most important concept of all concepts.

We must always be ascending. What is the best way to love my neighbor? I love my neighbor best by climbing my mountain of personal holiness. It is not helpful for me to spend my time telling others to climb. It is helpful if I myself climb, thereby setting an example for others to follow.

....We should be gentle and loving with each other, always tolerant that no two servants are called to serve in exactly the same way. Each has separate gifts, also, so we must never think it is beneficial to compare ourselves with anyone.

We must compare ourselves to Jesus in love of neighbor. Scripture gives us ample example of the selflessness with which Jesus served His brothers and sisters. He was a dutiful son to His mother and father. He was a good friend to His apostles. Jesus was

kind to strangers and those ill and less fortunate. He was patient in the extreme with the flaws of others. He saw each soul as a soul who was somewhere on the mountain and He viewed them with the patience of a teacher, who knows that the total cannot be achieved without walking through the sum. Jesus gave others the room to grow in the light of His love. Are we doing that for others? Or do we constantly point out the deficits in the holiness of our companions? Souls loved Jesus and sought out His companionship. They sought His love and tolerance, His acceptance and steadiness. This is our call to those around us. We must always rejoice in the holiness of our companions. Rejoice in each bit of progress or any bit of hope for progress. This will give us joy and we will not spend all of our time lamenting the failures of those around us, which is really our own failure.

...The Father in the Prodigal son story did not reproach his son. He did not sit down with him and grieve the lost years. He went straight to the celebration and rejoiced in the future service of the returned boy. This is the way our God reacts to returning children. He sees what the child of heaven is now capable of giving to the Kingdom. He sees the potential and the lovely swell of the family, given the return of a loved one. Remember that the laborers were all given the same wage, regardless of when they joined the work. This is an example of a good and gracious God, not an unjust God. We can use this to pull others in. Each servant is as necessary as the next.

Remember that there is little merit in loving those who love us, but great merit in loving those who are a cross to us.

It is through our closest relationships that we make the most dedicated progress up the mountain because those closest to us see our flaws clearly. We should pray for an increased awareness of our performance in the duty of the relationships closest to us.

It is within the structure of the family that many souls find great holiness. This is why Jesus is so determined to protect the family and this is also why the enemy is so anxious to destroy this heavenly structure. Family members see our flaws, yes, and often it is only a family member who has the courage to illuminate this flaw for us. We must not retaliate in anger if a loved one encourages us to alter our behavior. We should instead be open to the possibility that they may have a perspective that will benefit us. An arrogant soul cannot tolerate any criticism or direction. They will revolt and lash out at the one who dares press against their shell of self-satisfaction. We discussed the way of the cross and the pain that comes with it. Be at peace in this.

Before we take on to instruct someone or gently correct a soul, we must pray. We should spend time in silence and ask Jesus if it is He who is prompting us to assist a soul in this way. We should then proceed in all humility, certain that despite our closeness to Christ, we have a pack full of our own flaws to work upon. Our spirit should be one of kindness and tolerance. What would Jesus say to this soul? How would Jesus proceed?

...Truly, my friends, it is not good for a person to get away with constant bad behavior as it confirms their path. In cases where we are fearful of our family members, we must consider seeking outside help. We should confide in someone, perhaps a trusted priest who can advise us objectively.

Jesus understands that we are doing our best. We must understand that we are part of a heavenly team who shares our goals for all our loved ones. Remember that there are apostles the world over praying for our safety and peace.

The family is a microcosm of the heavenly Kingdom. Each family is a little Kingdom of God. This proceeds out in concentric circles, bigger and bigger. But it begins first with one soul united to Christ, then spreads into the immediate family, and then out and so on. We must do the work first in our own little soul, united to Jesus, then in our own little family, then out and out and out again, into the world, and eventually at one with the whole Kingdom of God upon our death. The work done within the family cannot be stressed enough in importance. It is here we learn how to be a Christian. It is here we learn how NOT to be a Christian. It is within the family that we learn about compassion and sacrifice and tolerance and forgiveness. Progress is made in quietness and the progress of one soul impacts the entire family. So we must be confident that our holiness will spread out into our families. It cannot help but do so. If we never say a word about Jesus Christ, but begin to live His message, we will benefit our families in ways we cannot understand. The holiness of one soul creates a receptacle of grace for all. Again, I stress, even if we are estranged from all of our family, but we decide to follow Christ in isolation from them, we will draw blessings down upon them all. It cannot help but be so, given Christ's goodness and desire to reach each of His children. We must be at peace in everything, dear apostles. There is no reason for anything else.

Sometimes in describing a thing it is good to say what it is not so that souls can move closer to truth by abandoning what is false. Love of neighbor is not judgmental. It is not unkind, ever. It is rather gentle and patient with the frailty of the soul, whether on the path or drifting in the world. Love of neighbor assumes the presence of the loving God in the soul of each person and treats each person accordingly. How do I treat Jesus? How does Jesus feel in that soul? How would Jesus like to be treated in the soul of the person in front of us? Jesus would like to be encouraged in that soul. He would like to be strengthened. He would like us to help Him to grow stronger in the soul and become the Divine Claimant of this soul. Jesus loves each soul powerfully and totally. We must look at each person as the most cherished child of the Father and we will begin to understand why we must love our neighbor. This soul in front of us is one that we can help escort through the heavenly gates, through our words, our actions, or simply our love.

We must walk gently with the feelings of others, with great reverence for the vulnerability of the spirit. A wounded spirit can be led into all kinds of trouble and we would not like to be the one who has inflicted the wound that caused the downfall of another. Human nature being what it is though, it is possible, indeed probable, that we will hurt others and cause damage to another at some time.

We will come to this realization in silence, not in noise. If upon silent reflection we come to understand that we have hurt another, we should reflect on what our Lord wishes us to do to assist heaven in healing the wound of the person we have failed. Again, this is not to discourage us, but to cleanse our conscience here on earth, where we can better provide recompense for our failures. It is often the case that our simple admission of wrongdoing can place the person on the path to healing. We should also pray for the healing of the soul so that heaven is invited by us to participate in the righting of the wrong. Heaven heals with far more efficiency than we can and the intercessory power of a repentant soul is powerful. God cannot resist the petitioner who seeks to make amends to others. God comes into these situations with great enthusiasm and effectiveness.

We should not carry the burden of our sin heavily. It is better that we be at peace in our failures while we work with heaven to remove the weaknesses that lead us to sin. We should work steadily with Jesus on our soul, practicing a little holiness each day through the challenges He has placed in front of us. For example, dear apostles, there is no point practicing piety on a day when we are surrounded by souls who annoy us and Jesus is asking us to practice patience. If we follow the path He has traced out for us, we cannot help but become a saint. If we seek to do it our way, we will have greater difficulty.

Always consider kindness. Gentleness and kindness are two attributes that heaven holds in the highest esteem. Our modern world seeks to eradicate these heavenly characteristics but through His apostles Jesus will flood the world with gentleness and kindness

In order to love our neighbor in the same way as souls love each other in heaven, we must begin to think like residents of that joyful place. In heaven, it is all about love and all about Jesus. The Savior, Jesus Christ, is well and truly united to each soul, to the extent that when Jesus enters a room or an area in heaven, nobody remarks upon it, because He never leaves any soul. There is constant unity with Christ in the soul. This is available to us here on earth. We are only separated by our lack of faith and lack of commitment to His will. If a soul commits himself to Jesus here on earth, and embarks upward on the mountain path through the service Jesus has willed for the individual, that soul is united to Jesus. Jesus is welcome in that soul and Jesus begins to work through that soul in the unique way that only He could have intended and planned. Each soul has a purpose and the purpose has so many facets over the lifetime of service, or indeed over one day, that we cannot imagine the richness of His plan. But we trust in His plan and that is all that matters.

What is the practical reality of this, we might ask. How does an apostle know if he or she is pleasing to God and indeed walking up the mountain path? Well, I can only speak for myself so that is what I will do. When I am serving heaven in unity to the will of the Savior, I feel stretched. I feel a sense that I am laboring. I do not feel a great personal satisfaction characterized by feelings such as "I am truly holy." A more accurate feeling of the apostle ascending the mountain would be "I am truly learning."

We should not dabble in false humility. If we are trying to serve Jesus, we must admit it. And certainly we serve in all of our glorious imperfection, so we must freely admit that as well. We can be proud of our commitment to Jesus without being proud of our spiritual advancements or proud of what heaven flows through us. Is a cup proud of the coffee it holds? Does a cup take credit for the quality of the coffee within it? The cup is simply the receptacle or vehicle that is used to transport the coffee from one place to the other. A cup is not proud, my friends, and neither should we be.

I repeat that we must never be discouraged or try to measure our holiness against another's. We must measure our holiness against Jesus Christ. In this way we will remain humble and concentrate not on the road behind us, but on the road in front of us. If the Lord gives us glimpses of His favor, we should thank Him. If He does not, we should not take this as a sign that we are not in His favor. If we are trying to serve and we are living in obedience to our Church, we are sure to make progress.

We should never be complacent. We must understand that if we are alive, there is work to be done in our soul. If we were finished, surely the Lord would have brought us to Him. Work steadily, dear apostles, and we will certainly become as holy as our Lord requires. We are called to do extra, it is true, so with God's grace let us do the extra with cheerfulness that foils any plans the enemy has to turn us into discontents who add to the unrest in the world.

(At this time I was considering leaving my group in Arkansas and trying to be part of a writers' colony in one place or moving in with my daughter, Carla, who was moving to a log house in North Carolina. I laughingly call these schemes the Queen Lear scenario.)

#### Pros of Log House

be with those I really love in the family sense of love

help my kids, grandkids in various ways

try out what could be THE long term solution to my aging life-style issues

#### Cons

fall into big no-no trap of mixing family and business

Plan A for a monthly retainer of \$1,000 a month at the log house:

I have no other expenses. I have a room furnished with a bed and bookcases and table or desk and my own bathroom. Kids can use it when I am not enthroned but it has only my "STUFF" in it.

Between you and Steve I get

Steve: daily drive to Mass and back - mostly noon Masses

Steve: drives to airport and pick up when I give out of town talks or go for other out of town visits to Diana, etc.

You and Steve: dinner chez the family - other food I cook myself in family kitchen but Steve buys whatever I like at his general food shopping

You and Steve: help with computer right away

You and Steve: My retainer includes electric, gas, whatever such things.

Plan B – smaller retainer - same as above except I drive my own car, but Steve helps me with car glitches. I would pay my own car insurance including towing but for smaller things like pumping up leaking tires, etc. Steve pumps it up and takes it to repair.

If you are interested I will pray some more and we could write up a contract of terms

Carla wrote later:

You are incredibly foolish, you know. DON'T you understand that I'd love to have you with me even if you hadn't a red cent???

To which I replied. Deep down I do, but probably I'd rather buy love than trust in it!

November 16, 2005

Dear Carla, In the reading for today, from the documents of Vatican II

"Children, as active members of the family, contribute in their own way to the holiness of their parents. With the love of grateful hearts, with loving respect and trust, they will return the generosity of their parents and will stand by them as true sons and daughters when they meet with hardship and the loneliness of old age."

Since my parents had such complicated relationships to their parents and I did to mine, I rarely think in this way, but maybe you and Diana are breaking the mold on this to actually feel it in a more classical manner.

December 1, 2005

Dear Marty, Irene, Sr. Judith, Ariela, Joe, Bill, Anne and Fr. Kevin,

I have decided to leave our dear little Star of the Sea and St. Michael's.

This is not because I haven't felt loved, helped and inspired here but for other reasons which will come later.

First, though, I want to thank each of you: Marty for your eager warmth and deeply pious way of participating in the Mass; Irene for showing me what daughterly love could be as you take care of your mother in her later years;

Sister Judith for showing me so much about the Christian ideal of sacrificial love and for your insights into my deepest needs; Ariela and Joe for showing me how much love can be shown through hospitality of house and heart, and for the love of the gifts of life you manifest all the time; Anne for your lively mind, beautiful voice and demonstration of such fierce love for your children; Bill for your warmth to me and your modeling of love for family; Fr. Kevin for showing me how a priest could integrate spirituality and psychology and be so affirming and caring of me and all of us.

I have been struggling with this decision for many months. I know you have been praying for me and trying to help with advice. I realize that some of you might not approve of my decision to go to my daughter's in North Carolina and will question the reasons I give.

Since I have prayed much over this and discussed it with mentors and my long time spiritual director who has known me for 6 years, I am not asking for further counsel, but merely sharing with you the reasons I think are valid for me.

This has been a very hard decision because I love the spirit of Star of the Sea and St. Michael's and all the wonderful qualities you all and other friends here have to offer. Please forgive me for the qualities of mine you have found difficult and pray for me on my new venture. The Jesus, Mary and Joseph you all love so much will be with me.

Love and prayers, Ronda

In wrong place entries: I was working with what was the Heart to Heart file already and, senior moment, forgot to retrieve the little slips of paper that were in the file folder so I am going to insert them with their earlier dates but at the end not to have to change all the page numbers again.

October, 2005

I met a psychologist who was a widow on a plane flight. She shared that no friend can be like a husband and children. This gave me great pause and probably influenced the decision I made about staying with the adult children for at least a while.

November, 2005

I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My motive was to intercede for the Jewish people to find Jesus.

Highlights of the trip – at Garden of Gethsemane I prayed "Jesus, You could take me now or otherwise eliminate any more sufferings, but I accept whatever You want in Your creative plan to sanctify me."

I thought how can I speak well to aging women if I don't feel in myself the pain of looking ugly (because of the non-dentures) and the urge to cover it up. (I chose pearly dentures to look better and now that failed also). I realize I wanted to look like my noble Grandmother Rosenson who I never met since she died before I was born, not like a funny little elf. I need to surrender this desire which involves vanity and envy of others.

Jesus, You were disfigured and You didn't look like the Son of God, but like a criminal! Just as you were still God in disguise, so to speak, I am Ronda in disguise, so to speak.

On the pilgrimage sometimes it seemed as if a Jewish person there who said he was Christian might have been faking it to keep a good job working with Christian pilgrims. We Jewish-Catholics spoke of this and how we felt distrust. I likened this to the way the Spanish royalty must have felt about those Jews who became Catholics but might have not had real conversions and then they

could be in league with the Muslims of that time. Of course they felt uneasy and wary. The Inquisitorial practices were horrible, but maybe a little more understandable given this reality.

I loved the modern round womb-like Churches such as the Annunciation. Lots of sense of Mary's love for me on this pilgrimage.

A few years ago I started sending a small sum to a foundation that runs a Christian school in the Holy Land for Christian Arabs. I picked out a young girl whose face appealed to me. I got a chance to meet her at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I was moved to tears to see this beautiful but sorrowful face with big black eyes, fearful – she is about 12 years old. The sight of her made me ashamed of some cynical surmises I had about possible these type of charitable activities being scams. It was such a person to person – Jewish grandmother Catholic encounter to with a sweet Christian Arab girl.

Later I confessed to cynicism throughout my life. How does cynicism help anything? Well one might avoid being cheated but at what a price in the blackening of the soul by suspiciousness!

During the pilgrimage Jesus seemed to say "I was a pilgrim, so was Mary. You are a pilgrim also – go where I send you and forget about a permanent place, at least for now."

Now, all the way back to April 24, 2005 when I gave a short introductory talk before Anne of Direction for Our Times spoke at a conference in Chicago. I loved Anne. This was the first time I met her. I was afraid she might seem phony – instead she was so honest, deep, funny, absolutely unpretentious. Here was the gist of my little talk making use of images that were on the minds of the large audience:

God works with me by means of Surprise

In my conversion – surprise God is not a truth but a Person: Jesus

The Passion (the Mel Gibson film) – I thought it would not be as beautiful as Jesus of Nazareth – surprise! It seemed to me as if *The Passion* isn't a film but Jesus intervening in our times through the screen.

Lord of the Rings: I thought it would be a violent boyish extravaganza – surprise – God is showing us we're not failed want to be saints but heroic little hobbits and He, Gandolf, loves us for fighting.

John Paul II's funeral – boring long ceremony? Surprise, the grain of wheat died and it's the springtime of the Church JP II predicted!

Anne – just a sentimental journal? Surprise: Jesus telling me that I am not an over the hill creep whose mind is filled only with worries and schemes but the beloved child, friend and helper who He needs and wants and who I should trust. Alleluia. So listen up – here she is!

April 19, 2005

Election of Benedict XVI. I was in a restaurant – we moved to the bar so we could see who it was on the TV, bribed a waiter to turn off the muzak so we could hear. When it was Ratzinger, I leaped out off my bar stool and yelled out “We won!” and then cried and cried and cried. I had been so afraid it might be someone opposite to JPII. What will heaven be like. A Protestant eating at the restaurant asked me why I was so happy? I joked – well it’s like for you if they chose Billy Graham instead of Jimmy Swaggart!

He seemed to understand.

Way back to September 2004 – I dreaded leaving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory at the Retreat Center. Staying in a private home Jesus inundated me with rapture as if saying, heart to heart, you can come to me anywhere and you don’t need to grieve leaving the Center.

January 8, 2005

In a sermon the priest head of the Retreat Center said that we tend to think we deserve only rejection and punishment, but the true contemplative knows he or she is loved as in the Song of Songs.

Random thought: Do old people need more sleep, usually, because God wants to give rest to His beasts of burden?

Sense of being a speaker-missionary.

I read in Gabrielle Bossis’ *He and I*, “Take the place of John and Mary Magdalene (under the cross.) Be yourself, you, whom I wanted in this century, this period, this little moment of time on earth, my poor little bride.”

January 25, 2005

Worrying about approval to be a consecrated widow, Jesus put me into an ecstasy. I had a blissful sense that only He counted and that wherever I go I should go as His. During this little time of grace all the rest of the problems about where to live disappeared in the joy of my identity as His.

Good quote in the book by Yann Martel , *Life of Pi*, “to choose doubt as philosophy of life is like choosing immobility as a means of transportation.”

July 2005 Defending the Faith Conference at Steubenville – great sense of how Franciscan openness made it possible to combine charismatic music and orthodox theology and a real consistent life ethic – every speaker mentioned helping the poor in some manner! Scott Hahn mentioned how Kimberly asked as their 25th anniversary present that they go to a poor country as a whole family and build a house for the poorest of the poor!

Kimberly Hahn said in her speech that anxiety is a sin of lack of trust!

The adoration chapels are not for seeing God as a sounding board for my worries, but to bury my worries in His heart.

July 22, 2005

Feeling de-fanged because of upper teeth removed for dentures – related it to before relying on knowing that I could make biting comments, even if I didn't. Also good for solidarity with the really poor who don't have dentures. I don't have to be like Dorothy Day or Catherine Doherty, God is making me poor in His own way, said Sr. Judith.

August 8, 2005

Someone sent a web link about 5 Languages of Love – a book that goes into how each of us expresses love differently and we can't expect the other to give the same way. They are

Affirming

Serving

Gift-Giving

Touch

Quality Time

I realized that I am mostly loving by affirming, quality time would be second, touch third and serving only selectively (i.e. help with intellectual and spiritual problems but not other nitty-gritty kinds).

But some of my friends who are not much on affirmation, touch or quality time are great at helping me and giving me gifts. I need to be more grateful and not wish so much for the affirmation or quality time.

August 27, 2005

Diana, my daughter who is a twin, as I am a twin, spoke about someone telling her that twins are always trying to bond in some perfect way with a twin substitute. We are so happy when we think we can.

I related this to unsuccessful attempts to force friends to be my twin.

August 30, 2005

It was moving to see the helicopter rescuers in New Orleans after Katrina lifting people in their arms off the roofs with trumpeters playing the Saints go Marching in after the storm.

Sept. 3, 2005 Charismatic Conference – where I gave 4 talks.

At a huge general assembly Fr. Faricy told us to ask forgiveness of Jesus for the sins our confessors said weren't sins. We gasped. He shrugged and said "So, I'm a conservative Catholic. What are you going to do, shoot me?"

He told us to ask Jesus what we need His forgiveness for? I thought of draining my energy on schemes instead of trusting Him.

At the last Mass there was such a wonderful mix of Anglos, Phillipinos, Hispanics, Blacks....it was wonderful. I thought "now the anawim are strengthening the speakers!"

September 12, 2005

I called a friend on telling an anecdote that seemed to me to indicate a callous disregard of the poor. I thought he would defend himself but he had tears in his eyes. I was ashamed of "hard-boiling" him in his sin by being so skeptical that he would repent. May I be so humble about my sins and defects!

October 5, 2005

Joan Andrews Bell, the tremendous Operation Rescue woman visited the Mahoney's here en route to an intervention against abortion. She and her husband adopted handicapped kids. They were so full of fun, especially Emiliano with prothesis legs, twisted arms, but bubbling over with joy!

I was so moved.

November 10, 2005

Listening to sentimental love songs on the radio at the dentist I am wondering, is this how men get out their emotions, by singing these songs or listening to them?

December 12, 2005

Dear friend,

About faith in God's providence concerning things one wants....

I have always felt that if what I want is not something I am sure is God's will, there is no reason to trust that He will give it to me.

I am sure it's God's will that I become a better person and I trust that He will give me the grace.

On the other hand, I see that God often works differently with others. If they will believe it was His grace if they get what they want, He may give it to them to win their gratitude. If I get what I want I do feel grateful, also, but it's not my main way of relating to God.