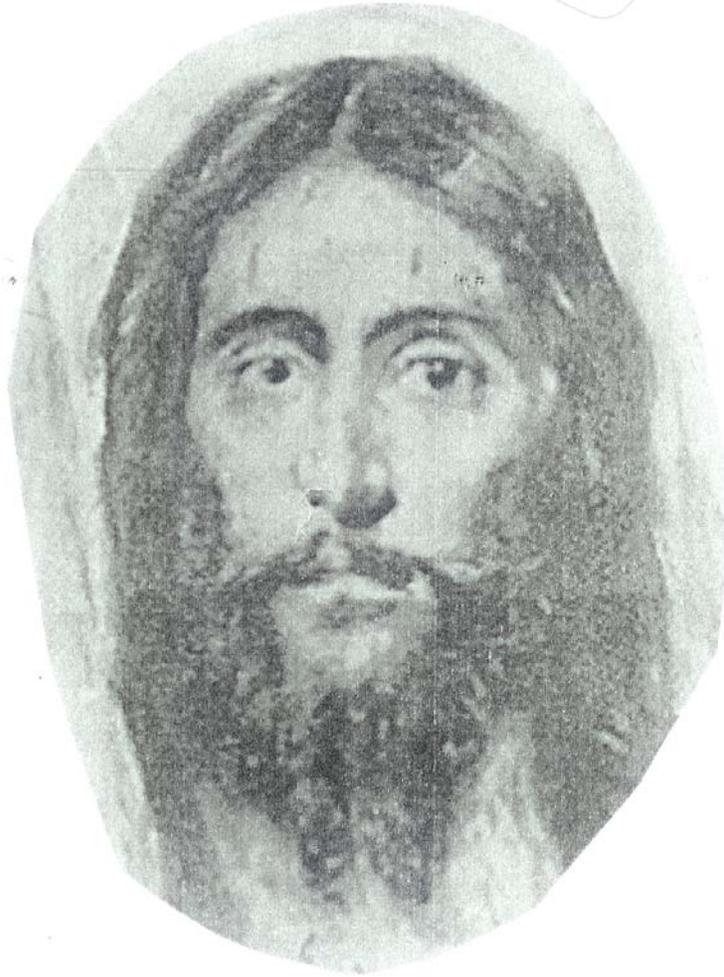


FACE TO FACE



EXCERPTS FROM THE SPIRITUAL JOURNAL
OF
Ronda Chervin
2001-2003

Introduction

It is some years since I wrote a regular spiritual journal.* *Face to Face* comes after the long grey night of the soul that followed the death of my husband in 1993. After a long hiatus, in 2001 I began to want to write a journal once more. It seemed good to write about the way Jesus was coming to me at age sixty-four.

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

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

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

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

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

*My last published journals spanned excerpts from 1977-1996 under the title *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord* (CMJ). Some account of my life between 1996 and the present can be found in the introduction to *A Widow’s Walk* (Our Sunday Visitor) and also in a fictionalized form in the novel *Last Fling*. These and other books of mine can be found on the website www.rondachervin.com.

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

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

I hear you telling me that I cannot experience the fullness of your love for me if I am afraid to come closer. ‘Perfect love casts out fear.’ Surrender!

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

A word about the format of *Face to Face*. My husband used to say that if he brought his camera on a trip he saw everything differently. Scenery framed by the lens of the camera became a landscape. By analogy, when I look at my day through the lens of the mysteries of your rosary, Mary, I see things differently. I watch to find in each twenty-four hours a joyful mystery, a sorrowful mystery, and a glorious mystery.

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

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

With this perspective in mind, is it better never to attribute any thought or feeling to the working of God in the soul? Such caution would seem to be tying God’s hands or gagging him. “The Spirit moves where he wills.” True, by sticking to formal prayers alone and never letting anyone else in on anything over and above, one can remove all ones own doubts and the potential ridicule of readers. But is that really God’s will? Should a Catholic never share enlightenment that seems to come from the Lord? I have come to

believe in writing down what I think Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, the angels and saints are telling me, mostly because I find their words better than mine.

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

“In her (Gertrude’s) writings we have a detailed record of God’s dealings with a soul, the personal relationship for which the Creator is willing to stoop with his creature. It is a picture of the Lord as she knew him, including not just his character, his goodness, and his love, but also the manner of his dealings with mankind.” Later, in the same volume we read of God telling Gertrude, (see p. 81) that he wanted her to write about how he worked in her that others may desire such graces for themselves.

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

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

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

Ideal? Not exactly. The reason I am not mentioning the name of the group or the college is because of painful conflicts endured during the years covered by this journal. Because my experiences yielded insights many might benefit from, I want to refer to the incidents in general terms but not mentioning names or places so that there will be the least

likelihood of readers identifying the group or any specific persons. For symmetry, I am also leaving out the names of friends in other places mentioned in Face to Face. I hope you will not feel insulted if you recognize yourself and wanted your names to appear in the boo, but I think it will be more charitable not to refer to specific persons even for good reasons.

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

November 16, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

When I arrived here a few years ago I was five years a widow. Before that I had been trying to be a consecrated sister in an emerging community. This group included mostly older women living separately in their own homes and communicating with each other by phone, mail, and at bi-yearly retreats. We wore blue denim jumpers, white blouses or sweaters, and simple white veils.* A few months after coming the call seemed to come to try to be a consecrated widow in the group running the college. Lots of stress was involved in these decisions. More about my new experimental vocation as this journal continues.

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

Did you, dear Jesus, when you told John to take care of Mary, know that even so stalwart and exalted a widow as your mother would be frightfully lonely with neither husband or son to protect her? We cannot know, but what most of us experience when our husbands are gone is a kind of tremulous vulnerability. I am thankful that you have given me a gift of openness to attract potential friends. I think about how much worse it is for more inward shy widows. As a married woman I treasured my friends, but as a widow I find them indispensable.

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

*For information on this group of Sisters, call 716-248-2469

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

As I bring this foolish sense of menace to you, Jesus, I think about how different your life was, much closer to natural realities. So many of your parables involve disasters for the imprudent. I hear you telling me now that my Father and yours allows me to be insecure because he wants me to long for the home that is heaven. The “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” could also cover this kind of childish fear of unexpected disaster.

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

Glorious Mystery:

Today I had a conversation with the sister head of the community that founded our school. Her plane to Rome was delayed due to storms and so she had an unexpected two hours with no urgent appointments. I grabbed her for counsel. Before inserting here the words of wisdom she offered me, a comment about my response to her as a personality. My response to people I meet is much influenced by literary factors. Since this woman is English, the first time I saw her, on the steps of St. Peter’s during the Rome Jubilee

Assembly, I immediately identified her with the wonderful Benedictine nuns described by the novelist Rumer Godden in the classic In This House of Brede. I was not disappointed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saturday, November 17, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Now, this one seems as if it was stage-set by you, Mother Mary. A year ago a woman started coming to our writer’s group, a nurse by profession. C. is the type of person I am immediately attracted to, round, earthy, lively, and warm. It turned out she was not a Catholic but an aspiring minister in a Unity church with a theosophist source though she was brought up as a Pentecostal. From her writings, she brought us a short story containing hilarious descriptions of going on an Eastern meditation retreat as well as the beginning of a serious, deep and also funny autobiographical novel. Since she was planning to move out of the area, we didn’t become as close as either of us thought, but enough for a farewell dinner on the town with a mutual friend, on Saturday, November 17th.

Since coming into the community here as a consecrated widow, my love of going out to restaurants has diminished. They say that extroverts tend, after mid-life, to become more and more drawn to solitude, as if to live out the side of their personalities so long over-shadowed. Still, sometimes I can’t wait to get off campus to some funky or gourmet restaurant. This time, when the plan was suggested, I dug in my heels and said no. This was one of those times when I didn’t want to go out into the world at all. But what to do about the farewell dinner? Shame-faced, I asked my friends whether they might like to eat at our college cafeteria instead. They came up with a compromise. They would cook the dinner and we could eat it on the table of my large office. I could pay for the juice and dessert.

The surprise came when C. brought not only a delicious covered dish but a huge metal box with drawers of all sizes in it. This contained the collection of many colored, all differently shaped beads that she uses in her jewelry business. “After dinner we can make rosaries,” C. announced beaming.

Rosaries are certainly usually made of beads, but almost always of the same color and shape. After dinner C. gave us a choice of thousands of beads of many different colors. Handing us paper plates she told us to choose our fifty-eight beads from a selection of miniscule tiny holed ones only a needle could enter, all the way to huge scaly fish beads an inch long. We hesitated. There were sometimes six or eight identical beads, but surely not fifty-eight of the same.

Influenced by Jungian ideas about symbols, C. surely would think that the non-matching colors and shapes we picked would be deeply meaningful. I certainly didn't want to disappoint her. Soon, though, the fun of sitting like three little girls stringing beads overcame any scrupulosity about the beads not looking Catholic enough for a rosary. My friend, P., manifested her love of pristine beauty and order by choosing different shades of light blue. C. put in her rosary as many symbols as she could find from the assortment stored in the metal box in drawers and vials. Since I wear shades of grey as a consecrated widow in my community since that is the color of our community's habits, I am starved for bright color. I chose the more brilliant of the beads, including many multi-colored ones with tiny designs of stars and stripes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nothing to it. Just copy me.”

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

The readings for the liturgy today were about widows. The sermon today had to do with the tough and tender nature of widows in the Old and New Testament. Imagine giving up ones last oil to feed a prophet or ones last mite to the temple treasury! I thought of the widow saints I wrote about in my book *A Widow's Walk*. For instance, how about medieval St. Elizabeth of Hungary, so strong to confront the luxurious living of the royal family and yet so tender to the poor.

Mary, called exalted widow in a Spanish novena prayer, teach me how to be as tough when confronting evil, but tender when needed by those who are hurt. Gentle woman, you teach me that it is only in following your bridegroom, the Holy Spirit, that I will avoid over-reacting in an angry toughness. You also want to teach me how to be tender not only to those I have a natural attraction for, but to everyone, even my opponents. If I forgive, that will be possible. I must not give up hope. I need to start with grateful trust in those "graced friendships" nurtured in the community I have joined.

A separate note from an article about Tolkien: "the only just literary critic is Christ who admires more than does any man the gifts he himself has bestowed."

November 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A bout of anxiety came during our Sunday afternoon charismatic prayer meeting. Our community is not anti-charismatic. Some of the priests are prominent in healing and deliverance ministry. Still we don't have a regular community-wide prayer meeting where the charismatic gifts can be shared. Some of us started a small group that met Sundays. As is usual when there are no praise and worship style musicians present, the mood is more somber than when the live beat of electric guitars accompanies the songs. Often I come weighed down by burdens and fears. I thank you, Holy Spirit, for the way you lift me out of heavy moods through the loving and strong words of the others in the group. By the end of our hour I always feel supported and more hopeful, surely fruits of the Spirit.

Glorious Mystery:

There was an impressive light shining through the darkness in the paintings shown by the speaker at our dinner, an artist who is a devout Catholic. Personally I am more drawn to classical art up through impressionism than to contemporary work, but because I have gotten to know this artist and his wife I was able to understand better the stark use of charcoal and blood red he uses to manifest the enigma of suffering and evil. A silvery-white light in the distance of a green foreground representing St. John of the Cross' dark night of the soul drew me into that mystery so much that the artist decided to give me that painting. It hangs in my office now. When I am in a sad mood it tells me that hope in the midst of suffering is deeper than any lightness coming from transitory comforts.

Additional reflections for today:

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

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

November 19, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The joyful mystery of today was meeting with a man who wants to produce one of my late husband's plays. The one-woman show is called *Myself: Alma Mahler* and is about the wife of the composer Gustav Mahler. An actress Pam Fields from Arizona, who has performed the role many times, would like to present the play here. Mahler had a personal meaning for Martin because he was a Jew who became a Catholic, partly to forward his career in anti-Semitic Vienna, but also out of a deep love for the Christian vision. His glorious religious music influenced my husband's conversion to the Catholic faith.

The man who wants to produce the Mahler play called after reading the script. He recited a few of the lines that particularly appealed to him and to his wife. It brought back memories of others who responded to this play my husband spent so many years perfecting.

For widows, memories play a different role than for wives with husbands still living. The best moments, and the worst as well, are no longer enmeshed in the trifles of daily living. They stand out, instead, in bold relief. My husband loved to write but was too perfectionist to produce anything easily. Many were the revisions of my husband's two plays and his fictional masterpiece about Christ and Satan in the desert called *Children of the Breath*.^{*} Practically every evening of our marriage Martin read aloud what he had written during the day. If other members of the family were around, so much the more appreciation to be relished.

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

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

So here I am with a producer here arranging for the production of the play where all my friends and students at the college will get to see it. Such happiness to be able to do something for my husband after his death concerning this play we both loved so much. Did you arrange this from your present eternal abode, Martin?

^{*}To find out more about the book *Children of the Breath*, hit the web-site www.rondachervin.com or call CMJ, the publisher, at 708-636-2828. To find out about the Alma Mahler play call Pam Fields, 602-996-5025

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Striking! Since my children have rejected so many of my best Catholic thoughts, it gave me pause to read Gibran's maxim. Of course it is only a half-truth, since it would impossible not to give our thoughts to our children, directly or indirectly, but...

Oh, Holy Spirit and guardian angels of my children, please give them the truth in a manner they can accept, disentangled from whatever in me they are still rebelling against!

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

Once an adult daughter who is not practicing her faith asked me, "Would you really like it if I just faked it, went to confession, Mass, communion, only to please you?" I answered, yes, to her surprise. If she did this I'd have hope that once back in the door you, Jesus, would seize her even if her motives were not of the highest. But, of course, on a deeper level I know that in one moment you could ravish her and she would know and come back to your church. And you want me to trust that if you don't do that now, or if you have tried to reach her and she has resisted, I just need to keep hoping that one day you will win, dear hound of heaven.

Still, such pain that the most wonderful gift I gave my children, the Catholic faith, is what they rejected the most at least in terms of sacraments and Church-going. Always when I think about this, I hear you saying, my Jesus, that this is your pain, that the gift of faith you gave to so many has been tossed aside as if it were no more than an old stuffed Santa Claus figure.

Glorious Mystery:

On the column on my pad for glorious mysteries of this day I wrote three words – "bond with D." D. is a new friend. He will come up again I am sure, but here maybe I should just describe him with great thankfulness to you my father in heaven since it is you who "invent," as it were each person we come to know.

D. offers an unusual combination of lightness and depth, creativity and traditional piety, youth and solidity. When I met him first this year, after an hour's conversation I announced that we could become spiritual friends. Circumstances did not lend themselves

to developing this acquaintanceship, and I began to feel a bit ashamed of being so forward with him. But then other encounters of a spiritual nature favored a closer bond. Rare it is, at least I find, that we meet anyone with whom there is little need for constraint. I think in this case, it is all my young friend's amiable virtue because he managed to make many friends in an exceedingly short time. He seems to come from an unusually happy family. That explains a lot. He is close to his mother, so women my age don't frighten him. I believe that many men have difficulty with anyone of mother or grandmother age.

My daughters consider it a virtue of mine that in spite of my hoary old age and credentials I always look upon any newcomer on the scene as an equal and a potential source of wisdom rather than as a disciple. Actually, given my so visible faults and shortcomings, I always consider it a sheer grace if anyone can put up with these enough to want to be a friend.

Anyhow D. is a lover of literature, music, and art and his conversation is redolent of knowledge of these fields, as well as a delicate, modest good humor about his own accomplishments and foibles. Most of all he impresses me by his piety and self-sacrifice, spending long hours during the night in prayer in our chapel.

Dear God, you promised me you would send me the human love I need. Let me profusely thank you for this friendship.

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

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

Don't embrace or obliterate.

Reserve a part of yourself just for God.

Not so many plans – follow the Holy Spirit.

Burn past garbage!

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

Re-boot.

Be satisfied vs. complaining.

Be carefree.

Take care of your own life.

Chose healthy friends.

November 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A discussion arose today about gossip. Are all stories about others wrong to tell, or only some? Is it a matter only of intention? If life is funny, why isn't expressing

amusement at the ways of other people just a normal part of conversation? This topic is important to me because I am much inclined to telling anecdotes about others and am sometimes the recipient of censorious looks when observed in the act by those who speak about others only in a positive manner.

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

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

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

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

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

Ugh! What a depressing subject. No wonder St. James writes that the controlling of the tongue is so difficult. I can't remember ever asking you, St. James, to intercede for me, but this would be a good time. St. James, so clear about the evils of speech, I beg you to remind me of your admonitions whenever I am tempted to relish tales about the flaws of others. Most of all, St. James, would you ask Jesus to fill my heart with such love for him and for my neighbor that I will not want to joke about them any more.

I do not have any notes about a glorious mystery for November 20th.

November 21, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

To become:

Holy – constant prayer, secure in His heart.
Quieter – more custody of the tongue.
Hopeful – avoid despairing natural level predictions.
Compassionate – not so judging, more forgiving.
Trusting – God will send the human love I need.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Some older seminarians have difficulty with our jam-packed schedule of classes, prayer, and work around the campus. One told me today how overwhelming it is for him. There is an option for a two year program with two philosophy courses per semester over a two year period, but precisely the older ones hate this since it adds still another year to their many years of study before ordination.

Since I have always loved studying philosophy because I am long on concepts and short on facts, it is hard for me to see how difficult it is for those of a more sensory or practical bent to have to steep themselves in pure thought: eight courses in eight months! Take a man who has spent forty years of his life working as a wrestling coach, or driving a tractor. How humbling to have to start fresh to master a field as far from his natural interests as philosophy!

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

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

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

Now, thinking over this matter once again, I pray: “Dear Jesus, you picked mostly uneducated men to be your apostles with the exception probably of Matthew and John. Surely you love those men you have called today whose hearts are bigger than their heads! But you also promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit on your Church and, in this century, she insists that priests be well trained in philosophy and theology to withstand the onslaughts of error in society and sometimes in the Church itself. Please give me the grace to teach them what they need to know and to take any amount of time to bring along those least gifted in the philosophical mode of thinking.”

Glorious Mystery:

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

My husband loved best of anything in the liturgy of the year the moment at the Easter Vigil where the big candle, carried into the Church in the darkness, is lit and then from that one candle all our little ones are enflamed. I have always loved most the Good

Friday service where my own sufferings are taken up into yours, my Savior, and I feel my heart merged into yours.

Writing about the red vigil lights on the altar of our small chapel, I am reminded of a funny incident a few years ago. One of our past seminarians was a sculptor and art teacher before coming to us. Very sensitive to décor, he decided one day that those red lights didn't fit with Eucharistic adoration at all. The altar should be bare of all but the altar cloth and the glowing gold monstrance with the host encircled in it. The white candles he tolerated but he spread his negative opinion about these small red candles around the campus, sure that his arguments would convince anyone who was open-minded.

Evidently the truth of the artist's view had not penetrated the mind of one of the sacristans. One evening he walked into the chapel right before community prayer carrying the tray with the vigil candles in their glass holders. From his place in the second row of seats, the artist suddenly stood up, palms extended and gestured the older man to stay away from the altar with the "offensive red candles." Utterly bewildered, the sacristan froze in his tracks. I burst out laughing. The sacristan, having no idea what was up, turned red with shame and stiffly backed out.

I ran out to the sacristy to explain and apologize for laughing at him. But since he had not understood in the least the objections of the artist to the little red candles, he also couldn't fathom why his action in obedience to the artist could be funny either. It was almost a month before the older man spoke to me again in a friendly way. Incidentally, the artist never won that battle and the seven red candles still grace the altar every evening for better or worse.

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

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

November 22, 2002

Joyful Mysteries:

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

Then, during the Mass, came delight in the singing of two students from the same family leading music at the Mass. One young woman has a voice a little like Joan Baez who I loved to hear during the 60's. Music means so much to me. It was my father's most important source of happiness. As a lad, he wanted to play drums in the orchestra, but his mother thought that was too low an occupation and could never convince him to transfer allegiance to piano or violin. In later life he took care of the percussion section of a small opera company's orchestra. He never bought any instruments back to the house, but whenever we listened to classical music, he would conduct the drum parts with his hands. Until he left us when my sister and I were eight years old, we never spent an evening without loud music in the background.

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

I realize that this is not exactly correct except in emergencies, but it seemed so unfair that they had to miss communion because of the priest's fault. He said that he would not give them communion. Since daily Mass isn't obligatory why should they be sad? I replied that even though it is not a juridical obligation, for many of us it is an obligation in love. If Jesus wants to leap down from heaven, so to speak, at the bidding of the priest, how could anything be more important. I couldn't bring the priest to understand. It seemed as if he had no understanding of the longing for the Eucharist in the hearts of daily communicants. Occasionally I have to miss, but then I try to "make it up" during the week. Grief filled my soul realizing that he, himself, sometimes missed saying Mass without any huge reason. In a letter to priests John Paul II wrote that he wanted them to clearly realize that he thought celebrating daily Mass to be essential and that, never in his priesthood, had he missed this august rite.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 23, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Another most joyful mystery of the day was finishing the final editing of a novel I wrote with Gene Grandy, a member of a writer's group. I started writing this book now called A Summer Knight's Tale in Sedona, Arizona several years ago. This book has had a long difficult life. The inspiration for it came from a friendship with some Catholic men who wanted me to be part of a lay community. The two leaders I had known for years. Separately my I-Thou relationship with both these friends was superb. Dwelling in two small houses with these ardently religious men and a woman friend trying out community, became unbearable to all of us.

Since each of our small band had a source of income involving little outside work, our rule of life was to avoid all scheduling in favor of following the mystical lead of the Holy Spirit about everything we did or said. Each day we had a session to review our progress and challenge one another about defects.

One of the lowest moments came when the two most zealous Eucharist adorers in the group forced me out of a heavy slumber at 2 AM convinced that the Spirit wanted us to spend 3 hours at an adoration chapel. Under protest I dressed hastily and jumped into the old truck for the 25 mile drive to this lovely place of worship. After an hour of drowsy

prayer I was ready to go back. I interrupted the trance-like state of the leaders with my preference for departure. Not to disturb the other adorers of the exposed Blessed Sacrament, we went outside to confer. Two against one said that God wanted us to stay. I asked for the key to the truck and spend an hour in the back seat tossing and turning in the cold night, not without grinding and gnashing of teeth.

We didn't last two months as a community. During our trial I spend many hours pondering why people with such holy aspirations had such a hard time getting along. One of the leaders thought that it was because we just didn't have enough virtues among ourselves to live together. "What were the missing virtues?" I asked myself. Ultimately I concluded that even though all four of us were long on zeal and devotion, we were greatly lacking in the virtue of prudence.

Nonetheless God brought lots of good out of our experiment. Now, about six years later, one of the men is an ordained priest and the other a late vocation seminarian. I am a consecrated widow and the young woman finished her Ph.D. studies and ministers as a Catholic counselor.

A year after living in this lay community I decided to write a novel about a priest long on zeal and short on prudence. His character was a composite of the two men I had tried to live with. Partly I thought I could get some healing of memories from writing a humorous book about zeal sans prudence. Another motive turned out to be a kind of vengeance. Having been hurt myself not only by these men but with quite a few other males of holy longings lacking in many others virtues, I think I wanted to have the satisfaction of really showing how bad that can be.

The plot involved a young highly dynamic Franciscan priest who spends a summer substituting in a sleepy parish in Arizona. His first Mass includes a loud deliverance prayer for the sins he discerns to be present in the congregation! He accomplishes a lot for the young people or the parish and also for some of the adults but gets into a lot of trouble with a music minister who falls in love with him and with ill-judged sensational attempts to rouse the parish, such as rehearsing a Passion play with nails driven into his own hands. In spite of the calamities the priest suffers, the overall purpose of the book is to encourage priests and help parishioners to understand them better.

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

If you are not familiar with marketing of religious books you will not know that unless you write in the style and manner of Andrew Greeley on the bad side, or with the depth of Michael O'Brien on the good side, it is almost impossible to find a publisher for a Catholic novel. The main reason is that most Catholic fiction readers get their books at Wal-Mart. They are not looking for profundity or even inspiration. They are usually

looking for escape. When they want something spiritual they go to a Catholic bookstore that sells non-fiction almost exclusively.

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

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

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

Not only I, but all the members of our group thought every addition and change Gene made was nothing short of terrific. Since Gene was working two jobs plus doing lay ministry in the parish and also discerning the priesthood, the collaboration took much longer than I hoped. About two years later we were ready to send it to Bud Macfarlane, Jr. for another look. By this time I had left Sedona to teach here. The icing on the cake is that I got an endorsement from a priest of our community who liked A Summer Knight’s Tale and was not only one of Bud’s best friends but also the model for the priest hero of Bud’s books.

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

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

Reluctantly I put the many versions of the novel and the discs into a file cabinet in marked “old manuscripts.” But after death comes resurrection. A year later I was surfing

the net looking to see if there was any Catholic writers' board. If there was one, maybe it would have tips for finding publishers for fiction. How about Catholic Writer's Association (CWA) with, praise be God, a notation that they were only open to chatting with authors who totally accept magisterial teaching! CWA Book Nook was one of the icons. It was full of notations about Catholic novels. Wow! Strange, though, I didn't recognize the names of any of the publishers.

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

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

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

Today's joyful mystery was sending her the disc. By now in February, 2003 when I am augmenting my notes from November 23rd, our novel can be found on the net of Francis/Isidore E-Press at

<http://home.earthlink.net/~mklively/fiepress/summerknight.html>.

If you have the net, why not click on this and take a look? You can also find the book on my web-site – **www.rondachervin.com**. A Summer Knight's Tale even won a prize in the inspirational fiction category of an e-book award called Eppie.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Tonight was our team dinner. The community I belong to is made up, as much as possible, of teams including priests, sisters, brothers, lay people and now consecrated widows who work together on a mission site. In our document about how the team is to work together there is emphasis on regular meetings. This aspect of the way of life of the Society is easy to implement in places like migrant camps, one of our original ministry where there is small team with one priest, a few sisters, a brother, and one family with some singles as well, working together perhaps during a period of five years or much longer.

But what happens when the team is working at a school like ours with several priests, many seminarians here only for a year or two, sisters and brothers in residence for an unspecified number of years, lay people with limited if renewable employment arrangements, and surrounding families not living on the property? We counted eighteen people as temporary and permanent team members. Some think this is so unwieldy it is not worth trying. Since I have been pushing for team meetings regardless of these difficulties I was disconcerted to have to hear tonight the seemingly plausible arguments of those who think it unfeasible to meet at all as a whole group.

Dear Mary, it is your community, and your school. What do you want us to do? There is so much division among us even about how to follow the most foundational principles of our way of life. Will it be an impasse?

Glorious Mystery

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

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

November 24, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

I often think how the most successful cultural exchange of peoples comes through food. In my lifetime it was first pizza that went from being flipped at two parlors to thousands of pizzerias, eventually to outdo the popularity of this concoction in the Italy of its origin. Then, Chinese food moved from an occasional small restaurant in New York City to become a part of even the smallest cities across the country. Next Japanese sushi was all the rage – expensive and exotic but now in many a mall. Thai restaurants made a smaller splash. Of course in hispanic parts of the country Mexican food has always been an entrée to that fine culture. Thank you God for, as it were, winning our hearts through our stomachs.

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

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

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

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

spent her last years lying quietly in blissful gratitude for the ministry to her of others, pondering God's goodness as she turned over in her soul the memories of ninety years!

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

Longing for freedom of spirit has always been a part of my quest even though I am not quite sure what freedom of spirit really is. My external image of it comes from the popular movie about St. Francis: Brother Sun, Sister Moon with scenes of followers

running through the fields. One of my mentors, Charles Rich, the lay contemplative,(see my web-site for books of mine about him and others I edited of his writings) claims that the real freedom of spirit comes interiorily from total surrender to God. Conchita, the Mexican mystical saint wrote that “Peace is the sweet freedom of spirit that does everything without anxiety.”

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

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

November 25, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Even though it is real winter elsewhere, today we had our typical “winter” weather: balmy winds and sunshine galore. Since so much of the summer – April-October is boiling hot and I complain so much about it, I need to really pause and exult in this “perfect day.” A friend of mine born on a Kansas farm used to berate me for this manner of thinking of weather. How selfish she thought New York City people for rating the weather only in terms of their own comfort instead of with a view to the more important needs of the crops.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A group of us who presently live at the college, floated a plan to have our base next year at the team center ½ hour away, commuting to the school during the week to teach or study. The idea is that once formed properly we could become the nucleus for adjunct projects at our present school such as a center of Catholic Cultural Studies. In the midst of pondering whether our proposal would be accepted, a discouraging thought came to mind. Suppose the great rapport we now find among our circle of friends would be shattered as soon as we had to deal with practical problems of life as administrators ourselves? (The plan was turned down, by the way).

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

That slowed down my racing thoughts for a while. Then I fell into questioning our community's vision of having persons of both sexes so close together in ministry. Even though we live as separately as possible in terms of sleeping quarters at the college, is there more proximity than is good for us, given the differences of character between men and women? Do the genders do better in the older tradition of, say, male priests running the parish and the sisters running the school or hospital?

I didn't get too far with this line of thought. It is clear that those who join this community enjoy the mixed teams and consider any tensions that result well worth those difficulties.

Glorious Mystery:

Suddenly in the midst of turning over these considerations in my mind during our quiet adoration prayer I felt a gust of hope. From you, Holy Spirit? A sense came that our small group of professors and students is being formed in some way that I cannot now imagine. Typing this up now in May of 2002 I realize how much has been clarified since November, 2001.

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

November 26, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

What a sense of your mystical body, Jesus, to have us all together for this great venture. I hear Mary, Mother of the Church, speaking in my heart. "Dearest daughter, take the time to ponder deeply these sublime moments where everything comes out even

better than you could hope. It is true that you are too physically weak for ascetical sacrifices, but I do want you to accept small discomforts such as the cold and the wind tonight so that you will be free to enjoy times like these, full of grace. I want to be for you like a mother encouraging a small whiney child. When you feel bent out of shape, take my hand and let me mother you through the tiny difficulties of daily life.”

Some other reflections of this day: Mary said once to Conchita, the mystical Mexican grandmother saint who will one day be a doctor of the Church, “‘I am gentle and humble of heart.’ I do not come to teach science or ostentatious victories. I come to teach patience and humility. I want you resemble your Jesus in this.”

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

November 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Now, however, as a widow almost cloistered in my college, a trip to the supermarket is a keen adventure! I usually go with a sister who drops me off on her way to pick up mail at a nearby post-office. My joyful mystery was enjoying the merry side of Sister on this little jaunt into "the world."

This anecdote reminds me of stories about the "turn sisters" in enclosed convents. These were often chosen from candidates who were unsuited to the intricacies of the chanting of the liturgy of the hours. Instead turn-sisters were the link to the outside world, receiving gifts of food and other supplies through the built in shelf that opened to a door from outside the convent and then back in, sort of like a Lazy-Susan. In our equalitarian culture of the twentieth century we might have thought of these turn-sisters as second-class citizens. Thinking about the pleasure our sister takes in leaving the campus, I wonder if many a turn-sister was quite happy with her state in life.

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

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

November 27, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

There is heaviness in my heart sometimes for the sisters who have to sacrifice their own will when it comes to the place they are sent to, sometimes seemingly unrelated to their natural gifts. At a team meeting one of the most holy older sisters said that God might want to use more subtle gifts for a particular team. I suppose that could mean the gift of presence, or of meriting graces for other members of the team precisely because of their sacrifice. This thought made me feel ashamed of my own extreme reluctance to do anything I don't enjoy unless it is clearly a means to even greater enjoyment such as preparations for teaching classes.

Much more sorrowful was watching the anointing of the sick of one of our most unusual seminarians. A man in his seventies, a world wide entrepreneur, who had never been sick in his life, this man contracted throat cancer after being accepted for study in our community. At the VA hospital he was told that the only cure for his throat would mean taking out his tongue. Since he could not preach after that, he insisted instead on a painful experimental treatment involving massive radiation. He came to classes with a beet red face hardly able to talk from the hoarseness, on a feeding tube diet of Ensure and then, later, small spoonfuls of jello or other soft foods. Finally unable to swallow, he was sent back to San Francisco, his home town, for further tests. Still he found time to send large boxes of nuts and other delicacies to us at the school. Every day we prayed for his recovery. Finally he returned, in less pain but still unable to eat. Because of weight loss and other new maladies, he is leaving us once again.

What an example for us of the pain older men are ready to go through to be priests! I sometimes suggest to those giving vocation sermons not to always address "young men." There are so many older men who are willing to go to any lengths to spend whatever remains of their lives as priests.

The Holy Spirit reminds me "I blow where I will."

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

November 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Today I had long chats with women friends. Since so many of my relationships here are with seminarians, I cherish in a new way the dearness of companionable women. I picture us as participating in some way in the mystery of the visitation when you, Mary went to visit Elizabeth mother of John the Baptist for mutual comfort and sisterly sharing of wisdom. There is an empathy that comes immediately in communing with those of the same sex, heightened in this case by these particular women being older with adult children. Since the death of my son, Charlie, ten years ago, closeness to friends who are mothers is also increased by their great pity for me as a survivor of his suicide. (For more about that tragedy and how Jesus brought me through it see my autobiography, *En Route of Eternity* – Miriam Press). Like me they would rather die than have a child make that choice, and so they want to blanket me in their compassionate affection. At the time of his death, Mary, you showed me unmistakably how close you were to me in the partial similitude of your enduring the death of your son, Jesus. O mother saints who lived through the death of children, Elizabeth Seton, Cornelia Connelly, Conchita, Praxedes – and others I can't remember at the moment, intercede for me in my worst memories and for all those others I have met since who grieve those losses.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

Every weekday evening we have what are called spiritual exercises. A member of the team is assigned on a rotating basis to meditate on the writings of our founder and come up with a personal witness sharing about how the truth in the excerpt has manifested itself in his or her life that week. Tonight one of the seminarians told us how there came a time when his rich family went bankrupt. Abruptly they had to change their way of life

and live like the poor. Instead of elaborate amusements they had to revert to impromptu family fun at home. He asked us to recall greater joy in life coming because of being poorer than usual. My memory came from Junior High School days. Our parents were recently divorced. We had little money. What intense delight I took in my first pink Spaulding hand-ball, purchased with fifty cents saved from months out of an allowance of a quarter a week. In those days the first priority was bubble-gum which I forsook to buy the little ball.

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

November 31, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

The objective is to help the students to come into a synthesis of theology, philosophy, literature, art and music. Even though I also like less noble forms of art such as cartoons, or popular Gospel songs, I find it almost unbearable that a graduate of Catholic higher education might never have heard Monteverdi's choral music or looked carefully at even a copy of a fresco of Fra Angelico. One of my colleagues who is gifted in music and teaches literature will bring in that aspect as well as books about art and architecture. I will prepare the lectures about philosophy and spirituality for each period of Catholic history.

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today, I feel anxiety about the future. Fear of loneliness dominates. There has been a shift in long range planning for seminarians such that next year will see fewer coming here to be part of our team while they study. There has always been more of an affinity between me and the future priests than with the undergraduates. (Now, six months later, this has evened out as more of the young people at the college have been drawn to me.)

What am I afraid of, my Jesus? When I asked that question in prayer, it seemed that you was trying to show me that my longing for more intimate relationships on the team is right in line with what the Holy Spirit inspired the authors of our group's

documents to hope for. My need for greater openness, more beauty on campus without sacrificing simplicity, is what we all need. In fact, one of our sisters proclaimed at a meeting that the root of problems on the team and at the college came from the lack of enough one on one love among us, thereby corroborating what I was sensing.

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

Glorious Mystery:

I found such a wonderful line in a hymn in the *Office of Readings* (a book of psalms and passages from the Fathers, Doctors and other Saints of the Church. This used to be chanted at Matins early in the morning. Now it is usually prayed any time of the day by religious and lay and is often found within the four-volume set of the Liturgy of the Hours). This line I found in the Common of the Apostles, “If you really love me, be glad, have hope, for I leave with you my Spirit to guide you.”

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

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

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

December 1, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Speaking of frustrations, I had a nasty little blow up with the supervisor of our college kitchen over a trivial matter involving food supplies. Since I am no longer a housewife with control of meals, I have become frantic about getting enough of what I need. I am semi-diabetic controlled by eliminating sugar, who should also avoid cholesterol. Hard carrots and tough pork chops are out because of rotting teeth; anything spicy for digestive reasons. As a result I need to have much more protein than is sometimes served.

Analyzing my over-reaction to this small immediate dietary problem, I notice that I am worse in my complaints when it is a woman, such as this one here, who is in charge. I lay this to a fear of poverty my mother must have weathered after her divorce when our income was drastically cut. She went back to work and cooked us simple but tasty meals. Perhaps my sense now, so many years after, is that if even a mother-figure withholds food, then I will really starve. (This has a happy ending because a few months later my friend decided to use some discretionary funds to buy me extra hamburgers and steak to cook for myself whenever I got famished.)

A male friend of both of us observed our little scene with what seemed like withering scorn. When I tried to bring forth my psychological explanation of my upset he could hardly believe it. Both he and the kitchen supervisor of them are strong healthy people. Since the three of us had been working together on a plan for a rustic, less-structured study abroad year for our students, my failure to get along with the other two seemed significant. From their standpoint, clearly a person as needy and weak as myself would never make it.

I churned miserably in defensive fury over this incident until my Recovery, Inc. principles kicked in. I facilitate a chapter of an international self-help group that deals with anger, depression and anxiety. Recovery, Inc., unrelated to 12 step programs of the

same name, was founded in the 1940's by a psychiatrist, Abraham Low, to help his out-patients to cope with daily life situations. It was at Franciscan University of Steubenville that I first became acquainted with this highly successful system for dealing with chronic anger, sadness, and fear. A feature of the weekly group meetings in the interiorizing of helpful slogans. These little adages express a realistic attitude toward life vs. the kind of romantic belief that life should be wonderful and, therefore, everything disappointing is outrageous and justifying of rage or fear.

One of our slogans is to expect that average rather than the exceptional from others and oneself. Applying this to the tiff described above, I forced myself to consider that it is average that healthy strong people have little understanding of those with chronic physical problems. I also saw that on average a person like me, with lots of such difficulties, should not dream of being part of plans based on robust health and relative youth.

After working the Recovery slogans, I was calm enough to release my fantasy year abroad plans to my Father God. I saw that he wanted me to affirm the projects of others in the community, but to realize that I am too old to adapt to every one of them. He hopes to bring me to a point where I will be less frothy and volatile and more realistic and trusting. He has plans of love for me that fit my nature as it is; not as I might wish it could be.

December 2, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The same male friend who had seemed so contemptuous about my food needs passed by and gave me a hug. I said I was sorry I was too rigid to fit into his dreams for the year abroad plan. He smiled and said, "I love you." I laughed.

The encounter brought to mind the song Lotte Lenya sang in the musical "Cabaret." There is a refrain "you learn how to settle for what you get." Lenya plays the role of an older woman, a widow, who is being courted by a Jewish man at the time in Germany just before World War II. He brings her a pineapple, an unheard of luxury from the black market. She gasps with delight, but admits that eating it would only give her gas!

By analogy, I need to pray to be less gluttonous about the future. "So, Jesus, I don't get the pineapple, the fantasy of a year abroad, but shouldn't I settle happily for the good will of these friends who wanted to make up after the fight?"

Sorrowful Mystery:

Well, this is a first. I didn't have a sorrowful mystery today!

Glorious Mystery:

In prayer you, Jesus, whispered in my heart something like, "Stop struggling. You have won the victory. Even if your plans don't work for the whole college or the community team, you can do it yourself."

At the time I didn't understand quite what doing it myself meant, but now half a year later it is clearer. Even though we will not be a new team working on formation, some of us in the original group will be part of the Catholic Arts and Wisdom course.

Taking stock of the entries in *Face to Face* so far I am wondering what you, the reader, are thinking. Pretty intense, eh? Naturally, a journal is not a diary. Between the strong emotional reactions and the bringing of these before the face of the Trinity, the Holy Family, and the angels and saints, there is no room for hourly notations of such boring things as now I brushed my teeth and, then, walked to the classroom. Perhaps I should spend more time thanking you, God, for those neutral low-key realities that act as a sort of insulation. Ordinary life does function as a pause between struggles to jump out of the little hells of each day, often of my own making, into your loving arms.

December 3, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

Signing the contract for the e-book, *A Summer Knight's Tale*, described earlier, I felt much satisfaction. My co-author Gene and I worked so hard on this book. Sitting thinking about the book and praying it will help zealous young priests to persevere, I had a sense that you, Jesus, were honoring all the labor I put into this and other books for the sake of truth. Many years ago when my heart was still heavy as lead from the grief of the loss of my son, I was taking a nap during a long drive. I had a kind of mystical dream in which you kissed me on the forehead leaving an invisible white diamond shape like that sometimes found above a horse's nose. Occasionally when I am feeling happy at having done something for you I get an echo of that image of your kiss leaving a diamond shape on my forehead, like a secret code between us.

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

December 4, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The flip side of people leaving our community site for other missions is the many new people who arrive either as members of the community or to teach in the college. I have gotten closer to a fine young scholar. Since this is your college, Our Lady, I need to thank you for sending him not only to us but specifically to me by putting in his heart a desire to be my friend. Such a warm, solid, loving, prudent man! Whereas some of the younger men have difficulty with their mothers and then project that onto me, there are others with close relationships to their own mothers who find in me a friendly surrogate in this new-to-them environment.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

My students are always astounded to see how these erroneous ideas have crept into their own minds without their realizing the origin or falseness of them. For example, how many post-Vatican II Catholics take it for granted that it is the intentions rather than the physical acts themselves that make something wrong. Accordingly, they believe that a couple who is using contraceptives because they want to have a large family later after they are settled in their careers couldn't be that wrong. With consummate precision our Pope-philosopher shows the anti-personalistic bias behind such false teaching and practice. How so? Basically counting intention rather than act is as if the body is separate from the soul. But God created the body as an expression of the soul. An act of sex during the fertile time needs to be an expression of the total openness of love between the embodied persons of man and wife. (For a simplified version of this and other Catholic ethical teachings see my short book *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics* – Pauline Books – Daughters of St. Paul).

December 5, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

If there were joyful moments today I made no note of them. They must have been overshadowed by the humungus sorrowful one.

Sorrowful Mystery:

There was a dramatic back and forth at a meeting I attended today. Usually I am the main hurler of angry words. This time others outdid me. So fierce were some of the words and emotions, that I insisted we find some kind of mediator to resolve the conflicts. Possibly due to so many spiritual warriors in the group who clutch rosaries and chaplets in their hands under the table even during uneventful meetings, things didn't escalate to an even more hateful outcome.

I left the gathering in a state of numb outrage. One of my friends, however, thought that perhaps the honesty expressed in the outbursts cleared the air.

Dear Jesus, you say you want to bring us peace but also that those are blessed who long for justice. We beg you to show us how to tap into your love for each of us in such a way that we can achieve both.

Glorious Mystery:

I was persuaded by quieter participants in the meeting to go to confession for the acid tone of my comments. As ever, Jesus, you know how to use the soft goodness of your priests in this sacrament to melt my hard heart.

December 6, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am still reeling under the impact of the angry meeting. I asked St. Teresa for some advice. I remember reading about her conflicts with men during her battle to get her reform approved. She seemed to send an image of jousting males on horseback and words like these, "Men will be fierce sometimes when roused to anger unless they are thoroughly tamed by Christ. Even in my reform Carmel the priests and brothers fought over issues that divided them. Sigh, pray, and laugh a little."

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 7, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Another day where I failed to look for a joyful mystery! Looking back, as I type these notes, I think that the crisis of yesterday knocked me for a loop so that I didn't even care to follow my by then cherished routine of writing down the daily sources of joy, sorrow and glory.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A brother in the community, noticing me so agitated, told me to pray against the demon of division. At Mass I thought I ought to have greater faith that you, Jesus, can overcome any division where all the parties are his loyal followers. You warn me against fomenting rage in others by expressing my own. Instead I need to become more silent. I can do more to make things better by conveying hope and gratitude for each person's gifts.

Lord, have mercy!

Glorious Mystery:

One of my motives for becoming a Catholic when I was twenty-one, after years of trying to find truth through philosophy alone, was to be certain of truth through the gift of infallibility to Peter and his successors. As an atheist I studied the contradictory views of many great philosophers. As a result, nothing could have been clearer to me by the time of my conversion than that good-will and intellect is insufficient to resolve the conflict of ideas. The Holy Spirit who guides the Church is not a human philosopher but a Divine Person whom I can trust.

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

Getting conflicting opinions from several local experts, I called the USCC to see if there was a document from the Vatican on this. First the person I spoke to said she was sure I was wrong, but when she looked up the document she found an explicit passage from Casti Connubi, the encyclical written at the beginning of the 20th century when condoms and diaphragms were becoming more and more popular even among Catholics. There my view was clearly expressed. If the spouse who refuses to contracept tries to persuade the other one not to, but fails to convince that contracepting spouse, she or he should pray and try to bring the other to the light, but is still obliged to consummate the sexual act by virtue

of his or her marital commitment. The non-contracepting party is to be considered not as a cooperating sinner but rather as a victim of the sin of the other. This has been the unchanged teaching for priests in confessional practice since then. Of course, this is not to say that a wavering spouse should take this teaching as a pretext for *encouraging* the contracepting spouse in his sin.

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

Thank you Holy Spirit for unraveling for us the intricacies of our moral problems. May the light of truth enlighten the whole world involved now in the even more tragic mentality allowing the abortion of possibly more babies than are allowed to be born.

December 8, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

A brave mediator has been found to help us with some of the problems that surfaced at that painful meeting. Thank you, Jesus. Please help me to wish for the outcomes that are your will and not just my bias.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

The policewoman made a point that stuck in my mind. Because of the greater physical strength of most men, there is an unconscious knowledge built into the psyches of women that an enraged or crazed male could kill almost any female with his bare hands if so motivated. I think this emerges as a kind of gut level fear in women when men show unusual degrees of verbal anger even if there is no aggressive physical act accompanying the words. Since the meeting where male anger was expressed, even though I was not a part of the worst verbal back and forth, I find that my body is tense, as if fearing a blow.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 9, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

(I lost the notes for the sorrowful mystery).

Glorious Mystery:

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

The priest who presides over the Anglican-use parish is a black convert from a Baptist background. A kind of contemporary renaissance man with talents as diverse as playing the banjo and singing grand opera, this priest loves high liturgy and appropriate Church appointments. At this Anglican-use Mass there is an altar and some benches with hard kneelers but little in the way other furnishings. Imagine his pleasure when it was discovered that hidden away in the abandoned gymnasium of the old prep school our college took over there was a huge wooden pulpit. Laboriously this was heaved onto a truck and placed in our makeshift chapel.

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

One of my favorite things is watching someone when they get something they have long wished for. In our world so full of disappointments, thank you, Lord, for sometimes granting those wishes. As a matter of fact, this priest is the fulfillment of one of my unspoken wishes. It happens that my mother though white was part of the Harlem literary and artistic movement in New York City. Some of her best friends were blacks. As

children my twin sister and I loved the visits of people of this much more fun-loving, imaginative, soft-spoken breed. Later I would thrill to the music of Gershwin's Porgy and Bess, the jazzy gospel singing of Mahalia Jackson, and read with pounding heart the vibrant shocking prose of such writers as James Baldwin. As a Catholic I was at first not too sure about Martin Luther King, Jr. but, like so many others skeptics, after the death of this hero, I began to read him with amazement. What faith, hope, and charitable forgiveness of enemies! And how touching to read about our own St. Martin de Porres.

Later I came to love the writings of such black women poets and novelists as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Best of all is a charismatic speaker and prayer leader, Babsie Bleasdel, with whom I shared the role of speaker at several Steubenville conferences. She rocked me in her large bosom for more than half an hour when I told her about the death of my son.

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

December 10, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

An anxiety attack this morning thinking about the mediation session planned for this afternoon. Before the death of my husband I never knew what the words "anxiety attack" meant. I assumed it was just heightened fear. Now I know it for a specific symptom of anxiety not always related directly to a foreseen future event or encounter. Even so, there are degrees of panic that range all the way from a tremulous feeling in the gut to the hysterical shaking characteristic of panic attacks. My anxiety is more of the tremulous feeling type.

Soon after my husband died I realized that he was like the anchorman of a ditzzy woman, more like a balloon floating in the air than an earthly mortal. One of the ways I knew this for a fact was the presence, of his death, of low-key anxiety attacks in situations where before I would have felt fairly confident such as meeting new people or going into an airport. This was, of course, pre-September 11, way back in 1994. The panic experience peaked a year after a nearly fatal traffic accident. In this incident I would have been instantly killed had I emerged out of a car, which had been standing still, but was hit in a sudden sleet storm by two pick-up trucks skidding on ice. Instead, I walked away from the totaled car without a scratch but badly shaken.

Like many such victims, at first I thought I'd stop driving, but that was too impractical under the circumstances of wanting to go to Mass each day. So, I pulled myself together and, muttering the Jesus prayer incessantly, managed to drive reasonably well. A year afterwards, however, on summer vacation visiting one of my daughters and her family, I started imagining that every truck on the road was about to plow into my little rented car. Soon I was screaming with panic anytime any car got near. I turned in my rent-car and hired a friend to chauffeur me around. She became increasingly alarmed at the shrieks I would emit whenever she made an abrupt stop or got what I considered too close to a truck. Since she was a psychotherapist she suggested that these symptoms might be related to deeper fears. Why not try some sessions with a counselor?

I agreed to go once and then stop if I didn't like the professional man she had in mind. It turned out that he was a Jew from a New York City background who was sufficiently broad-minded not to have problems with Jews who become Catholics. I spent a year and a half talking to him mostly on the phone once a week on the phone, since I lived most of the year far from Arizona at the college where I am still teaching.

One of the first pieces of advice Dr. X gave me was to avoid what he called "unsafe people." The appellation was not meant to be objective. A person is unsafe to be with who makes me feel distrust and panic. I don't have to justify the reaction. I just have to get away, at least for the present.

Gradually I got around to understanding the severe impact on my psyche of the cultural alienation that came from being as a child an atheistic Jew among other somewhat religiously Jewish children; a lower middle-class girl amidst upper-middle class school girls; the daughter of ex-Communist parents living in a house filled with card-carrying Communists whose activities my folks were busy informing on to the McCarthy committee on anti-American activities. Talk about not fitting in!

Becoming a Catholic was wonderful for me spiritually but difficult in terms of not really understanding the ways of born Irish-American Catholics – the dominant group in the Church in the United States. For example, most Jewish people are brought up to speak their minds loudly, to value justice above mercy, and to hold onto their resentments with fierce tenacity. A joke going the rounds last year was this: What's the difference between a Rottweiler and a Jewish mother? Answer: A Rottweiler sometimes lets go! Irish-American Catholics, in general, are brought up to hide their real thoughts in order to be respectable and also good. They believe that being holy by offering up sufferings for love of God is more important than getting justice. Unless it involves issues with Protestants on the old sod, they try to forgive as soon as possible.

Could I see, Dr. X asked me, that I might not feel understood or "safe" among Irish-American Catholics living together at a small college? The Irish-American Catholics in charge of my community and the school seemed amused but horrified by my honest vociferous expression of my feelings and ideas. At the same time as they seemed to tolerate me, they also became more defensive and hidden about their own opinions and decisions.

By the time of the conclusion of Dr. X's fine therapeutic work with me, I came to understand my reactions much better. Now facing a show-down with an Irish-American mediator, would I be able to maintain some kind of dignity or would I let the emerging panic attack escalate into....what?

Dear God, it seems to have been was your idea, after the Fall and especially the Tower of Babel, to allow there to be many nationalities. You put us together in the melting pot of your Church. Or, to shift the image, are we to be "homogenized" by the blood of your Son? And you give us the recipe for getting along. It's called following the Gospel. But it's so hard. Help me! Help them! Quick!

The mediation meeting was postponed.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 11, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

On the issue of usury, and in many other issues, there is the principle of what is wrong with some practice the Church rules out. In this case unjustly gauging the poor when they need loans. Philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas advanced as the main reason for the wrongness of taking interest on loans was that it was unnatural to make money from money rather than from sale of products. The ideas and writings of philosophers, no matter how great, are not infallible. It is to Peter that Jesus gave the keys. When new forms of banking was such that the banker would lose out on his just due by loaning without interest, the practice of low fees for loans was accepted. I don't know enough about economics to explain this any better.

An important point for Catholics is that it is necessary to research matters before blithely deciding that the reasoning behind dissent is correct. Cases where change seems like a contradiction in Catholic moral teaching have to do with developments rather than a denial of a truth of natural law. For example, natural family planning, making use of new knowledge about the fertile time of the woman's cycle is a development leading to a new application of Catholic teaching which insists that each genital act must be open to procreation but has never taught that couples cannot make love during non-fertile times. Post-menopausal women were not told they must abstain from sex because they couldn't

conceive a baby. If you search on the web or ask your bookstore to look up materials from the Couple to Couple League founded by John and Sheila Kippley you can go further in understanding the reasoning behind the ban on contraceptives but the acceptance of natural family planning for serious reasons.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am feeling anxious waiting to know when the mediator is coming to visit us. Instead of shuddering alone, I will flee into your hearts, Jesus and Mary, my refuge. There was a powerful singer who did music ministry at Franciscan University of Steubenville. She made tapes of her music under the title "Home in His Heart." I love that phrase.

Glorious Mystery:

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

Forgetting You is our greatest sin of omission
How it foment and fumes with each swish of the heart
If we fail to be consumed by the tabernacle within...

We ache for you when we are anxious,
Desperately spread a table in welcome when decisions await,
But forget you in the travel and travail of daily movements.

We pity our solitude, painting and embroidering sorrows
Out of forgettings, doubts and faithless denials,
A memory as untrained as an unbreeched youth...

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

O let us remember with each heart's motion, your holiest beating
Of wings and breath enabling our hearts to be hearts of flesh.

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

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

December 12, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The poinsettias have come to grace the foot of our altar. I just happened to read a contemporary novel describing the heroine as tending a garden where poinsettias were grown for Christmas sale. The book is replete with details about the care of these unusual plants. Now I appreciate them much more. They always come as a surprise to me during December since they are so different from the flowers or green leaves we usually see in the Church.

The prejudice I mentioned before about the conventional creates a sort of barrier between me and seasonal decorative flowers such as lilies at Easter. Yet after I study them awhile I see the rightness of their choice for the liturgical theme, even if I could not describe why they are in tune.

In the case of Christmas, the greatest surprise the world has ever known, God become a little baby, why not complement this mystery with the surprise of leaves not glimmering green but rich red? And is the velvety quality of the poinsetta a remote analogy to the soft tender skin of you, baby Jesus?

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am feeling pain and rage today that we have not heard from the mediator. Therapists have taught me to understand that fear and anger toward men surely comes from my father deserting our little family without prior notice when we were eight years old. Are these old insecurities and resentments now exploding out of long simmering lava like the flames at the top of a volcano?

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

You pleaded "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do?" In my Recovery, Inc. language this is expressed in the slogan "They're not doing it *to you*, they're just doing it. Help me to accept that the mediator is just himself a limited human being, probably dreading an unpleasant scene. He doesn't despise me for insisting on this mediation; he just wants to avoid something he can't be sure he will succeed at.

Glorious:

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

“Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all things will be added unto you.” That is one of my favorite sayings of Jesus. There in the procession was the mediator. He greeted me with affection and good plausible reasons for the delay. “Oh, ye of little faith,” I muttered to myself as a joined full-throatedly into the songs of praise to Our Lady of Guadalupe led by the marvelous Cathedral choir.

December 13, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Anger again since the very leader I met in the procession has still not called to fix a date for beginning our process. Lord, have mercy!

Glorious Mystery:

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

It is part of the teacher's cross that sometimes the same readings and lectures work for one class but not for the next one. One of the worst fiascos was the course years ago that went fine with one group of students but bombed on the next group, both in the same semester. The reason was extraordinary. In the second section of the class was a well-known young visionary. Not only was he supernaturally gifted, but he happened to be handsome with considerable savoir faire. This seemed to set up jealous vibes among the male students, and an uneasy curiosity among the young women. It was impossible to get them to concentrate on the ideas of the hoary old philosophers.

Since there is never a guarantee that students will love our classes, it is particularly heart-warming when they do and show it openly. Alleluia.

December 14, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

One of the men with whom I am in conflict asked to take a walk with me. In the past having a private conversation with him to resolve matters has been helpful, thanks be to God. This time, however, it felt like "stone-walling." I takes me about a year to catch up with these popular images that become a fad in our culture. At first I don't even understand phrases like "stone-walling" or "shining someone on," but then suddenly it hits

and I realize that the reason the image becomes so over-used is because it is a description of a widespread malady.

In this case it could be called stone-walling when someone brings up an, at least apparently, legitimate problem and the person confronted finds the quickest way to change the subject to something neutral, sometimes throwing in a few flattering remarks to deflect attention from the issue. I realize that conflict in life is inevitable. What I am seeking is some kind of just means of resolution vs. seething on one side and stone-walling on the other.

Mother Mary, this man is your beloved son, devoted to you. I give him to you to heal. If I am also being stubborn, please melt us both down from stubborn intransigence.

Glorious Mystery:

The mediator finally came. On this day I was so happy that he paid attention to my problems that I accepted what he said as reasonable. Later, as you will read, those very same words of his struck me as indicative of a way of understanding Christianity that I cannot embrace at all.

Basically the mediator said that the community does not believe in forcing people to improve such as administrators at the team-site. While efforts are made through prayer and persuasion, I need to offer up the sufferings at the college in intercession for the students. Because I saw that for him doing the mediation was a cross and that he had accepted it, I felt inspired to agree with him about my cross. That evening I was able to confess to a priest I had trouble with in the past, because the mediation session had melted my heart.

Typing up these notes six months later when the problems have worsened, I beg you, Holy Spirit, source of wisdom and comfort for the Church, to help us find a compromise on these differences. How tragic that our community, so blissfully free of heresy and scandal, is yet so torn by divisions based on personality and opposing judgments in prudential matters. Help!

December 15, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

I should pray now for that endeavor. Dear saints and artists and composers we will try to show you off to our students. Please let us at least not fail you by any jiffy methods of preparation. May your light shine before those students unfamiliar to an integrated theological and cultural Catholic world-view.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A group has been training in old-fashioned contrapuntal singing. They performed their first time together tonight in the newly decorated hall. It was a sadness for me to see that because some of the undergrads were unfamiliar with the more formal manner of this spiritual entertainment there was some tittering. In spite of pockets of "high" culture, in the United States, we are more comfortable with gospel and guitar than with organ. That is part of the reason for our Catholic Arts and Wisdom course – to familiarize the students with our wider European treasury.

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 16, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

Our English professor arranged for his students to write and then perform hymns, essays and dramas about the saints for the rest of the college community after dinner tonight. With astounding flair one of the young women, dressed in costume, recited a long poem she wrote about St. Clotilde, a not so well known early Christian queen whose prayers and example led to the conversion of Clovis of France. She managed to universalize the theme to cover any young woman in love with a non-Catholic yearning for their union to be fulfilled in Christ.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Today we learned for sure that the proposal to start a team to be formed away from the college that would commute to classes was turned down. When I brought the disappointment to you, Jesus and Mary, it seemed that the lesson was that we should be focusing at this time on each group member's vocation instead of on preparing apostolic work. Behind the sadness about giving up the original plan there is a certain fear of losing these wonderful comrades if they disperse because they do not feel they belong at the college as it presently is configured. Our Lady, you remind me how hard it was for you to release Jesus to his public ministry after the intimacy of the home at Nazareth. You want me to trust that true spiritual friendship is eternal no matter where each one is sent.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 17, 2001

(As I get closer to the holidays with lots of projects to finish before I leave for the family Christmas in New Hampshire, you will see the entries get shorter.)

Joyful Mystery:

One of our students, who is leaving after Christmas to study abroad, wanted to have lunch with me. To go out to eat with someone from the college feels different than jamming in some kind of private conversation at a remote table in the cafeteria. This young woman was originally signed up to go to another much more well known orthodox Catholic institution than ours. She happened to meet one of our professors at a High School college fair. So taken was she by our vision that she changed course abruptly and came far away from her home to study with us.

I believe this student is a representative of a certain new kind of young Catholic person. Brought up in a large devout family, she arrived fresh and wholesome with none of the tired “cool” of some teens in our culture. Her attendance at daily Mass, not obligatory, and at other prayer times was so regular and intense that some thought she might have a vocation to become a sister. During our lunch she confided that she thinks she does have a vocation, but to the lay missionaries of our community. (As I edit this once more in 2003 she has told me she wants to become a sister, after all).

Lay community members are formed to go out on world-wide missions. The families have to wait until there is a site that can afford the absolutely minimum expenses for the support of parents and children.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A theologian came today to apply for a teaching position next year. In spite of much work on getting our procedures lined up in good, efficient way there were quite a few difficulties in the arrangements. This made me impatient. The candidate was a layman with whom I had happy encounters in the past. It was amusing, if troubling, to find out how many problems he had at his present post that he would probably also find here if he came. Starting up small liberal arts institutions is much more difficult than any of us imagined. The vision is always glorious but the working out of the implementation is as complicated sometimes as unraveling wet knotted wool!

Okay, let me pray for the intercession of Mary and all the women saints who wove and knit. Would you like to help us with our figurative knots?

Glorious Mystery:

Surprise! An English publisher is coming out with a book about widows. It is a translation by Cardinal Biffi of a book originally in Latin by St. Ambrose. They asked if I would write an introduction. To prime the pump they sent me a similar publication, also translated by Cardinal Biffi of St. Ambrose, called by the shocking title *The Chaste Whore*. I was so flabbergasted when I saw the cover that I scanned it quickly to make sure it wasn't some kind of porno scam! No, it turns out to be the glorious image of St. Ambrose that like a whore who lets all men into her house and bed for money, the Church is the chaste whore who lets all men in sinners and saints alike...for free!

St. Ambrose, please intercede for all those sinners, unlike us, who are afraid to come back to the sacraments for fear of condemnation. Those I know personally in this state would not like to see their names here. But you know who they are.

December 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

One of our former students, who decided to transfer to Steubenville after two years with us, came back for a visit. What smiling faces and big hugs, from all of us who loved her when she was ours. The fun was augmented by the fact that since she is so much taller than most of us we had to stand on tippy toes to reach her shoulders with those hugs.

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

One of our most amiable cooperative serious seminarians has decided to leave the community and the college. What a blow! The shadow side of our free-spirited charism is that we are poorly organized and also not always just in matters of daily life. Everyone tried to dissuade him from departing. We failed. He still wants to be a priest, but somewhere else.

Priest saints please pray for this man. Ask Jesus to forgive us for whatever part we had in discouraging him. If he was always destined for another community or for becoming a priest in a diocese, please show him where he will feel the greatest sense of call and belonging.

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 19, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Heaviness of heart after hearing that a young student I was fond of who viewed me as a surrogate mother but who rarely confided in me is leaving. What a loss to us!

Mary, this is your school. Please help us to change in whatever ways will make us more of a true home for our students. Of course, they may have their own private reasons for wanting to leave that have nothing much to do with us, but if any part is our fault, inspire us to change.

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Some fear of flying to New Hampshire after September 11. Will that day ever be lost to memory? Not in our lifetimes! Lord have mercy on all those who lost that day much more than confidence in pleasure trips. Remind me, my guardian angel, to offer up my tiny fears in solidarity with the lasting trauma of those directly involved in family tragedy. (As it turned out I was not too anxious because I kept working my Recovery, Inc. techniques during my journey, such as seeing the averageness of feeling worried about the flights, etc.)

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 21, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

The worst fight had to do with a dispute involving use of cars. It took place in the midst of an excruciating pregnancy of my daughter, with mounting fear since the doctor said she might die of a heart attack during the delivery. With all of us in a state of panic, a glitch arose over arrangements concerning different cars. The details are not important. My daughter, Diana, did telephone mediation with enough success so that I could stay long enough to take care of the other children during the labor and delivery, thereby enabling my son-in-law to be at the side of his wife at that crucial time.

Still, about six months of coldness came after I left for my college until I got the grace to write a really humble apology for my part in the dispute. My son-in-law was so shocked at my honest admission of guilt that he thawed and now likes to show how much he loves me whenever I visit. Mutual forgiveness is so sweet. Thank you St. Joseph, patron of families, for helping me on that one. Please keep us all close in time and in eternity.

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

December 22, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Later in this journal you will read more about my visits to a hermitage, started shortly before Christmas of 2001. The priest formator of this hermit village not too far from the college prays without reading for about four hours a day visibly in the little chapel. When I come for retreats I feel drawn to prayer of simplicity – that is the kind of sighing aspersions such as Jesus, Mary, Joseph save souls, or the name of Jesus repeated over and over. This leads into a wordless sense of God's presence. Sometimes, as a grace from God, the prayer of quiet throws a mantle of deep peace over my soul.

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

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

Oh, yes. Simplify me, please.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Waves of homesickness for my community family back at the college. There is a whole different feeling being among so many devout and holy people there. A community is a kind of family, but really different. Family is so much tighter and interwoven psychologically and physically. Some of these relatives lived in my womb! But in a

religious community there are these spiritual bonds, coming especially because so many offer their sufferings for graces for the others. Sometimes when I know who is praying for me I can practically “see” the grace coursing across the chapel from their souls to mine.

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

Yes!

December 23, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

I was also pleased to find simple Christmas decorations of pine and a sweet unembellished nativity. How deep we are affected in matters of aesthetics by the values of our parents. Partly because of their communist background, but maybe also just as a matter of taste, both my mother and father detested any kind of gaudy or luxurious show. Since they were atheists when we were growing up, they rarely entered any Churches to make judgments on the ecclesial art, but the radical background ensured a hatred of anything suggestive of gouging the poor for funds to adorn statues or altars. Stained glass windows were okay, I guess because the beauty of them was so colorful and delightful as to numb the mind concerning costs. It was particularly anything gold or silver that was utterly taboo and that included, of course, personal jewelry of any kind.

This brings up a strange image from childhood: "the gilded ghetto". The idea was that even if Jews got wealthy they still lived in a ghetto since they were clumped together in certain neighborhoods and in those days still couldn't crash country clubs or certain blocks on Fifth Avenue of NYC where I was brought up.

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

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

In another compromise, during the last years of her life she chose to live in a fancy mostly Jewish residence overlooking the ocean in Santa Monica, California, rather than some more modest place for the elderly. I was surprised but happy that she wore a large if decorative cross around her neck. She had become a Catholic at the age of sixty. The wearing of this cross caused some curiosity in the other Jews since her looks and

mannerisms were clearly of their ancestry. After six months of gossip one of them got up the courage to ask her what she was. Airily she replied that she came from a Jewish background but that, “I like many things from different religions.”

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

Unfortunately, other liturgical dancers of less professional ability or discernment have managed to offend congregations with tight costumes and gestures more associated at

times with popular dance motifs than the modern dance or ballet style of the originators. This led to a ruling against all dance in the liturgy followed by the obedient and defied by those who weren't inclined to obey anything coming from the Bishops or the Vatican if it was contrary to their own ideas.

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

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

I imagine you replying that you rejoice in all praise of your son. I picture you loving rapt stillness for yourself and other Christians, but also loving ecstatic joyful physical expression. You also tell me that it saddens you if men and women are distracted from the Mass, itself a kind of ritual dance, when performers move in such a manner that can lead to sensual images in the minds of the on-lookers or participants.

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

December 24, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

My dear friend and godchild Becky is in the hospital for surgery resulting from a diabetic condition. I know her well enough to take in how horrifying she will find the loss of some of her mobility. Becky loves to walk and bike ride and swim. It would be easier for one like me who mostly sits to pray or teach or write.

Guardian angel of Becky, be with her to give her the best thoughts she can ponder at this so difficult time for her.

Glorious Mystery:

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

In the glory "department" I am also reminded this Christmas of Chesterton's conviction that there was no story in the whole world as touching as that of God become a baby. I always think of that when bringing the grandchildren over to the nativity to see

this beloved scene. The antiphon for one of the prayer times says “Today you will know the Lord is coming and by morning you will see his glory.”

Little infant Jesus, I know you are trying to reach me, to charm my maternal heart and drag me away from intellectualizing everything. As well, please worm your way into the hearts of my wavering daughters, their doubting husbands and all the grandchildren.

December 25, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Just as important to me as gifts from the family were a long dark gray dress, scarf and raincoat. They represented the hard won acceptance of my “wearing of the gray” as a consecrated widow in my community.

Dear Mary, you know how much I hate grey as a color so that it is quite a sacrifice to wear it every day. Disliking especially light and steel gray, I started buying more things in charcoal which almost looks like black, one of my favorite colors for clothing, especially since becoming a widow. I offer to you the loss of the bright colors I love, now so much more appreciated when seen worn by others.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Notes for December 26 are missing.

December 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 28, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I am visiting a dear family who have a summer and vacation home in New Hampshire. My hostess mentioned an idea she and her husband have of building on their property “casas di reposo” – rest houses for their elderly friends. Since these elderly friends include many of my favorite people on earth, I got quite excited by the idea. Let me turn to you, Mother Mary, and ask you to calm this almost manic enthusiasm I have concerning ideal schemes for my future.

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

A new insight into that bad habit of gossip and detraction. Today I realized that the situations and persons I describe to my friends in gossip involve some feeling of impotence. I am unable to win in the real encounters. Compensation appears to come with having the upper hand in my witty description of these recalcitrant people who stand in my way. In Dr. Low’s Recovery, Inc. system for anger, fear, and depression, this is called trying to get a “symbolic” victory by shouting out one’s own point of view, as if increasing the volume means persuading others; seldom the case.

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

So I turn to Our Lady, the true foundress of our little school. It is a beautiful vision. Help me not to be too ready to chuck it when I am frustrated by present problems. Let me hope and trust in you, Mother Mary.

Glorious Mystery:

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

St. Bernard, perhaps you, who wept to see the travesty that followed on the magnificent vision of the Crusades, are the one to pray to that these plans may one day achieve fulfillment, not as a utopia, but as a realistic expression of Christian virtue.

December 29, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

I took the two oldest boys who are 10 and 12 to confession this afternoon. I was impressed by how serious they were about it. It is so difficult to try to bring them into the Catholic mysteries when my daughter isn't receiving the sacraments or going to Mass and their father isn't a believer in God at all. Still somehow they get enough to keep coming when I am here. Padre Pio, help them.

Sorrowful Mystery:

As I anticipate leaving soon to visit my daughter Diana and her family in Los Angeles, I am feeling the pain of leaving this part of the family, especially since my Carla doesn't know Jesus as her savior. Even though that fundamentalist phrase has become ambiguous in its use by anti-Catholics there is a deep essential meaning to it that is valid and poignant.

Dear Jesus, please break through her barriers, especially those caused by me inadvertently or just because I am not holy enough so that you can shine through me to her. You tell me that you honor her suffering and yearning.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

December 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

