

ONE FOOT IN ETERNITY

The Journals

of

Ronda Chervin

1993 – May, 2013

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Introduction

I am guessing that most of you who open *One Foot in Eternity* know me from other Catholic books I have written, from talks at conferences, or from EWTN and Radio.

In 1993, just after my husband's death, Miriam Press published my autobiography called *En Route to Eternity*. At that time I was fifty-six years old. Now, at age seventy-five I am wanting to write a sequel using the humorous title: *One Foot in Eternity*.

For those of you who never read *En Route to Eternity*, here is a brief story of my life up to 1993.

I was born in New York City in 1937, a twin, to parents who met in the Communist party but who left to become informers to the F.B.I. while we were in the womb!

We were brought up as total atheists, although $\frac{3}{4}$ of the family came from Jewish backgrounds with one very Christian grandmother.

Eager to figure out the meaning of life, I studied philosophy at the university. Most of the professors, however, were skeptics. By 21 years old I was ready to commit suicide since I couldn't find either truth or love.

But God found me. While pursuing a graduate degree at Fordham University, under the tutelage of the Von Hildebrand circle, a series of miracles occurred. By age 21 in 1959 I became a Catholic. Eventually my twin-sister and my mother became Catholics.

I married an atheist with an orthodox Jewish upbringing. He was book salesman, looking for Christ. With a dispensation from his former civil marriage, we married in Rome and had twin daughters, Carla and Diana. He became a Catholic many years afterwards.

In 1964, we moved from Rome back to the United States. He became seriously ill with late-onset asthma. I finished my Ph.D. and we moved to California where I supported the family teaching philosophy at Loyola Marymount University and, later, at St. John's Seminary. During this time I wrote many books and gave many talks. My husband became a playwright and novelist.

After several miscarriages, we had a son, who became a cellist and composer. He committed suicide at the age of 19. Two years afterward my husband died of cardiac arrest.

Why did I write *En Route to Eternity* about my life up to then? Looking back I think it was because God knew I needed the type of healing of memories that could come

from trying to get “a God’s eye view” of my whole life before I would set forth on quite a different life-style as a widow.

During most of my marriage I wrote journals and letters to a spiritual mentor. Excerpts from these writings up to 1996 found their way into a book published by C.M.J. Marian Publishers called *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*. The journal writings and letters include early adventures in widowhood, also described fictionally in a novel I wrote called *Last Fling*. That book was not published but can be found on www.rondachervin.com as a free e-book.

So I am beginning *One Foot in Eternity* with autobiographical notes and excerpts from journals that start in 1996.

My prayer: Dear Jesus, Mary and Joseph and widow saints, I truly believe that you want me to select excerpts from these many writings to be available for others to read. But, I am a little afraid. I don’t want my “drama queen tendencies” to permeate this book. Instead I want it to be a form of heaving up my mind, heart, and soul to you, holy ones, that you may heal me of wounds of the past, and bring hope to those with similar experiences and feelings.

(With a view to avoiding drama queen tendencies I am omitting from these excerpts of the journals some painful experiences that involve others who might not like being described as secondary characters in my scenarios! This will make *One Foot in Eternity* less “juicy reading,” but it will improve my character, so if you are used to, humanly speaking, more exciting stuff from me, offer it up for my salvation and yours or go to www.rondachervin.com and try to novels I wrote during the same time period!

[Note: Every few years, after becoming a widow, I started a new journal with a new title. These titles will now become chapter titles for *En Route to Eternity*.]

Notes from the Feminine Underground

August, 1996 – November, 1998

(Note, the whole of this journal is not on the hard-drive or this book, and is only in a pile of journals presently in the bookcase at Diana Jump's house in California (one of my daughters - the larger manuscript in a mauve folder with my private promise on the cover and the El Greco Christ post-card at the bottom).

(Note: The title is a spoof off Dostoevsky's famous book *Notes from the Underground*.)

[These journals were written when I was age fifty-nine through sixty-one. To understand the context, I need to tell you about the time immediately after the death of my husband, Martin, in 1993. At that time we were living with my daughter, Carla, her husband, Peter, and their children, Nicholas and baby Alexander. I was teaching at the seminary in Camarillo, California. The famous Northridge earthquake hit two months after my husband's death. My daughter was terrified. We decided to sell the jointly owned home in Woodland Hills, California. They moved to Sedona, Arizona, and I moved to Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio. I had always wanted to teach at this university I thought was the best Catholic place in the whole world, being magisterial, charismatic, and Franciscan. I couldn't have done so when married because we had moved to California to avoid the horrible effects of cold weather on my husband's asthma. Now was my big chance.

However, something else was on my mind: finding a second husband. Now, twenty years later, I realize that Martin was the best man for me, in many ways, and I joke that "the absence of annoyance is not joy – beware married women of thinking it will be!" Of the list of twelve single old men friends I "looked into" the favorite was so frightened when Martin died that when I made a trip to his far away State, he checked himself into the hospital to avoid me! Some of my attempts to find a holy husband are described with humor in my novel, *Last Fling*. At the time these twelve rejections seemed in some cases devastating, but in most just a "learning experience."

My experience at Franciscan University was surprising and distressing. Even though I loved the President, Fr. Michael Scanlon, and the Franciscans, and the faculty and the students, I didn't fit in. Hindsight, 20 years later, I understand it better. I was a new widow. I needed to be near my family – people who knew me as the wife of my husband and the mother and grandmother of these adult and little children. Being

suddenly alone as a professor was, well, lonely. Especially since I didn't meet Mr. Perfect Second Husband. After a year and a half, I left, coming back often to speak at conferences.

A theme, fascinating to other widows, that you will follow throughout the journals, is this: if you are a woman, like me, with a pension and widow social security, and you love simplicity of life so that you can live in a room anywhere, you can become incredibly unstable! If you have a house and need your salary to live on, you have to stay places even if they are not "perfect." But, if you don't need money and you are not weighed down by a home, as soon as things get disappointing you can try something else. In these journals you will see that in my own opinion I thought of myself mostly as a crazed ding-bat, but sometimes simply as a pilgrim!

In the book, *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*, you can read about how I tried to become part of a religious community that accepted older women, including widows, called the Handmaids of Nazareth, founded by Dr. Yvonne Rosedale. Not to repeat what is in that book. I will briefly summarize this experience.

The Handmaids of Nazareth was a community designed for cyber-space where we met twice a year for retreats and otherwise communicated via telephone, e-mail, etc. I loved the foundress, a great-hearted single adoptive parent of many children from all over the world, but had a lot of difficulty with her ways of doing things. So I dropped out.

Next I tried a tiny community of with three others people – two men and another woman living in a house together. The rule of the community was that instead of having a daily schedule, besides daily Mass, we would just do whatever the Holy Spirit told us, moment by moment. We lived on the salary of the woman who owned the house and my contributions from my pension and social security and spent a lot of time in Adoration at various churches.

Even though I loved the members dearly, I had problems again with fitting in to aspects of the life-style that didn't fit me so well. After a short while, I left and moved in with the earthquake-dislocated daughter who was living in Sedona, Arizona. The others in this little group did very well, incidentally, in quite different vocations.

This is when the first unpublished journals begin. Throughout the excerpts from the journals, I will insert autobiographical notes so you can understand the context.]

(Below you will find my private promise, made on August, 1996) to be dedicated to Christ, not to remarry but to live in my own rule of life for Him and for the Church.

This promise can be made by anyone with a priest blessing it.

August 23, 1996

My Beautiful Jesus,
I come before you,
a daughter of Zion, a widow,
redeemed in your precious blood,
to consecrate my heart to you,
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
and obedient to Him,
For the rest of my life
in a private vow of ~~celibacy~~
as your bride ^{chastity}.
in a vow of simplicity
for the sake of the poor
I wish to live as your handmaid
in the image of your Blessed Mother.
I beg you to heal & purify my heart
that there may be nothing inside
but love for God & each person
I encounter.

Amen

Sister Ronda Marie
of The Precious Blood



(When I took this private promise, part of my rule was to live very simply by wearing plain blue jumpers and A-line dresses, as often as possible of the type I could buy for \$5 at the second hand shop. This way of dressing gave me more discretionary funds to send to Mother Teresa's nuns and pro-life causes).

December, 2006

Here in Sedona, Arizona, every morning I go to a Church with huge windows overlooking the red-rock scenery. They have adoration before the morning Mass. Quite a few people sit quietly in their pews. The seats of the church are arranged in a semi-circular manner around the raised sanctuary area.

Unlike the others, I am afflicted with seemingly ungovernable jumpiness. When I hear someone coming into the church, I feel compelled to turn my head to see who it is and to greet him or her with a toothy grin. Then after five more minutes of rapt prayer, I find a need for one of the many items in my tote bag: kleenex, pen and post-its, glasses, tic-tacs, scissors, devotional booklets. Even when I quiet down for ten whole minutes, kneeling, head in hands, engaged in deep prayer, I will suddenly jerk up and grab the pen to write some little note, or bring out a handkerchief for a thorough nose-blowing.

Most of the daily Mass Catholics have grown accustomed to my ways. Some sit at least two pews distance to avoid being distracted by this perpetual motion machine; others sit near and pay no attention.

During my quiet prayer, absorbed in the beauty of the large white host encircled by the gold monstrance, I suddenly thought about the early American Protestant Divine, Jonathan Edwards, who had a lot to say about analogy. This interesting thinker believed that everything in nature was created precisely for the purpose of providing analogies to supernatural realities. God is glad whenever we managed to spot the analogy, as in becoming aware of how the delicacy of a flower points to the delicacy of God's grace.

If nature provides such analogies, perhaps human made artifacts also can be jumping off points for Godly meditation. I was stunned once when a brilliant friend who was working her way through graduate school doing clerical work told me that every time she sealed an envelope she would meditate on the goodness of unity over separateness! Get it? The closed envelope, was more together, unified, than the open one!

Now why is it so characteristic of human nature to live on several levels at once - licking envelopes at the same time as meditating on the metaphysics of the universe? The many-layeredness of our psyches has always perplexed me. We are able to do so many things at once. Often instead of elevating ourselves to a higher level in the midst of menial tasks, we are dragged down to a lower level, from the "sublime to the ridiculous." Is the disunity of the many-layeredness of our personhood a result of the Fall, or just part of God's way of making us? Did Adam and Eve, before giving into

the temptation of disobeying God, have only one thought at a time? Were they what the Germans call "einfach" - one drawer - in the bureau of their character?

But we are forced, instead, to live out a many-drawer existence? In Asian spirituality they call it "monkey-mind" the way our thoughts during prayer slip from spirit to the mundane in a dizzying but boring way. Yet God, who was perfectly "integrated," if that word can be used of the Divine level or reality, nonetheless chose to create myriads of beings; eventually millions of millions of human beings. He must like variety, otherwise he could have just made one model of each possible being - one dog, one tree, one cat, one human person.

Very often the multi-layered feature of my life is miserably humiliating. In the midst of taking in the beautiful design on the tabernacle in our church, comes a pain of the lower digestive track. To go to the bathroom or not? Ugh! Even if I decide to forget it, the mood of rapt enjoyment of the artistry in our chapel decor is lost.

(Assembling these excerpts in 2013, I am smiling about the digestive track. Sometimes when I am complaining about this feature of the human body, the Lord seems to laugh at me and convey the idea that this feature of our physical being is a wonderful antidote to our ridiculous pride!)

(This next part of the journal is about my December retreat at St. Andrew's Abbey at Valyermo, California - I am an Oblate of this Benedictine Monastery and the private retreat was given me by Fr. Gregory Elmer, O.S.B., a very dear old friend who has known me for more than twenty-five years. A private retreat can take place when someone goes to a monastery for a quiet time outside the days given over to planned public retreats with many other participants. A monk or nun agrees to work with you personally on whatever issues you choose to bring.

Fr. Gregory is around fifty years old. I first met him when he was studying theology at Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles as a young monk. I was a young philosophy professor at the same place.

Fr. Gregory and I are most different in that he is a celibate monk and for most of my life I was a married mother. Most of all he is very inward and contemplative and I am extremely extrovert and active. On the other hand we have a great affinity because both of us suffered from similar childhood emotional problems and tend to reach out to Jesus in a certain desperate and passionate way not easily understood by more serene Catholics.

Coming this time for a retreat at this rustic desert monastery there was a new feeling of solidarity with the monks. I was trying for a second time to be a religious widow in the Handmaids of Nazareth. I felt joy in knowing the perseverance of my brother monks after so many years in their vowed life.

Fr. Gregory suggested that the theme for this private time with the Lord should be total surrender to Christ.

Here are some of Fr. Gregory's main insights. I am paraphrasing his words.

"Ronda," said Fr. Gregory, eyes full of amusement, "it is just like you to think that you will grow in holiness by making more and more heroic acts of virtue."

Examples I could think of would be constantly praying: "Jesus give me the heart for sacrifice of Mother Teresa of Calcutta."

"Heroism", Fr. Gregory continued in his most authoritative voice, "for people like you can be a form of theatrics!"

I settled back on the comfortable couch, notebook in hand, knowing that he would have some unexpected explanation of why what seemed so important to me, prayers to be heroically virtuous, could possibly be the wrong direction to take. I was not disappointed that his thoughts would surprise me.

"Instead of heroic acts of virtue what you need to do is to give up and beg God to give you what you need. That would be more poor in spirit. You are a lot like me. Our cross is that we cannot bear the cross. We should give this cross to Jesus - the cross that we are too weak to bear the cross. Each moment when you feel how weak you are, give that cross to Jesus as a love-gift. Jesus wants to bear our crosses with us. Jesus can bear those unbearable crosses with much more sensitivity and love than we can. He will offer these crosses to the Father for us."

Always very Scriptural in his teaching, Fr. Gregory, dressed in his long black monastic robes, brought in the big gun to prove his point: "We must follow St. Paul in 2 Cor. 10:5, casting down images and bringing into captivity every thought in obedience to Christ. We are not to directly fight with thoughts of despair, hatred, self-hatred. Instead we need to bring them "into captivity in obedience of Christ." We need to give those wretched thoughts to Jesus as a love-gift. He will know how to turn them from lead to gold. So, when those thoughts come, don't think about them. Don't analyze them. No, just give them to Jesus. Analysis of thoughts is an attempt to control them ourselves vs. giving them to Jesus. When Satan sees that we are giving our hateful emotions and thoughts to Jesus he will leave us alone."

"The real cross for the ego," Fr. Gregory resumed, "is that I cannot bear the cross! Realizing that you are too weak to bear the cross, diminishes the ego which wants to pride itself on being good enough to bear crosses!"

Gregory used the analogy of an orchestra. In an orchestra, we, you and I Ronda, are not powerful kettle drums but shrill stringy violins. We have been violently abused (psychologically) and also have abused ourselves by carrying burdens we don't have to bear.

"We should pray for consolation like a little baby would. A lonely little baby cries out - and so we should pray to Jesus. It is okay to say to him, 'I will die if you don't

help me.' This is not a nervous breakdown but an emotional surrender. When we do this we become kind and gentle."

That certainly rang true. I notice that when things are going very well I tend to become a little smug and full of unwanted advice for others. Under great pain of heart, myself, I reach out to others more tenderly, more compassionately.

Asking him about anxiety attacks in the night, Fr. Gregory developed for me an easy to remember humorous analogy.

"At night," he said, his large beautiful eyes gleaming, "be sure not to listen to the "radio station" KHell-like station KFAC. KHell is the bad news about yourself the Devil wants you to listen to. St. Catherine of Siena said that if it is making you depressed, that thought is not from God. Christ drowns out KHell. KHell broadcasts in the mind, not in the heart. The army Christ sends to defend me is love. John of the Cross says that the devil can get in the mind but not into the soul. He can only come into the soul or heart if we let him in.

A big subject for me whenever I make a private retreat is co-dependency. I am an expert in entangling myself in relationships of this kind. After idol-worship usually comes disappointment, resentment and then hate. Fr. Gregory tried to teach me "you cannot get your strength from people. Detachment isn't to hate creatures but simply to get your strength from God. The proof of the divinity of Christ is that he could forgive everyone, even those who killed him. That is where he goes beyond the Old Testament. Only God can forgive. Christ sponges up all the sins of the world. Since we ate the rotten fruit we are covered with vomit.

"The Apostles were converted when He came back from the dead and, instead of punishing them, forgave them, saying "Peace be with you. " You can only imitate God by being forgiving and compassionate.

"But I thought the twelve step people are always saying about codependency that you shouldn't just excuse people for treating you badly. You need to set up boundaries," I objected.

"Forgiving is not excusing," Fr. Gregory explained. The "enabler" gets enmeshed because she excuses instead of forgiving. Excusing is to say "you are not really bad." Forgiving is saying "you are bad, but I still love you." Enablers are always agitated. To be more peaceful, you must stop trying to fix others. But you certainly can get away from people who are treating you badly."

With this in mind, the monk added: "Melodrama, you know, Ronda, is the theatre of the ego. Making scenes is a way to escape from the long hard work of crucified love called patience. Benedictine monks are to share in the sufferings of Christ by patience. When you are agitated, cultivate solitude. This is good because there is no one to play-act before when you are alone."

"How long do I have to keep going through these horrible co-dependent relationships, Gregory, before I get healed?"

Dramatically, Gregory proclaimed, "Jesus sets us free by letting us 'be killed.' Yes, our ego is killed when we are rejected. "

That didn't sound like good news to me, but Gregory added hopefully that he thought I was coming toward a time of great freedom. I have to let all my hunger for human love get focused on Jesus.

Twisting the Scripture in an unusual way, the monk told me that I am "the pearl of great price" for which Jesus sold His glory. He bought me from the devil by his crucifixion. What is needed is not to try to earn the love of Jesus, but just to accept it.

To decide what to do, Gregory suggested that I ask what conduces to peace and what to agitation. When I feel depressed I should offer those feelings as a love-gift to Christ, and then distract myself by doing many varied satisfying things, such as reading and walking.

"But, but, but, life seems so boring when I don't have any drama in it." I expostulated.

"If you live more in your heart, Ronda, you will not fear boredom. Doubt and boredom are the shadows of the isolated mind."

One of the most humorous statements of Fr. Gregory during the retreat concerned the need to keep the mind busy by reading spiritual works: "if you do not give the mind something good to chew, then you eat yourself - which is a lousy diet!"

At the end of that very fruitful retreat session, I made my customary trip to the monastery cemetery. High in the desert among yucca trees a mile or so above the Abbey there is the most wonderful burial grounds I have ever seen. Long before my beloved dead were interred there, I loved to visit this cemetery just because of the aesthetics of it. Facing miles and miles of uninhabited desert there is a huge granite slab called "the eye of the needle." The reference is to the passage from the New Testament where Jesus says that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through a needle's eye.

Well, this huge piece of stone has in the middle a concave hole big enough for a camel to get through. Of course there are no camels in line waiting. The idea is that the visitor should realize that the souls of their loved ones have passed through the eye of the needle into the heavens. The Eye of the Needle is held into the gravelly desert sand by a montage of rocks cemented around the bottom. Those younger than I now am like to climb up to the hole and peer through at the sky. Round about the stone are the small rock crosses; one section for monks and the other for Oblates.

As an Oblate I would be entitled to burial at this magnificent site where friends like Fr. Gregory might pass an evening strolling through and praying for me.

My husband, a late convert, from an originally orthodox Jewish family, became a Catholic in his late sixties, but not an Oblate. Wanting, however, to imagine himself one day buried with me, my husband agreed to apply to be an Oblate just to get the grave-site! In a striking instance of grace operating no matter what the dispositions of the recipient might be, my husband actually become much more devout after making his oblation.

The Eye of the Needle cemetery came into a new significance after the death of our son. My husband insisted on following the young man's wishes and burying his ashes at sea - ritual facilitated for a not unreasonable sum by the Neptune Society. Feeling attached to the ashes, before delivery to the Society, I surreptitiously took half the ashes out of the urn when my husband wasn't looking, brought them to the Abbey cemetery and buried them under a little bush right near the Eye of the Needle stone. When I later confessed to my secret deed, my husband insisted on visiting the site to pray for his son. When I identified the little bush near the Eye, my husband startled me and other friends present by enacting the Jewish practice of throwing himself face down at the grave-site and wailing loudly talking to his son in mournful grief.

Martin's own funeral followed shortly afterward with full Benedictine solemn rites and a proper gravestone with a metal plaque with his name upon it. Since that time, whenever I visit the monastery for a day of recollection or a retreat, I make it a point to go up to the cemetery for some time of prayer and dialogue with my husband's spirit, my son's soul, and also my mother's ashes buried under the same bush as my son Charlie's. My mother's ashes I had rescued from the pile that was going out to sea many years before.

This time the dialogue at my husband's grave went this way:

"So, dear old hubby, are you glad your wish came true? You always wanted to be sure I never married again and became a nun instead. Now I have done it. What do you think? I'm going to be Sister Ronda Marie, a Handmaid of Nazareth."

No answer.

"You think this old Catholic yentah (a Yiddish name for a woman of the busy-body type) can make it to holiness?"

No answer. But I thought I could detect an invisible grin.

"Yentah, yes! Handmaid, no! is that what you're thinking old husband?"

I drove down the mountain from the Eye of the Needle with a liberated feeling. I am the Handmaid of the Lord and therefore not anyone else's Handmaid. Mary of Nazareth was the Handmaid of the Lord, not of St. Joseph?

On the psychological plane, for me being the Handmaid only of the Lord would mean something very definite. I would mean not believing that I have to do everything someone I love might want, for fear of losing their love. Concretely it

means, in co-dependency language, setting more boundaries. For me right now that would mean staying away from tasks and relationships that are very agitating and difficult and believing that I will get enough love from God and others without straining to do what I really am not meant to do.

More from Fr. Gregory on anxiety in the night. When these demons of fear of someday being somewhere without human love, how would I let the real hero, Jesus, smack them down? I suppose I would have to picture each terrifying outcome and carefully bring Jesus into that picture. I must imagine him, my beautiful Jesus, right in the picture, as the consoler, the comforter beyond all horror. Then I would have to pray: Jesus, I hope these things will not happen. They are not here right now. Just for today I will let go of these fears. I will believe that you can take care of me no matter what, just as have taken care of me in terrible circumstances of the past, just as you took care of concentration camp victims, and casualties of all wars. The world you lived in on earth was full of horrors. You didn't slay the tyrants, but you comforted the sheep and gave them hope. So smack down that demon who wants to tell me that there is no hope, no comfort, only gathering misery.

Referring to Tolkien's book *The Lord of the Rings*, Fr. Gregory proclaimed that the true saving "ring" is poverty of spirit, the first beatitude. It is the humble hobbits of Tolkien's saga who save the day, not Gandolf, the wise magician. Using a more contemporary analogy, Fr. Gregory remarked that "only the poor of spirit have God's "unlisted number." Just dial Jesus and you never get a tape recorded answer.

"If you pray with the mind alone," the monk told me, "you get the tape recording. But if you call with the heart you get the "hot-line."

I laughed. He added: "To imagine that you need to analyze everything about life with your mind is not the Catholic way. It is more a fruit of Enlightenment rationalism."

That last idea really struck me hard. Being a philosophy professor, I have a strong tendency to analyze just at the moment where only heartfelt prayer can bring peace.

Later Fr. Gregory asked:

"Do you, perhaps, think of prayer as getting God inside you? A better image might be to think of prayer as a path into the center of your heart where God already is. When you pray from the center, it keeps deepening. Then you can love others truly from the bottom of your heart."

Mentioning in one of these private retreat sessions that I find myself often doubting, not in an intellectual way so much, as just deep inside, Gregory replied perceptively: "Don't try to drum up faith. Just ask Jesus to give me more faith." Pray with the New Testament centurion: "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief."

Again I raised the problem of anxiety attacks. Fr. Gregory had another analogy for me.

"Set up an "electric fence. Now, here are the words that make the buzzer on the electric fence go off: 'should' and 'fix.'

"When the buzzer goes off, go into the cell of your heart and calm down. If you don't get away from the fence you will become so 'nuclear' that you, so to speak, 'Chernobyl.'

"Don't leave your interior cell until you see the positive lights on the fence which come from the fruits of the Holy Spirit: peace, self-control, joy ...

"When we are deeper in God's love we have more peace also about our loved ones. After all, if I know that God can take care of me, then He must be able to take care of them also. To return to the Chernobyl image, when trouble comes, if I am deep in God's love I don't have to run down to the basement of the hydroelectric plant to throw switches madly."

"Okay, okay, okay," I responded, amused at Fr. Gregory's graphic imagery.

"But how do I decide what to do for others and where my own needs come first?"

Since my dear monk friend spends most of his time on spiritual warfare, he had an answer to this one as well, as usual, somewhat startling.

"Total altruism is a heresy. If we reject our own needs then they roar out in unhealthy ways. One of the 12 Step slogans is 'keep it simple, stupid.'"

Tired of making notes, in the subsequent sessions, I started only putting down pithy one-liners:

"Instead of having breakdowns, have breakthroughs."

"Keep your life hid with Christ in God - where the Devil cannot find you to peck the graces out of your heart."

A general insight of mine into co-dependency. When one sees that there is great beauty in the personality of another, it is tempting to think that the bad part just has to go away over time, or be expunged by grace. But 12 Step teaches us we cannot change people.

To make it personal again, craving love from men, because my father left us when I was eight years old, I can be willing to accept some degree of emotional abusiveness for a long time in a present relationship to a father-figure. I fail to accept the reality that no matter how much goodness may be in a particular male friend, and how much goodness in me, our combined qualities might equal not love but nightmare.

This communication demonstrates how easily I can work out a complex mystical rationale for staying involved, even when all the signs point to fleeing as fast as my legs can carry me:

"But I thought I had finally Won -

the right to become a swathed nun

heart hidden to all but the divine

He whose love could never never hurt me.

And then I could label as demon any vagabond he-man

in latter days,

laugh as I strolled down the path,

making fun of the foibles of years gone by;

pain could become anecdotes that can't make me cry.

I'd crouch in my pew

in my drab dress of blue

Why? why? why? why? why?

How could You, God, Abba? send me a man

who could touch more wounds with one flick of a finger

than a thousand normal friendly men;

so I could feel

like a creep

before his svelte smile;

so I could feel

like a female slave

when he clapped his hands for instant obedience.

**So I could feel like a feverish workaholic
when he let out an insouciant laugh.
So I could be sure of total rejection if not today, tomorrow!**

**So I could be too agitated to pray
to the only One whose love is love.**

Job-ess-like, I peevishly implore God, oh God,

**I want no answer I can dig up
from the vast well of my clever formulations;
no answer that sounds like the words of
an imaginary playmate.**

**I will wait, like Job,
for the answer that cannot deceive
because it issues from the mouth of Truth, Himself.**

**Do you see me, God
sitting on the ash heap of my dreams of peace,
arms folded defiantly, waiting?**

**So, the friends of Job-ess, mock:
can God write on an IBM think-pad?**

**Yet, in the dark
the luminous face of Jesus lures.”**

(Now in 2013, rereading this terrible prose-poem, I am appalled. In memory, now more than fifteen years later, I have been considering that particular spiritual friendship to have been not so bad! Now, in 2013, I thank my Jesus for saving me from that man. Even though there was nothing sinful in the relationship, how toxic it was and what drama-queen tendencies that poem displays! However, I am including it as a reach-out to other co-dependents, since the story does have a happy ending as follows.)

I don't want to end this entry (about my co-dependent friendship) this way. If I fling my heart into the Sacred Heart I hear Jesus not berating me for folly, but consoling

me. He seems to tell me: "You were not wrong in seeing the love that is in this man. I have put it there. You can't avoid being pulled toward love as toward a magnet. Stop castigating yourself and him. Whenever he comes to mind, pray and forgive. He forgives you for being unable to love him as he would have wished. Now follow Fr. Gregory's advice and hide yourself in my Heart until you are ready to start out again."

And, after making this prayer I decided to call Mr. X after quite a long time of distancing myself from him. I said "Gee, I was reading my old journals and we really hurt each other a lot. I'm sorry for my part in it." He immediately suggested we forget the past and try to be friends. I don't really want to get close to him again, but it felt very good to forgive him and I hope I will be able to forget the past and just pray for him whenever I happen to think about him.

(And, God did answer that prayer and, even though I had somewhat painful friendships afterwards they never reached these awful proportions of woundedness and wounding!)

December 25, 1996

I felt very happy about it being my first Christmas as a Handmaid of Nazareth - a sort of tender glowy feeling inside.

My sister Carla got me a Nouwen book. Some years back, given the polarity of our ideas about the Church, we decided to try to make peace by both reading any books that came to our notice that were acceptable to all Catholics no matter what our views. We decided that Nouwen was a safe bet. The Nouwen book my sister sent this Christmas, "Can you drink this cup?" is wonderful. Becky (Geraghty, my godchild) got me a book by Kathleen Norris called Cloister Walk which turned out to be deeper than I thought considering that Kathleen Norris is a Protestant Benedictine Oblate! (Later she did become a Catholic.)

My daughter Carla came to the Christmas Mass. She noticed at the consecration how much the priest believed that the bread and wine was really Christ. My other daughter, Diana, in L.A. who has been doing Eastern style meditation saw a vision of Jesus carrying her cross. A few weeks later she felt flooded with happiness coming from Him. Since neither of them receive the sacraments any more, these signs seemed to show that grace was still working in their lives. Diana is reading Chesterton and Lewis and wanting to talk to me about spirituality!

December 30, 1996

Often during the holidays, I felt that I belonged in my little cell. That is what I call my downstairs room in my daughter's house. I love this place. It is a long bedroom with picture windows. The view is not of the famous red rocks of Sedona, but rather

of some short green trees. I have most of my possessions in this small cell. This in itself gives me great joy since I have always loved simplicity of life and had to fight constantly with my husband, when he was alive, because he loved abundance of good things.

It is a "nunny" feeling to enter my room, leaving the family areas to enter into a more secluded mode. Richard Geraghty, my former colleague at the seminary where we both taught philosophy, is visiting us. He is sitting in the guest room at the word-processor working on his book about faith in the writings of Cardinal Newman. I just went to chat with him. He pointed to my cell and said jokingly: "go be a nun!" In years past, he shared, when he was a religious brother, the spiritual director of his community would always ask at the beginning of each consultation: "Are you keeping the rule?" Since my rule calls for considerable time in quiet prayer, it is always good to go back to my cell and keep the rule.

I spent a wonderful New Year's Eve at a prayer meeting in the house of an extended hispanic family. The men each year kill a small calf at New Year's to provide food for the some thirty people who come. When I got to the house with a friend of mine, a whole bunch of small children greeted us with loudly sung hispanic hymns. The living room is a kind of shrine with statues and vigil lights. The prayer group of some thirteen families wants to buy 40 acres and start a community. The rosary, replete with very deep meditations on inner healing by a youth minister who is part of the family, was led by the children. Many of the men prayed as if in a semi-trance. It was incredible to see all the family unity.

January, 1997

The pastor of the Sedona parish, St. John Vianney, Fr. J. C. Ortiz agreed to let me have a key to the church so that I could come early to pray. It just feels special and nun-like to have a key to the sanctuary where Jesus waits patiently through the night until his adorers come in the morning.

There is real bond between the women who come an hour before Mass to pray. We know each other in other ways from parish groups and the Mass itself, but somehow sitting in silence before the Blessed Sacrament draws us even closer together. The Handmaids of Nazareth is a community devoted to the Eucharist, but we rarely get to be together except at retreats.

Anne, one of those early-bird contemplatives handed me a list of Scriptures of use in allaying anxiety about our children who have left the faith:

Ps. 72:4 "He will save the children of those in need."

Ps. 102:18 " ... that a race still to be born can praise God ... your servants' sons will have a permanent home and their descendants be in your presence always ... "

Isaiah 49:25 "I myself will save your children."

Isaiah 59:21 "My spirit ... and my words will not disappear from your mouth, nor from the mouths of your children, nor from the mouths of your children's children."

In an unusually humble move, a grace from Mary, the archetypal Handmaid, I called a coming visitor to the family who I have difficulties with and asked if there was anything special he might want me to buy for him to eat during his sojourn with us. I could sense in his voice some amazement that the old debater "enemy" Ronda would even think of calling about such simple matters.

Talking to a Christmas guest about my simply clothing I said it was a sign to me of not competing with other women or looking for men. Indeed, I have quite a different feeling when I am with women friends now and also with males. I feel set apart as a nun.

Some women like this. It gives them permission, as it were, to jump immediately into conversations about spirituality without the former constant mutual consultations about our emotional problems with the men in our lives. Other women seem alienated by my new identity. Either it reminds them of religious sisters of the past they disliked, or they just sense that I am living in a different world. And in fact I do feel much more distant from lay-life.

Someone mentioned that I am always wanting to talk about my own affairs and not listening effectively. Since several people have told me this recently I need to hearken better and work on it as a major flaw of self-centeredness. When I try to understand why I am so garrulous, what comes up is that I am a tad desperate most of the time. Therefore, what is bothering me at the moment, or chatter to cover up what is really bothering me, seems more important to me than topics others might want to talk about. Another problem is that I am more articulate than some friends who are slower about revealing themselves in conversation. Such women or men start in on some narrative and then lapse into long pauses. I tend to jump into the hiatus with my theories or stories.

Occasionally I meet someone even more self-preoccupied and talkative than myself and I hate it. The voice begins to seem relentless and the nervous energy unbearable. Alas!

I pray – “Dear Mary, the ponderer, surely you did not chatter like a magpie. You must have been the best listener in the world. Show me how to change in these bad habits. Help me at the root of the anxiety that makes me think I need so much attention from others. Let me have deep compassion for those with problems who

cannot reveal them in swift [REDACTED] deft language pictures but only with deep sighs and halting speech.

My friend Lorraine from my parish in Sedona gave me a sheet from a talk she gave about effective listening. Maybe if I type out the highlights it will get in better. Maybe some of you, readers, need to hear this also.

1. To listen effectively you have to enjoy being quiet and relaxed as you listen.
2. You have to listen safely - by just repeating what someone else says in your own words: - for example, Jane says, I hate so and so because she did this and that to me for no reason. You repeat in your own words: Jane, you are angry and frustrated because it seems to you that someone hurt you for no reason at all, right?
3. You have to like being able to understand and calm people down.
4. You can call on God's power of peace.
5. You like to be peaceful and like yourself being calm and patient.
6. You like being a good listener.
7. Wait until people finish speaking before you begin to respond.
8. Let God live in you.

(Many references in the rest of this book will be to a publisher I came into contact with, Jim Gilboy, of CMJ Marian Books. I first got to know him when he asked me to help in the editing of a manuscript. Subsequently he got interested in other books of mine. He reprinted some out of print ones and published freshly other ones.)

My new publisher is eager to see more on my husband Martin's masterpiece about Christ and Satan in the desert: *Children of the Breath*. He wants to come from Chicago to arrange for my daughter to edit the whole. How I love this book. My sense of Jesus comes a lot from his book. (Google Martin Chervin: *Children of the Breath*. It is an incredible book about everything Jesus and Satan might have said besides what is in the NT. Basically, Satan tries to convince Jesus that men are too worldly to ever accept His message. Jesus wins.

I got an invitation to do a parish mission based on the *Kiss from the Cross*:

A Saint for Every Kind of Suffering. I am thrilled that I, as a woman, would be asked to do a parish mission! Later I saw that it was hard because I can't hear confessions.

My grandsons stopped going regularly to Sunday Mass with me. I said to them: "The Lord Jesus is bored with adults, he'd enjoy seeing you guys, but you don't have to come." They thought about it and the older said yes and then the younger trotted along. Nicholas came up with a quarter to give in the collected totally unbidden. He asked why we give money and I replied, "so the priest can eat."

2.

from Venerable Conchita

(a Mexican grandmother about to be beatified) (Before the Altar #57)

"What is man without You? The word convinces, but the blood alone persuades, that is to say - the life of sacrifice in union with Jesus. Art makes the orator, but suffering alone makes the saint."

Also from Conchita

(Before the Alter, #61)

"I must also be an apostle by keeping silence when others talk scandal in my presence, by my speech in defending the honor of my neighbors, in excusing their weaknesses and defects, in speaking of God, of his love, of his goodness and of his charity to all men.

"I must be an apostle against too much concern with what others think.

Who passes through this exile without treading upon thorns, without his heart being lacerated and torn asunder? But love makes the cross sweet and pleasant and light. At first the cross is carried with repugnance, then with facility, and finally with love."

From a Hymn written in 1634 (Office of Readings)

We know our sin,

and we are burdened as with some loathsome thing,

And have fallen down just like leaves in the blast of winter:

And the sins we have committed just like winds have blown us all about.

You have taken from us Your brightness and comfort And have broken us by laying the debt of our sins upon us ...

Your Savior comes, do not be fearful, for it is I,

your God and your mighty Ruler,

Zion's Holy One and your Redeemer."

from St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, O.C.S. (November 9, 1906 letter to her mother):

"There is a Being who is Love and who wishes us to live in communion with Him. Oh, Mama, it is delightful, for He is there keeping me company, helping me to suffer, urging me to go beyond my sufferings to rest in Him; do as I do, you will see how that transforms everything."

I was gazing out the window of our Church in Sedona at a favorite pine tree. I thought that God must have known from all eternity that pines would become Christmas trees to celebrate the birth of His son.

I was talking to Alice Von Hildebrand about my vocation. She said that the habit is so beautiful because it is an outward sign of the inner consecration. That we should come to see that we are more beautiful and attract more people when they are just focusing on our spiritual beauty without any attempt to be outwardly attractive through our adornments.

However, she thinks that it is impossible simply to push a button and will to become more holy. Each of us has faults and we are usually rather blind to them. In the Gospel the blind man says "Lord that I may see." We should beg to "see." And we should pray for others to see. We cannot simply force someone to "see," no matter how right we may be about their motives. It is a matter of humility to be able to see ones weaknesses and not be filled with self-hatred but instead just see that we are loved and forgiven by Christ. Our charitable gentleness toward the weaknesses of others reflects that love and forgiveness and can help them "see" in this indirect way.

I am beginning to think I am not meant for community and should just live my own rule with a private promise. In the course of pondering psychological tensions that arise about community, a friend in Sedona who is also a psychoanalyst had these reflections. They are a little obscure but I found them insightful. You may find them so, also.

"If you are loved as a child, as you, Ronda, was, by people who are looking for mirrors of themselves, you tend to try to earn their love by being what they want you to be. You think they will stay if only to admire their own reflections.

When Fathers leave (my father left when we were 8 years old) you blame yourself for not twirling fast enough, for holding too loose, for failing to hide the fear that he wanted more than you could give...

When fathers leave mothers clutch their daughters tight and send balloons of hope, praying, this is enough, these daughter spirits so like mine, and curse the need for more.

And something in her burst inside with wanting to be enough to keep the dark away.

Life, grim teacher, helped her know she'd failed.

But she saw the "Son who died that she might live reflected in the fragment of the mirror she held in bleeding fingers, to never let go ... she, ecstatic, holds, but holds too tight, her fingers bleeding in the night...

They, who could have danced on rainbows earthbound, afraid that madness lies behind the light and in the mirror is the image of the Son, who had to die so she could live ..."

(While in Sedona, I started working on a book called Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging. This was published by CMJ Marian Books and is still in print.)

Reading Johnson on Aging, he says that we are upset because we do not have the energy to produce, but the purpose of the time of aging is to grow in virtue and in contemplative joy, not in productivity!

Lines from a poem of Carla, one of my twins, and then a companion poem written by Diana, her twin, after reading Carla's poem:

Twigs in Twilight by Carla

(concerning her longing for faith in Christ)

Let me fill each day with silence...

while the throbbing of salvation

rains its hail outside the door;

let me gather twigs of firewood and pray

for nothing more...

There's a loosened piece of yesterday still singing in my ears,

but a fast deceit of twilight

lends a luster to the fear

that the summer of the audience

is more than I can bear .

I will hobble toward your altar...

I will gather twigs in twilight,

I will push against the bait.

I will light a tiny fire
with its twigs all bundled tight,
in the thinness of the forest
will I build a tender light,
and while mighty souls rush homeward I will
stay and guard the night.

Burning in the Sun

(Diana's response – manifesting her new spiritual venture)

Let me roar into your stillness,
let me show you something more
in the vibrancy of living
than the danger at your door:
The sun is tapping at your window,
making patterns on the floor.
For the strongest armor can't protect the wariest of knight;
through chinks and cracks the Grail you spurn
is gilding you with light...
Tomorrow sings beyond the past
although you bind your feet
as you saltily gaze backward
at the city in defeat-
the rainbow of redemption resurrects
the ghosts you meet.

**I can see into your twilight
as I burn here in the sun;
I am firing Roman candles as I run
aimed at burning down your shelter,
Melting us two into one
We can fly far past the moonlight
We can waltz around a star
We can light the night with laughter once again...
your twigs are burning far more bright
than you believe
they are ...**

From the Office of Readings during Passion Week Sermons on 1 John something wonderful from St. Augustine:

"We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as he is" - The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not see what you long for, but that very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.

"Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait, he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is given to us.

So, my brethren, let us continue to desire, for we shall be filled (like St. Paul) 'forgetting what is behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on to the prize to which I am caned in the life above.'"

April, 1997

On joy, something beautiful from a tape someone gave me of a Rabbi Sholomo Carlebach called Teachings of Joy and Oneness - quoting from Rabbi Nachmann a famous Chasid of the 19th century:

What the world needs most is not peace but joy. Reb Nachmann says: people only hate when they are sad. Imagine there is someone in the world I can't stand the most, I hate that person, and every day I hate that person more. Now imagine that you are at your children's wedding, dancing, the happiest day of my life, and that person comes to the door. What will happen? I will interrupt the dancing and run to the door and embrace and kiss my arch-enemy and I will say my precious friend and I will not be lying..."

Possibly I don't fit into any group but I am more of a solitary pilgrim bride.

(Rereading this now in 2013, I want you to know that this theme will recur over and over again in this book. Once when I was giving talks at Pecos Monastery in New Mexico, the Lord seemed to say that I didn't belong anywhere. I was to be a pilgrim so He could send me anywhere in the Church. Then Fr. Luke Zimmer, when I was his directee, told me that I absolutely didn't belong in community by the very nature of my personality. But, because I desire greatly to be part of a community I keep trying. By now, 2013, I am convinced I am supposed to be a Dedicated Widow with a private promise and not to be in community but this is after eighteen (!!!!!) attempts in 20 years of widowhood to try to be in a community or start them.)

In Sedona I met a couple with a very unusual story. She had been a New Age "sacred prostitute) and he was a cowboy. In the course of their marriage preparation, he came to me and he made a fire and burned his little book with the list of all the many women he had sex with in the past. They did get married in the Church and became very faithful Catholics but eventually broke up years later, partly due to the brokenness from childhood experiences.

Late snow heavy on the green pine trees seen from the window of the Church: I thought that the wonderful feeling of that sight had something to do with the white purity on the green life - so often life does not seem pure and purity does not seem lively.

I went to a healing workshop. I think this message is very important for all of us.

"Do you control your feelings or do your feelings control you? ... First you have to accept the feelings that you have. Let your feelings be as big as they are. Unless you can do this you will end up stuffing, shoving, and storing them to be triggered uncontrollably at another time."

“Make a conscious choice to let go of the feelings surrounding this event or experience so they do not continue to reinjure you. Believe and resolve that carrying bitterness, rage/anger, fear, and resentment only gives that person and or situation power over you which is not part of God's plan for your life. Use some ritual to formalize your commitment to letting this go. (Perhaps you may imagine Christ going to Calvary and He is carrying the situation, your feelings, and this hurtful relationship on the cross. Each nail is one tear, hurt, or ounce of grief you have suffered.)

“Need to forgive and/or to set boundaries vs. holding on to resentment because you are used to it!”

For me to become what I dream I can be seems to me at this moment to involve more being a widow dedicated to the Lord than trying to work through all these emotional impasses. My sense is that I will become more what I am meant to be in the eyes of God by not knocking my head against the wall trying to accept things in the community I can't accept, or trying to change myself in ways that just don't seem to yield. Since I feel mostly miserable about being in the community and only occasionally happy about it, I should get out.

I am great at daily goals but not so good on long-term. What is my long-term goal right now in my life? To let God make me holy. That is clear. But what is the intermediate step?

Would trust in God mean thinking that if I totally live out my vision all by myself, I will find good friends wherever I go? These don't necessarily come in sequence.

At a healing talk it was suggested to bring Jesus to visit the angry inner child; bring your inner child to God and rest in his arms.

“It is erroneous to think either that feelings are no part of me, denial, stoicism, repression; or that feelings are the whole me and my master. Feelings are a part of me. Col. 1: 9-12 "May you will filled with the knowledge of his will ... so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord . . . for the attaining of all patience, steadfastness, joyously.”

A good definition: “co-dependency = letting another person's behavior unduly affect me and becoming obsessed with trying to control that person's behaviour.” This reminded me of a priest mentor who used to say “you can't control others, but they shouldn't be controlling you.”

“365 times in Scripture it says “Be not afraid!” That is one for each day of the year. Whenever we over-react we know it is an unhealed emotion.

“A hindrance to knowing God's will and being able to discern is a desire for approval over desire for God's will, or desire for personal comfort over desire for God's will.

A letter to Mother Mary Yvonne,

“After your call from Chicago, I curled up to go back to sleep. Perhaps you were praying for my tormented soul. Then some minutes later, it felt as if Jesus swooped down and took my heart out of my body and held it to His own - an hour of blissful surrender, as you have prayed for me to have.

And it became so clear that He is taking me out to be His pilgrim bride.

Lines from the Spiritual Canticle of John of the Cross: - when they look for me on the common, tell them that I have left with my Beloved.

He seemed to tell me that He had brought us together and that He used you to help me focus on Him alone and He used me to help you get launched and we can wave kisses to each other from our separate paths, forgiving each other for the pain we've have caused each other.

Ronda, a widow dedicated to the Lord

Weeping for Charlie - forgiving him for the pain his suicide caused me and everyone else, I got a sense of him with Martin saying to rest, that they would take care of the bringing Carla and Diana back to the sacraments.

Mother Mary Yvonne responded with great love saying that I had to go in the direction I thought best but that I should take a leave because Jesus told her I will come back.

(Now in 2013, I realize that I got *confused excerpting from the journal entitled Notes from the Feminine Underground*. As it was, I did try again to be a Handmaid but that failed to work out also, and I am not going to put in the details.)

Even though I am on leave from the Handmaids - Mother Mary Yvonne asked if I would continue the series about different spiritualities in the Church. The attached was sent today:

SPIRITUALITY FRANCISCAN

By Ronda Chervin

At a group of faculty at Franciscan University of Steubenville gathering to share about how to apply the Franciscan spirit to the university scene, it became apparent

that each of us had different aspects of the life and spirituality of St. Francis and his Order that attracted us:

how he personally cared for the poor his freedom of spirit

his utter simplicity

his contemplative ecstasy

his love for the Cross

his love for creation

his poetic way of loving God etc.

In many ways the Church as a whole has followed St. Francis both as laity and as religious.

All Catholics are enjoined to follow the Gospel in caring for the poor, in loving the Cross and in praising God for the beauty of Creation. All Catholics wish they could experience the ecstatic prayer life of St. Francis - though some would shudder to experience the painful part of contemplative union.

A Handmaid of Nazareth by virtue of her Marian model of charity would often be personally ministering to needy persons - in terms of corporal or spiritual works of mercy.

By virtue of her vow of joy, she would often find herself in marveling wonder at the beauty of creation, repeating the famous words of St. Francis about Brother Sun and Sister Moon. When depressed in spirits, she will often find that prayer of praise will bring her into a better more grateful frame of mind.

The more controversial aspects of Franciscanism would usually concern freedom of spirit and simplicity of life.

Freedom of spirit consists at least in part in having such burning zeal for the salvation of the world that a Christian is willing to risk looking foolish within their own families and in public to become a fool for Christ. Flamboyance was characteristic of St. Francis, but even a very quiet Franciscan person will demonstrate a counter-cultural freedom of spirit, for instance, by bringing the love of Christ into ordinary conversation as an expression of her own intimacy. Or, reaching out to a person in tears in the back of a Church. Persons with freedom of spirit simply do not start with the thought of what others will think so much as with what the Holy Spirit is telling them would please Jesus.

With regard to simplicity of life, there has always been much controversy even within the Franciscan Order. Few of the early disciples of Francis wanted to live in such utter poverty as did their founder. Some Third Order Franciscans spend endless hours in their chapters debating about what degree of wealth is compatible with a Secular Franciscan vocation.

Pope Paul VI reflects well the universality of the Franciscan spirit in admonishing the people of God that all Christians should have a simple and austere life style in solidarity with the poor.

For a Handmaid of Nazareth who is often living in the world, some questions that could be posed are these:

- have I developed a habit of acquiring unnecessary possessions as a boost to sagging spirits or for other reasons?**
- do I feel a need to compete with other women or bolster my own sense of attractiveness by adornments costing money that could be used for my own necessities or to help the needy?**
- do I go along with practices that are more worldly than holy such as viewing television programs that are not helpful to my vocation?**
- do I promote a spirit of simplicity in my family by avoiding too many or too luxurious gifts and suggesting simpler less expensive though attractive dress where possible; substituting creative play for more addictive amusements?**
- do I actively see where it may be possible to spend less and give more to the needy?**

The Franciscan spirit is not to become glum, fearful, insecure and miserable through impossible austerities. Franciscans always point out that poverty is not an end but a means. Franciscans try to let more God in so that they can do without so much else in a joyful spirit.

The many Franciscan spiritual themes listed at the beginning of this short piece all come together in an integrated Catholic personality. There is more time for contemplation when less time is spent acquiring things. There is more time to help the poor when there is more joy in creation so that we are not frightened that ministry to the needy might be a downer.

Some Handmaids of Nazareth who have fought addictions such as alcohol, over-eating, workaholism, nicotine, and co-dependency have found that following the

Handmaid Rule with its emphasis on greater union with God in prayer leads to surprising liberation from previous tendencies to bondage.

May St. Francis of Assisi intercede for us as we open ourselves to new forms of holiness.

April 24, 1997

Carla and Diana arranged a splendid book of loving letters from old friends and family for my 60th birthday - 53pages worth and also a surprise party at Pizza Hut. It was glorious. I kept crying, I was so surprised and delighted and felt so moved by all that love coming at once - like a foretaste of heaven. It also felt like a gift from Jesus because Carla found a picture on the Internet of the Jesus of the Raphael tapestry in Rome that came alive and made that the backdrop of all the pages in the "book of love."

Some wonderful lines from the book:

Evie said I was a super-duper scooper of souls

For Ommy, my Mommy A 60th birthday wish from Diana

“Clarity, strength, humility, love, patience.

And what is clarity but the knowledge that one is on the path toward God? The road is merciful enough to allow detours; the woman on her bicycle with hair streaming behind her., wearing a yellow poncho with fringes is allowed to stop from time to time when dew-filled roses beckon.

And sometimes strength is weakness, and when you are smallest, the dog comes to lick away the tears, dear heart, as you cling to his mane when you have need and he roars the demons into silence.

In your smallness, you can look back at the worst of detours and find the humility to make amends ...

And Love is everywhere you see it - look! The Light is burning through the leaves of past chapters and all is humbled by His presence. The wolf and the lamb have reached an understanding, and who is that silver-bearded man (Martin, my husband in eternity) walking them into Paradise? Looking over his shoulder yet for the one to come?

Patience, the road stretches through the mountains for a while, Moses, and you will not be denied the promised land this time ...

With love and awe and respect - Diana.

Alice Yon Hildebrand said "She has plenty of reasons to shed tears, but as Kierkegaard put it, how is Christ to dry the tears of those who have never cried?"

Madeleine Stebbins said "Her courage in looking truth in the eye in her own self, exposing her own vulnerability, weakness, and fallen nature is an astonishing and rare quality. It disarms all pretence in her listeners, and makes her so winning to friends."

Richard and Becky

"a work of nature where there is no unconscious, touching."

May, 1997

Funny Mother's Day letter from my daughter Diana in Los Angeles:

Once upon a time, there was a lonely queen of great beauty, locked up in a tower made of regrets. 'I have become a short, fat, evil troll,' she thought to herself cheerfully, as she ran her fingers through her long, wild hair, and knelt on the cold stones and prayed that no one would come to rescue her. In keeping with her new self-image, she determined to add dingy brown to her meager wardrobe of blue, and decided to knit a shapeless garment of this hue for herself. "

She then describes how even though the woman thinks she is wearing blue she is really wearing the colors of her whole past full of beautiful colors of children and husband and students. And finally Mother Mary tells her son to come and bring the woman out of her hermitage into the sunlight of eternity.

Lorraine Van Denburgh gave a talk. She said that trying to move your head into your heart - the obstacle is the stiff neck. If you give up the stiff neck you get healing, peace, and many other benefits.

She said that when you are asking forgiveness from someone between the asking and the forgiveness you need to put "What can I do that would be healing for you?"

If someone is wrong but won't admit it, just keep saying internally: "I forgive you and I set you free." Then you will leave their presence feeling free and peaceful.

Lorraine also said that a way to discern if a word is from God or from oneself is that if it is too good to be my thought, too wise, too loving, then it is from God!

June 1, 1997

More and more leadings to want to have lots of free time to just be available for works of mercy of all kinds vs. always being rushed so that people can't ask me for simple things freely.

Scripture reading about "in my father's house there are many mansions." I am pondering this as related to what counts is the love in my heart and what different groups I belong to is really a means - even though God might want something specific in the way of commitment, I should not be so uptight about every detail of those groups.

The doctor says I look much better from the calcium, vitamins, better food, and exercise. I gave up caffeine all together during most of Lent and then went back to one cup a day at noon to take care of depressive feelings four hours in the afternoon - that works - one cup takes it away.

This summer my family in Sedona decided to vacation at the San Juan Islands above Seattle with a view to buying land and building a house there. Since their work on computers can be done anywhere, they had a yen to try a new place.

I found the San Juan Islands to be one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen in the whole world. But it involved a 3-4 hour round trip on a ferry to get to daily Mass at a place called Shaw Island where Benedictine nuns support themselves raising llamas for sale. Talking to people on the ferry was a witness to other Catholics on these islands who had never conceived of taking a ferry to daily Mass. This in itself was such a witness to the Island Catholics of love of the Eucharist. Often

The Benedictine Gregorian chant at the Mass was heavenly. It was so strengthening to be "lost" in the Mass vs. my home parish so distracted by my own ministries.

On the ferry I met an ex-Catholic ferry man drawn to my nunnish appearance. The novice habit of the Handmaids of Nazareth is a plain blue denim jumper with a large crucifix and a veil of white cotton trimmed in red. This man said he was in trouble - would I pray. I did and he got out of whatever trouble. I met him two weeks later - I had given him my little Signs of Love - on the sacraments and he greeted me with such joy". It seemed a sign of what I will be able to do even more in the future. The habit evangelizes. Was at an Inn in Orcas eating breakfast and a man at the bar came over and grabbed the large cross around my neck! He was a taxi driver who has been away from the Church for decades because he loves Latin. I suggested he go see the Benedictine nuns.

Coming home from a trip, I arrived at Seattle airport and then flew in a 4 seater tiny plane to the islands - just me and the pilot and God. What if he had a stroke, I wondered?

My dear friend, also a Catholic writer, Patricia Treece visited. On charitable conversation she suggests that one mostly make "I" communications such as "I felt X" vs. "You" messages "You are a blankety blank." It amused me when she said that all the Jews she knew, like me, are always in a lather!"

"What causes the 'lathering,' Pride - maybe. Just a natural inclination towards anger? Or is it an artistic temperament that emotes first and becomes more reasonable later? The devil delightedly eggs these conflict situations on - appealing to already existing pride and anger and impatience with the imperfections of others.

"Whether or not being in a lather is pleasing to Jesus is another question -- I cannot imagine Jesus or Mary being in a lather all the time - and they were Jews.

(Added in 2013: In the book, *Becoming a Handmaid of the Lord*, I explain how, at Franciscan University of Steubenville, I learned about Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression. I have been working this program from 1993-2013 and it has helped me enormously with anger. You will read more about it in future chapters of this book.)

Asked what he is really sure of, my grandson, 7 1/2 years old, said 1) that God is real 2) that there are penguins on Antartica and that friendly dogs wag their tails.

On a trip to speak in San Antonio, Texas, I had, again, a sense of being a pilgrimess. I thought that my adult children are the base, but that I will be sent around, especially as a nun. He may make me discontented at home so that I will be willing to go elsewhere for Him.

August, 1997

Hearing the Chant for the Feast of the Assumption on Shaw Island, I felt that these 6 Benedictine nuns had saved the Holy Grail from the storms of Post Vatican II. I thought about how this chapel on an island in the remote Northwest is so far from the home of Jesus in Nazareth yet He is here with me through the Eucharist.

A nun passed by and said to a ewe: "Hi Margaret, I love you Margaret! So sweet! It reminded me of You, Jesus, saying you know Your sheep and they know You. And I am one. The Psalms come so alive at a sheep-farm monastery. The yodeling of this sister is like tongues.

In prayer, Jesus seemed to tell me that, " You must stop analyzing everything, so that you cannot be openhanded to receive the gifts of joy I want to give you - like the beauty of this monastery and bay view and the pines and the bells in the wind and the llamas and goats on the ferry and the flowers.

"Expect each day to be nailed to the Cross and then let me lift you down and give you consolation and foretastes of heaven."

God doesn't ask me to understand the cross, squirming around on it, but to accept it and be loving with Him and others. Period!

Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, O.P., Founder of the Brothers of St. John, says hope is a form of poverty.

Do I really expect everything from God alone or am I busy every waking moment trying to save myself?

So tired? God will reach me in this tired body. More for Him to do, less for me? I must trust God at this turning point in my life, to do less with more purity of heart?

Dom Philippe writes about Mary's interior joy "In a secret joy there is always a very special note of depth, interiority, intimacy. It is like a perfume carefully kept in a sealed bottle for fear its fragrance might evaporate. For this very reason there is a note of gravity in this joy. Mary must be joyful for the whole universe which knows nothing. She must be attentive to the presence of God for those who are unaware of it."

We learn what is really wrong with us when we see how this hurts others.

Mother Hildegarde of the Benedictine monastery said that the Holy Spirit doesn't make lists. We should not do everything by lists. Try to intuit when some intervention with a difficult person would be good vs. forcing things through.

October, 1997

Being like a little child: a little child goes where its parents go, not worried about the future. Jesus says that my consecration with private vows is a reward, not more work, but sheer joy. He has given me heavy crosses and now he wants to lighten my life.

(During this time I tried to join two men who wanted to have a woman's branch to their group, founding a new community. This lasted only a short time for reasons I will not write about. My dear Dominican nun friend and co-author thought that

these experiences indicate that I am supposed to live out a new form of consecrated life by myself with a mystical home within.)

November, 1997

Someone says that God shares all his virtues with us except one: judgment. When we want to judge we should say - Jesus forgives you, I forgive you, and I am set free.

In an argument by letter with a Rabbi who wants the Church to expunge everything in the NT about the Jews that has led to persecution, I asked if they would want to take out of Passover all reference to Egyptians since there are wars between Israelis and Egyptians?

December, 1997 – In the course of trying to evangelize New Age people, some of whom come to our parish soup kitchen, I met a man of about 45, unmarried. He seemed lonely. After some months of occasional conversations, when no one else was around I asked him if he didn't want children. He said that in his particular New Age vaguely Hindu "tribe" they have sex without condoms but be withdrawal. They practice taking the longest time before withdrawal for maximum pleasure. The analogy that came to my mind was if, instead of planting seeds in the ground, someone would use the seeds to play dominos. Jesus can't sanctify me when I am so busy and troubled about many things. I should never be too busy to open myself in Him. Otherwise I am disappointing him! He could do so much more to make me a saint if I would be more open. Jesus says that when I let him be my best friend with Mary and Joseph and the angels and saints then I will have peace.

January 1998

Reading Nouwen he mentions "a speaker poured water on hard, dried-out soil saying "look, the soil cannot receive the water and no seed can grow. Thereafter crumbling the soil with his hands and pouring water on it again, he said "It is only the broken soul that can receive the water and make the seed grow and bear fruit."

Women so much like to make a home of a job that leaving a job feels like leaving a home.

Diana says that mothers want their daughters to be twins to themselves.

Col. 1: 11 "You will have in you the strength, based on his own glorious power, never to give in, but to bear anything joyfully."

1 Peter 1 18-23 "Your faith and hope, then, are centered in God.

Quotes from a conference given by the Gootees. (Note in 2013 – I have forgotten who these healers are. If you know them write me a reminder – chervinronda@gmail.com)

"Anxiety comes from the irrational conviction that things have to go badly!"

"Need is not call. Do not just answer demands, because then you get worn out and cannot do what God wants you to do.

Jesus love me so much he wants me to be with him every moment.

“Fear is useless what is needed is trust.” Mark 5:36?

Meditate on "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" Col. 3: 15

January 22, 1998

At my Christian writers' group in Sedona someone suggested we all write something about a perfect day for me 10 years from now. Here is my response:

MY PERFECT DAY 10 YEARS FROM NOW

I am seventy years old. It is a weekday. I am living in a large house with all the members of my family there, too, including the Los Angeles family who are not with me now.

I arise without benefit of the alarm clock by the dawns early light. My bed is positioned so that I can see the ocean out my picture window. I lie in bed awhile gazing at the tranquil sea and praising God for its beauty.

After breakfast I walk a block away to Our Lady of the Sea for Adoration and Mass. I no longer own a car, because I never go anywhere but the Church.

From the windows of Our Lady of the Sea, I can view our ocean. When it is time for the Mass, my whole family, children and all, come to join me. After Mass they leave for work and school.

At the end of each Mass our prayer team, which includes the priest, prays over the sick and anyone in any kind of pain. Each and every hurting person has a sense of healing after these prayers.

Those who can, sit at tables in the social hall and have a light second breakfast together. After chatting awhile, each person, who wishes, exchanges one insight or favorite scripture passage. The priest is one of these persons.

Some stay to pray the rosary together. I talk to anyone after rosary who might want something of me.

By late morning, I am slowly walking back home, taking in the beauty of the ocean once again. On my return, I take a long nap. Then comes a big lunch. Then a walk on the beach with my dog and any grandkids that want to come.

Late afternoon finds me sitting at my word processor writing another in my series of popular Catholic novels.

I pray evening prayer and help with the big family dinner. After our meal everyone who has written something or drawn something shares it with the rest. Then we play a game and end with a family prayer.

I retire about 8 PM to spiritual reading and night prayer.

My cup runneth over.”

February, 1998

Feb. 1, 1998

Mother Angelica got a healing of her chronic problems with knees and legs. Alleluia.

Definite decision to give up speaking. Motto: I don't go nowhere, nohow!

Dear Jesus, I am so sorry. I loved doing this for you (speaking). Please give me something just as meanful for You. I hear Jesus saying he loves me and doesn't want me to feel terrible and he will give something as good.

Feb. 11

A woman charismatic speaker witnessed how she only liked nice people and had to learn to like eccentrics whereas I can only like eccentrics and, so her heart is bigger than mine - reverse snobber?

Mary Neill, O.P. my co-author, gave a talk that includes a mention of an African tribe where they have two dances: the dance of the little hunger is about hunger for food, security and love, but the dance of the great hunger is about the hunger for the divine. If we think that the little hungers are all that we have, then we try to satisfy these and repress the great hunger. Perhaps I am being led now back into the Dance of the Great Hunger?

One exercise she had was to write out 12 things you want to tell people you are beautiful: I thought –

God loves you don't give up!

What will save you is a surprise!

Who you are is more than you know!

Jesus is the great light we have, believe Him!

The Eucharist is Jesus!

The darkness will not overcome the light!

The truth shall set you free even if it hurts!

You don't have to be someone else to be holy, so accept your funny frailities!

Another striking question: In what ways have I tried to be a Ronda who God never heard of? To be a ballet dancer by taking classes while in college; to want to be a pure contemplative enunciating beautiful sayings and nothing else; to want to be the mother of many children as little Therese's mother was. I had 3 living children but 4-6 miscarriages.

I wondered whether trying to be a Sister is the same kind of thing or trying to be a quiet woman vs. a proclaimer of truth.

(Now in 2013, looking back I think the last two dreams were fantasies not God's will for me.)

March 20, 1998 DEATH OF CHARLIE RICH

This day saw the death of one of the people most important in my whole life as a Catholic: Charles Rich. To read more about this wonderful Jewish convert contemplative layman go to my web – www.rondachervin.com and click on the link.

March 28 – I was in a huge accident. It involved 2 different trucks plowing into my little car in a freak snow fall in Arizona. I was not hurt at all physically, although the glass from the windshield was in pieces in my lap and the car was totaled. I felt that it was a sign God had more for me to do in this life.

The bad result was PTS that lasts to this day whenever a vehicle could hit me while driving or being driven.

April 10, Good Friday, I had the urge to give up. Could be just physical exhaustion, but could also have the meaning of needing to give up the whole Pelagian thing and just be first and do later.

April 21 Jesus seems to say “nothing is more important than that your little heart take joy in Me and then you can proclaim Me. Psalm 43:4

May 8, at Saturday Mass, Fr. J. C., the pastor, asked us why were there. I said "Because I like to think that Jens would be disappointed if I didn't come." It was a sort of word from Him, unpremeditated and just in the Spirit.

Mother Mary Yvonne invited me to make first vows. After much dialogue, I remembered reading in the Vatican document about religious community, that one has to put community above the apostolate. And that is what I don't feel called to do. Basically, speaking, teaching and writing come first, for me, over community.

(Now in 2013, after trying many communities, I still think this is the central reason why I can't be in community.)

However, Mother Mary Yvonne became convinced in prayer that I did belong and that my apostolate was simply the way Jesus would use me in the community. I wrote these words in my journal: "Well, my Jesus, I am stunned and, yes, a little sceptical about becoming a Handmaid again. Yet I trust that since you gave such joy to Mother Yvonne and such fresh energy, that it is You, speaking through her to me and you in my happy sweet feeling about it."

(I am not going to detail here all the reasons why I became convinced once more that I didn't belong. I think Jesus wanted me to try again for many reasons but that it still wasn't the right choice.)

May 22, 1998

I have never thoroughly explained what I love so much about the tabernacle in our Church in Sedona. (This is the parish Church, not the famous Frank Lloyd Wright Church in the Rocks). Most often when I pass the tabernacle, while kneeling on the elevated part of the rug underneath it, I will reach up and stroke the raised silverish metal relief of the lamb of God without knowing quite why. Today, I feel an urge to understand the symbol better myself by trying to explain what I find so absolutely wonderful about the art work.

As many of you know, the main tabernacle was for many years on top of the central altar in our Churches. As Catholics entered the pews they would lower one knee to the ground and make the sign of the Cross as an expression of their faith that Our Lord and Saviour was truly present in the tabernacle under the species of the host. Since Vatican II, it has been the practice in many Churches to remove the tabernacle to a place to the side. One reason is to create a sacred space away from the altar area where people can pray quietly while others talk to each other, usually softly.

Of course, there are those who object strenuously to this practice. They maintain that it used to be possible to pray quietly in the Church at any time before the flock were encouraged to chatter away irreverently before and after services among themselves. In defense, some contemporary liturgists maintain that the purpose of gathering for Mass is not quiet prayer but communal fellowship around the mysteries of the altar. Let those who wish to pray in silence do so in their homes or make visits to Jesus in the tabernacle at other times.

Regardless of the pros and cons of this dispute, I love to kneel before Jesus in our heavy metal tabernacle which is wedged into the corner of the front of the Church.

In the center of the design on the front of the tabernacle is a lamb. Usually I take our little lamb for granted as an apt symbol for Jesus as lamb of God. Of course there are the high theological meanings - the lamb of the sacrifice in the Old Testament fulfilled by God Himself in Jesus becoming the sacrificial lamb for all times.

Personally, as I gaze at the little lamb figure, it is vulnerability and inexorable pain triumphant that I see. The flag, signifying the victory of the resurrection, is so jaunty and brave looking. Having the Lamb of God with the flag on the door of the house of the Eucharist I find touching. It seems to indicate how the closeness of Jesus to us when He comes inside us in Holy Communion, can only be experienced when we are lamb-like, vulnerable, open to Him and to each other.

If we dare to be so lamb-like, then we can experience peace, represented by the two peace signs, the large P with the X on it for PAX, peace in Latin that are raised on both sides of the lamb.

May my soul be always high and solid, vulnerable and peaceful, in spite of everything in me that makes that seem impossible, such as the aggressive wolflike traits - loud voice, angry retorts, threats of verbal retaliation.

May 24

From Diana (one of my daughters)

On Any Heavens

"If there are any heavens

My mother will (all by herself) have one

it will not be a pansy heaven

nor a fragile heaven of lilies-of-the-valley but it will be a heaven of black red roses

my father will be (deep like a rose, tall like a rose)

standing near my mother (swaying over her silent)

with eyes which are petals

and see nothing

with the face of a poet

really which is a flower and not a face with hands which whisper

this is my beloved

(suddenly in the sunlight he will bow, and the whole garden will bow).

(Now in 2013, reading this poem of my daughter, I am touched. I am thinking how wounded she, her twin sister, and her brother, Charlie, were wounded by the conflicts in our marriage. This poem seems like a longing for grace-filled healing.)

A priest said the miracle isn't when you get what you want from God, but when you do what God wants!

About giving up traveling to give talks I thought “Next time I hear the song ‘Whom shall I send?’ I will say anyone but me, send someone else!”

(Now in 2013, looking back, I think I needed Jesus to say in my heart that I could stop at that time for a while, and then later it was good to give talks but less often than before. I believe that many times people think that “a word from the Lord” was false when it seems that a road that was cross-filled then opens again but, sometimes, it is because we need a hiatus.)

Jesus seemed to kiss my forehead, as if leaving an invisible imprint of a diamond shape on the head of a horse, and He seemed to say “Thank you Ronda for being my speaker. I will give you worthwhile other work to do for Me”.

On June 13th I had a sense of my soul leaving my body and total unification with God. I no longer want insights about God, only God himself. This reminded me of the famous spiritual book called *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written for those who begin to long for wordless prayer.

July 4, 1998 Airports!

After some thirty years of life as an out of town speaker, I have decided to quit the lecture circuit. But I still have to get through 6 weeks of uncancellable speaking dates. So here I am on July 4th at 6:30 AM at the Pittsburgh airport on my way to New York City. This usually packed stop-over between flights from all over the Western United States heading East is almost empty on this holiday Saturday morning. As I slowly meander through the deserted aisles with an hour and a half before flight time, I count it up again. After just 6 more flights, I may never again have to go into an airport!

Somehow airports, these amazing twentieth century edifices, have come to represent to me the tension of world vs. spirit; the manifold variety of life vs. the joys of solitude; noise vs. quiet; adventure vs. tranquility. And, also, the ironies of Providence. After getting married in 1962, it was I, who hated travel, who wound up making trips once a month as a speaker. My husband, who adored travel, and went all around the world as an international book salesman before we married, had to leave that life due to disabling asthma. He would die of envy whenever he dropped me off at the airport.

"Going to Chicago?" Martin would ask? "Take in the drive around the lake. Get them to take you to such and such restaurant near the Water Tower ... Melbourne, Australia? . . . be sure to make a side trip to Sydney ... I'll never forget that harbor in World War II." Never, never, never, could he accept the fact that I was only

interested in seeing Churches and Catholic audiences. In fact, the only time during our courtship that he considered breaking up with me was on a trip to Paris. He wanted to spend a whole day traipsing down the Champs Elysee looking for fashionable clothing for his fiance. After a trip to Notre Dame Cathedral, I wanted to hole up in the hotel room studying the Summa Theologica. "Maybe you need to go into long time therapy," he remarked with disgust when he realized he couldn't convince me to waste another hour buying fancy outfits. "This money belongs to the poor," I insisted vehemently.

Anyhow, now that my dear husband has passed into eternity, I would give a million dollars just to see his large body at the airport gate waiting for my return from yet another conference, eyes wistfully looking down the list of departing flights wishing he were off on an adventure.

Today, waiting for my flight, knowing I only have 6 weeks to go, vivid horrible memories of airports come to mind. Because I am working on my notes for this book, I become aware that these bad airport times have often been connected with male/female issues:

- 1971: kicking a heavy suitcase across the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, my hands gripping smaller bags, with my six-month old son in a sack on my chest, I was astounded that no one would help. I decided men were so battered by the radical feminist stances popular in that decade, they were refusing traditional roles. Were they saying to themselves, perhaps, "if you think we're all male chauvinist pigs, and you want to be amazons, we'll show you what unisex really means. No more chivalry toward the weaker sex!"

1980's: the feeling of abandonment waiting around airports for connections after meetings with the Bishops on the Committee on the Concerns of Women. (I was one of the women professor experts on this committee). There was a sort of work-bonding between the female consultants and the male Bishops during the sessions - 3 times a year, for ten years at different locations. But then we would split after the weekend to different sections of the airport for flights taking us to our homes in States far removed from each other. Sitting at my gate after so much intense interaction, I would feel exhausted, sad, and lonely.

Still I learned an awful lot from sticking with the Committee. The stereotype is that women are nurturing and men ambitious and task-oriented. It took ten years for me to see that Bishops, being pastoral, are usually exceedingly loving on a personal level. And women professionals, though always empathetic, tend to be more oriented toward results in a work situation. At the meeting I attended after my son

committed suicide. I expected, and found, the women moving out toward me in my aching pain, but was amazed at how much love was extended by the Bishops.

After ten years of fatiguing, frustrating work, ending up with a document unacceptable for a 2/3 majority vote, it was the Bishops who kept in touch with us by Christmas card, assuring us of their prayers for our family concerns.

Somehow, it was the busy cold airport scene that took the brunt of the sensation of isolation I experienced after the meetings. I sat for hours in a funk waiting for my connection, compulsively working cross-word puzzles, licking my wounds over debates in the sessions I had lost. I realize that Bishops have to be at least 1/3 diplomat, where women leaders can afford to be militant prophetesses.

Sitting in the airport anonymous in the crowd, I ripped from the cross word puzzle book out too hard, hard puzzles, inexplicably beyond my intelligence, collecting a pile of these and with scowling face cast them into the metal trash bins at regular intervals.

- 1997: Killing time for five hours at Seattle airport. The tiny commuter plane from the city to the San Juan Isles where the family was vacationing, left only infrequently. Returning from a speaking date back East the only connections involved departure at 7 AM in the morning EST; arriving in Seattle at 2:30 PM, thirty minutes too late for the 6 seater. Next one leaves at 5:30 PM and lands at a large island where the ferry to our smaller isle leaves at 9:30 PM.

So many hours of travel and sitting! During the stop-overs of that long day, I am eating, doing crossword puzzles, knitting, praying the rosary, reading a paperback amidst strangers. This gives me plenty of time to muse about the miserable life-style I have adopted. I think about how women were meant to be nest-makers, not adventurers. My daughters are computer experts working out of their homes surrounded by their children. They seem happier doing that than I do on the speaker-travel path.

How did I get into this life-style of constant travel? Not hard to figure out. I am a Crusader for the Church. All over the world people seem to think that it is worth paying to put me on a plane and have me dropped into their cities to teach their people.

Does this mean Jesus "Wants me to go round and round the country until I drop dead from the fatigue of it all? Every time a trip involves unusually difficult sacrifices I try to convince myself it would be honky-dory-okay-by-Him if I quit.

Up to now, something always intervenes to persuade me that I have to keep it up, after all; such as watching Mother Angelica, in her 70's, with a 40 pound brace around her body, in constant pain, making it to yet another far-away conference. Or, Fr. Hardon in his eighties, bent-over and half blind, staggering through a huge terminal on his 4th trip of the month!

Here in Pittsburgh airport, on July 4th, 1998, at the start of my last round of speaking trips, I shove the notebook with my unhappy airport memoirs into my tote bag. I decide to take a last walk over to the Ladies' Room, before my flight is called. As I saunter over from my Gate past the shops and fast-food places, sudden feelings of love for the crazy airport-world wash over me. The funkiness of it all? The sense that with all its failings, air travel has united the world with friendly skies?

Actually what I have always liked best about the airport is taking in the beautiful faces, figures, and attire of young people. I am especially delighted by the colored skin of the black/hispanic mix women with their glorious intricately braided hairdos. The slim African origin men with high, high, behinds remind me of films showing lines of scantily dressed black hunters in the Veldt, seeking prey, spears held shoulder height.

Part of the enjoyment of watching others in the airport is the anonymity. Dowdy old-women attract no attention at all. I recall that all the way into her eighties my mother justified dying her hair, painting her lips red and wearing brightly colored shirts and contrasting kerchiefs on the basis that otherwise no one ever noticed old women. Now at sixty I know what she means.

Is there some similar mechanism at work in the way I find myself whenever I am at the airport, making numerous phone-calls at high rates to my close friends? With each call am I trying to confirm to myself that far from being a nonentity in a crowd of thousands of strangers, I am a loved important person to someone?

Contrastingly, dressing as a nun in my drab blue dresses and jumpers also feels like being covered, hidden. Instead of my clothing being self-expression through exterior wrappings, my true self lives within. I no longer display myself in time, but instead invisibly stretch myself toward eternity.

July 14: I have a sense that the pendulum swings in the Church comes because whenever one group is in power then what is left out of their theology or spirituality is taken up as a reaction. Otherwise the powerful become *too* proud and obnoxious. Hence "He exalteth the lowly."

There is an opportunity to Jetski at Bradenton Beach in Florida where we are having a family reunion vacation. I want to try. One of my son-in-law's, Peter, makes the sacrifice to take me on his jetski for 10 minutes or so. It feels good, not just the speed and waves, but also like feminine trust in a strong male.

In prayer in great pain all over my body from various maladies. Jesus seemed to say "Why do you think of me as far away, Ronda?"

My other son-in-law, Pete, husband of Diana, who is an agnostic at best, had a dream that he saw a cross made of olive wood and that Martin and Charlie were close and with our daughters dancing in West Side Story!

September 1998

Back in Sedona after a long series of out-of-town lectures, I thought it would be wonderful to devote myself to quiet prayer and peaceful work at my desk on various writing projects. No more pressure of air-travel, strange cities, conference crowds, speeches. I asked Mother Mary to slow me down. Mother Teresa wrote "We cannot put ourselves directly in the presence of God if we don't practice internal and external silence. Therefore we should make a special point of silence of mind, eyes, and tongue."

Instead the first month has been filled with difficulties - humungus car problems, tensions at the parish, and worst of all a whole series of invitations for out-of-town work, each one more intriguing and promising than the type of far-flung activities I had decided to turn down forever.

"Come to a monastery in Solesmes, France, and help run a retreat house for English-speaking guests!"

"Come to a huge university in the Mid-west and help with a Newman Center outreach to thousands of students!"

"Work with a holy priest and nun on a healing center in New England."

"Come to a tiny Catholic college by the seashore in the South and help start an entirely new creative program of studies!"

My head whirling with fantasies about these opportunities, peace began to seem even more distant than it had on the lecture circuit. In desperation I grabbed onto a Christian counselor, AL-Anon, and a home-retreat.

The goal of my counseling sessions is to develop more self-esteem as a child of God the Father, and greater intimacy with Christ, so that I can move out to others more from the heart than the head. (Mother Teresa always said that God doesn't need your work, He needs your heart.) Hopefully my life will have a stronger foundation after these sessions. The counselor also suggests being less body-hostile - i.e. taking the body into account as in swimming, eating well, lots of sleep.

I also went on a retreat with the hope of becoming so much more anchored in Christ that I would become detached enough to view the options in a rational manner without so much anxiety. In this way I will be a true Handmaid of the Lord, like Mary, who could not plan her life but was totally surrendered to whatever God would ask of her at each juncture. As reading for the home-retreat I selected excerpts from the writings of St. Bernard, a saint who wonderfully mingled the contemplative and the active; the head and the heart.

Some images that came with this inner work:

- I am not to go up and down in my moods based on exterior elements of life, but instead to be anchored in Jesus. Whether I stay or go, I will be walking hand in hand with Jesus, my Bridegroom.

- I notice that the attraction of lots of the fantasy-future places circles around greater closeness to strong male figures. Substitutes for my dead son and husband? But the Scripture says "Put not your trust in princes." Does being weaned from workaholism create a vacuum which I try to fill by dreaming about "princes," i.e. strong male figures who will waft me away to some new site for team-ministry? Is this a sort of addiction? As they say in 12 Step, my life is totally out of control - in my case, out of control from nurturing fantasies that become so dazzling that I cannot see straight?

Another 12 step idea comes into play here about "letting things happen vs. making them happen." Does the anxiety that comes with invitations for future work come from just fear of relocation? Maybe, it comes more from trying to make things happen by psyching-out how idyllic I could make the future? In the NOW I experience the resistance of those around me, but in the fantasy, I have the power to force everyone at the locale to conform to my ideas of how to do things perfectly!

In a book about personality I read about a syndrome that fits me pretty well. It describes a type who finds the present with its petty tasks boring and instead constantly fantasizes about more exciting future places and events. The drive behind such patterns is a desperate craving for missing elements in one's present life.

The counselor projected that after our sessions I would be able to relate to others more from the heart than the head. Later this week there was a situation where a friend accused me of cutting people off forever if they disagreed with me. I was upset at her confronting remarks. Making a list of friends, I could prove that many of them are not intellectual allies but I still love them for other reasons. Then I realized that since the friend who brought it up was one who disagrees with me on some important subjects, her comments were really expressing her own fear that I would reject her. So, instead of spending more time on analysis, I hastened to reassure her that even though I want to reject people who disagree with me, I rarely do so. It seemed to me a sign of progress that I felt her fear in my heart, instead of just thinking about the subject of friendship in an abstract way.

As I type up my handwritten jottings thus far, I feel even more anxious. They come together in the form of a vicious circle - fear leading to fantasy, leading to more fear, stronger fantasies ... ugh!

I wonder, is the Lord trying to show me just how painful trying to evade the NOW and live on the FUTURE can get? Is the purpose to get the fast-forward on my mental tape going so fast that I have to move into Step One - my life is totally out of control? Someday will the slogan "One Day at a Time" begin to look less like a slogan and more like a life-saver?

I think that we cannot just decide to anchor ourselves in God. He has to anchor us in Him. The boat doesn't anchor itself; the captain does. I am the boat. God is the captain.

TRANSITION

A beautiful reading at Mass from Sirach 36:15-16

"Give peace, Lord, to those who wait for you and your prophets shall proclaim you as you deserve. Hear the prayers of your servant and of your people Israel." Lines from St. Bernard that helped:

"The reason for loving God is God Himself."

"Justice should be eager but not hasty. We need to rebuke others but not always right away."

In the midst of these turbulent first few weeks of counseling, 12 step and retreat work, the invitation involving the small college in the South became more urgent. Everything about this option seemed really perfect for me since the Mission

Statement and plans coincided so much with ideas I have always had myself about Catholic education.

Exhausted at the thought of another trial-balloon after years of false starts since Martin's death, I prayed before going to bed:

"Dear Jesus, I am too tired to experiment. Can you just tell me which way to go? One day at a time? Lead Kindly Light ... one step ahead enough for me?"

I woke up the next morning thinking that there is no reason why I should be exempt from the Cross of having to experiment. How can I demand that God tell me what to do by a direct mystical voice? Isn't it part of the cross of the single life, even if consecrated, that we are sometimes "too free?" Too many options?

I also see that all these work-missions are pointless unless I am anchored in Christ.

Considering the possibility of continuing my teaching mission in the new setting in the South, a four month semester, January - May, to replace an older priest teaching 10 seminarians - happy images leap out at me:

From Psalm 92 in the Liturgy of the Hours this morning:

"Still bearing fruit when they are old; still full of sap, still green."

In prayer Jesus reminds me that I was begging for a place where everything I need would be there - Eucharist and regular food, and I would never have to drive again. He reminds me that He loves to surprise me; that He always has worked with me through surprise. Also that He told me that in my fatigue I would need to lean more on the Church. Going to a college run by a fervent religious community would hopefully mean leaning more on others. Overwhelming feelings of gratitude at how great a gift this could be -maybe not a fantasy, but a reality God wants for me.

If I am really to go, then I would see this time in Sedona in a different way - not as the final refuge place - but instead as like the time after the gong when the battered boxer staggers into his corner for the ministrations of his coaches. Just the way these men surround the boxer to pour ointments onto his wounds, massage his back and stuff his thirsting mouth with lemons, so are my counselors during this hiatus, in pitying charity, pouring soothing balm on my bloody scars ... so that I will be ready for the next round in the arena!

On the fourth day of the retreat I seem to hear Jesus saying in my heart "My bride, I am offering you this place in Texas where I think we can be happy together. A

bride wouldn't have to say yes out of duty, but maybe you want to say yes to this venture with Me."

This thought is consoling and also challenging. The words presuppose that I am not a slave but a bride and that Christ really is interested more in His intimacy with me than in my work for His kingdom.

Back to Pilgrim Bride image, not necessarily Corpus Christi forever, just for this Spring - more like One Day at a Time? (This was a small college run by a religious order in Texas, Our Lady of Corpus Christi, administered by the Society of Our Lady of the Trinity.

AI-Anon is such an American spirituality - so practical and pragmatic in a good way.

I went to bed and couldn't sleep. Jesus seemed to come to me in a rapturous way as if He were lifting my whole self, up and out. I was pondering happily the interior locution about Texas being a place He thought we could be happy together. This blissful feeling lasted for about an hour. To give myself up to happiness, and not as they say in 12 step literature be addicted to suffering.

I also thought about the 12 step idea of how much we need the members of the group. This truth contrasts with the residue of being brought up to be Nietzschean, strong and independent, so I feel ashamed to need these groups. This is the Mystical Body dependence - they need me, perhaps, at this college, for clarity of ideas. I need them for wisdom about daily living.

Since there was still a vague option of ministering to English speaking pilgrims at Solesmes, France, I had a stream of consciousness about Paris and France: Piaf, Chevalier, Rimbaud, La Gaité Parisienne, the Dom Cafe, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Notre Dame, Chartres, Rue du Bac, Proust, Galois, de Gaulle, Pascal, Montaigne, de Sales, Marillac, Vincent de Paul, Bernard, Chantal, Acarie, Marie of the Incarnation, Therese, Eminence Gris, Peguy, Bernanos, Raissa and Jacques Maritain, Baudeliere, La Grange, Daniel Rops, Teilhard, de Foucauld, Monserrat, Montparnasse, Bizet, Bloy, Monet, Manet, Camus, Hugo, Lustiger?

Notes from a session with the counselor: Trace back fear in unresolved situations to loss of father. When I come to face an unresolved situation like Corpus Christi, I should rest in the love of Jesus, anchored in His heart. Fr. Tony Anderson, who invited me to teach there, is a contemplative, so he operates out of his own space. Pray for it to go smoothly. The anchor is under the storm. I don't have to be at the

mercy of the waves of life. I need to be so anchored in God that I live in the Now. The grace is in the Now. Ask God to help me live in the present.

Emotional healing needs safety, not conflict. Avoid unsafe people for me during this time. You have to have safety to be healed. Neediness means out of control. But taking care of human needs is just being responsible - even if they are my own needs. If I don't accept my needs I will find unhealthy ways to satisfy them.

God will bring forth images to show me what I need to work on during the next two weeks. The grace of the last two weeks is to rest in His love which is unconditional. I don't have to worry about Him abandoning me.

Be sure to include adoration prayer.

October 2, 1998

(During this time I was looking into the possibility of ministering at the Newman Center of a huge University as a Handmaid of Nazareth. I made a trip to the University where Mother Mary Yvonne also came to help with discernment. I decided to move there for this ministry, but then before the time my work would commence I left Sedona to be a substitute professor from January-May at Our Lady of Corpus Christi. During that time I left the Handmaids, and so I stayed in Corpus Christi instead of going to the big University as a campus minister.)

In Al-Anon working on Step 3 I made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him. When my only goal is to become holy - all love of God and neighbor - then I will have no problem with this step because of course He can make me holy in any situation I find myself in. It is when I am thinking that I must guarantee my own earthly happiness that I get into frantic racing thoughts about pros and cons of every option before me.

I need to have arms not only to embrace others, but to embrace my own self in love. Does everyone else have a lovable self except me? Did God create me without a self? Am I only part of a "we?" Pray to get a relationship to myself, to perceive the goodness in me. Psalm 139, I am personally knit in my mother's womb, the handiwork of God. Embrace who I am, so that I am not at the whim of everyone around me. Pray to be a more balanced person - the most balanced person I can be, little by little. I am too harsh on myself. Don't compare myself to very different person like Alice Von Hildebrand. The only true comparison is with myself. I have to befriend myself. No extra responsibilities. This is a time to be alone and let things surface. Healing takes a long time. The Steps empower this by living in the present moment.

October 8

ChristianTherapy: I need to beg Jesus to show me how to love myself in Him, in His heart; to want to be alone more in order to be able to listen better to God.

A sense that the anchor image isn't so good for me, that it would be better to think of Jesus embracing me and out of that to go out to others looking for love and affirming them is okay - just to accept the pain of it when I am rejected by men who are not able to give that much love. My name is yearning. I recall the image of the pilgrim bride in the Church. I am sensing that teaching is my game; much more than parish ministry or sit at home and write and pray.

The little book mark of the 12 Steps called Just for Today is terrific. If you, the reader are not familiar with it, you might want to google it.

Weaning:

It is said that in some traditional cultures, women weaned their babies from breastmilk by blackening the bosom with some noxious smelling ointment. Disgusted, the baby would accept the substitute of food for the previously desired milk. What a graphic image! Whenever I think of it, I picture the large older baby grabbing for the familiar breast and suddenly recoiling from the smell and maybe the sticky feel, crying for a while, and then hungrily accepting the offered food instead.

By analogy, it seems to me that in my own adult life God detaches me from places and people to move me on somewhere else by means of an equally distressing but perhaps necessary weaning process.

Always I begin a new venture full of hope. The beauty of the location is sublime. The people are perfect. God's presence is everywhere, all the time. I could dance in the streets it is all so wonderful, and usually I find some hour of the day when few are about to watch, and literally dance around the Church, the house, the byways of the town.

It is with a kind of bemused ironic smile that I recall now those feelings about a monastery, a college, a city surrounded by Red Rocks. How many hours spent figuring out in detail how to guarantee these paradises forever. In each case I would figure out how to manipulate every circumstance and person involved to want me and keep me. Could I become indispensable by doing a thousand times more than anyone else in my work? Would it work to affirm others with such a consummate choice of words that they would always want such a loving person near?

Such romanticism.! So many illusions! What about the many flaws in my own character that could change any Eden into Purgatory, if not Hell, for the people who have to be with me? That would be a long story. Maybe too painful for this moment of reflection?

Just now, there is another question which interests me more. What has God's strategy been through the decades to lead me on, out of circumstances that if tolerably good in some ways, are still not where He wants me to be for the next round?

(Reading this in 2013, I realize that I still have a lot of this syndrome in my life. But also it seems to me that I can't make it seem that God wants me to be a pilgrim, if the real reasons I can't stay in one place is just my faults. Of course, another possibility is that God, knowing my faults, even while He tries to sanctify me, gives me a way out until I would reach such a point that any place would be fine because "God alone is enough.")

Let me begin with a memory so far distant as to be more amusing than miserable.

Off to teach summer-school for a short two week session. A friend of mine had recommended me for the post. Even though she was sure the particular students attending would resist my ideas, it would be good for them to have to hear them anyhow, she reasoned.

Well, the resistance was worse than even my friend had imagined. Older male students sat unsmiling for hour long sessions, arms crossed on their chests. Older woman students smiled at my jokes but then grabbed me in the corridor during break time to explain how irrelevant my ideas were compared to their own better insights.

All was not lost, however. That same school was the location of a group of zealot Catholics I had read about in a magazine article. When I found them I was overwhelmed. They were the most perfect, strong, daring, creative, fascinating Catholics in the whole world. And, as a bonus, they were also fond of dining out with just enough red wine to make even anecdotes about enemies more fun than pain.

The day after my first encounter with the group, I was so happy I danced across the campus to early morning Mass, singing a gospel song about "The Lord turns water into wine."

The euphoria lasted through the whole 2 weeks ending with my writing up a witty letter of application for a job in their branch of the college. The last line was "So when are ya gonna make me anna offer I kannanota refuse?"

Evidently, my will was not God's will. Six months of attempts by mail from my home base to cajol them into hiring me, led only to frustration and anguish. The breast got blacker and blacker.

Rumors of the reactions of the group to began to reach me through the grape vine. Knitting image. "That woman seems like a nervous wreck. Doesn't she ever relax?" "She's almost as bad as our fearless leader when it comes to workaholism! She'll be driving us all nuts adding new projects to our already overloaded schedules."

The final weaning came when the head of the group, my hero, confessed that he was simply not the saint I thought him to be and just didn't have time even to deal with my letters, no less my presence as a colleague!

I was crushed. Evidently there was no way I could ever suck the milk of human happiness from those breasts!

So what was the better choice God had in mind for me? At that time it was new friends who had plenty of time for me and found my high energy stimulating rather than frightening. At the same time, Jesus deepened my interior sense of His presence, gracing me with prayer of quiet.

Another time I will fill out more incidents of weaning. With what motive? To relive the pain again? Not really. More to convince myself that when the present weaning is over, from a place that is very good, but still not "right," there will be solid food in the new places God is sending me. Will I be better nourished by that food, if my dreams of it are more tempered with realism? I hope so. I do hope so. Please let me hope so, God!

October 23, 1998

More coming out of the counseling:

"Pray to be open to the total history of your life, whatever is there, known or unknown, for the purposes of healing."

"Yes, stay with the image of He is embracing me - but not just the best of me, but the whole of me including the whole past. There is no life experience no matter how terrible that makes me repulsive to God."

Beautiful letter from Mother Mary Yvonne when I was feeling so grieved on Charlie's birthday (my son who committed suicide):

"Good night, Ronda. God bless you. I prayed for you tonight. God gives heavy burdens to those He loves greatly. Your burdens have put you in the company of those He loves greatly; He asks them to help Him carry His cross, to shoulder it in their sorrows. And so, you are near to him in all you bear, and tonight He holds you deeply in the flame of His sacred Heart; your heart forever lost in and always falling more deeply into His heart of sorrows and unfathomable love. There, in that place in His heart, is your peace."

October 30, 1998

An old twelve-step saying goes "It's easier to wear slippers than to carpet the whole world." I didn't get it right away. Then I saw it was about fixing oneself vs. trying to fix everyone else.

I thought if I started looking for examples, the saying would stay in my mind longer. An immediate challenge was the problem of holidays. Why do I dislike them so much? The theory that fits best, ugly as it may be, is that such gatherings frustrate my main wish, to be the center of attention. In my tiny birth family, I could often seize center-stage because I was so verbal. I picked up from my mother a way of telling anecdotes, not without a touch of malicious humor, that drew the attention of the others. My sister being deeper and more inward could rarely get a word in edgewise. The teaching and speaking profession, of course, have provided me with a wholesome outlet for those gifts developed in childhood.

At informal gatherings, however, it is rarely possible for one person to be the center of attention unless she or he is being honored in some way. Obviously, at usual social gatherings, no one is going to let one person get up and give speeches! Second best to being the center of attention, I find, is that something is going on that has enough pizzazz to grab my whole attention; such as someone else seizing the stage who has something fascinating, deep, or funny to recount.

At informal gatherings, of course, focused talk is unlikely. Most of the people around are not looking for a structured situation where they will have to be an audience or speaker, but instead a casual set-up where they can enjoy one or two others of their choice without having to either give much or be much challenged.

If everyone is sitting quietly watching some wonderful film, I am happy with that.

I used to expend large amounts of energy at gatherings trying to manipulate the situation so that I could, if not get the attention of everyone, at least get something interesting going by means of asking provocative questions and trying to get the whole group to answer them, the-way I can when I am teaching.

If you knew what my extended family is like, you would realize that it would take a lot of fixing, "carpeting the world," to get any of them to do anything I want at any time. Not quite true. I greatly enjoy just looking at the beautiful faces of family members, eating the gourmet cooking of family members, and I am happy to be able to help by putting steady streams of dishes into the dish-washer or cleaning pots and pans that don't fit in the machine. But between meals, what sometimes happens is that I sit in a corner, knitting, smiling vaguely, and feeling miserable.

Why, you might ask, don't I just leave town for the holidays - say visit a monastery and make a retreat? Well, first of all, the family insists I be there because they love me and want me to enjoy and applaud everything they plan. And, second, even though I don't like what they plan, for the most part, I would still miss them if I absented myself altogether. After all, they are the people I love best in the whole world.

So, now looking toward the oncoming holiday season, full of such informal family gatherings, I ask myself, how could I apply my new maxim "wear slippers instead of trying to carpet the world?"

What "carpeting the world" would translate into is easy to figure out.

What I would like would be to "fix up" the holidays in "my own image and likeness," by super-planning. Say, three days before Christmas, the oldest grandchild would read out the story of the birth of Christ from the Bible. Then the adults might sit in a circle sipping eggnog telling about their favorite memory of Christmas as a child. Christmas Eve we could listen to Handel's Messiah while the children watched the Life of Jesus for children on kiddie or the little Drummer Boy on TV After opening presents, Christmas morning everyone, even the majority who are non-Catholic, would go to Mass with me after I pointed out, hopefully without sarcasm, that the word Christmas after all means Christ-Mass! The Christmas dinner would follow around 3 PM.

Since it I not me, but my daughter and her husband, and not myself who are the hosts of the family Christmas, it is unlikely any of my "carpeting" plans will win out. I cannot "carpet the world." So, what would "wearing slippers," be like? How could this holiday be different for me given that it will be stretched out over 2 weeks with six house guests because of the way Christmas and New Year fall out this year?

What came to mind, when I paused to pray in midst of this sad recital of my holiday impasse, was that there could be a new way to celebrate the holidays as a consecrated woman. Could "wearing slippers" be something so simple as deciding how I think a nun should celebrate Christmas, as I should anyway, and then just doing it, joining only in family activities that fit?

What would it be like to announce when the house guests arrive that Christmas is especially holy to me this year because I am a Sister in first vows and so I will be spending more time in the Church in prayer than usual? It would be hard to do most of my praying at home amidst the hustle and bustle of 5 children and 8 adults. Why not, instead, over the holidays this year, take a good two hours for Mass, liturgy of the hours, personal quiet time, right in the Church.

Suppose when I come home I do the dishes, sit around with everyone an hour or so, and then retreat to my room for quiet activities. Later on, I could take the children for walks, have more quiet time, pray some more and see if different family members drift down to my quarters to talk to me. After dinner I could spend an hour or so blending into the common atmosphere, but then go down early for night prayer and bedtime.

(Reading this after all these years, now in 2013, some of these things the family actually does such as a 40 day Advent Wreath ceremony, and sometimes I do absent myself for breaks.)

New move: I'm not telling them what to do, and they would not be forcing me into a mode that I can't fit into.

(Note: Trying basically to follow this 12 step oriented plan, after the first evening of some tension over differing feelings about Clinton - I got the grace to relax and stop pushing and just enjoy everyone as they were and it was enjoyable. Also spent lots of time on typing up entries for this book.)

October 24, 1998

I am concentrating on 3rd step: surrender to his dominion in the world, in their lives, and my life. I should pray daily for healing of hurts and unknown memories. I am still frantic trying to fix certain situations. (Isaiah 12:1-6) - God indeed is my savior. I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the Lord and he has been my savior.

I have a greater desire to be quiet and alone.

I got an image of just like if you grab a cat by the scruff of its neck it can't get away, Jesus is grabbing me by my gut so I can't get away.

Therapy session Nov. 3, 1998

My therapist thinks I have more strength than I think but it is deep in me not outside. I need to be more centered. I need to see His love for me being all the time through the day, not just when I am praying - "3rd step?"

When I have a better sense of myself as loved by Christ I will be nun-like without trying to fit some mold.

(Reading this in 2013, I think that being a dedicated widow with my own rule is a form of being a bride of Christ but not fitting into a pseudo-nun mold.)

Just try to be with Ronda. The child-like part needs to be embraced.

The therapist tells me to "visualize yourself at age eight sitting on His lap. I embrace the eight year old and let her bring back memories. Dialogue with the inner child - myself now and the inner child. Ask her what needs to be healed. Trust what comes up; don't dismiss some part of my history. How did the 8 year old Ronda really feel about Mommy? Let that flow. When the child answers write that down.

(This exercise was profitable but too unique to me to put in here as an example for a reader to benefit.)

An assignment for Christian Writers' Guild: (In the group I led, we wrote vignettes on topics such as the below. The best went into a book I still use in ministry to the elderly called Legacy: How to Write Your Memoirs for Family and Friends.)

My First Memory by Ronda Chervin

Tears! Disgust!

"Don't make us eat that!"

Did we say it or did we just think it? My two year old twin-sister and I were about two years old. On this occasion, I remember, we were standing in pajamas in a small narrow kitchen of our Long Island, N.Y. home. The issue was breakfast.

Our father was insisting we eat the runny scrambled eggs he had just made, and we were making a fuss.

My sister's mouth was shut tight in grim resistance. My father was yelling "You're going to eat those eggs, like them or not." It seems now as if it must have been the first time I felt the strength of his anger.

Our father was known never to change his mind about anything he thought was right or true. During the time when we were eight years old, and our parents were separating, we heard constantly about his annoying intransigence. How amazed my mother would have been to learn that a month before his death in his eighties, my father with tears in his eyes admitted he had been wrong about a matter the "rightness" of which had cost him dearly. But that's another story.

Insight into the scrambled egg incident did come from my mother a few years before she died in her eighties. Our mother was reminiscing about how miserable it had been to live with our father. She said that he could be charming. He was a good worker and even did most of the cooking and housework, most unusual for a man at that time - the 1930's. She also admitted that he did love us children. It was his stubborn fanaticism she grew to hate. All her unhappiness welled up in an especially poignant fashion when a Frenchman she had loved during her days of expatriate Paris cafe society life came to the United States on a business trip. He was an art dealer and was in town only a few days. My mother described her escape that Saturday on the train from Long Island to NYC to see this Parisian love of her life once more. Evidently there was no way this married man was going to rescue his old love from her life of imprisonment with my father, and she returned resigned to her fate.

Could that trip to the city by our mother have been the very Saturday of the scrambled eggs? Did our father sense our mother might be trying to engineer her escape? Did he take out his anger at her on the little twin tots he might have had to raise alone?

What would our lives have been like if one Frenchman had said "oui" instead of "non"?

After that experience as a two year old, I hated scrambled eggs for twenty years.

December, 1998

I had a glitch with AT&T where they had seemed to be giving me free minutes for six months, but it didn't happen. I was furious that it wasn't so. I asked myself why I talk so much on the phone?

Always good reasons, or more because I panic and don't talk enough to Jesus on the free hot line?

A lugubrious thought: I am too old for anyone but God to care if I change for the better; others are too used to me to hope I will be better.

Realization from 6th step that being more drenched in God's love is the only way I could cease to want to be the center of human attention. Then I will want God to take away the defect so that I could still be talkative, friendly, but not be the center. Being a professor I have the center legitimately vs. in social situations where it is not legitimate.

I would be less co-dependent if I made Jesus, Mary and Joseph my confidentes all day long; not have energy drain of fear about losing people who love me if I go away.

December 19, 1998

Impeachment by Congress of Clinton. Sense it is like an interdict of a town because of the King and the whole country is ex-communicated and suffers until the King really repents.

The goal of my counseling sessions was that I would be anchored in Christ to go forth to Corpus Christi with less fear coming from unhealed areas. As I am about to start on this new phase of my life, I, indeed, do feel full of strength; a little trepidation but not paralyzing. Praise be to God!

(This ends the journal entitled *Notes from the Feminine Underground*. There is a hiatus between these entries and the next journal *Face to Face*. Some of my life during the hiatus can be found in a fictionalized way in the novels called *Ties that Bind*, *A Summer Knight's Tale* (co-author Gene Grandy, and *Last Fling*.)

Face to Face

2001-2003

Introduction

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

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

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

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

- is it easier for me to love you as truth
because truth is strong and love is vulnerable?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here is something more about inclusions in this journal of the dialogues with Jesus, Mary, and other persons known in prayer. As a teacher of spirituality I fully realize that making it sound as if every word heard in one’s heart during prayer is straight from God can be faulty and arrogant. Experts in mysticism point out how mistakes or illusions can infuse the writings even of canonized saints. This can be explained by the fact that usually infused wisdom is given within a few moments. The recipient of the locution tends to embroider the few graced words with his or her own sense of the meaning of those words, sometimes adding many paragraphs. This added portion can even include factual errors coming from the limitations of the scientific knowledge of the times, such as medieval saints presupposing that the earth is the center of the universe. Detecting such falsehoods about

facts in the writings of the mystic does not nullify the essential truth that may truly be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 16, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

When I arrived here a few years ago I was five years a widow. Before that I had been trying to be a consecrated sister in an emerging community. As described in Notes from the Feminine Underground, above, I left that community. A few months after coming to this new place, the call seemed to come to try to be a consecrated widow in the group running

the college. Lots of stress was involved in these decisions. More about my new experimental vocation as this journal continues.

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

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

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

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

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

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

remind me that if I will “be still and know that You are God” I will be less anxious and fretful.

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today it rained and some water leaked in through a door into the cafeteria area. In our relatively dry climate here, whenever it rains most people praise you, God. I love the sound of rain on the roof or aslant my windows, but water coming inside frightens me. Brought up in city apartments high above the ground, I never thought of weather as actually entering a dwelling. When my husband, Martin, and I moved to a house in the suburbs with our children, I was startled when rain dared to come right through the crack at the bottom of our door. Was I fearful because I had lived so long in a city world of technology where problems are readily solved by calling the landlord or the repairman? I think my sense of menace at even a small trickle of rain slowly flowing toward our rug in the country

came from this shock at something moving and alien, unlike the well-controlled water from the faucet. So, this morning, seeing water coming through the space under the dining room door of our college evoked these disconcerting memories. There was an almost flood the year I arrived here, but the hurricane skirted around our city.

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Saturday, November 17, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Suddenly I remembered a dear very ailing friend of mine in Arizona, a Unity minister. My goal had been to bring her into the Catholic church. Not much success with that, but she would sometimes agree to pray the rosary with me meditatively leaving out the “pray for us sinners” since she didn’t believe in sin! Before I left town, my friend did go back to the more traditional Episcopal church of her family. Thank you Jesus and Mary. It happened

that she loves bright colored clothing and jewelry. Having finished my own rosary before the others were finished, I asked if I could make one for this dear suffering friend. This time I went to town choosing five of the one- inch scaly bluish translucent fish, and many big yellow and red balls.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nothing to it. Just copy me.”

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

The readings for the liturgy today were about widows. The sermon today had to do with the tough and tender nature of widows in the Old and New Testament. Imagine giving up one’s last oil to feed a prophet or one’s last mite to the temple treasury! I thought of the

widow saints I wrote about in my book *A Widow's Walk*. (This book has since been re-published by Johnnette Benkovic's Simon Peter Press under the title *Walk with me, Jesus: A Widow's Journey*. For instance, how about medieval St. Elizabeth of Hungary, so strong to confront the luxurious living of the royal family and so tender to the poor.

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

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

November 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

for the playfulness of it, feel a need to do their darnedest to improve their looks with cosmetics or bright shiny fabrics?

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

Additional reflections for today:

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

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

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

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.

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...

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

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

Don't embrace or obliterate.

Reserve a part of yourself just for God.

Not so many plans – follow the Holy Spirit.

Burn past garbage!

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

Re-boot.

Be satisfied vs. complaining.

Be carefree.

Take care of your own life.

Chose healthy friends.

November 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

November 21, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

stubbornly holding onto false unchallenged opinions. Thank You for giving me joy in being corrected.

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

To become:

Holy – constant prayer, secure in His heart.

Quieter – more custody of the tongue.

Hopeful – avoid despairing natural level predictions.

Compassionate – not so judging, more forgiving.

Trusting – God will send the human love I need.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

praying that there won't be any need to get off the freeway on the left requiring three lane changes, I do manage to change lanes now whenever expedient.

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

November 22, 2002

Joyful Mysteries:

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

So, what's so glorious about this? Well, it was Thanksgiving Day and I was dying to go to confession. Usually at community Masses on holidays we have a priest hearing before the service. I forgot about this. I was sitting in my pew 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. The book, with a plot about the adventures of a zealous Franciscan young priest on his summer assignment in a parish, is really about how fervor needs to be balanced with prudence and justice if it is not to become twisted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas a regular publisher has to pay for paper, printing, warehousing to the tune of about \$20,000 for a good run on a book, for about \$500 you can take a disc with a book on it and transform it for the net so that anyone can down-load it for about \$5. Such net people don't get a book but they get what is called nowadays "a read." They can browse through a chapter of a book on the net to decide whether they want a disc of the whole or

just have it transferred to their hard-drive. No dusting either! Some e-book publishers also do POD which means they print-on-demand regular looking copies for a higher price. This means they don't have to advance much money for printing or storage.

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

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

(Now in 2013 you can get it used on Amazon. Just google the title.)

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

Glorious Mystery

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

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

November 24, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

When I turned sixty I wrote a book called *Seeking Christ in the Sufferings and Joys of Aging*. (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, the simplicity issue seems more complicated.

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

Just the same, these questions inevitably lead to fantasies about my utopian dream college – a small self-supporting farming school with the least tuition and simplicity-minded professors and their families working for room and board. Barter. A doctor could live on campus donating his services in exchange for free education for his children. The same with the initial constructors. Beauty? Nature and the simple 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 website 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 in the Southern part of the United States: balmy winds and sunshine galore. Since so much of the summer – April-October is boiling hot and I complain so much about it, I need to really pause and exult in this “perfect day.” A friend of mine, born on a Kansas farm, used to berate me for this manner of thinking of weather. How selfish she thought New York City people are for rating the weather only in terms of their own comfort instead of with a view to the more important needs of the crops.

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

November 26, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

November 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

November 27, 2001

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Sometimes I am amused if I hear snoring. Today, I am more touched by a kind of creaturely trust represented by these natural sounds and postures. We know that God understands how tired we are in his service. We also have a cozy kind of familiarity with each other that obviates any need to pretend, by a straight-backed perfection, to some recollected holiness we have not yet achieved. Come to think of it, little Therese of Lisieux

admitted to falling asleep often in choir. Isn't it likely that Mary and Joseph often slept when Jesus remained awake?

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

November 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

You seem to be teaching me, Holy Spirit, to praise this man lavishly for what he says and does that is good and try to change the subject when his wit turns sour. I know that we can learn from the flaws of others as well as from their virtues. Help me withdraw my own claws when I have been hurt. Let me find fun not in sarcasm and caricature but rather in

the ambiguities of life that are so human and humorous. How I love it when others are able to relax a tense atmosphere by means of non-toxic outrageous puns and zany stories.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

November 31, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Of course one of the reasons why planning is so exciting is that we are projecting the ideal without any of the limits. What do we do when the slide projector breaks down? When worrying about such glitches, I need to remember how once on a retreat the priest-

director's opening talk was to be accompanied by slides. Two hundred participants sat patiently watching him take half an hour trying to fix the broken projector. Not once did he curse or even sigh! I remember this patient endurance more than any words he spoke later in the retreat.

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today, I feel anxiety about the future. Fear of loneliness dominates. What am I afraid of, my Jesus? When I asked that question in prayer, it seemed that You 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 or laid back, optimistic or pessimistic ways of relating to life. Usually an individual has one the strongest, one fairly characteristic, with the others rarely in evidence. Each has its good side. Choleric (angry) people are also usually high-energy and willing to come against evils. Phlegmatic (passive laid back) ones, not being "driven" can sit for hours listening to others and giving advice. They are patient with delay. It takes a sanguine (optimistic) person to start new ventures and to rebound from discouraging setbacks. Melancholics (sad-sacks) face up to the worst without denial and are more likely to come up with deep remedies than the other types.

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

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

December 1, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

December 3, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

Newspaper reports are coming out about the fighting in Israel. It tears me apart. I think it was around 1987 that we went on a trip to the Holy Land. In spite of many difficult features of the place, I will never regret that pilgrimage. For me the most important thing was being able to picture afterwards what that territory looks like as a backdrop for reading Scripture. The idea that Your feet, my Jesus, actually walked on that earth is so extraordinary. Also, at the very end of our ten days there I felt a kind of pull from the land, as if it was asking me to pledge to return some day. This sense was linked to the

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 4, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

I get so upset when I give directions over and over again to my students for their study and papers but they pay no attention and then lose out. I helps me to remember, St. Augustine, that you, one of the greatest geniuses of all times, had even more recalcitrant pupils who sassed you and then refused to pay their fees (See *Confessions*). I need to show my love for my dear students who have such good will by patiently repeating instructions no matter

how tedious this may be. Teacher saints Thomas Aquinas, Elizabeth Seton, Angela Merici, Don Bosco, De Salle, help me.

Glorious Mystery:

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

My students are always astounded to see how these erroneous ideas have crept into their own minds without their realizing the origin or falseness of them. For example, how many post-Vatican II Catholics take it for granted that it is the intentions rather than the physical acts themselves that make something wrong. Accordingly, they believe that a couple who is using contraceptives because they want to have a large family later after they are settled in their careers couldn't be that wrong. With consummate precision our Pope-philosopher shows the anti-personalistic bias behind such false teaching and practice. How so? Basically counting intention rather than act, is as if the body is separate from the soul. But God created the body as an expression of the soul. An act of sex during the fertile time - needs to be an expression of the total openness of love between the embodied persons of man and wife. (For a simplified version of this and other Catholic ethical teachings see my short book *Living in Love: About Christian Ethics* – Pauline Books – Daughters of St. Paul. It was reprinted by Franciscan University of Steubenville Press, and is now part of a compendium of mine called *The Way of Love* as the 3rd "book" called Making Loving Moral Decisions. See my web-site for more about this 4 segment new book).

December 6, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

In the *Office of Reading* I find St. Augustine commenting on the words of St. Peter reassuring Jesus after the resurrection how much he loved him: "Peter had denied Christ

three times and to counter this he must profess his faith three times. Otherwise his tongue would seem quicker to serve fear than love.”

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

December 7, 2001

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

(Reading this now in 2013, we are more aware of how contraceptives are themselves partially abortifacient.)

December 8, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 9, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

The highlight of a visit to the home of dear friends was the contemplation of their elegant Siamese cat. Of pets we had when I was a child and later in life, I generally prefer dogs, but to look at I find cats even more fascinating. While we were talking and praying together I watched the cat roaming around the room, settling in the laps of its 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?

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

The priest who presides over the Anglican-use parish is a black convert from a Baptist background. A kind of contemporary renaissance man with talents as diverse as playing the banjo and singing grand opera, this priest loves high liturgy and appropriate Church appointments. At this Anglican-use Mass there is an altar and some benches with hard kneelers but little in the way 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 Bleasdell, with whom I shared the role of speaker at several Steubenville conferences. She rocked me in her large bosom for more than half an hour when I told her about the death of my son.

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

December 10, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 11, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Even though the 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, if it took the form of robbing the serving person of all rights.

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

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

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

An important point for Catholics is that it is necessary to research matters before blithely deciding that the reasoning behind dissent is correct. Cases where change seems like a

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

Forgetting You is our greatest sin of omission

How it 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:

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am feeling pain and rage today about an unresolved conflict that involves male authority figures. Therapists have taught me to understand that fear and anger toward men surely comes from 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."

Glorious:

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

“Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all things will be added unto you.” That is one of my favorite sayings of Jesus. There in the procession was one of the authority figures I am so afraid of. He greeted me with affection ...“Oh, ye of little faith,” I muttered to myself as 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!

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, simple movement to the singing, as well as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, benediction and a short sung rosary

with slides of the mysteries. It begins with an extemporaneous prayer from the heart by the presiding priest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

December 15, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 16, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

One of the presentations of students to the whole college involved acting out the encouragement a still born baby would give from heaven to the grieving mother still on earth. It was a remarkably poignant dramatic scene, reaching me personally because of my many miscarriages. Those who teach about healing of memories tell us we need to name those babies and to picture meeting them in eternity. Some of my seeming miscarriages involved what is known as hydataform 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 excercises for mothers of the miscarried I “got” four names rather than six. To my surprise those four names came into my mind immediately. Someday I will know them in heaven.

I like to think that you, Mother Mary, took those babies into your bosom and brought them up in some way I cannot fathom. Let me ask them now to intercede for their family. “Little babes, now adults in the Lord, please pray for any of us in purgatory, and for we whose feet still touch the ground. We are such a motley crew of broken, struggling, pathetic yet

noble creatures. Most of all, I beg you to make known to those of us who are skeptics that there is a life beyond this world with joy promised by Jesus for all of “good will.”

December 17, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

December 18, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

A few years ago I started donating money for the needs of our sisters in Central America. The original purpose was to help with the building of a new convent since the old one was too small and infested with rats. As it turned out, one of the young sisters was dying a painful death of cancer. Some of my money went so that she could get more relief from pain by going to the hospital. Thank you cards came from the convent for me. The superior was the blood sister of the one who eventually died. This surviving sister was

called to our area for meetings and passed through the college. She came to my office to give me a big hug of gratitude. From this woman's rather thin chest came warmth like a furnace. It was a cool day. I think it had to be supernatural heat from the love in her heart conveyed by you, Holy Spirit, as a healing balm for my heart.

December 19, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 20, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

Quickly scanning the long written evaluations of my classes by the students in my classes this semester, I am greatly heartened by their praise. Whereas I had been doubting if I wanted to stay at the college if there would be fewer seminarians next year, these so personal responses by the undergraduates pushed me to seeing how needed I am. Besides positive comments about the course material, so many of them just put down spontaneously words like, “never leave us, we love you.” They know we don’t get these until after the grades go in, so it can’t be written off as flattery. 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, but since only a copy, worth nothing. Of course that doesn't mean it is valueless to us. Having prayed before it for now forty years, it is dear to me indeed.

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

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

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

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

Oh, yes. Simplify me, please.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

Yes!

December 23, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

This brings up a strange image from childhood: "the gilded ghetto". The idea was that even if Jews got wealthy they still lived in a ghetto 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 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, swathed like a nun, in the role of Mary at the crucifixion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

December 24, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Little infant Jesus, I know You are trying to reach me, to charm my maternal heart and drag me away from intellectualizing everything. 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, I forgive you Mommy, for your part, and Daddy, for your part, in that tragedy. May the balm of the forgiveness of God come to you now wherever you are, no longer on earth, on your spiritual journey.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

December 27, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

The parish church in the town of Exeter where I went this morning, because it is our priest’s day off, was chilly. In his sermon the priest made a contrast between the warmth of the Christmas reality and the chill of the season. During the Mass I felt a need to forgive all those at the college who I am frustrated with. Some sense came to me of how it is as

hard for them to change to meet my needs as for me to change to meet theirs. We find that difficult to comprehend. Of course, our own interior obstacles we know so well that we certainly know from within how deep-seated they are. With those whose faults are different from our own, we only see the failure; rarely the struggle. Lord, have mercy on us all.

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 28, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

December 29, 2001

Sorrowful Mystery:

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 one's own happiness vs. basing it on what others will do.

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

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

December 30, 2001

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 1, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

January 2, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

I invited some friends to come with me to the monastery where my husband is buried. After agreeing to come, one admitted that he had a distaste for visiting cemeteries. This led to a theological discussion about salvation. These friends are Christians but not Church-goers. The man's idea is that he knows he is saved since he has asked forgiveness for his sins throughout life. It came out that many actions Catholics would think of as sins he would accept as just human nature or even good. I chose not to argue with him as I would

have in the past. He knows I disagree. Something in the serious expression in his usually joking face made me realize of a sudden that whereas I am busy trying to “convert” him, he is thinking that his task as a Christian is to convert me to a more trusting acceptance of human failings. Don’t I need to see how tolerant Jesus is of the attitudes this man takes for granted such as the legitimacy of sex outside of marriage? Interesting!

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

January 3, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 5, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Now in 2013, this friend Paul is rather famous as a charismatic priest whose full name is Fr. Paul Griesgraber of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Reseda, California (Ventura County, a suburb of Los Angeles.)

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Carla:

**I've seen you felled and you have lifted me
so many times. We clasp and rise again
though limping, crying, sinking in debris
or humbling our swords to say amen.**

**I've entered through your merry burning eyes
That dare despair and win. I disagree.
You needn't be a genius in disguise,
Nor I a saint on genuflected knee.**

**...To be! It is enough. And if our cry
should startle every cloud by happenstance?
Leave most of us below to give reply,
"The best I've done is not by will, but chance."**

Diana:

**The best I've done is not by chance, but will,
Despite the tricky spokes of Fortune's Wheel
That masquerade as random kismet, still
It's discipline that sows the seeds, I feel.**

**...No, let us both be brilliant and be saints...
we are we, and that's enough!
We soar, we fall, we slaps and rise still higher,**

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

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

January 6, 2002

Joyful and Glorious Mysteries – today combined:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Often, on social occasions, I long to leave the world and hide in the back of a Church for the rest of my life. Since I was fingering the rosary in my lap while chatting with the family it seemed to me I heard you, Mary, telling me that you love all these people. They are wrapped in your mantle. You are praying for me. You want me to accept the limitations of those still trapped in worldliness and not try to hide, escape, atrophy, repeat patterns of reaction. You want to teach me how to pray in depth for others wherever providence sets me down.

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

January 7, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

What is joyful about reading it comes partly from nostalgia since we used to go to Coney Island as children and teenagers. Another part might be interest in understanding what was behind those hard faces that surrounded us on those occasional sprees. One of the

things I like best about reading fiction is getting behind the facts to the motives. No doubt, also, many of us, including me, get a certain pleasure in thinking “at least my circumstances aren’t that bad!”

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

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

“When I bare an equal weight of horror and hope
then no one will accuse me of simplicity.”

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

January 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

also have the privilege of being linked to the Holy Family, the apostles and early disciples in ways that carry a special blessing.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

January 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Mary comforts, "When you feel that loneliness call on me. 'Am I not your mother?'" And she adds, "Don't be afraid to yearn for Martin and Charlie and picture that great reunion

partly mediated by your faithful prayers for them. Do you think they are not in my arms because they might be in purgatory? Do you think that I am not in purgatory?

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

January 10, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

On the way back to my college, I went to a conference in a mid-Western state where I gave a talk. There was a mix up about my ride from the airport to the hotel. At different times in the last decade I have given up speaking for good because of the seeming inevitability of so many inconveniences and real miseries associated with travel. Jesus, you alone know what these trips cost me physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Please let it be placed in the account of grace for the participants in conferences who are most in need of your comfort or mercy.

January 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Typing this up six months later I can’t even remember what my talk was about. I do recall feeling that my way of speaking heart to heart was complementary to the modes of address of the other speakers. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for giving me the openness to do public witnessing that came with the other graces of charismatic renewal. I think hearing the famous early speakers such as Bobbie Cavnar and Ruth Stapleton increased my sense that there is nothing that stays longer in the minds of listeners than the true story of how God touched our hearts and brought us from hellish pain into his kingdom.

January 12, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 13, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Yes, yes, yes.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Guardian angel, please help me remember the next time how to arrange things better on my end to avoid such uncharitable and rancorous scenes.

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

January 14, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

January 15, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

January 16, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

January 17, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

A challenging statement of Fr. Ishmael was that God could be using the arm of Islam to lash out at the practical atheism of so many Christians. On the other hand, violent Islam is the attempt to make a kingdom of God on earth – a type of false messianism.

January 18, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 19, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

January 20, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 22, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

I helped Sister Anne by editing a book she wrote about her work called *On the Front Lines* published by Queenship. What makes the stories exceptional is the direct, fearless, approach Sister Anne Sophie brings. She walks right into the hospital rooms of the dying and confronts the family. "Why are you watching the soaps instead of praying the rosary?...You've forgotten how? Here's one for each of you, let's do it." Or, "Your sister

hasn't talked to you in years because of an old feud? What's her telephone number? Hello, this is Sister Anne Sophie. Your sister's having trouble dying because she thinks you hate her. I'm handing the phone to her right now. Tell her what you need to say!" And it works, over and over again. They are able to die in peace.

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

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

January 23, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

January 24, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 25, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

One of the greatest wishes came through today for someone I am in conflict with. I was glad of the spontaneous joy in my heart to see him so happy. Later in the same day I got to enjoy him having fun playing a game. That activity is not one I participate in so it was particularly evident that my delight was for him. Since I am poor indeed when it comes to forgiveness of those who I see as obstacles to my goals, I think this is a way that you are leading me into greater solidarity with such persons. If I was totally locked into seeing them as enemies, how could I rejoice for them?

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

January 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

January 27, 2002

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

January 28, 2002

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

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

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

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

January 29, 2002:

Joyful:

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

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

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

January 30, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

January 31, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

February 8, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

February 9, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

February 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

(After many struggles and attempts to accept problems at the college I am, at this point, coming closer and closer to the decision to leave my residence at the college and live at the Retreat Center, commuting from there to teach at the college without being part of the community. The philosophy of the leaders of the community I find most difficult, in the end, is that they think that victims of injustices in the institution, must choose to bear the cross rather than fighting for change. I had been praying to the Little Infant of Prague. He seemed to tell me that it was more childlike to do what I can vs. fix everything by battling giants.)

Glorious Mystery:

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

“The tabernacle is small but holds all eternity.

I want to shrink to fit in there –

I want to be so small I could be held

In someone’s palm and not be recognized.

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

Chosen out of all the other hosts

Not because I was so much more

Delectable but because I was

Utterly undetectable.

An indistinct wafer consumed by love of God.”

February 12, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

February 13, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

February 14, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

My daughter Carla's Ash Wednesday Poem

(such a poignant description of what lapsed Catholics feel)

Mountaineer

Here's the hollow made to hold my head

When I was giant also, where I slept

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

The day I started shrinking when I fled.

I wonder, can you feel my thread-thin feet

Come skitter where my head once rested? I

Am just another ant who wonders why

You never chased me. Pointless to retreat.

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

But nothing works, not logic, loss of pride,

Nor climbing back despite the dark inside,

Annihilating darkness, undefined.

I hope. It happens sometimes that I grow

For minutes, even hours. Then I stride

Uphill on legs of light you may provide.

At any rate, I hope but cannot know.

**At times, I sneak the trodden path instead,
Behind both light and darkness, tiny limbs
Beneath a premise bowed, a beast of whim.**

I find this nook again. I rest my head.

February 15, 2002

Glorious Mysteries:

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

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

February 16, 2002 At the Retreat Center

Joyful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Lick the bloody dust of the via dolorosa

Staunch the incurable wounds of My priests

Not with stinging taunts

Rather with a Mary-kiss of compassionate love.

February 17, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

February 18, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

February 19, 2002

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

February 20, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

February 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

February 24, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

February 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

February 27, 2002

Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries:

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

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

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

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

March 1, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

March 2, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Spring Break at the Retreat Center

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

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

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

March 3, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

March 4, 2002

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

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

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

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

March 5, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Watching the others make a longer thanksgiving after Mass. I decided I ought to do the same. Great peace following that decision.

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

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

There is a hilarious story of the house I am living in on the Retreat Center grounds. The priest head was passing by a street scene where a man was expostulating with a moving company that they were moving his house off the property instead of the house next door they were supposed to haul off. But it turned out that the angry man didn’t want the house. Father said he’d take it for the cost of moving and he plopped it at the Center for a guest house!

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

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

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

March 7, 2002

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

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

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

March 9, 2002

Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What do You say, my Jesus?

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

Amen.

March 10, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Returning to the college, I seemed to see everyone again, freshly. I loved hearing about the great graces of the students from the pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico.

March 11, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

“What else have I in heaven but you?

Apart from you I want nothing on earth.

My body and heart faint for joy.

God is my possession forever...

To be near God is my happiness.

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

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

March 15, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

Realize this humor is a saving grace all my life but two edged since it means stuffing a lot.

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

March 17, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

March 20, 2002

Glorious Mystery

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

March 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

March 24, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

March 25, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

Listening to Monteverde's "Two Angels"

Worrying about my daughters and their sometimes frightening relationships. St. Mary Magdalene says that they don't have Jesus as their lover. Pray they may know Him with passion and you, too, even more. Pant for Him. They have inherited much eros. It needs to be transformed not repressed.

March 27, 2002

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

March 28 Holy Thursday trip to Solitudes

Sorrowful Mystery:

I mentioned on the phone to my daughter, Diana, about living most of the week at the Center rather than the college. . She said "Good. Why would you want to fight all the rest of your life?"

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

When I came into the small chapel Jesus threw me immediately into prayer of quiet. A sense perhaps I am to live the year after as a semi-hermit of the Adoration Chapel at OLCC. I had a feeling of my dear contemplative saints, Magdalene, Teresa, Therese Edith Stein, Conchita bringing me here.

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

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

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

Do You play dead in the tabernacle

Until one of Your lovers come by

And You resurrect for us?

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

Carla wrote a poem for Good Friday called

Purgatory:

In the domain of stumblers and stones,

His body waits for me like a cross,

A thing to cling to

When twenty shades of hell

Slant down to cover stalwart faces

Lit by hope.

How many slips and sobs till Paradise?

**Here, where sorrowful mysteries circle,
Round for sliding feet,
His tongue cries light,
Flies it with the ravens of this night,
Faint as the shine of feathers
Growing wings.**

From a Good Friday poem of Jim Ridley:

**In your dread thurible of parted Flesh
Let now my timid immolation start.
Throw on the gore-sopped wad of rag, my heart;
Or nail it to the beams of that blazing Tree,
Scrap torn from the flag of the enemy.
Burn this sullied ensign of my surrender
Into the banner of Your Victory, Your hidden Splendor.**

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

Pere Thomas: The vow of chastity supposes a very great detachment of heart. It allows God to determine the order among our friends. Instead of having personal preferences, we adopt our Lord’s choice and are free to love those He asks us to love.” “Religious life in community is animated by the charity of hearts that are free.”

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

“We don’t need to get settled in; we don’t rent our cell.”

Pere Thomas “God doesn’t want His son to come to earth without being wanted. Mary’s longing provided for this.”

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

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

Pere Thomas “God doesn’t want His son to come to earth without being wanted. Mary’s longing provided for this.”

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

Easter Monday

I am reading Saward about Icons:

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

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

Mary wants to rescue her brethren from the suicide of sin and so let’s her Son plunge her into co-redemptive compassion.” Be like her.

April 1, 2002 Easter Monday

Glorious Mystery:

St. Francis and I made it to Medicare!!!! (A few years before I turned 65, I had no insurance with Medicare 2 years or so off in the horizon. Because of my breast cancer years ago, insurance would cost me \$1,000 a month. That would be about ½ my income. I prayed and prayed to St. Francis can begged him to make it so that I could use that money to give to the poor (on the basis that Mother Teresa’s poor who are dying need it now, whereas I just need in on spec) but not have any big health problem before the 2 years were up. It worked!)

April A computer expert says there is a general problem in all aspects of life these days – people think you can command people like the mouse commands the computer. We have lost the sense of negotiation.

April 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

April 11, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

April 14, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

April 15, 2002

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

April 19, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

April 21, 2002

Sorrowful:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

April 25, 2002

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

April 29, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

I am tense about work. Martha, Martha. O Jesus, when will you no longer have to chide me Martha, Martha vs. Mary sitting at Your feet? “When you trust me and give up your idols.”

April 30, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

May 1, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

He came down safe and sound and beaming with joy.

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

May 6, 2002

Tomorrow I leave for New Hampshire to see my daughter and her family for a short break before summer school. Jesus says I want you to be My love coming to their exhausted hearts. My daughter and her husband are on the verge of a divorce. (Because I don't want anyone to be hurt by anything in this journal, I am omitting a great deal from now on about this situation.)

Glorious Mystery:

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

May 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

To see Carla, Peter and the kids.

May 10, 2002

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

May 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Peter fixing my computer stereo so easily – can have beautiful music this summer.

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

May 12, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

May 13, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

I have a sense that Bishops and administrators have to be sanguines (hopeful temperaments) for that role and that can factor into cover up.

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

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

May 14, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

May 15, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

May 16, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

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

May 17, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

Great seeing how some have lead rosaries in front of abortion clinics for decades, indefatigable and still doing it peacefully.

May 21, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

May 22, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

May 24, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

May 28, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

May 30, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

I am editing a novel I wrote about widowhood called Last Fling. (It can be found as a free e-book on www.rondachervin.com).

Glorious Mystery:

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

May 31, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

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

What do you say, Jesus? “That is what it is like without the God of love. I don’t tell my people to pretend evil isn’t there; but to overcome it with love.”

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

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

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

June 3, 2002

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

June 8 and 9, 2002

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

June 11, 2002

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

June 14, 2002

Sorrowful:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

June 15, 2002

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

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

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

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

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

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

June 20, 2002 New Hampshire – (This was the visit moving toward the divorce so much is left out to not have things in print others would not like to see here.)

June 23, 2002

Week 4 Sunday morning Psalm 118 “Open to me the gates of holiness: I will enter and give thanks; this is the Lord’s own gate.” To think on what will make me more holy is my only concern. Seek first the kingdom...

June 24, 2002

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

Talking to Jesus: I want You to take me to an old place I knew at the illuminative stage (the traditional formulation is that there are three stages in the spiritual life: purgative, illuminative and unitive. The illuminative is full of beautiful insights. The unitive is more wordless.) back in 1977, but suppose You want to take me to new places? Jesus replies that

what matters is not that someone is canonized, but that My love is appeased. Rapture. Eucharist as visible tip of the iceberg of My invisible presence.

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

June 25, 2002

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

Absolutely need:

Credit card

Food

Bedding

Spiritual reading

Biographies

Rosary,

Paper

Liturgy of the hours.

Sack purse

Phone card

Toiletries

Pens

Checks

Course materials

Addresses

Copies of my books

Suitcase

Clock

180

Winter coat

Boots

Umbrella

Rain coat

Birkenstocks

5 summer outfits

5 winter outfits

Watch

Glasses

Calendar

Underwear, socks

Manuscripts

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

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

June 26, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

Sorrowful Mystery:

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

June 27, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

June 28, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

Oh little Infant Jesus and Mary and Joseph, there is my yearning daughter, Carla, of such beautiful heart and soul, yet so stubborn and doubting – she wants your help. Please come to her in this time of such severe conflict. Show her your beautiful hearts.

The holy family seems to reply together: “Do you think we love her less than you? Keep praying and sharing their pain.”

Joyful Mystery:

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

June 29, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

July 3, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

July 4, 2002

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

In the Introduction to the Writings of St. Gertrude, Sister Maximilian Marnau writes: says "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." (I quoted this in my introduction to *One Foot in Eternity*, but it may mean something more to you if you have persevered thus far) God said to Gertrude that He wanted her to write about how He worked in her that others may desire such graces for themselves.

July 5, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

July 6, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

July 7, 2002

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

It might be good to write an article about aging and contemplation about how this is a gateway to heaven and that we need to overcome the feeling that since we think of ourselves

as ugly old toads that means God thinks of us that way. Old saints still had contemplative graces of union like Teresa of Avila, and JPPII.

July 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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

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

Glorious Mystery:

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

A long e-letter from a friend of the family, Gabriel Meyer, writer and journalist relating to some of the current problems.

He said "The concept of 'happiness' keeps coming to mind. Popular American culture, from Gershwin to the soaps, keys people into the notion that personal happiness is the paramount aim in life to be distinguished from living a useful, productive life. Happiness in the modern sense is focused on the idea that another person can "save" me, that another person can provide the basis for my own personal fulfillment, that a relationship with an

ideal person will solve the problem of my life and place me in a new life condition of happiness and fulfillment. (i.e. through him or her, I will finally get what I really want)....

“But my experience is that happiness does not work that way. First of all, people can’t save each other. What they can do, and this is beyond price, is to help each other (the biblical ‘helpmate.’ How long it takes to realize that friends, not lovers, are the best things in life! And to have the possibility of both in their due and deepening seasons, as committed husbands and wives can...”

(Shades of Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina: what she wanted from Vronsky was a kind of passionate salvation, the ultimate lover, and, at some point, when the relationship is settled, he turns into another husband, not totally different from the one she fled from to him.)

“Secondly happiness is not a permanent or stable condition; it is a sense of well-being and beatitude, and, this side of the world to come, it is (in my experience, and by its very nature) partial and elusive (there on Tuesday, overwhelmed by events on Wednesday; glimpsed in a recalled memory or on a stroll; or in the satisfaction of some accomplishment, or in the delight of a beloved; but elusive, a perception, a gift, a ‘find,’ not a possession, not a state of affairs.

“Paraphrase - in marriage people need the stability of balance – artists need grounded practical people around. Otherwise if you try to find a similar person you come up with brief ecstasy of mutual identity and then chaos when neither is willing to do the dishes.”

July 8, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

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joy in cutting down for the sake of giving to the poor made it less didactic. Thank you St. Francis for inspiring me and letting others be inspired by me even for my so meager efforts at loving holy poverty.

Sorrowful Mystery:

A fierce quarrel with my daughter over relative trifles. The dispute even seems more hilarious than bitter an hour afterwards! A few days ago I went to the beach with a friend and the kids. Since we used her blanket and it was too wet and sandy to put in the trunk of her car, I thought it would be nice of me to put it through our washer and dryer here while we ate dinner and played games. There was a brief moment when it occurred to me that this could be heavy on the washer, but I was in too big a hurry to pay attention. It wound up breaking the washer which refused to go into spin even after removing the heavy blanket and towels. Of course, I insisted that I would pay for the repair rather than my daughter and her husband who had nothing to do with my mistake.

Today was the day the repairman was to come. About \$25-\$30 was my son-in-law's estimate of the cost for labor. I figured it might be a bit more but thought it would be a reasonable penance for my stupidity to pay for it graciously. The idea was to lock the watchdogs into a remote part of the house between one and four PM or for however long it would take to usher the repairman to the tiny laundry room and out. Unfortunately he came an hour and a half early. It happened that my daughter who has good control over the dogs – one of whom is a huge mastiff puppy, was feeling sick and was lying in bed upstairs. I left the repairman in the vestibule behind closed doors and tried to lead the dogs into their holding cell. The Dalmatian accepted the bait of a pot of old noodles, but the mastiff refused. A watchdog he was meant to be and here was his big chance. I tried dragging him by the collar but he is too heavy to pull. So I told the repairman to wait a few minutes more while I got my daughter. She refused to come down saying that I had agreed to handle the whole thing. Since she is afraid of workmen she would never have let them come on a weekday if I hadn't said I could take care of it.

Furious, I bounded down the stairs. Happily the mastiff had meanwhile walked himself into the prison and all I had to do was close the door and make sure none of the little boys opened it again. It costs \$100 in labor costs for the man to empty all the sand out of the machine.

An hour later my daughter and I were screeching at each other. She was yelling that I had no right to try to control her. If she wouldn't come down to take care of the dogs and the repairman had to leave that was her business, not mine. Did I think just because I was her mother I had a right to bully her? I was screaming that I wasn't going to pay another \$100 every day of the week for this man's time because she wouldn't control the dogs. Besides, if the dogs bit him they could go to prison, as happened in a recent news story.

By the time we split I was ready to leave a month early from my summer stay with the family – such as on the next plane. Teeth clenched, body tight, eyes blazing, I lay on my bed going through the steps of what such an early departure would entail on a practical level especially since my room at the college is being used by summer guests and it is hot as hell at the hermitage.

Happily my daughter came up to my bedroom, angry still but obviously eager to make up. Her analysis was that I say I want to help but it is always more difficult and then I get frantic and controlling and unbearable. Why did I even suggest helping? I realized this was a typical Recovery, Inc. example where each person was doing their average and it led to conflict, but it was a trivial matter. I admitted that I often get much more upset than I think beforehand about dealing with glitches and repair people who I don't trust.

Still since the washer breakdown was my fault I thought I had to help and that in an impasse like this with the dogs I would think anyone who could help ought to help. Finally she said that she over-reacted because she was feeling so awful and because it was her mother, and I said I was sorry for being so raging about it and we agreed that for the rest of the summer I won't try to help at all and just be there for her as a loving background figure, which is what she is really craving.

Just the same I felt too tense to pray. I decided that maybe, instead of just noting it as a sorrowful mystery and coming back to it six months from now, it might be good to write it all up immediately trying to dialogue with you, Mary, after all, a housewife in your own way.

The image I am getting is that if a similar thing happened in the town of Nazareth and mother and daughter came to you, likely enough you would make us both a refreshing drink and cajole us into laughing by asking questions such as “yes, that was the worst thing anyone ever did to you in your whole life?” Then you might tell us that God understood the underlying tensions in families and that he would honor us more for making up quickly than he would keep in mind the temporary rage. Perhaps you would add that you would be glad to come over next time there was a problem and be of help.

It worked! After writing down this little imaginary conversation, the knot of anger is gone. Thank you, Mother Mary. I'll be back sooner next time.

Glorious Mystery:

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

July 9, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

When my husband and I lived for years with Carla and Peter, they did the cooking marvellously and I did the clean up. Then, at various colleges I mostly ate in the cafeteria. In certain ways having cooked for the family some twenty-five years, and not very well at that, I loved any meal prepared by anyone else no matter whether it was gourmet or scraps.

It was only a year ago here in New Hampshire where I have a separate suite with its own kitchen and at the Retreat Center where I also have my own stove that I've begun gingerly to plan and cook my own food again. Maybe you know the joke about the man who is ushered into his heavenly quarters by St. Peter. The first evening he looks down to hell and sees a magnificent banquet being served. St. Peter brings him bread and water. This goes on for three days. Finally our new arrival complains. St. Peter replies: "It's hard to cook for one."

I love to eat but dislike cooking, so I've been buying the simplest things to cook such as chops and steaks and adding stir fry vegetables. This morning I was chopping up the veggies into a pan while a chicken was defrosting in the microwave. It suddenly occurred to me that if I added the chicken pieces to the pan with the tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, carrots and celery plus some water and boullion cubes I would have a sort of chicken cacciatore dish. The thought of variety gave me so much pleasure the time must be coming to venture forth into more experiments.

It probably has to do with a principle my last therapist was eager to get across – take control of your own life. Now, this summer, having decided not to fill every extra moment with writing projects, I have plenty of time for so-called self-nurturing. Offering some of this fare to the grandkids is fun, too. Even if they sometimes sniff at it with disdain since it is not the way Mommy and Daddy used to make it, other times they gobble it down with relish.

Is it, perhaps You, Holy Spirit, that drenches a culture with phrases that may seem far-fetched at first, but really conceal natural wisdom such as "be self-nurturing" or "seek balance," or "brokenness needs healing"? I think so. I find that each of these originally obnoxious sounding ideas emerges into popularity because there really is some pervasive syndrome out there that people are struggling with poorly. Ultimately God's love is the answer, but I don't think He minds using human insight as a bridge.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Writing about pop-psychology phrases, there is one that came to mind today: “avoid stuffing pain.” I tend to do this. I replace sorrow over something real with worry about something future that might not come to pass.

Glorious Mystery:

Today is our wedding anniversary. Martin and I were married in 1962 in an old monastic church in Rome, San Onofrio. The reason was that the American Friars of the Atonement presided at this Church and the Vatican wanted the marriage to take place at a place under United States auspices. We had waited quite a few years before marrying waiting to see if we could get a dispensation from Martin’s previous secular ceremony taking place in Tijuana, Mexico. At a moment in the proceedings where it seemed it would be impossible to get such a dispensation, my Jesus, you gave me a special grace to say I would choose the Church over what seemed all earthly happiness. Shortly after the permission came through. If you are interested in more of this story you could read my autobiography, *En Route to Eternity* (see rondachervin.com on the net for how to order it).

Today I am remembering only the beautiful times of our marriage, sensing that his soul is watching over the family left behind. Martin, Martin, wherever you are on the paths of eternity, pray for us. Forgive me for all the ways I disappointed you in life and after your death. You always said I would realize only after your death how much I lost. Well, I do. We will have an eternity to make up for all those feuds. A grace perhaps from you, Martin, was to savor all the lovely qualities of our children today rather than worry about their problems.

I received a moving e-mail from my daughter, Diana, in California. She said that nothing I have ever written about the faith or told her impressed her a bit. The only thing that has given her faith in my faith is that I came through cancer, the suicide of my son, her brother; and the death of Martin, my husband and her father. Glory be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and especially Mother Mary so close to me in those sufferings. Surely that was sheer grace.

The head priest of the Retreat wrote an e-mail saying that if I needed to come back sooner than planned he would be happy himself to install a better air-conditioner in the guest house I use. I am overwhelmed. It is a long time since any man in authority has considered any physical needs I might have. How generous he is. Praying gratefully about his offer I thought that it is part of his nature and your grace that he wants to be a refuge for others.

July 10, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Now, let me take the time to rejoice in a healing, possibly miraculous, of a possible cancer a dear friend was worried about. Our Lady of Lourdes, to whom I prayed especially, thank you. I wonder how you can stand interacting with us on earth, Mother Mary. We spend so much time begging and then almost no time in thanking, as if drawn by a magnet to the next worry.

It reminds me of Kierkegaard's analysis of resignation and hope. He claimed that hard as it is to resign oneself in detachment from some dearly longed for wish; it is even harder to hope. But without hope we are not ready to welcome the gift of receiving what seemed impossible to obtain.

In contemporary psychological terms, resignation, I suppose, involves some degree of control by the self. I may not be able to get what I want but I can decide how to react assuming I lose. Hope demands a surrender to the person who is beyond our control: God. So even if I get what I longed for, since it was not within my control I can immediately start thinking suspiciously that something worse may be just down the road. Better to hope for nothing than hope in a God whose ways are not our ways?

To end this joyful mystery, I decided write the recovered friend a long e-mail. In that way I exemplified my hope that this cure is real.

Sorrowful Mystery:

My daughter and I had a discussion yesterday about family rights in the case of adults. Do parents and siblings have a right to pressure adult children and sisters or brothers on decisions? Of course, the specific matter is Carla's immediate choices. It is characteristic of Jewish ancestry families when they are tight to meddle without scruples in any matter perceived as dangerous to physical or psychological well-being of any member.

After a few hours of talk, I realized that even if I have a right to express deeply believed convictions based on God's truth at least once, and to pray up a storm, I probably don't have any right to apply constant nagging pressure. I surely need to spend some of my time here "letting go and letting God" as the 12 step people put it so well. If I keep commending her soul into your hands, Jesus, I should become less agitated.

I had a hard time during quiet prayer time this morning, too restless and anxious. I decided to try later, but I was left with a doubt as to how much of a true contemplative I am called to be. Living on the weekends at the Retreat Center does not really entail a decision about this. We are all called to be saints, and it is impossible to be a saint without infused graces of prayer. If I can sit still and let You love me, God, for two hours a day it will surely do me no harm. It could be that I need a year of refuge, at least on the weekends, from activism, to come to apostolic work in a different mode now and in the future.

“Martha, Martha,” I hear you chiding me, Jesus. “Worried and troubled about many things, and now this new concern, so soon. I wanted this to be a time of such peace and joy for you. Don’t fill it with needless anxiety. Open yourself to the graces I send and trust, trust, trust.”

Glorious Mystery:

Today after the regular morning Mass, here in New Hampshire, while I was sitting quietly in thanksgiving for Holy Communion, a second visiting priest came slowly toward the altar. I would guess his age to be about ninety. Though he was not hunched over, his head drooped low on his chest and his walk was halting. It soon became apparent that he was saying the old Latin Mass but facing the people. I was the only one in the Church but he didn’t seem to see me or hear my responses and he didn’t ask, as sometimes is done, whether I wanted to receive or not.

Since I was in no hurry, I decided it would be pleasant to stay and place myself in solidarity with all those lovers of the Latin Mass who bewail the infrequency of its celebration. I became a Catholic a few years before the vernacular so I am familiar with the words even though I’ve never studied Latin. The priest said the Mass extremely slowly whether because of his age or his devotion or both. This gave me ample opportunity to simply gaze at the aesthetics of the thing. There was this grey face surrounded by a circlet of white hair. The oval of his head seemed like a whitish ball that swung the bright red vestments as he turned it from the sacramentary to the chalice back and forth. That white of his hair perfectly matched the white sleeves of the chasuble? that protruded from the vestment. Later the white of the host slowly lifted up in his gnarled hands completed the contrast with the blazing red garment for the martyrs whose lives he was commending.

Further contrast was provided by the swaying motion of the vestment and the altar cloth in the breeze coming from a fan some three feet away and the swift flight of a small bird trying to find its way out of the church.

The Mass took a good three quarters of an hour without any sermon. At the end he intoned the beginning of the Gospel of St. John and then knelt at the foot of the altar for the St. Michael prayer. In a loud voice I made the responses to these prayers. As he hobbled off holding the covered chalice I took a chance and very unlike any pre-Vatican II person, yelled out, “Thank you, Father.” He turned around and looked at me in the front pew for the first time. With a beatific smile he said, “Thank you for staying. That was the Mass!”

July 11, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A cool day! Alleluia. Summer in New Hampshire varies between hot, humid weather in the nineties and enchantingly cool days of about 70 degrees. Today was one of those charming breezy days. More and more studies are being made of the effects of temperature on moods. I am often sad on darker days, and disgruntled without usually noticing why on hot days.

Jesus and Mary, I often think of how hot the weather was for long summers in the Holy Land, especially since my visit in May, already unbearably warm for me. There is plenty in the Old Testament about parched earth and thirsting deer, but I don't recall any complaints about it by people in the New Testament. Was that just because parchment was expensive and so the poor early Christians wrote only about essentials, or was everyone used to it, or were your followers then much more ascetical minded?

I see you both smiling indulgently. You seem to want to tell me that you understand those of your children who suffer more than others over physical discomforts. I need not be ashamed or compare myself enviously with those hardier or holier. You urge me to simplify my interior life by humbly confessing my difficulties about all the little crosses of my day. You want me to try to relieve them, and if that is impossible, give them to you and offer them for others in greater spiritual need. Then, don't fret, let go.

Lots of fun playing a scrabble like game called Upword with the older grandsons. They are now proficient enough to be a challenge. In fact one of them beat me out by ten points. What I enjoyed most was their ingenuity. Also, they are willing to be gently corrected by me when they fall into gloating or sarcasm. That please me greatly.

Thank you God for the world of play. I take it for granted a lot, even though I miss it sorely when I can find no recreation suitable to my tastes.

The six year old asked me to make him macaroni and cheese. He requests juice from my small fridge but this is the first time he had the trust to expect me to make a bigger sacrifice of time. I was happy to do it since I will be sitting him next month for quite a number of days. It will be important that he feel an easy familiarity with me.

Grandmother saint, Conchita of Mexico, be with us as we approach this time when their mother will be away and only me, old granny, will be here with their father to hold up the feminine side.

Sorrowful Mystery:

Today was the feast of St. Benedict. A quotation from his rule reads “seek peace and pursue it...accept weaknesses with utmost patience.” A reading from St. Paul for today is about thinking on what is good, virtuous...then you will have peace.

As any reader of *Face to Face* can tell, peace is not a regular tenant in my frantic little soul. I rarely seek it either, thinking it as unlikely as finding gold on a city pavement. Yet I have been graced with more peace since the long weekends at the Retreat Center. Also one of the titles by the psychologist who founded the Recovery, Inc. group for anger, fear and depression, I facilitate is *Peace Over Power*. The basic idea is that in any situation in life we can decide what counts more to us, peace or some ersatz sense of power coming from bullying or sarcasm.

Prince of peace, my Jesus, please help me to want peace over the exhausting excitement of conflict.

July 12, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

It was a happy occasion to meet Tom Smith today at Mass in Exeter unexpectedly. Tom is the summer school teacher at Philip’s Exeter Academy who wants me to give a talk to his students. He is teaching a course called “The Other Side of Silence” about contemplative prayer in world religions. What a friendly, open man, so excited about his various ministries! It was a pleasure to talk to him and let him show me around this old New England academy, founded in the 18th century. The short impromptu visit in preparation for my talk next Saturday, with all the hurried dialogue, reminded me how academic I am, loving so much the exchange of ideas.

The Holy Spirit reminds me that He likes to surprise me. I need not think of summer as all prayer, and winter as full of talks. I need to be open to what he might be inspiring others to do with me.

July 13, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

It happened that a combination gas-station and car-wash is the only place within half an hour of Newmarket, N.H., where I am staying for the summer, that sells the 1,000 plus minutes for \$20 phone cards I find the cheapest for my purposes. Four times they said the phone card was coming in, but it hadn’t arrived. The warm woman behind the counter when she saw my sad face, ran around from her post and gave me a hug. “I’m so sorry. How about a free car wash and a quart of oil to compensate.” I was so startled that any business person, especially in presumably stand-offish New England would make such an

offer. Jesus seemed to tell me that he is trying to heal me of my New York City suspiciousness of trade's people.

The next reversal came soon. I found myself with a flat tire when pulling out of our driveway to go to confession. Even though I have an insurance policy which is supposed to cover rent-cars I got confused and forgot that it also covers road service. When the Rent-a-Wreck weekend person didn't know what I should do, my son-in-law graciously decided to put on the spare for me. Even though it was his time for weekend relaxation, he roused himself and patiently jacked up the car which kept slipping back since the emergency brake doesn't work. I was so grateful.

The Holy Spirit says – another surprise. I don't want you to stereotype people so much. There is plenty of goodness in others you won't see if you are too busy or too upset by your own deficiencies.

Glorious Mystery:

Today was my youngest grandson's third birthday. Light-spirited fun is certainly to the glory of God who made us to start as children vs. serious adults. A funny moment came when Dad gave large balloons to each of the four children. For a second there little Zachary thought he wasn't going to get one. His face broke out into total dismay. "Here's yours, Zacko!" In a flash misery turned to ecstatic joy.

There was another sweet moment when all of us with ages ranging from 65 down to 6 got to see the little one's greedy pleasure in his presents as his little hands frantically tore off the wrappings.

Oh God, if these anniversaries are so happy, what will the surprises of heaven be like?

July 14, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A friend from more than forty years ago came to visit. We are both philosophy professors so we had a great time discussing ideas. Besides that, I find as I age that there is a type of peace I feel in the presence of old, old, friends that is different from being with newer ones. Continuity, I suppose. He knew me when I was twenty-one and has seen the whole progression from young woman, wife, mother to grandmother-widow? Even though it is almost ten years since my husband's death it is so strange to have people get to know me who have never known him.

Perhaps in relation to a stream of consciousness about widowhood, I picked off the bookshelf for bedtime reading the autobiographical book *Left Over Life to Kill* by Caitlin Thomas, wife of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. It is forty five years since I read it when it

was published in 1957. At that time the book was sensational because we were forced to realize that “the woman behind the man” was herself a superb writer. Even though her marriage was more tumultuous and all-engrossing than mine, there is lots in her portrayal of the widow at emotional loose-ends that any widow could resonate with. Strikingly portrayed is the uneasy gyration of frantic activity with numb passivity.

Help me, beloved widow saints, with the residue of these unholy states of being. Won't you accompany me into the heart of the Second Bridegroom where alone can be found absolute love and peace.

Glorious Mystery:

What I saw as a glorious mystery was that much as I loved seeing my old friend, I felt a longing all the time just to be alone with You. This seemed a confirmation of my more contemplative vocation since, in the past, I would never have wanted to be alone as an alternative to talking up a storm with friends.

Please, please, please really draw me into Your heart, my Jesus and then I will become an even better friend, also.

July 15, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A proof of the locution that you want to heal me of suspiciousness of trades' people? I went to the local mechanic to see about my flat tire. They were such a happy band of workers – three men joking with each other throughout in their small shop. Even though it was obvious I was clueless and they could have sold me a brand new tire, they checked out the flat one, sealed it and said to come back to test the air tomorrow morning. At that time I could pay them \$8 for the job!

I praised them lavishly and promised I'd tell all my friends to go to them. Perhaps wearing a large crucifix has something to do with it. Sometimes a Christian, whether Catholic or not, seems to be helpful because of You. Some of them say something like “what a pretty cross you're wearing.” Even though such a comment is kind of spiritually gauche in the sense that my battered old crucifix is hardly pretty or meant to be, I realize the sentiment behind it, “I love him, too.”

Sorrowful Mystery:

Last night I was reading more in the Caitlin Thomas book. Shortly after Dylan's death, Caitlin made a trip with her five year old son to Italy. Before she used to complain greatly about her housewifely rounds, but now: “Then I could wholeheartedly revile my fate, and say I was meant for better things. But now I have got better things, and only myself to

revile, what do I do but complain about my lack of chains, and go searching, and screeching, and banging into walls, like a blinded demented hen, looking for a master to tell me what to do, and when; so that, presumably, I shall have the pleasure of doing the opposite again. For that is another of those little bittersweet ironies, that wrongdoing loses its savour when it is made permissible; and only the unprocurable is a luxury. So now that nobody cared what I did, nor tried to stop my exaggerated exhibitions of myself, just to show I was afraid of nothing, the bite was deftly taken out of the apple. And replaced by a quaking aspen leaf, that was me, not sure of which foot to put in front of the other, in which direction to turn my eyes, stumbling, belatedly newly born, wandering, bereft, in a dense country of confused woods, stifled by too many trees.”

Glorious Mystery:

Today is the feast of St. Bonaventure. In the Office of Readings was one of my favorite selections from his book *The Journey of the Mind to God*. He writes that on looking at the cross a person should be

“...full of faith, hope and charity, devoted, full of wonder and joy, marked by gratitude, and open to praise and jubilation.”

Some scholars think that jubilation is another word for praying in tongues. St. Teresa of Avila wrote of being in jubilation and speaking incomprehensible words.

I am thinking that it is rare that I look at you, Jesus, on a crucifix with joy and praise, concentrating more on uniting my suffering with yours.

Von Hildebrand spoke often of the need to experience the paradox that we live in a valley of tears but also in a world full of the glory of God.

Then, in the readings for today, comes one of the most famous of the words of St. Bonaventure:

“Seek the answer in God’s grace, not in doctrine; in the longing of will, not in the understanding; in the sighs of prayer, not in research; seek the bridegroom not the teacher; God and not man; darkness not daylight; and look not to the light but rather to the raging fire that carries the soul to God with intense fervor and glowing love. The fire is God, and the furnace is in Jerusalem, fired by Christ in the ardor of his loving passion...”

Let us die, then, and enter into the darkness, silencing our anxieties, our passions and all the fantasies of our imagination. Let us pass over with the crucified Christ from this world to the Father, so that, when the Father has shown himself to us, we can say with Philip: *It is enough.*”

Surely this was not written to cause us to neglect doctrine, understand, teaching and light, but to long for the goal of truth, union with the persons of the Trinity. Philosophy is the handmaid, not the Bridegroom.

When, finally, will I embrace you, my God, with all my heart, rather than clinging to the idea of you, instead, with my mind?

Reading The Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross (commentary on Stanza 16) I found these lines:

“...for the perfect enjoyment of this communion with God, all the senses and faculties, interior and exterior, should be unoccupied, idle, and empty of their own operations and objects. The more active they are in themselves at such a time, the more they hinder communication.”

No wonder active saints longed for retreat, not because there were not united to God in their works but because they wanted time to enjoy the inspirations of God more fully.

Let me cherish this summer period without pressure. You know, Holy Spirit, that it will take time to release me from the busyness of my mind and hands. Let me let You release me.

In Psalm 112 it says “the just man fears no evil news, with a firm heart he trusts in the Lord.” That’s what I need, firmness, not to be so rattled at any discomfort or anxious thought that comes along. Look how the Holy Father sacrifices to go on those incredible trips. His heart is firm. Make my heart firm, God. Then I will be able to better put up with car glitches or Churches without air-conditioning? I hear the Holy Spirit laughing, as it were, and asking me “Haven’t you accepted matter yet?”

Writing about holy persons, John of the Cross says that “they ordinarily bear in themselves an ‘I-don’t-know-what’ of greatness and dignity. This causes awe and respect in others because of the supernatural effect diffused in such persons from their close and familiar conversation with God.” (*Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 17)

What a good description of the founder of the order that runs the college. In his presence I usually feel as if wafted into an ante-room of heaven.

July 16, 2002

Sorrowful Mystery:

A friend of mine is searching for a good school for a son of hers in the State they are moving to. The anguish in finding that the public schools are likely to be full of delinquent kids and the Catholic schools probably lead by those with dissenting opinions is a serious problem. Because of his learning disabilities she doesn’t feel equipped to home-school him.

Listening to my friend's worries woke me up once more to how important it is to be teaching in or founding new Catholic schools loyal to the magisterium. Please, Holy Spirit, speed on these initiatives and give courage to those already ministering in this way to deal with the practical problems of such projects.

Glorious Mystery:

Today is the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. One of the readings is from Zephaniah 3 "Shout for joy, O Daughter Zion." A popular charismatic song based on these words is "And the Father will Dance." Even though "Zion" stands for Christians for not only the Jewish people but also the Christian people, I like to relate daughter Zion to myself as a female Jewish lover of Jesus. Whenever possible at charismatic conferences where I speak I urge the music ministers to play And the Father will Dance and then cajole as many as possible in the audience to get up and do an Israeli type round dance to the music.

So, now, whenever I hear citations from Zephaniah, my heart dances. Happy feast day, Our Lady of Zion and Carmel.

Mid-afternoon prayer included these lines: "The gentle will inherit the earth. They will have peace to their heart's content. Later, meditating on John of the Cross' *Spiritual Canticle*, Stanzas 20-21, I came upon this related way of seeing it. The bridegroom wants to bring the bride to a state of detached peace. He doesn't do this by forcing her to control her errant emotions. Instead it is the sweetness of the grace He pours into her soul that leads her to surrender and then, as a result, she is less concerned about lower things.

I thought that we cannot give up the craving for happiness on this earth except through foretastes of heaven becoming so beautiful that we can let go of our worldly hopes. John of the Cross doesn't mean that holy people have no emotions, as the Stoics tried to attain, but that these feelings are purified of wildness and excess.

For years I used to use as a prayer at the opening of classes lines from Ephesians 2: 17-21. I have not repeated them slowly for a long time. How they resonate with my summer goal of trying to set out into the deep of God with greater fervor and focus:

"May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life. Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself."

Thomas Dubay in his justly popular book *The Fire Within* proves that there is nothing in the writings of the holy mystics that is not also in Scripture. How about this passage as an example?

July 18, 2002

Preparing the Catholic Arts and Wisdom class for the Fall, I thank You, Father God, for colleagues game for teaching together.

I find it well worth the sacrifice of being sole mentor to let the students in on the fun and enrichment of several professorial minds at work. It is good for them to know there is more than one aspect to perennial truths.

In John of the Cross' commentary on Stanza 22 of *The Spiritual Canticle* he writes that in the spiritual marriage the soul becomes divine through participation insofar as is possible in this life. I find it clarifying to my students when they hear of New Age gurus who claim that the soul is divine. Often they make it seem as if there is no transcendent God – only the divine within the human soul or the world. Sometimes, then, they take sentences out of context from Jewish and Christian writers to show that all religions believe in the divinity of the soul.

The key word is “participation.” To partake of something is not to be identical to it. The light of day participates in the sun. It isn't the whole sun. In eternity the blessed will be in the closest possible union with the divine, but each one will not become a god or goddess.

In the commentary of John on Stanza 23 he writes that to the bride he (Christ) communicates his ways of redemption with remarkable ease and frequency.

Perhaps this is one more citation I can use to show that locutions are not necessarily illusory even for those less advanced in the spiritual life.

I keep wondering if I am belaboring this point out of fear of ridicule or simply sensitivity to some reader's natural doubt. It helps me, Jesus of the Sacred Heart, to consider that You literally died to win our hearts in repentant gratitude. Some doubters of locutions seem to think of You as sitting like a spectator on top of a mountain laughing at us, your children, as we keep falling back down the hill. I want to see You, instead, as hovering over us with loving-kindness eager to encourage us in whatever way we will accept, whether it be locutions, visions, or the many personalized gifts of daily life such as a favorite hymn sung at the moment someone needs it most.

July 19, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

A good talk with my daughter. Your grace, my Jesus, is pouring over this family bringing appreciation for each other's virtues and love.

Perhaps because sitting on the floor to pray is hard on the body, I have begun slowly to add some sacred dance to my time at your feet, Lord. I play the Missa Criolla – marvelous

Argentinian music composed in the 60's to which my sister choreographed a passionate and inspiring dance many years ago. Even though I am a clumsy ox it does my soul good to have the body take the lead in prayer, at least occasionally.

Also I absolutely need exercise but can't stand making myself a moving prey to the mosquitoes as happens always on summer walks. When this part of my family moved to a forest area in New Hampshire I had such happy visions of these strolls. No more. In spite of repellant and post-bite fluids, these are big annoying bites that last a week. So, dancing about my room is good for me.

The Jewish people rock back and forth when they pray. Some charismatic Christians dance in the spirit. I wonder if you danced when you were alone, Mother Mary? And You, Jesus? I have a sense You are telling me there were ritual religious dances and ways women danced on special occasions, too.

Sorrowful Mysteries:

When I first came this summer I had lives of the saints to read before closing my eyes at night. Now that I have run out of these I am selecting books off the old family shelf, hoping to learn something as well as turn my mind away from heavy problems besetting me at this time.

Two of these books I was dipping into were upsetting since they forced me to face dreadful realities on the social scene I try not to think about too much. One was a book written in 1925 called the *New Negro*. It contains articles, poetry, fiction, drama coming out of what was called the Harlem Renaissance. Since my mother was one of those New York City white people with many black friends of those arty circles, I have always had an interest in this period of black urban history between the two World Wars.

What made it sorrowful to read was the projection in the optimistic articles of a seemingly certain progress toward equality and appreciation between blacks and whites. The violent horrors of black liberation with the continuance even after partial victory, of racism, discrimination, family dissolution, crime, drug-addiction and abortion, was not foreseen even by those whose writings displayed the seeds of these destructive forces. The black ministers preaching hell-fire for the sins of their people were depicted for the most part as comic or tragic figures, but not as prophets of still worse immorality.

Blacks saints intercede for your people. Help them come back to their Christian roots. Let the non-violent mission of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers remain to inspire the people to the values that can save them from bitter despair.

When I put *The New Negro* back on the shelf half read, I opened a book of Reader's Digest Condensed Fiction. Just to insert here a little joke, my godfather, Balduin Schwarz, born in

Germany was quite an expert in the English language he adopted in middle age when he escaped from the Nazis to teach in the United States. He loved to make jokes based on the peculiarities of our idiom. An avid reader of the Reader's Digest which he perused, however, only off the bathroom rack, he used to excuse himself for such trips saying that he was off to study the Digester's Reader.

Anyhow, the first novel digested in this volume was by Tom Clancy, called *Without Remorse*. I rarely read thrillers but since this writer is so popular, I decided I could do with more of a slice of the culture I don't belong to. This helps me in teaching since many of my students are much more immersed in that culture than I am. If I illustrate a point in philosophy with examples from a best-seller, especially if it was made into a movie, they get the point instantly.

The plot involved a good guy Navy Seal who, on return from duty in Vietnam, gets mixed up in fighting a drug ring that includes young prostitutes who are tortured and killed in the line of duty by their pimps. We gradually watch our sensitive, strong, noble Navy man develop into a kind of terrorist, taking the law into his own violent hands. At first it looks as if the moral of the novel is that terrorism is wrong even against bad guys. Instead we are worked into thinking that since there are some police working with criminals, individual vendetta is justified.

While it could be that we have reached a point of moral chaos in our country such that the author's point is worthy of serious debate, the depressing part was how the violence was depicted with a kind of gleeful abandon. Since he is a best-selling writer there must be many who enjoy such scenes.

Father God, you proclaim that vengeance is Yours and that even in legitimate self-protection or national defense we need to flee from hatred. How far from this are we? As the philosophers of peace from Tolstoy to Gandhi, to Martin Luther King, Jr. are eager to show, there can be no peace in society if our hearts are full of violence – inner hate, verbal displays, or physical force. So let peace begin with me by always giving me Your love so that the feeling and the word hate will never be part of my soul and language.

Glorious Mystery:

The hymn for Daytime Prayer Thursday Week III reads, "You (God) are the spirit's tranquil home. In you alone is hope fulfilled."

The part that moved my heart was "in you alone is hope fulfilled." Amen. No more hoping foolishly in perfect people, perfect colleges, perfect communities. We need to try always to advance the good, but our hope must be in you alone.

July 20, 2002

Joyful Mystery:

Today I got to visit a summer class of High School students from around the world at Phillips Exeter Academy. Founded in 1781 this school is renowned as a New England preparatory school. The teacher of the class, as mentioned earlier, is a Catholic who teaches a kind of spirituality class under the title *The Other Side of Silence*. Making use of texts from world religions he engages the small group of ten or so students in examining religious experience in a philosophical and psychological way that is both pluralistic but directing them through questions to the ante-room at least of Revelation.

The teens from countries or ancestries as diverse as Taiwan, Turkey, Africa and America still had much in common. They gave the appearance of being sincere seekers, open, questioning, and, I would say, kind of lost. More about that under sorrowful mysteries.

I found the creative, fertile, spontaneous mind of the professor stimulating. Instead of using lecture notes he has readings and themes, but lets the class sessions evolve with pointed interview questions for me. Without being intrusive he was clearly personally interested in knowing the students as individual persons and affirming them for their responsiveness.

For example he read a passage from Elijah about hearing the Lord not in the wind, fire or earthquake but in a still small voice. Then he asked us whether we heard still small voices. The answers were diverse and probing. You could tell that the student journals would take this further.

Since I hope I am also like this as a teacher, I found it confirming to be in the class of someone with the same methods, who was making it work. Much as I dream of being a full-time contemplative, when I have months without teaching I dreadfully miss the chance to crystallize my thinking into coherent lines of reasoning and to have a role such that others are required to respond in the ways I think will help them to find meaning in life.

Sorrowful Mysteries:

Looking at the faces of the young people in the room, making allowance for their need to be “cool,” still I sensed a kind of sad numbness in them. Remembering other teens I see in neutral settings, I don’t think this is a generation full of idealism, conviction, and hope. Cautious, disillusioned, anxious, would fit them better. On the other hand the lack of façade or bravado gave an impression of openness to truth. The ardently Catholic students that go to the college I teach in during the year, while also rather cautious and anxious, project much more hope for they know there is truth and salvation no matter what happens in terms of tragedy on earth.

This week thousands of young people will go to World Youth Day in Toronto. I have seen kids with little faith pushed to attend by their parents come back blazing apostles. Lord, break through the defenses, heal the wounds, and sent them forth into this sad world of ours.

Glorious Mystery:

Following up on the question that seems to be almost haunting Face to Face, the issue of trusting locutions, I was thinking that the “still, small voice,” that spoke to Elijah is part of the answer. When we seek proof that it is really God and not ourselves in locutions are we wishing for something as powerful as the winds of Pentecost or an earthquake as a confirmation? Isn’t Elijah teaching us to trust, instead, the still small voice, not so loud but penetrating to the core because of the truth of the message? Does “still” mean words in the heart vs. audible words from an invisible source?

After the nap I took in the afternoon I awoke full of a light type of peace. Then I read in John of the Cross that sweetness helps us run along the path. My feeling was that You, Jesus, want so much to help those young people and you were glad I was there for them.

A surprise. My son-in-law is cleaning out a former condo of his parents this week. Some items his parents want for their new house in another State, but lots of it is to be divided among the adult children and grandchildren. In making these decisions Peter found a cellophane envelope with two pieces of rock. There was a label that said stones from the floor of St. Peter’s Rome! Hmmm. Of all the family members, can you guess which one a professedly agnostic son-in-law would think to give that relic to? Alleluia! It felt like the center of the Church leaped thousands of miles to come into my hand.

July 27, 2002

Glorious Mystery:

My dear spiritual director, Fr. Eckley Macklin, and another dear friend professor came fo a visit and we went to Tanglewood. We heard Brahms paino concerto # 2 – lush. Like rapture. Music like a river or thread through life. Music as hope – correspondence between brightly lit orchestra in the darkness of the park and light shining in the darkness of the music – 3 way analogy?

July 30, 2002

(Here begins a plain journal – it feels like I have interiorized finding joy and sorrow and glory each day and can more just talk to God and the angels and saints most of the day without themes.)

At the parish Mass this morning Fr. Finnegan with his white hair was sitting during the reading of the Epistle in a chair underneath an aureole of yellow flowers sitting on the mantle behind his head. Father God I love those unexpected visual moments that come now and then without anyone's planning. This one was like a wreath over the priest's head, as if nature itself wanted to crown him.

I went on a trip with the students from Tom Smith's classes in Phillips Exeter Academy. As part of their course they make field trips: one week to the Buddhist temple, and one to a cloistered Carmelite monastery of nuns. On the way into a parlour room where we were to sit – about 25 of us to talk to some 10 sister behind the open work grille – there was a large wooden statue of Little Therese. A little above ground level she was elevated in such a way that it was possible to take one of her open hands and to hug her habited form. Even though the face was not yours, it seemed as if you were truly present for me there, my beloved St. Therese.

Behind the nuns there was a painting made by their superior of Jesus, good shepherd, holding a lamb in His arms. What was unusual was the way it almost seemed as if You, Jesus, was making eye-contact with the lamb. The sense of You being a lamb of God and my being Your lamb was poignant.

Thank you, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Teresa of Avila for these nuns with radiant faces enduring 2 hours in sweltering heat to talk to us. Some of the students expressed at the end that they felt such respect coming to them from these contemplatives. One of the Sisters told them that they could only be happy if they were making God happy. An evocative statement! Yes, dear Jesus, let me get it that simple. It is like St. Thomas saying you can only love yourself loving.

July 31, 2002

I was overwhelmed by the canonization of Juan Diego seen on EWTN. What a sense of your universal Church, Our Lady of Guadalupe. You know you are my favorite apparition – I think because of the incredible beauty of your Mexican face and your being a pregnant mother. When the Aztecs came out dancing during the ceremony I called my sister, the sacred dancer. With an unexpected deep sob from the gut I said “one day we will be in heaven with no more tears and conflicts. We will sing and dance together in heaven.”

I realized little Infant Jesus how infrequently I cry, I who am trying to follow a spiritual path toward being more of the heart than the head. Not too childlike, not to cry in spite of all the pain here in the family.

Little Infant, help them to cry and me, too.

Jesus says when you are scared you have to hold on tighter to me.

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Since I was packing up the Office of Reading book for my return to the college, I read ahead from the writings of the saints for all the days until August 16th.

Some quotations:

St. John Vianney said “This union of God with a tiny creature is a lovely thing. It is a happiness beyond understanding. My little children, your hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God.”

St. John Vianney, intercede for me that my heart may be stretched.

Another reading mentions that St. Dominic was cheerful. St. Clare says that the fragrance of Jesus revives us from the dead!

Ah, make me joyful with your joy, Lord, since life seems heavy right now.

August 2, 2002

In Ephesians 4:29-32 Paul says “Say only the good things men need to hear.”

August 3, 2002

In the parish bulletin from Liguori Press there was a print of El Greco’s Christ the Savior painting. It is not the same as the one on Veronica’s veil. I could put them next to each other and see that.

August 4, 2002

I met this couple who years ago converted from Campus Crusade to the Catholic Church. At the time I was godmother to their daughter we all lived in L.A.

Thank you dear Holy Spirit for bringing these terrific Protestant ministers into your Church to help us in this time of such great need.

August 5, 2002

Joy to be in the Exeter class again. They seem to like me. Guardian angel of each of those so eager but poor of spirit young people, guide them into the arms of their Savior.

August 6, 2002 Feast of the Transfiguration.

I especially love this feast day. I always remember a comic but actually wonderful moment Martin and I had at the actual Mount of Transfiguration in Israel. My husband hated charismatic renewal. When he occasionally went to some conference, he alone among thousands crossed his hands over his chest while all the others, including me, of course,

were waving our arms in the air in praise. It happened that a pilgrim bus arrived at the Mount just as we were about to enter the Church. The pilgrims lifted their arms in praise as they came off the bus.

Suddenly Martin raised his arms, too. I snapped a photo, thinking he was doing it in just and it would fun to have the photo some days years from then.

Seeing the photo years after, Martin remarked that he hadn't been mocking charismatics. He actually felt a great grace to praise God in that way at that moment!

August 7, 2002

I see that the whole purpose of writing Face to Face is to bring me into constant dialogue with You, my spouse.

August 8, 2002

Deciding to stay here for the weekend and not visit old friends, because I feel a great thirst for silence and slowness that my heart has built up over sixty-five years of chatter and fast-forward pace on everything.

Sweet prayer releasing the family, seeing that Carla has to decide what she wants for her life now. Mary, guardian angel help Carla in this time of need and decision.

(This decision was for a divorce. Carla and Peter were not married in the Church. They were very close and quite happy, especially sharing their love for their four sons, but tragically couldn't work out severe problems.)

Jesus, You say, "if you let go you can have more of this delicious peace in your heart."

About my return to the college and the Center, Jesus says: Just love and do what you will. Take us with you. Be more carefree. We will inspire you in your daily rounds. You don't need to strain so. Nothing contrived, rigid. Trust takes that away.

Heart to Heart

2003-2005

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

*“I think that the Heart of my Spouse is mine alone,
just as mine is His alone,
and I speak to Him then in the solitude
of this delightful heart to heart,
while waiting to contemplate Him one day
face to face.”*

May 18, 2003

A lovely poem by my daughter, Carla:

Laudate

My trees are huddled tightly in their groups –
They’re listening. They wait for the chirroo
Of this last sunrise. Every trunk is full
But they are not departing. They have roots.

The first slight golden drops begin to fall
Like floating carpets. When the wrecking ball
Smacks thicker waters from this praying sky,
This bleeding sky, this cracking sky, then I

Will have to lift my feet. Because I can,
I cross myself and mumble my amens
Just as the egg breaks. I can almost hear
The willing barks receive the dawn. “No fear:

We’ll follow,” whisper leaves so I might know
Their promise to remember when I go.

May 20, 2003

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

June 1, 2003 (letter from a trip elsewhere)

Dear Father,

Travel makes the mind grow narrower, I find. Now I don’t want to be a hermit, I want to be an anchorite, I am so horrified by the noise of worldly life. Mama mia! My heart yearns for Jesus in the monstrance in my oratory and for your Mass. Also your wisdom. Even though I have gotten along very well with my daughter – who is writing more and more Catholic imagery poems – and her friend, and the kids, I can hardly bear the noise and also that there’s no one I can talk Catholic with.

Working on *Taming the Lion Within: 6 Steps from Anger to Peace* has been cathartic and enlightening – especially the research. Most of the Christian psychotherapists I read think that anger is a cover for vulnerability. I have finished the 99 page first draft of it and am eager to share it for teaching and input. (Since then it has come out as a shorter book. For information see Books for Sale on www.rondachervin.com.)

I want to be small and silent. It seems clearer to me how my exaggerated humor and nervous chatter is a defense mechanism and how only absorbing the love of God for me in

contemplative prayer can make me feel safe enough to be smaller and quieter so that my energies can go into being a blessing to others and not to “the defense fund....”

June 10, 2003

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

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

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

June 18, 2003

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

June 22, 2003

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

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

June 25, 2003

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

June 30, 2003

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

July 3, 2003

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

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

July 4, 2003

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

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

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

I used to hate the shaved heads of the males members of the community. It reminded me of prisoners or concentration camp residents. Suddenly I had a different image. Their heads are like baby's heads – you can see the hard outlines but there is the soft fuzz in contrast. I used to love that texture of my baby's hard heads but soft covering of hair. Are shaved heads an unconscious symbol of the monk or hermit as being like a child with no public role?

July 10, 2003

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

June 10, 2003

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

July 11, 2003

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

July 12, 2003

Dear little Jenny (my oldest grandchild),

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

July 14, 2003

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

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

July 16, 2003

Dearest Diana (daughter in Los Angeles)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The oratory has in it a wonderful Mexican crucifix – about 4 feet tall, the wood about 6 inches wide thick ridged dark wood, hand-carved. The face of Christ looks older than usual – easier for me to identify with, not only the pain but the fatigue in the face. There is a Hispanic wooden tabernacle with metal nails in a design. I sit on the floor on a mat to pray. How the words of the Psalm “like a dry weary land, my soul longs for you, O God” resonate in this dry weary desert like land that surrounds me. I spend about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour here in the morning after breakfast and before Mass, another period after siesta, and different times run in to talk to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the angels as my day proceeds. In the evening 7-8 we pray together before the Blessed Sacrament, but in silence.

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

July 19, 2003

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

July 21, 2003

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

July 23, 2003

July 24, 2003

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

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

July 26, 2003

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

July 30, 2003

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

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

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

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

August 4, 2003 Sermon of my Priest

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

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

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

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

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

“Dear Father,

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

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

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

(I wrote a book like this called Healing of Rejection. It had a strange history. A large Christian publisher was interested in doing something of mine since I am a well-known author. I sent the manuscript but they didn't like it because they thought it was too sad. So I have it as a free e-book on www.rondachervin.com.)

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

I have been listening to more tapes about the spirituality of Fr. Thomas Philippe. I don't know why, but for me it was totally new to think of the purpose of the dark nights being to die to the ego, not the true self. This puts it so clearly. I am wondering if having gone through quite a lot of dark nights already, the last dark night is the detachment from my “professional self.” People seem to think I am more humble than most in terms at least of

not being arrogant professionally as a teacher, speaker, writer, but there is still plenty of love of fame and applause, as you have detected and occasionally make fun of in a gentle way. I had the feeling that God allowed me to fall on my face in personal sin many years ago to get rid of the vanity of thinking I was on the road to holiness vs. just wanting mercy. We can talk of this more when you return.

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

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

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

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

August 15, 2003

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

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

“My meditation daily is Jesus’ answer to Teresa of Avila when she asked, what do you want of me, and He said, ENJOY ME. How relentlessly I must put aside my ego’s inflated worries to let that enjoyment flood in.” She wrote me about a workshop she went to where someone said that worry comes from an inflation of the ego – as if I could save the world if only I worried enough?

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

Storge – affection love – and preghiera come bambino, semplice, dolce, anche Tongues.

September 2, 2003

August 30, 2003

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

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

September 4, 2003

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

September 6, 2003

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

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

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

September 9th

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

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

...

**We are everything, and nothing
But the memories we leave,
We imagine we are choosing
We are choosing to believe....**

**We are splinters of the cross
And the man who said, forsaken,
That the Father who had left him
Would return for what was taken.**

**We have not that long to go
There are mountains shouting “Leap”,
there are rosaries we cling to
When the monsters haunt our sleep.**

Sept. 12, 2003

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

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

Sept. 13, 2003

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

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

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

September 14, 2003

Today Jesus seemed to say, “Ronda, I love you, with all your knots and ups and downs and snarling. I want so much to just drown you in my love. Stop fretting about the future. Just know that I will be with you and it will be good even if life is not perfect and if you fail

often. So don't think you have to copy anyone. Just be you and let Me love you into a better you.

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

Sept. 28, 2003

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

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

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

Sept. 29th

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

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

October 7, 2003 Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary

Meditation on Littleness

One who is totally vulnerable becomes invulnerable

because there is no pride left to squash?

As under the heavy tread of the giant tire,

the tiniest of the ants escapes from the hill?

**The strutting tyrant,
The bravado tongue
Becomes a handful of dust
While the tiny soul soars into Light?**

**God became a babe!
The second person of the Trinity a circle of bread!
While the rustic maid becomes the Queen of heaven!**

**If everyone is seen as but a poor little thing
Even I, I, i,
Will Thy kingdom come?**

October 9, 2003

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

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

October 12, 2003

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

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

October 14, 2002

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

“Although I am weak and despised

I remember your precepts...

Though anguish and distress have seized me,

I delight in your commands...

If you teach me, I shall live.”

October 15, 2003

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

October 19, 2003

Dear Father,

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

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

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

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

From a letter to a friend:

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

Dear Cathy,

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

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

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

October 28, 2003

Letter to a friend,

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

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

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

Here is a great line from Donne's sermons:

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

Isn't that stunning? Shalom, Ronda

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

Driving a car vs. subways and buses

Washers and driers vs. in the sink

Airplanes vs. trains

stereos

Tape recorders

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

Microwaves

TV remotes,

Hair-dryers

CD's

ATM's

Cell-phones

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

October 29, 2003

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

THE DIVINE LONGING FOR THE HUMAN HEART

A Contemplative Introduction to the Catholic Faith

The Center of Reality

Images:

A spinning ball of earth in a void of space.

or

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

Scripture:

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

Meditation:

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

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

Dwell in the pain for as long as you can.

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

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

November 2, 2003

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

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

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

November 5, 2003 (Letters to F. are to the woman living with my daughter Diana who used to live in an ashram and who wants to be a Catholic.)

Dear F.,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sin diffuses our ability to grasp, indeed, finally, even to hope for that life. Sin narrows our focus, withers our human capacities, limits the range and scope of our desires and, ultimately, denies us access to ourselves. Grace breaks into that slumber, to dispel the blindness, and to create capacities for truth, for reality – for life in union with Life....Repentance does not only mean sorrow or regret...but teshuvah – Hebrew for turning to God, like the Prodigal Son, turning away from darkness to open out one’s life.”

Well, you can see that Gabriel would be a good godfather. He is often out of town. When I come, we will invite him to meet you and you can see if it is a click.

From F. to me:

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

Dear F.,

On the body and soul. This is a hard one not only for Hindus but for others influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition. In both of these the soul is the real core of the self and the body is like a container or a jail said Plato. In these ways of thought, at death the soul

sheds the body and either merges with the divine or enters it when purified by reincarnations in some way.

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

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

I am probably going to send you a booklet written by a fascinating thinker. He was the Swiss ambassador, from the Protestant background, to India in the 50's. During that time he became a serious Hindu practioner. But eventually became a Catholic contemplative. He wrote this outline for a longer book I have always found illuminating of the similiarties and differences between the 2 ways of thought.

November, 2003

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

Monks-why's

Eremitically sealed,

medicine?

scent?

liqueur?

no, you?

Packed by God alone,

sealed with wax embossed

with inscrutable runes,
only angels read.

Demons dance round
look through stained glass
under altars at transparent coffins
hope to shatter and defile
peer at a heart
swathed tight in grace

The curious tap the pane
they hear no echoes
or human sounds
mums the word
of pregnant silence

Human love that wants to give
finds no entry place
where only the heart-beat
of the divine beloved
can be heard.

Alone pure need
can melt the seal
releasing healing balm

for the wounds of
poor little ones

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

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

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

Letter November 20 from F.:

Dear Ronda,

While I was outside cutting huge cardboard boxes into dumpster-sized bits, I noticed something that looked like half of a credit card sticking out of one of the cobblestone joints directly in front of our porch. "You know," I said to myself, "that little piece of plastic is just stiff enough and tall

enough to actually trip someone -- most likely the mailman, with his

arms full of fragile packages." So I finished what I was doing and then picked up the piece of "credit card". Only it wasn't a credit card at all. It was a blue plastic ingot-like thing, and on it was written in large letters "DISCIPLESHIP". That made me laugh -- reminded me of the ashram and so I figured this was a

little "haha" from the guru. Then I noticed the very fine print beneath that word. It read: "You were created to become like Christ". Turning it over, I discovered another message: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

"Well, well, well," I said to myself, "how bizarre is this?!"

Thursday, November 20, 2003

Dear F.,

December 10, 2003

Letter to a friend:

So happy to hear from you. I am so happy you liked my funky afghan. A Ronda original. Sometimes I think that when I get to the pearly gates instead of mounting to heaven on the

prayers of my intercessors or my mountain of books and articles, Mary will extend a huge connected rope of all the things I knit for people out of motherly love and a wholesome way to deal with nervous tension! Anyhow, I thought it came out a little garish and you might not like it, but it seems as if you do!

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

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

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

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

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

December 12, 2003

From F. about Our Lady of Guadalupe:

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

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

Dec. 13, 2003

Dear F.

We're a lot alike. I believe that everything good, as the Jungians say, has its shadow side. So having an active analytic mind means that one's distractions are more interesting and

convoluted whereas a less analytic mind is distracted say by the desire to eat a hamburger next.

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

Today I make minestrone soup for our Sunday brunch and let it simmer away. It is one of my only 2 regular jobs - a 2 x a week mail run to the town and making the main dish for Sunday brunch the only optional communal meal but one where guests who have come to Mass come. I will pray for your meditation times to grow tranquilly - maybe pray on that rosary more.

Letter to another friend:

Dear I.,

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

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

December 17, 2003

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

Excerpt from a letter to the grandparents of my son-in-law Pete who lives in Los Angeles:

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

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

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

December 20, 2003

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

The Broken Pencils

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

...! Do not fool around!

**You have to give
up everything.
to talk with all your heart, you first must find
your heart. It’s drowning in a midnight sea,**

it's speechless: give it breath, force it to be

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

I'll dream,

and should I see that lion (*my husband's nickname*) whom I loved,
not yet succumbed...

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

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

December 21, 2003

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our priest teaches us to be more affective than effective.

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

From Office of Readings Thursday, Second Week of Advent quoted from St. Peter Chrysologus “God comforted Jacob ...encircled him with a wrestler’s embrace to teach him not to be afraid but to love him...in all the events we have recalled, the flame of divine love enkindled human hearts and its intoxication overflowed into men’s sense. Wounded by love, they longed to look upon God with their bodily eyes. Yet how could our narrow human vision apprehend God, whom the whole world cannot contain?...Love does not reflect; it is unreasonable and knows no moderation. Love refuses to be consoled when its goal proves impossible...whatever reward they merited was nothing to the saints if they could not see the Lord. (It inspires us to long to see His face.)

December 24, 2003

It is so different here at the Center than in a family Christmas setting. Because there are so few decorations each one stands out – each day one more candle is lit before an icon. At 7 PM adoration there were many lit candles around each, especially an icon made by Sr. Catherine of the Nativity. And suddenly the poinsettias appeared and the little simple crèche. (To see come of the icons of this wonderful nun, go to www.ccwatershed.com under special projects.)

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

December 25, 2003

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

December 28, 2003

Father said in a sermon "Father's house" is the "Father's bosom." It reminds me of the old black spiritual "Rock-a-my-soul in the bosom of Abraham."

I asked a locutionary, about whom I will write more later, if Jesus had any message for me. Here is how she (Anne of Direction for Our Times) replied after praying for me to Jesus:

From Jesus: "I would have her joyful but even more than that, I would have her at peace. I can place peace in the hearts of my servants, but as you have seen yourself, only if they are disposed to accept my gift of peace. As you are now attempting to accept this gift from me, I would have her also accept my gift as I extend the same gift to her. She must meditate on the newness of each day in My service. I will remember all of her actions for heaven. I will forget any human mistakes she has made. I am like this with every soul who serves me so beautifully. You may send this, of course. My servants intercede for each other with such energy that I cannot but answer each prayer. This causes me great joy...Your ministering to each other is another illustration of Me within you. It is I who respond so rapidly and passionately to the pain of a hurting servant. For this day, detach even more from all around you. You are with Me. That is all you need be."

After reading this message I felt floods of peace and also a clearer sense about my future. I had been ricocheting back and forth peacelessly about here vs. other possibilities, not just work places, but my daughter's haven in New Hampshire. I am mostly concerned about my growing disabilities. But after the message and the graces of peace that followed I felt confirmed and peaceful that since here I have so much more peace, I should stay here as long as I can.

December 30, 2004

Much is happening here. On January 7th for 3 months comes our French hermit icon-writer, Sister Catherine, the one who did many of the icons we see in the little chapel. She is coming to visit and also to fresco a hermitage in Mexico we are building. She is supposed to be a real free-spirit Holy Fool who sings and dances spontaneously in chapel!

January 1, 2004

From a letter to a friend having difficulty with parents who don't understand him:

"My godparents, who were German, used to speak of the German verb "bejahen" which means "to yes" as in affirming someone. They thought one of the deepest needs of the human person is to feel "yes-ed" in their very being and that this was part of the gift of love. Jah is German for yes."

It is a great gift to have parents who understand and affirm one. Rare, I would say. Yes, many have parents who will affirm something about a child but rarely the ultimate inner nature of him or her.

It occurred to me that Jesus was not very understood by his own villagers who wanted to throw him off the cliff as insane because he dared to make himself God. Perhaps you are not that familiar with that Scripture passage.

At 66 I am happy that anyone understands any part of me.

Years from now you may be able to forgive your parents even if for now "keeping them in outer boundaries" is the best strategy.

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January 4, 2003

A letter from the friend I am instructing. (I am including these references to a Hindu spiritual group not because I believe in that leaders, but because the advice given by the guru is one that we could also use if we want to leave the world and hide in a monastery.)

I liked the line in your article: "We need to see ourselves as funny, frail, striving little sinners in need of mercy and forgiveness." That's classic Ronda to me -- humorously truthful or truthfully humorous. Also, your steady reminder to slake one's thirst for love -- not only as a recipient but as a bestower, too -- at the limitless fountain of God is the single most important teaching all human beings -- men and women -- need to imbibe, in my opinion. Think how unskewed people's lives would be if they sought love in church, rather than in bath houses and on the streets....

The guru used to say to her snotty devotees, "If you think you're here in Baba's ashram perfectly spiritual and whole because you do the practices every day, but you haven't spoken to your parents/family in years, think again! (She had been educated at Oxford, so she said "agane", like an Englishman.) None of us 'makes it' in this world until we have 'made it' with our family. Those of you who are here 'hiding out' I want you to get up right now -- right now! -- and take what you've learned from Baba to your parents, to your brothers and sisters. It is easy to practice seeing God in each other in Baba's house, but Baba meant for us to see God in each other EVERYWHERE. So many times in darshan, people come and say, 'My father abused me, my mother abandoned me' -- they want to know how they can reconcile their hurt with the love they now feel. The answer is always the same: 'This love you now feel is a gift from God; go and share it freely with the very ones who hurt you most.' Otherwise, what is the point of *sadhana*? Baba didn't go around the world building pleasure palaces; he took his own guru's instructions: 'uplift the downtrodden, feed many people' and created refuges on every continent. In Baba's time, that was enough. When he took *samadhi*, Baba commanded that his ashrams become *gurukulas* (-schools, on a plane with seminaries, sort of) and we have spent many years attempting to fulfill Baba's wishes. His ashrams are now places of learning, not retreat; we honor him and his benevolence towards us by taking back to the world what we are taught here."

Sometimes, a handful of people *would* get up, and depart on the spot, headed to whatever amends or reunions or forgiveness they'd avoided their entire lives. Indeed, the guru's words were fuel for my own soul when that day came for me to choose "hiding out" or face "making it" with my parents. The guru looked at me long the day I left. She knew I'd wanted to stay, she knew I worked hard, she knew -- even though I often avoided her,

haha! -- that I loved living in her ashram and that I craved its cradling harbor. "Pat," she said at last, "everything you seek here is awaiting you *out there*. Take *sannyass* in your heart and rejoice in the service God has given you." I admit, I was bitter that my skills, my devotion hadn't merited the guru telling me to stay on, but, as I looked into her limitless eyes, I sensed -- despite my desires -- that she was right in bidding me to go...

So today I am able to sit here and type to you, unfettered by regrets...In short, I feel pretty "clean" as far as family goes, which ought to make my entry into Christ's family all the smoother.

From my reply: I wanted to tell you about a practice many modern Catholics are now doing called Healing the Family Tree. You write down on the "tree" grid the worst traits that impacted you of each family member and then you have a Mass said for healing, and then other exercises like writing letters that you don't send to each one about what you felt and they "write back", as it were, through the Holy Spirit, what they were going through when they hurt you. It's terrific.

I think you did incredibly much to spend so much time with your father in his last illness and be with your mother. You know widows go through many processes and some want to be more alone vs. others who want family close, close, close.

At first I wanted to rush off and do my own things that I couldn't when Martin was alive because of his health such as teach in Ohio at this great Antioch like college in a climate he couldn't have taken, but then later I wanted to be with the kids. It's not a steady state being a widow.

Regarding the question of the Pope being allegedly divine, perhaps it would help to make these distinctions: sacred, holy, divine:

Sacred is something set apart for God such as a sacred space for the altar not used, say, for ping pong, or sacred vestments not used for the swimming pool.

Holy = sometimes synonym for sacred as in "the holy altar": but about people it means saintly (incredibly good in a heroic way).

Divine - absolute perfect being

"I had a divine hot fudge sundae is a cute saying but a hyperbole like "awesome"

Now, the Pope being called The Holy Father - this is more like, sacred, set apart.

His doctrine on faith and morals is infallible, which means that the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to keep him from leading the flock astray on faith and morals. That does not mean on policy.

Some Popes were also saints, such as John XXIII whose body is incorrupt (did not fall apart like normal corpses) or St. Teresa of Avila. Some Popes were villains. In the case of sinners who became saints like Mary Magdalene or Augustine, their saintliness is dated from the time of their conversions.

Some gurus are saints and some are not. Some unsaintly gurus still have good teachings, some don't.

At least this roughly describes how a Catholic understands it.

January 8, 2004

Sister Catherine arrived. I liked her immediately. Here is how I described her in the preface to her life tale as told to me which I started writing after I got to know her better: "an older French woman, short of stature, wearing a simple sweater and long dark skirt, and beaming with joy appeared at morning Mass in our simple monastic chapel."

January 19, 2004 from a letter to a philosophical seminarian

Celibacy - is a gift. Even if hard it should be joyful - a comparison, when I do most menial tasks it is hard and not joyful, but when I do things like writing or teaching even though there is some sacrifice and hardness basically I feel joyful even making those sacrifices such as, say, digging up some fact for a class on the web.

Of course celibacy goes much deeper into the soul than research. All Christians love Jesus. And many are in love with Him, but the celibate has to be in love with Him to make the sacrifice. You could ask Jesus to either woo you into being in love with Him or give you a clear sign you are to not be a vowed religious or priest. Of course that leaves out the single life, but most men who want to be married find someone to marry.

Every vocation has lots of sufferings, as I always told you and that lovely young woman I met (what happened to her by the way?) If you decided you crave marriage, you would need to find a wife who loves being with kids because it is hard for philosophers to raise children. It's not hard for us to love children, but to spend all the time they need for their nurture and growth, so it would be very difficult if your wife was also a heady vs. an earthy person."

January 20, 2004

My new friend, a widow who wants to become a consecrated widow wrote this beautiful passage about her marriage and God:

“There was a time, when T. was still living, that I was open to some of the stuff I read regarding other lives and reincarnation. But to sit and watch illness take the life of one you love, well, that changed everything. Love in the uniqueness of Tom's being and mine grew closer and closer in those days. I also remember thinking, years ago, how it might not be so difficult to live through T.'s death because God was the source of my love and focus. But that has so changed. God is still the source of my love and focus. What stirs in my heart though is this thought. If God is truly a loving and personal being, He would know how much and how important love and communion of being is. After all we hold that that is God's very own life--relational life and being. I can't possibly believe all of that (love) is for nothing. It would make love nothing more than a scientific energy that responds to chemicals in the brain! I remember the look of love...not sexual encounter...but the real look of love in the days when death was knocking at our door. It was deeper than brain chemicals and transmitters!!

I responded:

I like the way you relate it to the experience of love as death draws near. Since my husband died suddenly, it was different for me, but I think that perhaps a mysterious sign of having completed purgatory is that the soul of the dead person is more united after purgatory to the spouse on earth.

An analogue concerning widows who think of consecration as a continuation of their human spousal love and those who don't might be that Jews who become Catholics but love their Jewish identity like to called themselves completed Jews when they become Catholics vs. assimilation; so widows who remained in love with their husbands see consecration to Jesus as a completion of their spousal love vs. as an opposite.

About Walker Percy, Paul Elie writes

“His faith, he insisted, was not about order or community or permanence. It was an act of desperation, made true by his stubbornness in maintaining it. Why believe? ‘what else is there?’ Why not scientific humanism? ‘It's not good enough.’ Why isn't it? “This life is too much trouble, far too strange, to arrive at the end of it and have to answer, ‘Scientific humanism.’ That won't do. A poor show. Life is a mystery, love is a delight. Therefore I take it as axiomatic that one should settle for nothing less than the infinite mystery and the infinite delight, i.e., God. In fact I demand it. I refuse to settle for anything else.”

January 24, 2004

From Michael O'Brien's novel *Cry of Stone*:

“poems are frozen inside all words, like ice waiting for the sun.”

I am wondering about whether child-likeness, as in going to the heart, isn't different in some respects in the feminine vs. the masculine.

For example, today when I brought her groceries up to the kitchen, Sr. Catherine ran up to me and kissed my cheek and said “you are such a nice Mommy.”

It was so disarming and charming and childlike, but no man would make such a gesture, not because it is child-like but because he would seem effeminate. Isn't this because being affectionate and vulnerable is more feminine than masculine?

So, say, if a male saint were to walk up to an enemy soldier and whistle a brave little tune, that would be childlike but masculine, sort of like St. Francis of Assisi. A woman would not likely do such a thing.

Our priest says that the holy family wants us to be part of their family.

Dear Father,

I am wondering about whether child-likeness, as in going to the heart, isn't different in some respects in the feminine vs. the masculine.

For example, today when I brought her groceries up to the kitchen, Sr. Catherine ran up to me and kissed my cheek and said “you are such a nice Mommy.”

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January 28, 2004

O'Brien's novel *A Cry of Stone*, regarding the death of a beloved:

"He was alive, he had not gone out of existence, he had merely been carried to another station of the journey, beyond the reach of the eyes but not beyond the reach of the heart. In her heart she carried him still, and her love for him continued and grew. So the heart's loss was also, strangely, the heart's gain."

Also from that book “The interior castle, cannot rise unless the bastion of pride is leveled. The stones crumble, and only weakness is left. Then He comes.”

January 30, 2004

Since December I have been in touch with a locutionary. She sends me words she has received. Of course, as Catholics we are not obliged to believe or follow private revelations of this sort, but because I think hers are genuine, I am excerpting parts I found spiritually helpful. (These have since been published by CMJ Marian Publishers under the title *Direction for our Times* by “Anne.”

August

From the Blessed Mother:

“Children, I know it is difficult for you at times. Remember that I lived the earthly life and drew much comfort from faith. I was often unsure of what the future held for my Son but I knew it was suffering. I lived that reality, despite which I remained cheerful, dutiful and joyful...I constantly asked our Heavenly Father to sustain me. When I felt the grief of my Son’s future, I stopped whatever I was doing and made an act of obedience to our Father. Whenever you feel unsure of yourself or afraid, make an act of Obedience. Say the following: “God in heaven, I pledge my allegiance to you. I give you my life, my work, and my heart. In turn, give me the grace of obeying your every direction to the fullest extent possible.”

Blessed Mother

August 13, 2003

Blessed Mother:

My dear consecrated souls, are you listening to your mother? Are you letting my messages reshape your soul and your direction? Perhaps you are angry at your mother. Tell me, dear little wounded soul. You may tell me if you are unhappy. Only through communication can we get to the root of the trouble and heal your pain. I do not want any blockages between us. So you must be honest. If you have healing that must be done, look around now. I will send you a holy soul to assist you. You will know this soul and with the help of this comrade, you can discover the source of your pain and we can lance any wounds that continue to take you from your mother. My child, injustice exists in your world. But injustice is not allowed in heaven. There is only love and celebration. Let me tell you about heaven so that you know and understand the glory of your destination. Heaven is filled with souls who love God. These souls, all filled with joy, explore every facet of the Divine. There is great knowledge to be had and anything you want to learn, you can learn. Imagine exulting in the accomplishments of all of the saints, both those who are known to

you and those who are known only to God. In heaven, your accomplishments will be celebrated. Your faults, your sins, do not make the journey and are not only forgotten, but incinerated. Can you imagine, dear ones? Do you begin to picture this? Let me continue. In heaven, there are vast spaces, filled with every bit of beauty ever created by God. If, on earth, you create something that is divinely inspired, and this is what we want from you, it will endure in heaven, to be admired and explored by your brothers and sisters. Your spiritual relationships will also follow you to heaven. Every memory of your sins will be erased because you could not enjoy heaven if you were constantly annoyed by the memory of your mistakes. This is a mercy of God Himself and a good illustrative example of the character of your God. Please consider that more. He is never spiteful, never vengeful, and never punishes to punish. God, your all loving Father, moves only for the benefit of you, His creatures, created in love and hope. Children, I say to you with love, let go of your pain. I will help you. Ask me, please, and allow me to wash away the past hurts inflicted upon you by troubled souls. I wish your wholeness, your wellness, your confidence. Your healing is here, in my hand. I extend my hand to you now and place it in your heart. Be with me, dear one. It is to you, I speak.

“Consider those with whom you are comfortable. Do you not see that those souls carry true love within them? It is safe to be with them because they carry a seed of God in them and that is what generates that love. It is that seed you respond to when you feel comfortable and safe with a person. Well, dear ones, I have to tell you that fewer and fewer carry that seed of love and that is why so many of your fellow brothers and sisters have fallen prey to diseases of the mind. Man was not meant to live without love in his life. He should walk through each day and experience a little love in this person, that person, and ideally, through every soul who has contact with him. ...Now a man can survive quite nicely if he is nurtured by divine love. ...But few souls are accepting divine love.”

Here are some excerpts from earlier locutions:

February 17, 2004

I did an interview for Zenit about the theme of my article on the Joys of Being a Woman of the Church from the book on The Gift of Femininity published by Servant, edited and assembled by Christine Mugridge. I got a letter from a Canadian priest saying that he liked the article so much that he Xeroxed it for all the girls and women of his parish and had a Women’s Celebration Day around it. It brought tears to my eyes to see how much witness stories help others. I saw how Jesus wants to use me this way, because he has given me the courage to give my witness.

Jesus seemed to be telling me He would use me wherever I go because I want to bring His truth and light and love, but that He wants me to have the deep quiet time with Him at the Retreat Center also.

March 5, 2004

I have been thinking about how some angry people are more angry at strangers and some at those who are close – but behind the anger it is the same false perfectionist stance and flight from the cross of the limitations and sins of others. “Except for you, my life could be great, so I want to annihilate you with my anger.”

Seeing THE PASSION – it felt not like a film but like an intervention of God forcing the world to come to grips with what Jesus suffered for us. My grandson Nicholas was very impressed. I thought it was terrific in terms of apologetics in the sense that no one could think that without the Resurrection the disciples would risk such a death.

March 12, 2004

If you “don’t fit in” somewhere, do you try to “stand out” or “hide”?

Unrelated – I was reading the famous old novel USA by John Dos Passos. He has this glamorous, charming, young woman who had many abortions getting into her late 30’s, notice that she is growing old. Her husband is preparing for her to go for the abortion when she decides against it, saying, “I want the little brat!” This reminded me of choices some women I have known made when feeling the clock ticking down.

March 15, 2004

From JP II The Way of the Cross

“The cross is raw crudeness and horror, barbarity and ignominy, the place on which, atrociously, dies the Incarnate Son of God. Let no one dare to violate or cover up the atrocity of pain, the place in which love reveals itself and life gushes forth in abundance, the icon of mercy without limit, and beyond all human expectation.

O cross of Christ, which shines out tragic and brilliant in the night of human agony. By your light is illumined every dark step of sorrow....You lead humanity back to its original splendor...our one hope, the safe anchor in the storms of life.”

March 18, 2004

Response to “Anne” concerning an entry in the journal of her locutions. Here is what she wrote as she heard Jesus speak in her heart:

“Jesus

Well done, little soul. You see how the enemy seeks to negotiate with you. I want you to record many things for Me on this day. We will begin with your experience in church this morning. We will then move to your suffering on this day and then I will return to you here.

I am drawing a complete blank on church this morning. I have been in the garden since yesterday. To be honest I've had a terrible time thinking that I just want my life back. I can't earn a living, I'm tired of being broke, I'm tired of feeling like a nut, and I'm tired of not knowing what is going to happen to me from one day to the next. I have these feelings and I make acts of obedience because, despite all, I know that I am going in one direction and that is toward heaven. Nothing will knock me off the path of service to Jesus. Nothing. I will do whatever He asks me, whenever He asks me and that is my decision. I decided to overlook these feelings and not torment myself any further as Jesus understands humanity and the pull of the world. He wants me to know what I am giving up and I feel so beaten down anyway that I do not have much energy to entertain myself with reproaches and the drama of self-loathing. So I am complaining at times. Whatever. I would like to shake the hand and congratulate the soul who would do this and not have the odd moment of crankiness. I cannot remember what happened in church, that's how much impact things have on me so if our Lord wants it recorded, my sweet Saviour must please remind me.

Okay. I think I have it. I was doing this kind of resigned complaining. My hands and feet hurt terribly, and after Mass I did the Stations. During the stations and in contemplation of His Passion, I made yet another act of commitment to Him and to suffering this Passion for Him. (Please believe that I get the barest taste.) He made me understand that my little acts of obedience in the heat of the temptation to rebel give Him tremendous glory. They are more powerful than the most poetic and joyful praises of love sung to Him at times when we are in the spirit of unity. Now, do not be discouraged and think that there is no point to our joyful outbursts of love. They, too, give Him glory. It is simply that dedicated duty in the face of complete and total flatness of spirit is a good thing and we must see it as the opportunity for God's glory that it is. God is good to give me this opportunity. I'm nearly laughing as I write that because the words and the sentiments have been scraped pitifully from the bottom of my barrel of faith. Once again, intellectually I know it to be true far more than I feel it emotionally. I am in a pretty dry state of spirituality right now.

Regarding the suffering today, I'm glad it is over, I will say first of all. Secondly, the devil now attempts to divert me with a new pitch. He offered me millions of souls if I would cease this suffering. He said he would give the kingdom millions of souls. He then asked if I heard him. I am attempting not to dialogue as our Lord does not want me to talk to him. As he was asking me this I felt as though he were ripping something from the inside of my chest. My heart, I suspect. This went on. He said give me the suffering and I will trade you millions of

souls. You will have served Him well and saved millions. You can have them through the messages. You want God's glory? Make the deal. This was at the end of the suffering and he, the devil, then said, relax, you're done. Get up. I remained still because I work for Christ and only Christ tells me when I am done and when to get up. Sure enough, I wasn't. He was trying to get me to excuse myself early and leave some of the suffering behind. I waited and he then said, I'm leaving you to think about it. I will be with you until tomorrow and I'll help you to think about it. I'm willing to hand you millions of souls through the messages. All you have to do is give me this suffering you hate so much. What's to think about?

Well, reader, I will tell you what's to think about. He is not the one who decides what I do and do not do or decides what I suffer or do not suffer. Despite my continual and unabated complaining, I suffer willingly for Jesus Christ and His mother, whom I love with all of my heart. I was then told by Jesus that I was finished and I rested. Our Lord explained to me that of course we would not negotiate that deal or any deal with the enemy, because, as Jesus said,

We do not deal with evil, first and foremost, because evil never looks after the interests of heaven. Never. We can rest in that statement because as My goodness is never changing, the evil of the enemy never changes. The goal is always darkness when one is dealing with those who work for hell. Now, little soul, I tell you also why we do not make such a negotiation. What if the evil one agreed to give us every soul in the world but one and that one were yours? Would I hand over My cross, accept the compromise and merely shake my head at the loss of your soul? You see My smile in your heart, Anne, because you know how ridiculous the very suggestion is to Me. I could no sooner do without you than I could do without the whole of the heavenly kingdom. You are Mine and I am yours. Each soul is equally precious to Me and you know that because I have revealed My heart to you. You will be given flashes of what the evil one offers you today. I have no fears about your ability to stay on an uneven and narrow course as you have often proved your reliability to heaven. Be at peace as you keep Me company in the Garden this evening. All is well and I want to tell you, My little friend, that My stay in the Garden was made bearable by contemplation of little acts of courage like you made this morning in the church."

I, Ronda, wrote this back to Anne: "This dialogue was so beautiful. I go through minor feelings of confusion, come to think about it, usually after my nap, which is near to the Crucifixion time. I offer it up when I remember to, but this locution more than any other will get me to be sure to see this is how the devil works on me. It brings tears to my eyes. I really like the gutsy (Chicago?) way you write your part, just the way it comes. I think Jesus honors that vs. flowery memorized prayers when those, even if beautiful, don't match your real feelings.

March 25, 2004

Dear Tom,

(Concerning frustration in prayer)

This is just guess work, but I think that creative Catholic intellectuals sometimes get so wrapped up in the sense of Jesus as a symbol in our religion that we can lose the most basic sense of Jesus being who He says He is in the Gospels and proves Himself to be in the intimate I-Thou of the sacraments and mystical prayer.

When we read the proofs of St. Thomas closely we realize God is the center of all reality and not dependent in the least on my concept of him in a subjective sense. Then adoration makes sense vs. floating in vagueness during prayer.

So, when you review C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity where he says in those famous WWII radio addresses - look either Jesus is a madman, a liar, or he is who he says he was. In Hebrew tradition to say I and the Father are one is a divinity claim. So, don't think of Him as a prophet or an archetype but either as really God or as only a philosopher who cannot save us from our sins. And so, if He is really God, the living personal God, pray to Him with that sense in your heart.

March 26, 2004

Dear Tom,

By extreme hermits I mean the ones in early Egypt Christian times who ran out to the furthest reaches of the desert in rags. Others took a ciborium with the Eucharist with them to little huts they built and or met on Sundays for Mass.

I can't read 58 pages of anything right now. I am due to give a talk for Pax Romana in the parish near the UN where UN people are invited. I leave next Wednesday and return Sunday so don't expect e-mails during that time.

Doctors of the Church - I love the Office of Readings - full of strong teaching, but especially for apologetics Augustine and Thomas. There are nifty little compendiums of Thomas that just hit the highlight and not all the controversies he is answering. I bet you could easily find one on used books Barnes and Nobles cheap.

“Hating not being a saint yet!” I understand. I am appalled. When I became a Catholic at 21 I thought maybe 5 years would do it. All of these feelings have to do with proudly wanting to be an ambassador vs. a child of God. We want to give love, not receive love. What makes us more holy is being super receptive to God's love as did John of the Cross, Teresa, and Therese. Somehow, big hearted as we both are, we think receiving love is a bit sentimental. Project-itis fits in very well with this.

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How about - on the way into Mass each day, as well as thinking of all the people you need to help with this and that, say a prayer such as

**“Jesus! I am the one who needs to be saved. Here I am the humble publican confessing to -
------(whatever your main weaknesses are.) I am poor and needy. Help me. As
you fill my body with your precious body and blood, please make your love percolate into
the marrow of my painful body, heart, mind and spirit.**

April 8, 2004

(from a letter to a friend feeling bad because her married son is not as close as before)

Here are some thoughts for you to ponder. If they are totally off base just forget them.

Mothers and sons. Often mothers choose a husband for certain needed qualities, but want opposite ones in their sons or opposites plus the same good ones of the husband.

For example, I wanted my husband to be a father. I needed a man who would be less idealistic, more protective, more shrewd, and provide for my kids more than I would being a spacey pseudo-Franciscan Catholic. Even though I provided for the kids, after he became disabled, he kept me from becoming a total hippie Catholic. But then I wanted Charlie to be a Franciscan Catholic. So I was looking to my son to provide the qualities that weren't in my husband.

By analogy, your first husband, I gather, was an adventuresome wild type of guy. You wanted in your second husband an opposite to that - someone strong, intelligent, prudent, steady, kind. But in your son you could some of that wild adventuresome quality. Now that is there for his wife and not you. So that is part of the pain.

In part the healing of my grief for losing my little Saint Charlie (as he was to become) is being a surrogate mother to seminarians. Ask God to show you how you can mother other sons as you move on to work with the needy, some of whom are probably shipwrecked wild ones.

April 8, 2004

I spent a few hours reading this short book about Marthe Robin (pronounced Roban) a French woman of the 20th century who after becoming paralyzed for unknown causes in her early 20's never ate, drank, or slept and bore the stigmata on Fridays. She was a holy soul and foundress of Foyer de Charite - retreat centers and a whole movement with 60 of these centers world-wide by 1980's. Probably more today. She founded these things from her bed by means of priests following her inspirations.

Here are two lines that struck me:

"All of life is Calvary and every soul is a Gethsemane where all drink in silence the chalice of their own lives."

"my real joy on my sickbed is profound.....What a labor! What growth God has wrought in me! But what leapings of the heart, what death-struggles of the will it takes to die to self."

Easter Triduum:

Dear Carla, my sister,

So many lovely things here. First of all an older woman who is trying living here does the decorations, so she picked beautiful simple wild flowers, a magenta colored cactus blossom for the altar of repose.

Then the stations, after the men carried the cross (about 4 feet high) about 5 yards each from station to station, a little bitty woman, visiting mother of a monk, offered to take it. I felt ashamed. Even though I have a bad back, etc. etc., I figured it couldn't be that heavy if she carried it, leaned against her shoulder, so I gingerly volunteered for the next to last Pieta Station. I figured Father would say no if he thought it was risky. But he didn't.

I felt very brave and noble and was congratulating myself on my courage, when we turned the bend on our long road, and there right in front of my station was reclining a huge black cow. It was so funny, totally cutting the ultra-serious way monks do these rites - total silence always, not little whispers, as most lay people including me tend to.

The cow moved away when I arrived. When we got over the little rise to the last Resurrection point, there was the whole herd waiting for us: 6 cows and 5 calves. I suppose some were steers, I didn't check. It felt like they wanted to be with us for the Resurrection.

During the whole procession our mother cat who just gave birth to 5 kittens followed us meowing.

I have been having a lovely week. I am feeling since NY, that I am just in the right life and place. By the way my back is better since I stopped sitting on the floor to pray and now sit in a stodgy chair with the cushion instead. So travel is a bit easier. It just seems that it is just right to have long periods of quiet contemplative prayer and then go out on a speaking date, but not more than 1 a month, and spend time here writing, not counseling but just affirming people. Since the priest is so austere it doesn't hurt to have a spaniel-like friendly old woman affirming them.

Jesus seemed to say in my heart, "Yes, Yes, Yes."

A line from one of the sermons - we need to love others in the place of their greatest need which they will only open to us if they feel we love them.

I love Taize hymns.

I am going to play the St. Matthew Passion while cleaning up.

Love to you and Arthur in the place of your deepest needs, Ronda

Some things that Jesus allegedly told Anne about my soul:

I wish My little servant to respond yes to Me in another area in the area of trust.

(Addressed to me):

I desire unity with you, dearest, but you pull away because you do not trust your Jesus.

Would I ever fail you? Would I ever send you a plan that was detrimental to your spirituality and your unity with Me? You know that I would not because My desire, like your desire, is unity.

I want to draw you directly into My heart, and I want to do that now. You need do nothing, only trust. Tell Me you trust Me all through each day.

You desire My happiness and you seek to comfort Me. I will be comforted by unity with you. That is what your Saviour desires.

Ask Me to give you heightened trust. Practice trusting Me. Ask yourself, what would I decide to do right now if I totally trusted Jesus?

The answers will come to you and you will struggle less with doubts and anxieties. These things are not from Me and they hinder Our progress.

I love you completely. Let us remove these final little blocks and be together so you can serve Me with abandon.”

(I felt greatly moved by this locution which cuts with a two edged sword for me. Afterward, reading it over and over on a busy confused day because my computer screen seemingly died – as if the computer was overwhelmed that Jesus came right through its old being? – I felt driven to rush to buy a replacement – when I finally got back from the store and went to bed early I had a sense of Jesus trying to melt my heart and of Mary’s sweet presence hovering over me as I prayed the rosary falling asleep.)

April 13, 2004

My computer monitor went into death throes. In my usual exaggerated way, I immediately thought – this is a sign to give up writing and e-mail and the net! I felt depressed as soon as I decided that. Then Jesus seemed to give me an answer – he is weaning me from lots of loud speech through the relative silence of the computer. I should get a new monitor and not worry about being addicted at this point. Slowly but surely I will be able to put prayer before projects so that I would come to the projects with peace.

April 22, 2004

I went to confession about an argument I had with someone about Israelis and Palestinians. I see that it is a Recovery, Inc. type of thing (the international group I often lead little meetings about for overcoming anger, fear and depression) in the sense of we get a rush of symbolic victory overcoming enemies in argument since we can't win on the ground, especially in political arguments. Such arguments are spiritually dangerous. Even though infallibility doesn't cover application of Just War, since the Vatican is preaching peace, if I start a campaign about the Israeli side I could be agitated a lot of the time.

A Jewish convert friend wrote concerning the Israeli war that he thought the Pope's views were just misinformed and came from his thinking the Arabs are the underdogs.) Not that it shook my faith, of course, since these matters don't come under infallibility.

I spend many hours in my oratory pondering how Hebrew-Catholics, Jews who became Catholics, should deal with the current dilemma of our loyalty to Israel. After all, Israel includes plenty of pro-abortion atheists – Sharon (the Prime Minister) is an atheist at least up until recently and I haven't heard different. Just the same we cannot help desiring that Israel be victorious. Then, what about the claims of Christian Arabs against Israeli treatment of them?

(Years later I read a wonderful book about Israel by an English journalist, Sennott, *The Body and Blood*. Each chapter gives the point of view of a different group, Jew, Muslim and Christian (Lebanese). In each chapter you sympathize with that point of view, but then he shows the negatives of each when they have power.)

We had a sermon today about poverty of spirit for contemplatives. Father said that especially for contemplatives we want to avoid a kind of problem many academics have which is that they infallibilize their own opinions, so they are rich in half-truths and can't listen to anyone else. Not that the half-truths aren't true but that a kind of arrogant assertion of them is not in the spirit of Jesus.

I immediately went to confession. I analyze my tendency to be this way as coming from feeling weak because I cannot win on issues such as Israel with other Catholics, so I want a

symbolic victory by debating them into the ground meanwhile ignoring that after all Israelis aren't exactly saints either. My Jewish convert husband, who was much more pro-Israeli than I, still thought the sabra soldiers looked like Fascists.

April 22, 2004

I visited the home of a friend who has teen girls. What a delight to hear them giggling in the other room. I miss that aspect of family life in my Retreat Center.

I was thinking about how long people live nowadays: to have more time to recover from their lives?

Unrelated – a very loving woman I know was being scolded by her husband for being messy. I asked her: "how many times do you see the word "neat" in the Gospels, and how many times do you see the word "love"? And even I, who love neatness, do value love more.

April 30, 2004

Dear Father,

Today in your wonderful sermon you spoke of the comparison between a babe nourished by the blood of the mother and then the milk, with the Eucharist.

They didn't show mothers how to breastfeed when I had my twins but I did breastfeed my son and it gave me such a wonderful feeling about my body. I had previously experienced it mostly as an ugly encumbrance on my soul. When feeding my son at the breast I was overjoyed that of my very bodily substance I was giving life to my son's body, and I felt it was analogous to the Eucharist.

Sunday Sermon on May 2, 2004 for 4th Sunday of Easter

(Note: This was taken down by me in shorthand. Later when I put some of this on our website I included a note about these sermons being designed for contemplatives here, so that they would have to be modified in some ways in the minds of actives.)

“In the Gospel reading from St. John Jesus speaks about our eternal life. He and the Father and the Holy Spirit are one in our spiritual life. Even though we have distractions and troubles that make us fear to be “snatched out of the Father's hand,” as Jesus explains, we should not fear. We can think that the devil is snatching us out of God's hand sometimes. We feel as if we are not in God's hand or his arms, as if we have been stolen away from our hopes about our spiritual life.

But, despite sins and betrayals, Jesus says that ordinary people like us will not be snatched out of God's hand. He wants to talk to us in our ordinariness to assure us that it is not true that we are snatched.

In the face of great problems that could have discouraged humans and even in the midst of persecution, we can live a sublime life and each of us is called to live that.

The Gospel speaks of the “voice” of Jesus. The Holy Father has been speaking a lot about the “face” of Christ, but here it is His voice that is mentioned. John the Baptist rejoiced to hear His voice. According to St. John of the Cross, the voice is the interior voice heard in silence. God speaks in silence says St. John of the Cross.

We need to be gathered into the hand of God by our recollection (gathering ourselves) not through logic and reasoning, but being touched by the voice of love even more intimate than sight. The auditory is closer to love than sight, which can be deceived easily as by seeing “lights” or tricks that come from bad spirits.

Hearing the vibrations from the voice in our own hearts that are attentive to that voice we thrill as it responds to the longing for the voice of the Good Shepherd. This is an affective hearing. In order to hear that voice we have to have the gift to be gathered by recollection. It is hard if there is too much exterior noise.

We confide ourselves to the Blessed Virgin Mother of the poor to take us into her arms to be gathered into God’s hand.

We have to dispel the conflictual voices and distractions. Just as St. Paul talked louder to overcome the voices of unbelieving Jews, we have to “talk” louder than the persecuting voices. Sometimes we need the courage to speak over the voices of bad spirits telling us that there is no use trying to be contemplative because we are hopeless or that “this is just not your line of work.” I used to have such temptations in the beginning years (of being a monk) I argued these down so that now, even though I feel just as inadequate, I have talked myself out of giving up.

When you are starting, you have these persecuting voices and it is hard to hear the inner voices. Jesus knows that and so we need a spiritual resurrection of our little hearts that need to know that none of us will be snatched away.

It is a major truth of this Gospel, because some of the most subtle temptations are where we feel snatched out of His hand into the chaos of our minds. The Father is greater than all this.

Let us dedicate ourselves as little people to our spiritual Mother Mary to renew faith and hope in the resurrection, when we feel deluged and have a hard time gathering ourselves together.

Recollection comes through a special grace as we are drawn up into a hidden spot necessary for the contemplative life. St. Teresa of Avila says that before a great mystical

grace “I was in a great recollection when it happened.” The prelude to the mystical is recollection.

We need to pray because each of us knows how poor we are in terms of distractions and troubles. We need to pray for recollection so that we can hear that voice in our heart.

May 4, 2004

(In answer to a letter from someone thinking that Judaism is as good as the Catholic religion):

Jesus said He came for the Jews first. Every reading these last 2 weeks is about how the apostles went first to the Jews. Throughout the centuries many Jews have converted. We are a universal Church - the catechism repeats this often. One and true doesn't mean other religions are completely wrong but we have the fullness of truth. I like the way JP II puts it in *Threshold of Hope* that there is a main light from God and then other religions see shafts of this light. Jews rush to join Jesus and Messianic Judaism partly because they stand the street and preach.

Letter to someone asking about what the term spiritual gluttony means, I replied:

On spiritual gluttony, there is a certain clear way of distinguishing. If you are a spiritual glutton you go around from place to place looking for spiritual highs and detest the lows and flee from them into escapist mechanisms such as addictions including co-dependency on perfect people. If you are a fervent woman desiring to be purified you accept, with struggle of course, the crosses God sends or allows, offering them for others and begging to be purified through them. That does not mean asking for crosses or not trying to eliminate them when possible, but it means accepting them when you can't change anything.

Reflecting gratefully on the mentorship of the priest here: I have always thought that the more a woman is a Catholic leader, the more she needs a stronger male mentor. I see this in Alice Von Hildebrand for whom Dietrich was everything, but now she gravitates toward Fr. Benedict Groeschel who lives nearby. Also, of course, almost all the women saints, and maybe all, but we don't know of it, had strong male mentors to help them grow.

June 12, 2004 (back on the East Coast)

Visiting St. Scholastica's Priory in Massachusetts to pick up boxes of Charlie Rich tapes and letters, I was almost in tears over the discombobulation of travel, cold and heat, and desire to be finally settled in one place. I reread the locution Jesus seemed to have sent me through Anne and realized once more that unity with Him counts more than unity of place. He does have a plan for me and it will be good for me. Right now all I need is trust. Meanwhile Jesus told me to thank Him for having so many options.

June 30, 2004 – written to an atheistic friend.

Dearest Emily,

I will pray for your surgery. I am delighted about your new grandbaby. Just looking at her must be a great joy even if you can't help much.

About purgatory. Here the basic way I see it is that at the time of death everyone sees Jesus. If they love light and goodness they move toward Him. Now, to be in heaven you have to have nothing but love in your heart. But sins of the past constrict the heart and leave pockets of cold, resentment, non-forgiveness, hate, etc.

Purgatory is a place of purification - I call it stretching the heart to love more and purifying it to get rid of those pockets mentioned above. You can tell even in this life that repenting, forgiving, etc. is painful.

The pain is mainly spiritual and immaterial since souls do not have bodies, but as a condescending to our earthly viewpoint it is described by Jesus and shown to visionaries, including Dante, as physical pain. There is no fixed Catholic doctrine resolving the conundrum of how souls without bodies can be shown as suffering physical pain to visionaries. I looked it up.

Here is how you could "pray"

God, if there is a God, I am very sorry for all the sins, defects, etc. of my life, especially those that directly hurt other people. Please forgive me. I offer the sufferings I have been going through with Parkinsons and all the ones in the future as a penance for those sins and defects. Also if Christians are right in what they believe, show me clearly.

Can't hurt. Chesterton said the reason he became a Catholic was to get rid of his sins.

Love, Ronda

Letter to a member of the Hebrew-Catholic Association Board:

I guess I would think of a Hebrew-Catholic wanting to support Jews living in Israel as the first plank. How would we support this concretely? Obviously trying to refute those who make out that the Jews simply grabbed Arab land and deserve to be flung into the sea. But what else? Should we send money to support an army that probably does abortions for the female members?

Should we advance some kind of support by Hebrew Catholics in a public forum just with some kind of manifesto, say from the H-C Association? Would this manifesto be published simultaneously in an Israeli paper or web as well as in some US paper?

Just floating ideas at this point.

(Nothing came of this but years later someone started an organization like that of non-Catholic Christians who support Israel. This is called Catholics for Israel. It is wonderful. You can find it by googling it.)

July 7, 2004

Franciscan University of Steubenville wants me to do a show for their TV Forum shown on EWTN about my book Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace. Talking to them about this program, to be done in October when I am giving a workshop there on this topic, I started pushing for a tape of it, as well. Jesus seemed to laugh at me and say, "So reaching a million people on TV is not enough for you?" I laughed aloud.

July 8, 2004

Regarding Jesus seemingly laughing at me about the Taming stuff at FUS, I am thinking I DON'T TAKE IN THE GOOD ENOUGH, BUT JUST LEAP TO THE NEXT WORRY! He wants me to soak in all the good He is arranging for me.

July 9, 2004

Went to the ordination of priests from the community who ran the college where I used to teach. If felt the Holy Spirit urging me to go to celebrate with some of the ordinands who had been my students. I prayed and prayed to be able to feel love for those administrators I might meet I had been in conflict with. Sure enough I saw one in the opening procession and had the grace to jump up onto the kneeler, and wave with joy to see him. He seemed delighted to see me also. I realized that even though we experienced such severe problems we have been praying for each other. I thought, what joy will there be in heaven when we have forgiven every single person who ever harmed us!

There was a wonderful moment during the ceremony at the point where all the priests attending give a hug of peace to the newly ordained. A very thin, shorter, priest who was previously a High School wrestling champ, grabbed a huge newly ordained friend of his and lifted him off the floor. It was such a marvelous dramatic unconventional gesture. It reminded me why I loved this community in spite of all the problems we had.

July 11, 2004

After Sunday Mass at the bigger chapel I backed right into a car Father's aunt and uncle had donated to the Center. Those staying longer to pray in Church heard the loud bang. I felt stupid, senile, ugh!

July 12, 2004

From the book *Star Children* by Clara Asscher-Pinkhof about the Jewish children in concentration camps:

"We were permitted to bring my dead father to the gate. Two men carried him on a bier covered in white...We walked behind until the gate opened and two men passed through with their load. My father entered into freedom, but the gate was closed for us.

"Oh, he received death in a friendly way; he knew that only death could open the barbed wire and the gate. He nodded to this space, this freedom, in the days of his illness, and now that they are open to him, he has greeted them happily...what happens to his body is the secret of the little brick house there in the distance. What happens to his soul we will know and understand all the rest of our lives; the good, which is imperishable...it is not death that has to open the barbed wire and gate, but the soul itself, grown until it is unassailable, which can rise above the impediments created by harsh hatred and mightless might. You can live and be free however tightly your mortal remains are wedged."

July 14, 2004

Coming to see that my conflicts about where to live in the future revolve around a perfectly understandable widow's need to be protected by strong, just, men. Unconsciously, as I waver, I am probably weighing up how much I can trust the men in each locale to take care of me. In the Psalms, though, it is written "put not your trust in princes." When will I truly believe that God the Father is protecting me?

July 15, 2004

Father told me today that all the monks say that they are disturbed by the way I look around during prayer from my perch at the front of our little chapel. He suggested I might consider sitting in the back instead.

At first I felt numb, but then deep prayer of quiet came over me. Even though I can see what they mean, I still felt rejected. I look around because I love them so much and in a motherly, and also former teacherly, way, I want to check out how they are doing. They say teachers have a terrible time retiring because they are used to being center stage directing everything in the room.

I talked to Cathy, one of my oldest friends. She thought that the men here need to bond like a family – they are younger and will be close for the rest of their lives. However, she thought it possible that I need to be some place where I can be more central. That might not be so much ego as just my character which is not introvert.

July 17, 2004

I had a long unusually intricate dream where I was talking to St. Edith Stein who was visiting and speaking at the college where I used to teach. She was like Alice Von Hildebrand, very intense and compassionate.

I couldn't remember what she said, but I woke up wanting to offer all my sufferings for the conversion of the Jewish people.

My friend Roy Schoeman who loves Edith Stein so much thought it was not a dream but a real interaction where she was giving me instructions.

An interesting quotation: “The guardian ego is a scriptwriter, tagging moods, experiences, behaviors, and things as “me,” keeping a record of its biographical inventory, which is stores in memory. Since it is a mental function, however, all it can really come up with is an *idea* of the self, which it eventually fashions into an *ideal* – and unfortunately too often into an *idol*. Its attempt to feed and keep the idol intact is narcissism in its purest form – the worship of the *self-idol*.”

Dear Hebrew-Catholic friends,

Looking forward to the novena before the feast day of Edith Stein in August, I am thinking that some of us might be called to make an offering of this type:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, you know how I love the Jewish people and wish that all of them would know you, at least as well as I do. I offer to you the little and big crosses of my life now and in the future for the enlightenment and ingrafting into your Church of the Jewish people.

July 24, 2004 Feast of St. Birgitta widow and pilgrim

I have been in great turmoil over what I should do in the future. I got so upset I decided to insist on some kind of answer:

Should I just stay at the Center and cut out all the outside works

or

plunge into the outside works leaving the Center for someplace else

or

try to balance the two in some ratio that would work?

Jesus seemed to answer me this way:

"You don't belong anywhere. That is your cross. I have told you before not to join any group but just be Ronda of Jesus and let me set you down anywhere in my Church.

"I don't want you to make any decisions regarding active/contemplative. I want you to follow the Holy Spirit by doing anything good you want to do that is offered and I will be with you all the time whether in your oratory or away on work in my Church.

"Don't push, don't strain. Enjoy the beauty here, and the excitement of other places. Offer the fatigue, or the heat, or the cold to me without TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO ARRANGE YOUR LIFE TO AVOID CROSSES. DO INSTEAD WHAT MAKES YOU JOYFUL AND ACCEPT THE CROSSES THAT GO WITH IT.

"I love you and you love me and Mary, Joseph and the saints and that is all you need."

Sounds pretty right on to me. Cuts like a 2 edge sword through all my dreads and fantasies.

July 27, 2004

"One's own free unfettered choice, one's own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy--is that very "most advantageous advantage" which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky

This quotation fits in well with some of my schemes for alternate life-styles to this one at the Center. How wrong could it be to want to be in a place where I can love and be loved in an appropriate but still more naturally extrovert manner? Like the locution above from Jesus? Like Augustine's "love and do what you will" concerning choices between goods?

July 30, 2004

I had written a letter to Bishop Burke of St. Louis about consecrated widows and the status of this emerging vocation at this time. Here is a part of his reply:

"At present there is no rite for the consecration of widows.

A widow can live a life dedicated wholly to Christ and she can make private vows. It is not proper for a widow to wear a habit or a veil since these are signs of belonging to an institute of consecrated life. A consecrated virgin living in the world should not wear a habit or veil either, since these are signs of separation from the world, and the vocation of

the consecrated virgin is lived in the world. With the approval of the local Ordinary, a member of the faithful may have a suitable oratory with the reserved Blessed Sacrament. Some consecrated virgins...have such an oratory, but not all of them do."

(In the meantime an interesting possibility arose to visit and check out a lay Catholic village in Arkansas where one of the leaders is a very happily married older man who is a Jewish convert from NYC. He would be happy to have other Hebrew Catholics nearby.)

August 4, 2004 Letter to Marty (the leader mentioned above) in Arkansas

I want to ask you and Irene and Ariela (a Jewish convert sabra from Israel, married to an American gentile convert) to pray for me during this exciting but difficult time. It would mean leaving a situation where there are many ardent, holy, people.

By comparison the reasons for leaving seem trivial such as the fact that monks are mostly silent and I need much more interaction and inconveniences. All this seems worth it when the priest mentor is present but when he's away very often and long it doesn't seem worth it.

I have been here only 1 1/2 years full time, the rest being long, long weekends for 2 years. Part of me is eager to look into a big change, and part is afraid of nothing working out anywhere.

Jesus assures me He will be with me wherever I go.

August 7, 2004 (letter from a very old family friend, Gabriel Meyer, the journalist and writer of beautiful books about St. Joseph and also characters in the Holy Land)

Ronda:

Shalom!

On the Retreat Center situation: Not being able to talk about all the particulars in person, I wouldn't hazard an opinion on whether or not you belong where you are. However, in that this isn't the first time you've found yourself in a similar situation -- feeling that a particular setting is not your spiritual home, after all -- it's worth looking at the whole question of Finding Where I Belong.

What you describe in your email seem, at least at first reading, like the annoyances, inconveniences and, indeed, disappointments that are part and parcel of any situation -- including one to which you'd been called. As Cardinal Newman so memorably wrote: Everything this side of heaven, everything born of earth -- even the best -- finally disappoints. (That's a paraphrase.) It's a hard truth, but a salutary one, I think. On a

fundamental level, there's no way out of feeling lonely, because we are alone, with all our constitutive hungers that cannot be satisfied, met or even addressed short of God. Lonely in the best of marriages; lonely in the best and most vital of religious communities; lonely even, God help us, when we get to be the center of attention and everybody thinks we're wonderful.

As for the other things you list (and I'm sure there's more to it than you had time to sketch out): they sound like the stuff of life (mismatched schedules, discomforts due to weather, not getting enough of something you imagine you want or need, etc.).

I'm not saying you shouldn't move on, or that the hermitage is right for you. What I am saying is that there is no perfect or ideal community where everyone is available to you just the way you want them to be, or where everyone (or even anyone, for that matter) understands. If that were so, should we ever find such an ideal community, a sensible person should run as hard as he or she could from it (as old St Macarios urges). It would be a spiritual trap, precisely because such a community that so thoroughly meets our needs would allow us to remain focused, centered, grounded on and in our (chaotic, unappeasable) selves, and the dreams we wish to foist on others, instead of wrested (as the classical spiritual writers say) from such a life dominated by the self precisely by the demands, inconveniences and incomprehensions of others, through the work of loving and serving them.

I know you know all this; but it's all I had to offer by way of advice at this point. I have always found these truths exhilarating in the abstract and hard to take in real life. Nevertheless, as Ignatius of Loyola would urge, you use hard truths to clear away the brush around the issues (this is a REAL paraphrase), and, then, if there's more to it than that (than the normal resistance we put up to the demands of love), we'll be able to see more clearly.

And, for the record, I like talking to you.

August 10, 2004

Pondering the trip to Arkansas for a visit to see if I liked it, I was feeling very confused about whether I need to stay here at the hermitage, for the sake of my soul. Perhaps, after all, I am called to be a victim soul, as seem to be some of those here.

Then at Adoration I felt Gogo (Dietrich Von Hildebrand) trying to help me from the world beyond – to tell me I am more like him with this exuberant joy combined with inescapable sufferings. I realized that Gogo had a spirituality not just a philosophy – though they were intertwined and this spirituality was in his person even more than in the books and formal talks.

I called Lily (Alice Von Hildebrand) and she said that my gift is that I have so much joy in spite of the terrible sufferings of my life. She thought I absolutely was not called to be a sacrificial soul in that sense.

August 11, 2004

Draft letter to the Catholic Solitudes Community (I did not send this after all, but spoke out portions of it to different people here in ways that fit my relationship to each one. However, again, I am keeping it to remember how I felt at this time in my life.)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the pathos and humor characteristic of my “tribe” I am writing this letter about a painful but possibly not unexpected decision.

Yes, even though I love, love, love having the Eucharistic Jesus in my oratory, and I revere you, Fr. P., as a holy priest, and I love my holy brothers and sisters here and do believe that everyone here loves me with true Christian charity, I am planning to leave.

I am anticipating that some of you will think the reasons are obvious and bad, such as:

“She’s a wimp when it comes to even tiny physical hardships and even more when it comes to spiritual warfare; or

She’s an ego-maniac, so she can’t stand not being center-stage.”

Actually I think there is some truth in the above, but probably even more significant are factors that are undramatic and more humbling such as:

I am old – Adios amigos, companeros de me viejez.

Old people like things to be steady and structured with few changes. It took me 2 weeks even to adjust to changing Mass to 7 and Adoration to 6 let alone going off to Hebbroville when Fr. P. is away.

Old people like to see the same faces every day. This place is a kaleidoscope of people coming and going and coming, sometimes unpredictably.

I am a widow –

Most widows crave the protection of men who are strong, like those of you who are brothers, are, but we want you to be near, preferably in sight, and always in the same place. You could easily add up how many of my very annoying demands have to do with not knowing if I can get help in practical areas of my ignorance.

I am an extrovert –

Extroverts gain strength from fellowship and get weak from solitude. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are great supernatural friends and I feel their love most of the time, but still...

I thought, and so did Fr. P., that these difficulties might be overcome by taking off for speaking trips. That is enough, when I can come home to a stable base, but not when many are not here. But there are such very good reasons for you not all being here a good part of the time that there is no way I can even imagine that changing.

So, where is the old holy fool thinking of going? For years and years I have been dreaming of some colony or complex for older people, not yet convalescent, that would be Catholic, ardently so, but also have in residence creative and/or intellectual types. Well, it exists. There is a group of about 30 families plus widows living in Northern Arkansas in the country with condos to rent for \$350 a month and also home-school families on the same property. It has a 24 hour adoration Church a few miles away. It has a Latin Mass (St. Peter's Society) on Sundays. It includes a few charismatics, Schoenstatt people, lots of Operation Rescue people, lots of Marian devotion, and one of the leaders is a Hebrew-Catholic Writer and Evangelist who hopes more Jewish converts will settle there to help him with his outreach.

Of course it is probable that not a one of these people will be as holy as you'all and then my big attempts at holiness by osmosis will go by the board! If you're not smiling yet, I got you wrong.

Perhaps you will wonder why I didn't consult you more about this decision. I guess it is because it would be too painful to hear your spiritual reasons why I should stay and still want to leave because of my more trivial but still real reasons.

I promise to pray mightily for you and recommend this hermitage far and wide. Please pray for me and accept my undying gratitude for all each one of you have done for me in prayer and deed, and let me make retreats from time to time. And when you think of me...perhaps, instead of thinking of me as a failed contemplative, think of me as, actually, I have always been, your favorite category of person: a poor little thing, Ronda

August 16, 2004

Feeling insecure before this trip to Arkansas for 3 days, I thought if I trusted in you, Jesus, I would realize you love me and you will be with me wherever I stay or go.

If I decide to go because I am just too stressed when Father leaves, what is so awful about that? In Recovery, Inc., it would be putting my mental health first. (This is a tool in this system for anger, fear and depression. It means that we must not stay in situations that we are not obligated to stay in because of some ideal or the opinions of others, if it is causing us too much misery or stress.)

August 17, 2004

I decided I ought to talk to Father more about Arkansas. He said I am not a contemplative or a nun but an active with contemplative inspirations and that if I don't have enough outlets then my energy gets skewed. It is perfectly legitimate to think about my retirement needs and maybe I should try Arkansas for a couple of months to see if the fantasy checks out, naturally and supernaturally. I could always come back and forth.

I did go to visit Arkansas and did like everything about Mary, Star of the Sea, the Catholic village. Nothing seemed ecstatic about it but more like Goldilocks finding a chair and a bed that fit. Maybe it is easier for me to fit with lay people who are trying to be holy than with monks who are holy. The little condo I will rent so cheaply seemed like a kind of snug hobbit house. I came upon a reading from Ezekiel on the feast of St. Bernard: "They went astray in the desert wilderness. In their straits He rescued them...to reach an inhabited city."

Jesus seemed to be showing me all the great good it was for me to live at the Retreat Center and how all the people here helped me and I helped them, but that He allowed the part that was so hard to help me now to leave for another place. All I need to do is trust and hold on tight.

Before leaving for Arkansas, one of the most delightful of squeezed in events was doing Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace at a local prison. I had never done any prison ministry. There were 40 men who are in a Catholic RCIA program run by a wonderful warm, insightful, sister, who invited me to come because of the many anger problems in the prison.

To my surprise I fit in very well! I think it is because prisoners are not into denial and the desperate way I cling to Jesus in the midst of problems such as anger, resonated with their desperate way of clinging to Jesus in the midst of their anger and resentment. Somehow the NYC street girl came out full force in my lingo and passion, different from talking to students or parish people. They loved it and invited me back.

August 27, 2004

I met a priest at the ordination last month who is now in charge of evangelization in this diocese. We talked about the possibility of doing Catholic radio interview, talk shows on the station here. For starters I will do one with the theme of Woman to Woman – 13 half hour shows with teachings and women of the community I admire.

Later it turned out that the shows might be postponed because of the need to have some on the election issues on that station. I wrote him concerning radio talks about pro-life and voting:

The Bishops in Germany during the Nazi time are now berated constantly for not being even stronger condemning Hitler in the political forum even though some of them did instruct Catholics not to vote Nazi. There is no way 50 million aborted babies balances out with deaths from capital punishment, etc. I know that many Catholics vote Democratic because they think that party is better on social justice, but 50 million babies killed is the hugest social justice issue, ever in this country since slavery just as the murder of innocent Jews and Poles and handicapped was a social justice issue in Germany.

How any Catholic can vote for a candidate who was actually against banning partial birth abortions is beyond me. How a Catholic democrat can live with that platform is beyond me, etc. etc.

I am delighted a great priest will be able to enunciate some of these pointers to hispanic voters - well worth being bumped for.

Another time, however, I think in regard to Bishops and laity - when a lay person donates many hours of volunteer time to the diocese and the Bishop has to postpone something, it would be good if he called the lay person and said, "Thank you for all your work on this. I really appreciate it. Unfortunately I have a higher priority right now. I am sorry that I have to postpone yours or add this new proviso contrary to what you were originally told."

August 28, 2004

For the feast of St. Augustine, Father spoke about how a person like him of such extreme sensibilities had to integrate the human and divine in his life in a different way than those less extreme. Given his past life, after his conversion he hated to be alone and surrounded himself with friends. I related this idea to myself and decided to make St. Augustine one of the active saint patrons of my more active life in Arkansas. Other good patrons could be St. Paul, and Mother Teresa (as a speaker).

August 30, 2004

Thoughts about father/son being different from father/daughter.

If a father figure is trying to help in the healing of a son-figure – of course with God the Father as the supernatural healer, it seems, as I have heard, that separations are a necessary, since part of the process is the father figure letting the son experience that with his unconditional love in the background, the "son" can be independent, at least at intervals.

But the archetype of father-daughter involves the father eventually giving away the daughter into the hands of the new male protector, the bridegroom, without essentially any independent time in between.

By the way, could female promiscuity of college girls be related to this? They have to leave the father but the bridegroom is not yet in sight?

If this is true, then daughter figures experience separation from the father-figure mentor as much more painful, unless she is handed over to another protective male figure.

September 2, 2004

Long talk with Father about my new venture in Arkansas. He thought I should pray Abba a lot as a healing of the father wound. Pere Thomas taught that the Trinity wants to be everything to us: father, friend, brother, beloved. The Holy Spirit is the Father of the poor.

I am wounded about “home.” I want to have a home. I need to pray that the interior insecurity is healed in the home of the heart of God. Our ultimate home is heaven. We need to pray that the heavenly Jerusalem will touch down in our earthly homes so that we don’t feel like refugees. In prayer we have a foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem – of our supernatural home.

In the heavenly Jerusalem we have the feeling of being the beloved and we will have sisters and brothers and friends and we will be fathered, but this is only possible in the Trinity.

Since I have these anxieties from childhood, natural security props are good, but they don’t provide the ultimate security in the Trinity. Even if I have every natural security in Arkansas I could still feel insecure if I don’t enough cultivate the supernatural. God can allow me to feel insecure in order to draw me into the supernatural security of my absolute home in the bosom of the Trinity.

September 7, 2004

Letter to Marty Barrack (the head of the little Hebrew-Catholic group there).

I am terribly excited about coming to Arkansas. I have some interesting things to do before I come. This weekend I am doing my Taming the Lion workshop in a parish. After that I have a mini-course with seminarians at my last little college on my book Battle for the 20th Century Mind with 3 very bright seminarians.

September 8, 2004

After a nap I awoke with such a feeling of bliss, I thought it was Mother Mary's kiss. I had been reading about how some of us find it hard to be close to Mary because we think of her as so perfect. Maybe she wants to overcome this barrier by making her presence felt. It helps me to imagine she is like Lily Von Hildebrand – so pure but so warm.

September 9, 2004

Letter to a friend who suffers terribly from feeling a failure in life.

As a penance for your sins of despair please make a big poster with this written on it

CHRISTIAN SUCCESS = HAVING LOVE FOR GOD AND NEIGHBOR IN YOUR HEART

I will try to remember that every time you call, the first question will be: how did you experience love for God and for others in your heart today?

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September 9, 2004

(This back and forth involves an Orthodox Jewish family man in Israel who is moving toward Christianity in the Catholic Church and writing on the Hebrew Catholic Assoc. dialogue board. By the way many non-Jewish Catholics like to dialogue on this board. If you like what I quote from it, look into lurking or writing on it. And please pray for these Jewish seekers!)

From Richard R.

Subject: [AHC] Jewish Christian/the paradox and the mystery

Hi,

After reading Colleen's last post, so candid and beautiful, I decided that I wanted to tell you about an experience I had yesterday.

I went shopping with my family to Home Center (Yes, they're here in Israel, too). I looked around me at all those THINGS under those awful florescent lights, and the girls walking by with shirts too small and pants too tight...I had started saying the rosary silently on the journey there. I said to myself: keep going. And then it was as though all that emptiness and darkness yielded before a light. . Every word of the rosary carried me beyond my immediate environment and I was in the vestibule of someplace I hope to be forever. I felt sorry for people who were so pre-occupied with just which color plate they wanted. I wanted none of it.

And, this morning, my morning prayers, my Jewish daily prayers, opened to me as though arising out of the words I had addressed to Mary and the meditation that revealed the glorious mysteries in new ways.

My recent posts have not, perhaps, reflected this deepening Jewish Christian experience, coming as they have, out of my concern to restore the continuity of Jewish and Christian religion. I am afraid they sound cold, reflecting more the side of me that is deeply inspired by scholastic philosophy and is restless until I submit my mind to God, rather than the side of me that is restless until I submit my heart to God.

For me, the issue of how to be both a Jew and a Catholic (to me, Christianity is Catholicism. Protestant theology makes no sense to me when it is not positively offensive, and the inwardness, mystery and dignity of Catholic liturgy is in perfect harmony with my personality.) is a pressing existential issue. I must have both! Which is perhaps a bit greedy. But I have experienced in my own life the redemptive power of Catholic faith, even the small faith I have come to so far.

My father fled the holocaust from Nazi Germany in 1938. I fled to Israel from the spiritual holocaust of America in 1970. In that year, I applied to a yeshiva. When I was accepted, I burst out crying. I was home. But that was just the beginning of a difficult journey. Now, I can't imagine living without a mezuzah on my door, without kosher food, without the Sabbath, without the High Holidays coming up. For the life of the Torah has redeemed me from the culture of darkness and placed me in a culture of light. And it has taken me to the threshold of a new light that is its own light, though it shines forth from the eye of a child it has disowned.

Yet I am wary. For I know that I am one of those who would have chosen to remain in the desert rather than enter the "real world" of the land of Israel where manna would be replaced by wheat, where days spent in prayer, meditation and the contemplation of God's

word would be largely replaced by farming, where faith would be tested by the burden of coping with materiality and the moral ambiguities of political life. I would fly from this world with too much relish, for there is nothing I want here anymore. And sometimes that makes me want to cry. Recently, as I was meditating on Christ carrying the cross, I realized that he didn't suffer that passively. He had to put his energy into carrying the very cross on which he would be crucified. In a small way, that's what life feels like, all the time, except the times when through meditation and prayer the seal of this world is broken.

I was consoled when I heard Fr. Groeschel talk about the hope of heaven. Yes, yes! I want to go to heaven. Jews don't talk much about heaven. They talk about taking care to do God's will in this world. Perhaps, if I were a better Jew I wouldn't need the consolation of hoping in Heaven. Perhaps, if I were a better Jew, it would be enough to know that I am serving God right here. Ah, but then, it is the very hope of heaven that has given me a patience for others I never had before, and it is the mystery of Jesus that has renewed by appreciation of Judaism.

Paradox imprisons until it is sprung by Mystery.

All the best,

Richard

Dear Richard,

Even though your letter was addressed to Colleen since you posted it on the Association of Hebrew Catholic Discussion Board I would like to respond -

Even though I am a woman, I was brought up by an atheist feminist mother to debate first and love later. My first interest in God was that He was Truth and it took me awhile to catch on that Love was His first name.

Wanting heaven is wanting to receive and give God and neighbor perfect love. Worldly selfish people don't want to go to heaven, because what's in heaven they would want? Or, to use Buber's wonderful language - God wants our response to His I-Thou love. I saw lots of love for God and eternal union with him in the Chasidic mystics Buber introduced me to.

I loved this post of yours because it revealed more of your heart to us.

The last line is a gem - a poet lives underneath the scholastic.

Regarding patience and mystical experience of God's love - to which you referred, Richard:

I am presently devoting most of the time I am not either at Mass or prayer, or writing on the Board, to giving workshops entitled

Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace.

The gist of the book is that when we don't feel sheltered enough in God's love with the hope of heaven (Augustine says the only happiness on earth is hope of heaven - there is all kinds of joy, of course, from experiencing God's gifts on earth but not the solid happiness of hope for heaven where God will dry all tears....etc.) when we don't feel sheltered in His love our vulnerability to harm, frustration, rejection, etc. makes us either hotly angry or coldly angry (long term resentment - cold-shouldering those who frustrate our plans, etc. etc.) Feeling vulnerable because we are too weak to bring about paradise on earth on our own terms, we either lash out IMPATIENTLY or withdraw COLDLY to lick our wounds.

Raging lion-like anger is a vain attempt to feel strong when frustrating events make us feel weak.

It took me 9 years of a secular anger-management free group that, by the way, has a branch in Israel – free but donations appreciated - called Recovery, Inc. - not 12 Step, plus psychotherapy, plus hours of contemplative prayer a day to become more of a lamb.

An olive wood statue of a lion with the lamb made by Christians in Israel graces my workshops!

Please pray for these workshops - some I am doing now in prison ministry.

September 13, 2004

Response to a woman on the Association of Hebrew Catholics' Discussion Web who thinks abortion and contraception are okay in many circumstances.

Dear Debbie,

When I prayed about it I was torn between logic and what I could read between the lines in what you wrote - or thought I could.

Let's start with logic. If we say that right and wrong depends only on feeling, then the feeling of the date rapist that he knows "she really wants it no matter what she says," counts as much as the feeling of a woman that she needs to use contraceptives. Feelings are indicators only when a person's emotions are a response to genuine intrinsic realities vs. mere reactions and sometimes over-reactions to past wounds, etc. Statistics I have read show that raped women who do keep the baby do better psychologically than those whose own hurt pushes them toward hurting the innocent child - same with incest.

I believe almost all cases where the life of the mother is at stake are now double-effect instances - though there are still a tiny percentage where it is one life against another. The way I explain this in ethics classes is this: the ship is sinking - people are clinging to life rafts. Do you have a right to push someone else off the life raft to increase your chances of

survival? Sure, you are less blamable if you do it than if you could kill someone in cold blood, but still it is not right to do it. By the same token, killing your baby to save your life is not right even though much less blame-worthy than abortion on demand for trivial reasons.

Enough logic. Between the lines I read that you have been hurt by ways you have felt treated in the Church and all of us have. I like to do my best to try to change ways of dealing with people in the Church that are less than loving. These may be intertwined in experience with ethical issues but they are separable in the sense that only if there is authority for moral teachings can we avoid anyone justifying anything by false logic.

I would be happy to dialogue further with you on any of this.

October 4, 2004 Star of the Sea - Arkansa

It has taken me almost 2 months to calm down after the throes of moving, even though I had so little to move.

November 5, 2004

Dear new friend,

(a member of our Hebrew-Catholic fellowship group who wears the Jewish traditional garb at Mass)

That is so wonderful that you were able to pray over people in this charismatic way with your Jewish prayer shawl! Alleluia. That's an H-C development that I can totally get behind.

What a bond we have on fear of rejection. I like to say in talks - how ridiculous is it to go into deep depression because someone didn't smile at me when he or she just happened to have a migraine at the time.

You are giving me fuel for my back burner book on co-dependency and contemplative prayer based on the idea that only drinking in the love of Jesus in depth in prayer can heal those of us wounded in the heart. I was thinking of some title for the book I am writing about this like "Hole in the Heart" but it sounds too much like a murder mystery!

Of course you know the saying of the famous Pascal (discoverer of the vacuum) that "there is a God-sized vacuum in our hearts that only God can fill."

(This book is called Healing of Rejection with the help of the Lord and is available as a free e-book on www.rondachervin.com click on books and then free e-books.)

Actually I was amazed that anyone with an orphan background (which this man had) could be so openly warm to strangers as you are. That is certainly a grace.

Obviously it is worth being wounded to reach out to others warmly - isn't that the life story of Our Savior?

Dear friends,

A prayer for Hebrew Catholic meetings:

Yeshua, Messiah,

coming for your people,

now as then -

As we join in small

and large meetings,

we Jews,

who have let

You find us,

want to sing our fulfillment song

to 21st century Jews.

Help us to teach this song, also

to our non-Jewish brothers and sisters

in Your church,

so that Jews may hear this melody

from their lips, too,

and take hope.

Our Lady of Zion,

and your entourage

of Hebrew-Catholic saints,
lead our chorus,
in a Magnificat to
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia. Amen.

November 15, 2004

When I wake up I sometimes think, “I can go to daily Mass to receive my Jesus because this priest made the sacrifice of celibacy to bring Him to me.”

November 24, 2004

The transition to living here in Arkansas was much more stressful than I imagined – not because of setting up house which only took 2 days but because of recurring computer glitches. On the shadow side, I feel ashamed of being so addicted to it that its failure causes me to go into a tailspin. On the positive side, after all, I am a communicator and in a new place writing to many old friends on e-mail and tracking the details of speech dates has to be important and quite a cross when it is not possible.

The people are wonderful – very interesting, diverse and lovingly friendly to me.

There is a hermitess here, building her place slowly. I feel such a pull to her and to her land. Even though my condo is wonderful – beautiful wide view of Arkansas hills and trees, much more spacious than my previous little guest hut at the monastery, there is something in me that can’t stand conventional living places. I could when I had to for the family, but now....

Mostly I have been trying to see how to get a balance between prayer and working on ministries here and speaking in the wider world. I did a few EWTN shows on Taming the Lion Within, and as a result I am flooded with requests for talks near and far. On the one hand I am delighted to be wanted and on the other less and less able to handle the proliferation of details surrounding each speaking engagement which usually include either visits of local people at the place I go to who know me and want to see me and also trips to the family when these can be piggy-backed.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seem very, very near all day and night but in a different way than when I was at the monastery where spirituality was much more intense. On the other hand, I feel more comfortable as an ardent lay woman than as a highly deficient contemplative.

I am meeting the Bishop to see about becoming a consecrated widow. This feels just right at this point. Also, since consecrated widows are not allowed to wear a habit I am veering toward the blue denim outfits lots of the women here like to wear with a suit and blouse for talks.

I had been praying for the gift of counsel. It turns out that God does give it me when it comes to anger problems where I feel highly competent because of years of Recovery, Inc. and the synthesis in Taming the Lion Within.

December 2, 2004

I had a lovely experience just now. I go to the jail for Legion of Mary to minister to the women there. Today I went to the courthouse to pray for one of the women we visit in the jail whose case was coming up.

I left the key running in the car, but carefully locked it with the button in the window ledge. When I came out I realized I didn't have the key in my purse but congratulated myself on the spare in the magnet box under the bumper. Alas, that key didn't work. I walked over to Conoco. Seeing the huge cross I wear around me neck, the man asked me if I knew the Mahoney's who he thought were the most Christian family he'd ever seen. They live at Star of the Sea. As a result of this tie in, he asked a cop friend to open my car so I wouldn't have to pay the locksmith! Hurrah!

Dec. 5, 2004 About my daughter Carla's 5th high risk baby conceived on Martin's birthday.

Last One

O little childilah

conceived late fall

when the branches

of the trees

had already said goodbye

to their leaves

How have you,

but a month old,

made yourself

so fiercely loved
that large older ones
pledge their lives for yours?

and over-the-hill
grandparents,
biting their lips
as they face
the dark night
laugh again

will we see you here
dear babe
or only in eternity?

Dec. 29, 2004

Great line in Michael O'Brien's *Strangers and Sojourners*: "I began to find it more important to forgive my enemy on the day I found out that I am my enemy."

February 1, 2005

Dearest Carla (my daughter)

(Concerning a glitch I had over a business deal) I recall Martin, (my husband), saying with regret that in her old age his mother had lost her fangs!

Maybe it will pass, could be a week of a bad cold and sore throat after 3 weeks out of town, but I am so depleted that I just feel I have no fight left in me for ANYTHING!

At the moment my only concern is to go to Mass and live somewhere where it is warm in winter and cool in summer (i.e. adequate heat and A/C.) So far my little condo is pretty good for this.

What is going good is Taming the Lion on which I make no profit but I get lots of hits on the web from another round of TV programs based on the one I did at Steubenville with celebrity theologians and priests. It showed today and I already am getting e-mails and a huge old codger ran into me at the Catholic coffee shop and shook my hand with pleasure because he's just seen me on EWTN. It felt very nice.

Love, Mom

Feb. 17, 2005

Realization – because of charismatic renewal with its emphasis on witnessing about Jesus, I can talk to Bible belt gals in prison – sing Amazing Grace and witness from the heart better.

February 23, 2005

"Life has an eloquence greater than any sermon." - Kierkegaard

The Holy Spirit seems to say: "I want you to let Sr. Judith teach you how to be compassionate -not just to minds, but to bodies in old age who are undergoing my Passion as a purification - now all bravado has to go and they have to become weak and in need only of my mercy. Will you be My merciful hands? If you bring compassionate love to those in most need - body and soul, will I not send you just such compassionate friends in your time of gradual bodily demolition?"

March 1, 2005

(Letter to a friend who spoke of missing Mass because of despair.)

I was praying for you and this thought came to mind, hopefully from the Holy Spirit:

It is not wrong or evil or unspiritual to say to God "I am in such mental, physical, emotional, spiritual pain, that I wish I was dead. Help me now." I have prayed that way on several occasions. I lie down on the floor and beg Him to help me any way He wants.

It is not wrong to say I wish I had a husband, a career, a way out of debt, or I wish my father and others in my family showed me more deep healing love.

What is wrong is to say - This is what I need God and you deliver or I'll go on strike by missing Sunday or Holy Day Masses - of course it's okay if you are utterly exhausted from your pain.

I love you and pray for you and that is REAL EVEN IF YOU ARE TOO MUDDLED FOR NOW TO FEEL IT.

March 1, 2005

Dear Ronda:

(her answer to the above letter)

I have not gone on strike. What's more, it's quite clear to me that I am full of pride and arrogance and really am rotten interiorly - hateful, angry etc. I simply don't know, and really struggle with whether I actually have faith at all. It is all quite unreal to me. I do go to Mass , but it feels empty and meaningless. I simply go through motions, but really am not sure if I believe at all.

Thank you for your prayers.

Dear friend, (answer by me to above reply of my friend)

Of course we feel hateful when we are angry. I think the anger has been long bottled up and it is scaring you when it comes out.

I think you are in transition on this to see that people don't fall over dead if you challenge them as in "Ronda, you're not listening."

Neither will God fall over dead if you tell him in prayer and at Mass that you feel awful and you feel as if you got a raw deal in life, etc. etc., but you hang in because you do think He is your only hope even if you are full of doubt.

March 3, 2005 from Anne (locutionary of Direction for Our Times – if you read this and like the way she writes in her own voice and in later citations from Jesus, Mary and the saints, go to www.directionforourtimes.com)

“I feel my mission is to persuade people to find their path and begin the ascent. How on earth can we make this palatable to souls who do not want to suffer, do not want to sacrifice, and do not want to make changes in their worldly habits.

“Well first of all and most importantly, we have to show joy. These people are not stupid. If we are miserable nobody will want to join our ranks. And if we are not joyful, we should be.

“Secondly we need to set an example of climbing. If we are standing still on our own path, looking around and pointing at all the others who are not on their paths, we discourage people from finding their little lane up the mountain. We who stand still on the path take

all of our credit from simply finding the path. Even a demon knows how to locate the path. The holiness comes from the ascent.

“Next, we need to illustrate to souls what is at the top of our little lanes. Is it worldly acclaim? A clear credit card account? A 2005 model car? A big house in a nice neighbourhood? None of these things are at the top of the mountain. Only Jesus is there.

“Why is He to be desired? Well, He is the best therapist, the best friend, the best doctor, and the best accountant all rolled into one. He is omniscient, He has prepared your place for eternity and He is the only one with directions on how to get there. Souls must stop asking all of these other, equally directionless people for illumination when only Christ has the information they seek.

“I do not want to wade into the world and tell people that the road to heaven is steep and harsh. This message is too grim and dreadfully inaccurate. I will say this. The road to heaven has been marked out for you. You may view it from where you are standing and feel fearful as it looks difficult. Here is what you do not know. When you get to the foot of your little lane, the one personally labelled with your name, you will find Jesus there, waiting patiently, with total love and acceptance in His eyes. He is clean and clear, like beautiful mountain stream water. All is Light and Truth and Joy with Jesus. He will take your hand and up you will go, like the roller coaster car as the chains grab it and pull it, high, higher, and higher. You will quickly get so high that you will abandon your hold on your destiny and simply enjoy the view, allowing Christ to take you.

“Now, with regard to the steep drop that comes after you feel you have reached the top, it is only an illusion. You feel a sense of fear in your companionship with Christ at times, but it is only when you look straight down, forgetting that the car is underneath and the loving arm of the guardrail is safely holding you in. My advice to souls is to continue to enjoy the view, despite the down turns where you feel the wind on your face and the fear in your stomach. Jesus has you. You are really still on your little path, and the next ascent will come swiftly. The only difference in a worldly roller coaster and the heavenly mountain is that you end at the top with Jesus, not the bottom.”

March 4, 2005

Night of March 6, 2005

Sudden words in my head, "I am looking for the hands of the one who will bury me."

(Many years after when I signed a funeral arrangement with an undertaker who was also a parishioner in the same Church as mine, I laughingly looked at her hands and said "I like looking at the hands that will bury me.")

March 7, 2005

Went to confession about envy of a beautiful woman who lives in our parish. I realized that even though I choose to be counter-cultural and not wear rich clothing and make up I could still be envious of those who do.

I am thinking of the meaning of that peculiar curse word, "mother-fucker." I have often wondered at it. Of course Freud must have loved it as exemplifying his theory, but in a related sense, is part of male sex the urge to re-enter to woman-womb and be released from the tensions of adulthood. In a book by an Indian writer called Red Earth and Pouring Rain by Vikram Chandra, right after a young lad insults another boy by calling him a mother-fucker, a prostitute claims that sex unites and makes castes equal "In love our hearts have mingled like red earth and pouring rain."

The insult symbolizes the taboo? Because God sets up sexual energy as a way to cross into new bonding with new families and children coming from that attraction, rather than all huddled and incestuous and ingrown?

Draft article March 14, 2005

Linguistic Cleansing

When you think of sins of thought, WORD, and deed, probably under the title "word" you are confessing curses, calumny, detraction, or harsh judgments.

But there is a need of purification in our words that does not involve sin per se but would also make us better Christians.

Examples:

Use of the words "all," "we," "some". I have an opinion about something but I am in a minority. By enunciating the opinion with the word "we," or "all," instead of "I" or "some" people, we are pridefully bolstering our side.

Use of demeaning descriptions such as bums vs. street people. It may seem artificial at first to change a common word to what could seem a euphemism, but it is also a delicate form of charity to avoid a word associated with disdain.

Not using words that are affectionate as a means of withholding love, such as never rarely affirming others when they deserve praise.

March 15, 2005

I wanted to have a special prayer time before leaving for NYC so Sr. Judith gave me a Scripture:

"Cast your cares on Him." (Letter of Peter)

Jesus seemed to say, "You know, Ronda, you need never be anxious again, if you choose to trust in Me."

Dear Sr. Judith,

I was feeling pretty carefree and then 2 hours later came this painful but healing insight about the clothing issue (that is my concern about what I should wear as I move toward becoming a consecrated widow)

After Martin died, I put on lipstick and wore, for me, gorgeous hippie style colorful outfits and flirted with every single Catholic man I could find and after 12 of them rejected me I decided I wanted to wear no make-up, and only blue simple garments and just live for Jesus.

I thought that Jesus might be mad being chosen last, sour grapes, etc., but He seemed to tell me He didn't mind at all, and He scooped me up into His embrace and He still does, but since I associate the being scooped up with the blue, grey, tan dresses, it still looms as an issue. In fact, the more loved by Him I feel the more I long for blue, charcoal and tan. Eh?

This memory came up:

When we (me and my twin sister) were about thirteen we first put on make up and wore tight clothes. Since our parents had divorced, or rather separated as they never were married except common law, our father used to pick us up on Sundays to take us to the movies, etc.

The first time I wore lipstick and a tight sweater to this Sunday meeting my father called me a slut and made me go home and wipe off the lipstick and change into something more asexual.

Now then, when I met Dietrich Von Hildebrand, the great philosopher and my new teacher, when I was 21, I was wearing lipstick and attractive clothing. None of the close-in members of the Von H set wore lipstick. Once there was a Christmas party. I was planning to wear a bright red dress kind of crepe with some back showing. Shortly before the party

my godmother told me it was not modest to wear at a party where there might be priest guests and suggested I should not wear it.

So, of course, I identify being a beloved Catholic woman with not wearing make up or red.

March 15, 2005

Got blue dye to change the color of my bright red A-line dress and it came out plum! Nice compromise.

Diana, my daughter who lives in the LA area, sent a box of NY Jewish food – lox, bagels, herrings, sturgeon, white fish. We gobbled it down – I commended her for being so lavish.

Tears listening unexpectedly to hearing the Kol Nidre on the radio (cello piece played at Jewish funerals that my son, Charles, who committed suicide played in concert). I called, my daughter Carla, asking “why did he do it?” She says she thinks we should credit him with free will and look at his suicide letter. (See En Route to Eternity, the chapter, ‘Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee’ where he explains that he doesn’t want to be an adult.

March 22, 2005 – My sister Carla wrote about all this:

Dear Ronda,

Whew. This is a brief message of love to say I've read it (my letter about the teen experience with our father and make up and sexy clothing). Yes I do remember the day, and about the Hildebrand set. You looked so beautiful in the dress Diana gave you - I believe it is a mauve color. It has flowing lines. I was fascinated Isn't there a good balance between 'slut' red and drab gray or tan or blue? Dad definitely had problems torn between his mother and father's different ethos. (My father's Dad was a Don Juan Hispanic married to a puritanic Christian woman). But kids do need guidance - too bad though such kind of guidance leaves such wounds. I believe I got away from Dad's wrath because of my thinness. But now, be a beautiful bride of Christ. Bright clothes do not have to be provocative - just let them say, I'm for life! love, Carla

My reply:

Dear Carla,

Thanks for writing in your busiest week. I had a funny answer right away. I bought dark blue dye to dye the bright red dress. It came out a lovely plum color.

Your affirmation means a lot to me. I am going to just go to the thrift shops and look for dresses that I like. The purple one, unfortunately, had tassles which got all grungy. So I cut them off, but it doesn't look that good any more for talks. So I will buy a few more.

I was part of a conference on Jews and the Church in NYC. NYC is like hell! The hotel was on 45th Street - those gigantic flashing signs and hordes of people - 1/2 hour to go 8 blocks in the rain in a taxi, garbage all over the streets.

The conference went well but I was delighted to get out of there.

Non-heated Church basement for the talks 60 degrees inside - hotel like our apartment years back with clanging radiators, peeling paint, walk down 10 flights because of a broken elevator all for \$144 per night! Plus painful bleeding hemorrhoids! However 180 people mostly over 60 sat for 12 hours in the cold basement listening to us! And the wonderful woman who sponsored the conference, Nona Aguilar, gave me a big stipend, more than agreed on, to compensate me a little.

I am making a vow that unless conditions improve drastically I will stop out of town talks after April 2007 at 70 years old. Want to make a pact?

Love and prayers, Ronda

From Nona, the conference organizer:

Dear Ronda,

Thank you so much for your contribution at the "Jews and the Church" conference. I heard from someone who is a friend of Alice Von Hildebrand's who told me that she came to the conference unwillingly (only because of her debt to the Von Hildebrand's) She was considerably more unhappy after she arrived. She

reports that she settled down to listen in what could only be described as THE WORST FRAME OF MIND. But before dinner on Saturday, you turned her around completely. Yes, she learned a lot from Roy and from Father Koterski, but you were -- are! -- the star in her book. She had long heard of you from AvH, but never met you. She thought you were wonderful, funny, and utterly terrific. She quoted you extensively, in fact. She concluded by telling me that yesterday, for the first time in her life, she knelt and prayed for the conversion of the Jews. "And I will pray for that intention from now on!"

Fondly, --Nona

Dearest Nona,

By the time I landed in my bed last night after a whole day of hemorrhoids and nausea on the plane, I actually thought I was going to die, no hyperbole. And now this!

Maybe to win the conversion of the stubborn Jews it takes just this much redemptive suffering! Tears of joy, Ronda

March 24, 2005

While praying the Mercy Chaplet today at 3 PM for Terri Schiavo I felt an urge to put down some thoughts from the standpoint of a former atheist though of Jewish background.

Cardinal Newman once wrote that it would not be licit to commit one venial sin even if the consequence would be the elimination of all the suffering in the world. Only a person who believes in eternal happiness could write such a sentence.

Nothing is more common to atheists than the view that the worst evil is suffering and that it is to be eliminated at any cost to others that is legal.

The only reason an atheist might think that some rights are inalienable is because in his/her mind the violation of rights such as the right to liberty would involve greater sufferings in the long run such as a hugely greater amount of slavery.

Ergo, if in the perpetrators mind the suffering of a husband in having a bed-ridden wife where she cannot help monetarily or in other tangible ways, would easily seem to outweigh 14 days of starvation. The sufferings of a baby in the womb from a saline abortion would be much less than the suffering of 24/7 care of a baby. According to most atheists, only because some people love their babies would that sacrifice of care-taking of babies be worth it.

The reason we don't think this way is because we believe that doing evil is worse than suffering. Someone could believe this is true even as an atheist just on the basis of the intrinsic negativity of evil, but it is unlikely. Plato tried to prove this in the Republic, namely that irrespective of any divine perspective to do an injustice is much worse than being a victim of an injustice. Why? Because it hurts the soul to do evil and the soul is more important than the body. But most atheists don't believe there is such a thing as a soul!

Most religious people can stand to take suffering rather than do evil because we believe that in heaven we will be blissfully happy.

Accordingly, if we really want to see an end of the horrors of anti-life sins in our times, we need to pray and pray and pray for the deep conversion of sinners and also against our own, perhaps, smaller sins of choosing evil rather than sacrifice.

The smallest avoidable sacrifice that we undertake out of love for God and neighbor is a witness that sacrifice is better than selfish choices to avoid suffering - if only letting someone get ahead of us on the freeway without bad-mouthing them, or getting ahead of us on the supermarket line!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, save souls!

March 25, 2005

There is a man here, Marty Barrack, who likes to say - "if anything I do annoys or puzzles you, don't waste more than 60 seconds before talking it over with me." Well, at first I didn't believe him but I have tried a few times and it worked out very well. He actually is humble enough to hear about glitches and not get so bent out of shape that others would never try again.

A friend of mine wrote this about Terri Schiavo:

“When the Law of man, which by nature is at the service of Life, retracts its plighted troth to Life and proudly vows allegiance to a new master whose name is Death, the Law, by Death's courtly sorcery, is transmogrified into a savage idol. Like all false gods, it demands of its worshipers human sacrifice. Terri Schiavo will not be its only victim any more than the first of the unborn to be lawfully aborted has slaked the appetite of Moloch for human flesh. In her graven images, Justice is depicted as being blind. Blind indeed has she become. There is One who can heal her blindness. He offers His Light to her darkness, but she tightens that black rag around her eyes to keep His muddy spit from getting on her painted lids, which flutter in coquettish anticipation of Death's sweet kiss.”

March 27, 2005 (A poem I wrote about each of my daughter's pregnancies)

YOUR FIFTH,

Our Fifth

No more!

I can't!

No more!

I can't!

Only the

290

daring

take

risks!

The first

your

breakthrough

The second

your

praise

of

motherhood

in the valley

of the

shadow

of death

The third

your

triumphant

love

of

the

surprise

of personhood

The fourth

fear

hope

delight!

The fifth?

fruit

of

new love

And we

husbands,

brothers,

grandmas,

grandpas,

aunts,

uncles,

get to

lick

the

cubs!

Easter Sunday, March 28, 2005

Letter to grandsons age 9 and 5

Dear Maxie and Zacko,

Ever wonder why we celebrate holidays at all? The word "holiday" comes from "holy day". Ask your Mom what "holy" means. Well, why do we celebrate birthdays? It happened so long ago, your birth. You don't exactly get re-born on your birthday, do you? But, in celebrating your birthday, we are remembering the day you were born, and helping you see how unique and wonderful we think you are.

Same with holy days. We are celebrating a great event. Easter we are celebrating how that Jesus who died such a painful death on the Cross, rose from the tomb to go up to heaven. If you are not sure what this was all about, ask Nicholas or Alexander to put on the Resurrection scene from the movie Jesus of Nazareth.

March 28, 2005

Fr. Define, (our wonderful Latin Mass, Society of St. Peter priest here in Arkansas) quoted Pope Gregory saying that our response to the events of Easter is unrestrained joy. (This parish has a combination of usual parish Catholics, charismatics, and Latin Mass people.)

I looked around. "Unrestrained joy?" The congregation appeared to be so grim. Of course they had joy inside, but certainly not unrestrained.

I am thinking of infusing this topic into the Readiness to Change talk (out of Von Hildebrand's book Transformation in Christ, mentioning how far from being ready to change most of us are. Most of us hate change, become very defensive at the idea of it, and dig in totally against the slightest criticism. I could use as an example how readily Latin Mass people would show unrestrained joy at Easter Mass and by contrast how many charismatics find it unbearable to listen to 1 1/2 hours of Latin. If asked to change we would resist greatly. Happily I, personally, am straddling enjoying both the English Mass and the Latin Mass, but in other areas, of course.....I am just as reluctant to change.

The goal would be not that all Latin Mass people would dance on Easter Sunday or charismatics go to the Latin Mass but that we would respect each other's freedom of choice.

I recently read a saint story about a Norbertine Saint who lived in the 12th century -- during the Crusades. Life was extremely depressing in those days and the saint story was filled with one depressing episode after another (about death, the plague, poverty, fear, doubt, etc). It was an inspiring saint story about faith in the midst of hopelessness.

But I try to think of such depressing stories as more reason to "count our blessings."

April 2, 2005

The dying Pope. My daughter Diana, not a practicing Catholic again yet, responded this way to a report that the Pope told his aides "Don't weep. I am happy. Pray with joy.":

Sister Judith wrote this lovely, loving poem:

THOU ART PETER

Peter hangs between earth and heaven

as his children pray for his soul -

God is calling him home.

Our father, our brother,

for he is Peter and servant

of the servants of God.

Our hearts cry our eyes weep,

we are losing our moorings

for he is Peter

The world mourns,

even the most hardened

is moved - for he is Peter.

Heads of states, heads of

nations, all recognize

this man is Peter.

Now he returns to the
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
from whence he came.

For he is Peter.

Sister Judith

From Carla my daughter in New Hampshire also not a practicing Catholic again yet:

Re: John Paul II's end of life-- priest, sportsman, poet, MAN

I shall miss a great friend, one who wooed me with that extraordinary visage when I was even further from the apses and naves than I am today. This pope is an astonishing figure. He will ALWAYS be alive, a galloping amazement, a tall white column, or just a man with a face borrowed from some eternal guidebook labeled "this is how they look when they are real."

(then Carla about this Quote from John Paul II from his death bed, some think addressed to the youth in the Square, others think addressed to Jesus and Mary):

“I have looked for you. Now you have come to me. And I thank you.”

I think this sentence may not have been directed at the youths at all. As a statement uttered from a deathbed, can one imagine anything more joyous? No matter in whom I believe at the point of my own death, I suppose I would give my left arm now if I could be sure of saying the same.

Goodbye, shepherd. I had looked for you, oh, in many ways. I will miss seeing your crook on the mountains.”

April 2, 2005

Amidst tears of joy that dear John Paul II is having a hand in drawing my daughters back to the Church, I thought “I will honor him by working for the Church until I drop dead” vs. always thinking if it is too physically hard to travel, etc. then I will stop , certainly by age 70!”

On quite another subject:

Letter to my sister Carla

I think you have always been very realistic and stoic about physical pain and I have always found it unbearable - as in dental pain, etc. I wonder why? Am I more sensitive to it, or just in general much more self-protective? Alas!

April 2, 2005

Pope Left a Message for Divine Mercy Sunday (Read by Archbishop Sandri in St. Peter's Square)

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 3, 2005 (Zenit.org).- To the surprise of the faithful attending the Mass for John Paul II's eternal rest, a Vatican official read a message the Pope had prepared for Divine Mercy Sunday.

"To humanity, which at times seems to be lost and dominated by the power of evil, egoism and fear, the risen Lord offers as a gift his love that forgives, reconciles and reopens the spirit to hope. It is love that converts hearts and gives peace. How much need the world has to understand and accept Divine Mercy!"

April 4, 2005

Little article for godspy (a web Catholic magazine. They didn't publish it even though they asked me for it):

Most of us could write a long article about everything that we loved about John Paul II's impact on our lives. As a philosopher, I had a special joy in teaching his thought. Married to a playwright with daughters who are poets, these facets of St. John Paul the Great also delighted me.

The line from his poetry I quote the most often comes from his rock quarry labors as a young man:

"When horror and hope are equally balanced in my soul, no one will accuse me of simplicity."

When my son committed suicide (RIP) I thought - how can I teach or give speeches? If I couldn't save my son, who could I help? Instead, what I found is that surviving the horror of the suicide of a child gave me experiential credentials for all those I taught who had suffered in excruciating ways. They would not "accuse me of simplicity!"

John Paul II was an active saint with a strong contemplative side - a third order Carmelite priest. He wrote his doctoral thesis on faith in John of the Cross. One of his themes is this: we long for and cherish mystical experiences. But no human experience can encompass the infinite God. This is why faith is even more important. Supernatural faith is a gift from God that reaches the infinite eternal God.

Interesting talk with a woman philosophy prof. at Lyons College, Dr. Martha Beck who writes about Plato's dialogues. She wondered how I wrote so much. I replied:

"Well, you are younger than I and still have time. My guess is that you are trying to write perfect insights perfectly, like Plato did, whereas I write, like Kierkegaard, as a desperate person conveying saving insights to other desperate readers!"

April 10, 2005

Quotes from Pope from the Ghetto by Gertrud Von Le Fort:

"Justice exists only in hell; in heaven there is grace, and on earth there is the cross. But the church is here, that she may bless those who bear this cross."

"He whose love for Christ is not yet perfect, is loved so much the more perfectly by Christ."

"It is better for a person to die of the truth which the Lord has created, than that he should continue to live on the illusions he creates for himself."

April 11, 2005

Sisters of the Cross

Dear Sister Cecilia,

Here is the preface (to a new book by Venerable Conchita of Mexico, the grandmother 20th century saint who founded 5 different orders/groups in the Church and probably will be soon canonized).

"When you listen to a beautiful love song, do you examine each word? And if some lyrics manifest a pathos or a joy that goes beyond your own, do you turn down the volume, not to hear the melody? I doubt it.

For those of us nowhere near the height or depth of Venerable Conchita's union with Jesus, there may be a moment when listening to her love song that we want to close the book because the pathos and joy of it is above and deeper than our own level. We find that we can't drop it. Why? Because it is too beautiful.

When reading Holy Hours, I seemed to hear my Jesus tell me not to give up because my prayer is so inferior to Conchita's, but rather to sing her song for now, only in a "lower

key.” For example, when Conchita asks Jesus for more and more sufferings, I could just ask for the grace not to make such a fuss over the sufferings that come along unbidden.

Meditative reading of Holy Hours speaks to a place in our hearts we don’t always want to go. Why? Perhaps because there is a part of us that does not want to be too intimate with Jesus. “Love is not loved” Saint Mary Magdalene dei Pazzi used to proclaim

Conchita’s spirituality is precisely a proof of the depth we all could go in experiencing the love of Jesus were we to surrender totally.

Don’t we not want, just as Conchita did, “to kiss those pale and mute lips, which spoke only tenderness and breathed only charity...”? (Holy Hour, 3)

Don’t we want, just as Conchita did, “to try to think inside of Jesus, not just live, but think with His very thoughts, so saintly, so immaculate, and as transparent as the sky without clouds...just and non-judgmental...”? (Holy Hour 7)

Don’t we want, just as Conchita did, “to perform our works in a supernatural manner...(rather than) routinely, thus, lazily, without stirring up fervor, scattered and without spirit.”? (Holy Hour 13)

Don’t we want, just as Conchita did, “to make our lives a tapestry of acts of love that may serve as both wrapping and life for all our virtues.”? (Holy Hour 14)

Don’t we want, just as Conchita did, “to hide in the depth of the rock, to be cured and become happy.”? (Holy Hour 17)

Don’t we want, just as Conchita did, “to cheer up, and be brave!”? (Holy Hour 21)

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!

Now, as you begin to join the heart of Venerable Conchita in her Holy Hour prayers, ask the Holy Spirit to make you at least long to long for the transforming union that was hers.

I had such an unexpected experience this evening. A woman friend wanted me very much to go to her concert in Batesville. There wasn't enough room in her husband Buddy's car and she had to go early to rehearse, so she said I should hitch a ride with a friend of hers, a widower. My letter to her tells the story. I think it is because of the green dress vs. my usual dull rags.

Dear Anne,

Maybe you're a Catholic yentah (matchmaker)? This Paul man, who obligingly drove me to the concert, who, by the way, is 90 years old, on the way back described it as his first

date since becoming a widower 7 months ago! When I told him that it was not a date and that I was trying to be a consecrated widow, he replied that he had decided when his wife died not to remarry. But then as I was getting out of the car at the Church he remarked, while inviting me to visit him, that even though he was 90 he still could do a lot, such as still drive very well, and concluded with "well, now you have a chance for a boyfriend!"

He seemed to me to be a dear fellow, full of humor and New Yorkese ways, but he didn't seem to get it or was that just his way of being friendly?

He is probably more lonely than he divulges and just wants to have more feminine friends?

April 30, 2005

Dear friends,

Not sure yet but I have been invited to apply for a co-host job on a Catholic radio station (also on the web) for a Catholic Woman to Woman show. It would be a paid job and I could do it out of my house so I could phase out all travel except to family and friends and reach potentially 26,000,000 people a day! It is a paid job so I could pay someone to do all my errands, etc., maybe even eat a rack of lamb from time to time.

I would become the Dr. Laura, Dr. Ruth of the Catholic Church - Dr. Ronda!

Feeling over excited I asked Jesus about it and He seemed to say:

"Well, I have stuffed you with wisdom, why not let it all out?" Also that He has prepared me for this role since I have the philosophical and spiritual wisdom plus the popular approach plus the gift of gab plus all the books on woman's issues.

If it's not God's will it will crash quickly, I hope.

(As it happened, they never got back to me because the person in charge decided not to have a woman to woman show at all! I felt deflated, especially having sent the above letter to all my friends and acquaintances. Since I had shortly before down a program for EWTN which reaches 50 million, Jesus seemed to joke with me: "So 50 million isn't enough for you, you need 26 million more?"

(Now reading this in 2013 I am wondering. Was the first seeming affirmation about this from Jesus mean that it was surely not Jesus since it didn't come out as expected? I am inclined to think that with all the speaking on radio and TV I did after that project fell through He just wanted to encourage me to speak vs. trying to be a pseudo-contemplative.)

May 1, 2005

Dear friends,

Even though we are not supposed to discuss politics on the Association of Hebrew Catholic discussion board, there is a related philosophical issue with regard to attitudes toward Israel.

Just on an ethnic level, people who live in a country have a right to love it and want to protect it. This does not mean they should defend it in the sense of "my country right or wrong," since universal just war theory is binding on Catholics, still one can't say that a person of Jewish ancestry whether atheistic or orthodox or anything in between doesn't have a right to hope that the land of ones people would survive just as US Irish Americans want Ireland to survive.

For instance, Germans fought for their Fatherland even if they were anti-Nazi just as we would fight for the US in spite of our horrible abortion laws!

May 1, 2005

(Message of Jesus, alleged dictated to Anne – Direction for Our Times:

Be at peace, dear children of heaven. There is no reason for anything but a peaceful countenance. I am working in your soul if you are allowing Me to do so and you will come closer and closer to Me. You see that I am calling you to do this. I want you to behave like Me and even to think like Me. You will be gentle and kind to those you meet in your day and they will then consider what it is that makes you different. And there is a contrast between those following Me, and those following the world. The closer you come to Me, the greater the contrast. I would like to see a multitude of souls drawing closer to Me. You can help with this project because you represent Me. I am calling everyone and I use each of you to do this. So be My voice in your world and cry out to your brothers and sisters. Tell them of My love for them and tell them of My wish to draw them closer to Me. If you allow Me to work through you, I will do so. If you practice loving all souls and being merciful to all souls, soon you will be speaking My name to them. You understand that if you are not merciful and kind, it will not matter what you say because souls will be repelled. It is only through your love, inspired by Me, that they are moved. So be gentle as I am gentle and souls will be drawn back into the safe pasture of My Sacred Heart.

May 3, 2005

Dear Carla (when she was pregnant with her 5th child).

In a speech Pope Benedict gave in 2002 about the nature of the beautiful he contrasts the Greek Adonis type notion with the Christian notion in which the disfigured Christ on the cross is the most beautiful because it is the great demonstration of love.

This paragraph made me think of beautiful non-pregnant Carla and beautiful pregnant Carla so I thought you might like it:

"In the face of the Shroud of Turin so disfigured there appears the genuine, extreme beauty: the beauty of love that goes "to the very end."

May 8, 2005 (letter from my daughter, Diana)

Happy Mother's Day!

Thank you for being a tiger when we were little, and letting us ride you and brush your hair and flying us in the air. Thank you for loving every scribble and jot of paint and words I ever created, and instilling in me the knowledge that I was special and valuable.

Thank you for showing me (by following your model) how to be passionate about what you do, and try hard even when it's difficult to do your best. Thank you for suffering with such enormous dignity that it's difficult to know you're in pain.

Thank you for believing so much that faith flies like white heat from your fingers. Thank you for doubting so little, even when tested like Job.

Thank you for sharing your warmth and generosity. Nobody I ever knew gives so much and so easily. Thank you for your joy in small things like a lovely beach and your marvelous gratitude for small gifts.

Thank you for letting me ride (figuratively) on your tiger back as you age, marveling at your courage and strength. I pray that I can be the extraordinary woman you are at your age.

I love you, Mommy.

Diana

Dearest Daughter,

I love you so much. It is nice to think that you think of me that way, even if it is not true. You paint me strong colors and I feel weak and shaky a lot. Is it because I really am

stronger than I think, or because you want me to be strong and think that if you tell me I am strong I will be stronger? If the latter, you are probably right.

Perhaps I suffer big things with dignity and humor but I am a captious little foot stamping dwarf about every day frustrations which you deal with much more humor and grace.

I think of myself as tight and miserly even if having bouts of generosity and you as easily generous.

If I would paint a portrait of you I would have strands of all the colors of the rainbow moving from the circumference of the edges of the picture into a close swirl that will tighten up to become your final personality, something so strong and focused.

Love, Mom

From: Diana

Huh, I think that the weakshakiness is the core of strength, paradoxically. Know what I mean? It's the denial that creates the black stuff. And we're all on our way to where.

I'm having fun with my new relationship with Mary Magdalene. (She prayed to St. Mary Magdalene for a special favor) I had such a beautiful day yesterday, lobster on the beach/white satin lingerie and er...fun moments with my husband, where after one feels no guilt/a private courtyard and so much love it hurt...picture Pete dancing around scattering rose petals and telling me I was the most beautiful vision he ever saw! I never asked for much before, and God is giving it to me in spades since I asked. I feel beloved.

Funnily, I picture you the same way (the rainbow thing) but muted a bit because you are so afraid to grab life with both hands and just lap it up. So is Jen, I fear. Generations skip.

I love you!

May 12, 2005

From a letter written to a "recovering homosexual," from one who ministers to Christian homosexuals trying to become chaste:

"...This whole issue of "remembering" the "good" times. There is no mistake about it, there were some good times. In fact, many of those "good times" look a whole lot better than the moment or situation we are in right now. To say otherwise would be "double speak" and the ultimate denial.

"Fact is, not everything we experienced in our bondage days was totally awful. I can remember the good times, just like anyone else can.

“So could the children of Israel when they were dusty, dry and hungry in the wilderness! We imagine that the bondage of Israel must have been nothing more than brutality and torture. Thank you Cecil B. De Mille for that!

“In fact, the Israelites owned property, in Goshen. They also had really nice vegetable gardens...hence the longing for garlic and melons, when all they had to eat in the desert was "this manna". They probably had some good fishing days in Egypt also.

“And yet, the Scripture clearly says that God heard their cries and moans for deliverance. No matter how nice the fishing might have been, or how plenteous the produce, Israel knew that they were called to be free men, not slaves. Servants yes (of God), but not slaves (of man).

“Deliverance came....miraculously. Through the Red Sea Israel passed. Freedom! Next God led them to some very bitter waters. YUK! Who could drink THAT??? Moses throws some charcoal in it and it's made sweet. Next, it was just a short 7 mile walk to the most beautiful Oasis you can imagine. This Oasis had 7 Springs! Ever been to Mammoth Springs? Imagine 7 of those. WOW. And the water was not only plenteous, but sweet too!

“Now why in the world didn't God just take Israel from the Red Sea and lead them directly to the Oasis?

“Next stop, a huge rock! Not a drop of water in sight. Man did the people complain about that! "Better to be in bondage in Egypt", they said, "than to be brought to this wilderness to die!" Moses strikes the rock and, VIOLA!, water comes out! Paul tells us that that rock was Christ!

"Oh, it was SO much better in the old days! We had garlic! We had melons! We had homes and a favorite fishing spot! This freedom thing is too much work, and the rations leave a whole lot to be desired too! We should never have left Egypt in the first place. Woe is us!!! We wanna go back!"

“Sound familiar?

“So, why didn't God just lead Israel to a cleft rock with a spigot in it in]the first place?

“The answer to both these questions is the same.

“They never knew the character of the Father! God had to teach them His character. I think this one object lesson went something like this.

"Trust Me. Bondage may appear sweet. Freedom may "appear" bitter.

"Only the Power of your Father can make this freedom sweet. Once sweetened, you WILL be nourished and saved by it."

"Never think that today is "it". Times of beautiful refreshment await...just a few miles down the road...just over the next sand dune."

"Nothing, not even solid rock, can prevent your Father from meeting you, and showing Himself strong on your behalf."

"Although it might seem like a wilderness that you're in, remember that it is your Father Who has brought you to it. Can it get any better than that?"

Oh yeah, one more thing. "You can't drink and complain at the same time! Do you wanna gripe all day? or start drinkin'?"

"I had a very deep and long lasting relationship. It was so beautiful that it almost killed me! Talk about co-dependency! If I'm honest, I can see that the relationship was sick. No matter how "good" the "good times" seem to have been. A slave is still a slave, no matter how good the fishing or abundant the produce.

Anyway, this is what I have learned about remembering the "good times".

June 10, 2005

Dear Sister Judith, (concerning the question of what I should do to foster a movement for consecrated widows in the Church)

I prayed about this during the night and this morning. I got back a mixed message, as it were.

- To think of *myself* as a woman of Jesus, a widow dedicated to the Lord -

June 15, 2005

***Kiss from the Cross: A Saint for Every Kind of Suffering* is going out of print. It seems like the end of an era to me. It sold some 15,000 copies over its 15 or so years of existence. May God bless all who read it and took hope. Many thought it my best book.**

"The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job)

(Many years later, to my joy, it was published in Korean by means of a priest whose vocation, he claimed, was saved when he read this in the seminary.)

June 16, 2005

I found this note of mine in a file for the book on overcoming rejection I am working on. The note didn't fit the manuscript but I want to save it to ponder it: - it was a propos of Freud saying women want to control men.

I asked myself if I am part of this battle of the sexes for power. If I meet men in authority positions I can't control, do I grow to hate them? I do become anxious, such as dealing with the type of priest who charms women into being willing slave-like helpers? Do I like male students because I can control their wildness and they have to obey me?

June 17, 2005

Dear Anne, (I was asked to write an endorsement for Anne's series of locutions entitled *Direction for Our Times*):

"I started off reading Anne's *Direction for Our Times* in a sceptical frame of mind. The Church's teaching on private revelation is that you don't have to believe any specific alleged account of locutions or visions. It's not like Scripture and Tradition that every Catholic must believe. And, in fact, some alleged messages don't ring true to me at all.

"When I started reading *Direction for Our Times*, I was charmed. First I was delighted with Anne's honesty about her own failings, struggles and doubts. Then I was delighted with the "voice" of Jesus - so loving, compassionate, yet firm and authoritative. Then I was delighted with the way the words attributed to Him touched my own heart.

"Why do we need these messages now? I can't say for everyone, but for many of us old-timers (I'm 68) who have been faithful for decades there is always need for renewal of hope and joy in the Lord. We need to know that He understands how hard it is for us to see all the dissent in our beloved Church. We need to know that He understands how hard we try not to be among the lax and sinful, but how often we fail. We need to know that He forgives us and still honors our attempts to please Him even in the midst of our distractions.

"I love all the Volumes I have been able to read, but Vol. I, with the many dialogues between Anne in her life as a wife and mother, spoke to me especially as a woman in the Church. I read excerpts to a mothers' prayer group in a parish. They were so moved. After my talk, within 15 minutes the volumes were whisked off the book table by eager hands.

"Private Revelation is not infallible, but what I am sure of is that I am being inspired through these readings to greater trust in the God who is our only hope."

June 21, 2005

Images of the week:

Listening to rap music at a restaurant, I wondered, is this the pop version of operatic recitatif (sp.?)

Wonderful last stanza of an Auden poem about what's wrong with romantic love:

**“Stand, stand at the window
as the tears scald and smart
you shall love your crooked neighbor
with your crooked heart.”**

Thought before getting my upper dentures: After I am de-fanged I should be a less aggressive person!

May 30, 2005

Direction for Our Times, As Given to Anne a Lay Apostle

(This part is about the discernments that were made concerning Anne's apostolate and the writings by authorities. If you are not interested, skip ahead. I am including these endorsements because I do think these messages come from Jesus and they are having a good influence on me, so I will be quoting them frequently throughout.)

In July 2003 Our Lord indicated to Anne that her journal was to be published and disseminated:

Jesus: "These words I bring to you are more Good News. I want you to share these words, as you would share the Good News. If you prepare a great banquet, filled with the finest of foods, you do not sit down alone to sample and enjoy it. You invite friends and loved ones to share and celebrate together. In the same way, I want you to share My words. I will secure the necessary permissions and then you must obey the promptings I place in your heart. All will be seen to. I require only your obedience. I send these words to call humanity back to the Light."

A sister who works closely with Anne delivered these messages to Anne's bishop and asked him to read them. Anne began to meet regularly with her bishop and parish priest.

In August 2003, Jane Gomulka contacted Jim Gilboy, the President of CMJ Marian Publishers and asked him to consider publishing this journal. Jim indicated that he does not publish private revelations. He explained that his ministry stems from the Blessed Mother's messages in Medjugorje, and he did not want to detract from this work. He ended the conversation with "I work for Our Lady so drop them off and I'll look them over." Jim reviewed the messages and met with Anne.

After careful discernment in prayer Jim made a decision to print the series of messages in December 2003. Jim requested and was given permission from Anne's Bishop to print the Volumes.

Rome and the Personal Messages for Pope John Paul II

In January 2004, Anne took a series of 12 personal messages for Pope John Paul II. Per Our Lord's instructions, Anne asked Jim Gilboy to deliver them to the Holy Father. Jim agreed, although he had no viable connection to Rome at this time. Soon though, a series of connections opened a path to Rome. Jim and his wife, a sister who works closely with Anne, and Jane Gomulka met with Andrzej Maria Cardinal Deskur, retired Director of Communications at the Vatican, and long time friend of Pope John Paul II.

On Holy Saturday, April 10, 2004 our group met with Cardinal Deskur and presented to him what is now Volumes One through Four of the series entitled Direction for Our Times as Given to Anne, a Lay Apostle. Jim and the group explained that Anne received 12 personal messages for the Holy Father contained in a sealed envelope. Cardinal Deskur received the group warmly, asked many questions about Anne and her obedience to her bishop, the Church, and the mission. Cardinal Deskur was given the following message which Anne received before we left for Rome:

Jesus: April 5, 2004

"I would ask my servants to present these words as words from heaven. I have a great mission that I wish to accomplish through these messages and I have attached graces that are unimaginable to human minds. Those who read them will understand if they have been called to participate in this heavenly project. I want these words disseminated the world over. I will see that this is accomplished. Ask me for guidance in this matter and guidance will be available to every person who pays attention to My will. Good and holy children of God, understand that these times are not like other times. These messages are not like other messages. I am trying to save many souls at this time. Do not think this can be done in the future. It must be done now. I ask that you treat this work according to my heavenly request for urgency. Your reward will be no small thing, even though I know you serve from love, not personal interest. Feel My graces flow through these words to your soul. Feel my truth as I convey it to you. All is well, as I am directing all, but I need many yes answers at this time."

Cardinal Deskur agreed to take the 12 personal messages to the Holy Father the next day at their brunch on Easter Sunday. Cardinal Deskur kept a copy of the four Volumes as well as Anne's personal journal. Cardinal Deskur directed Jim Gilboy to take a copy of the Volumes to Cardinal Ratzinger's office. Jim left the copies with Cardinal Ratzinger's secretary since the Cardinal was out of the country during our visit.

On Easter Sunday our group was privileged to sit on the same platform as the altar for Easter Sunday Mass. We enjoyed the liturgy celebrated by Pope John Paul II, from the third row behind the priests and altar boys. After Mass, we saw Cardinal Deskur moving toward his van to attend brunch with the Holy Father. The sisters accompanying him were carrying the sealed envelope containing the messages for Pope John Paul II.

The following Wednesday, April 14, 2004 our group had a personal audience with the Holy Father following the general audience.

[Photo Jim and Sister with Pope John Paul II.]

Publishing the Volumes and Disseminating the Message

By the end of May 2004, Jim Gilboy had completed publication of Volumes One through Four and began disseminating them to religious bookstores and the general public.

In September 2004, Archbishop Philip Hannan of New Orleans, Louisiana began reading the Volumes. He was so inspired by these words from heaven that he decided his FOCUS Worldwide Television Network needed to play a role in getting these Volumes distributed quickly. He enlisted the assistance of Sr. Breige McKenna and Fr Kevin Scallon to discern the [content of the] Volumes and make contact with Anne's bishop. After reading the Volumes and speaking with Anne's bishop, Sr Breige was deeply touched. She encouraged Archbishop Hannan to proceed. Archbishop Hannan also spoke with Anne's bishop, met with Anne and filmed a series of interviews with Anne and her team. These programs launched the mission throughout the United States.

In October 2004, two Sisters returned to Rome to deliver the remaining sets of Volumes to Cardinal Ratzinger and Cardinal Deskur. Cardinal Deskur met with the sisters and was given copies of Volumes One through Ten. The following Sunday, October 31, 2004, the sisters were granted a private audience with The Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his papal apartment.

[Photo of Sister with The Holy Father holding Volume Two.]

In October 2004, Volume Six was published.

On October 15, 2004 Anne recorded the last message for Volume Ten. This completed the recording of Direction for Our Times as Given to Anne a Lay Apostle. Our Lord indicated that this body of work, The Volumes was complete.

In December 2004 Volumes Seven, Nine and Ten were published.

Currently Volumes Five and Eight are not in print. Anne's bishop will decide [discern] when these Volumes should be printed.

(Volume Five was only printed in 2012 or 2013).

...On Christmas night, December 25, 2004, our Lord revealed to Anne that she would receive a telephone call asking her to go to Rome. He instructed her to say yes, and that she would be traveling with her husband. In January 2005 Archbishop Philip Hannan called Anne to ask whether she and her husband would travel with him to Rome to meet with Cardinal Deskur. Anne, her husband and the Archbishop meet with Cardinal Deskur. Following the meeting, Archbishop Hannan was taken to Cardinal Ratzinger's Office at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Archbishop Hannan met with the priest responsible for investigation of mystical phenomena. Archbishop Hannan was confirmed in his discernment. He was told to continue His work with this mission.

Jesus to Anne: February 9, 2005

"The Church is aware of this mission of mercy and is assisting through the cooperation of your bishop. It is I who wills this mission and it is I who directs its course."

Other notes from these explanations:Our Blessed Mother has indicated that Anne is to remain anonymous at this time.

Blessed Mother to Anne: April 16, 2005

"I want you to retain your private life as a mother and wife. In order for this to be possible, souls must obey my instructions. Anne, you will speak for Jesus and represent this mission. When you are speaking, you are Anne. When you are working for this mission, you are Anne. When you are serving your family at home or away from home, you are a mother and wife and you belong to your family. Souls must be respectful of this because your vocation must be protected. If the situation arose that you were serving this mission and your family was suffering, we would take you from the mission. You have a heavenly duty, Anne, so please advise souls to be respectful. You will bring great graces to others but only through obedience to heaven. I will help you with each situation but we are serious about this distinction of service. Your family will not suffer. I am personally appealing to each soul to respect this woman's anonymity."

On January 31, 2005 Anne's bishop, in Ireland, wrote the following letter:

"To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Anne, a lay apostle, is a Catholic of my diocese in good standing. She is a wife and mother of small children who is devoted to her husband and family. I know her to be a deeply spiritual and committed person. In recent years she has felt called to a more public role in the Church while remaining anonymous. She is at all times insistent that whatever she does in the area of public witness to her faith is done in obedience to me, her bishop, and in accord with the authority of the Catholic Church."

The lay apostolate started by Anne involved different pious practices. I wondered why daily Mass wasn't one of them. I asked Anne to ask Jesus about this and here is the answer He allegedly gave:

Jesus says, "Many of My most beloved servants come to Me in the sacrifice of the Mass each day. This loyalty delights Me and I use these graces for others without cease. Indeed, it is through these graces that many of My lay apostles will be called. I know that many lay apostles will be inspired to do this, also. But I am not insisting that they do. This apostolate is for everyone and not everyone will be called in the same way. I have carefully selected the actions that will be necessary for Me to preserve these souls in My grace during the time of transition. All is well. I do not make mistakes.

Talking to Jesus about this, here is what I, Ronda, seemed to get:

Daily Mass could be analogous to giving everything to the poor that is not a necessity. It is an invitation not an obligation. That doesn't mean Jesus would not prefer these practices, but that He may lead certain of His people by a circuitous route to these decisions at another time. Just because they may not yet be willing to do "x" doesn't mean that it isn't great that they are doing "y." And since they don't want to receive the grace He would give them to do "x" He is happy they are doing "y."

Well, that's my kinda philosophical way of analyzing what He means and I will ponder it further to see if I am missing something I need to understand.

It's enough to keep me in unity with the movement though I don't think I am called to be a lay apostle in this movement. Many times Jesus has told me not to belong to anything but the Church. I think it is because this analytical bent just gets me upset with something or other that is happening, and then I upset others needlessly.

I have been pondering this since that time. Now, when I am editing this part of my journal, I have another idea about it. Could it be that there are very devout Catholics who have such critical minds that were they to go to daily Mass without fail, given the problems in the Church today, they would become overwhelmed by noticing these problems and not more holy necessarily?

June 7, 2005

I was amazed by my daughter, Carla, loving my toothless look when I take out the dentures. She immediately brightened on seeing me without the teeth or dentures and said that it is my real self, full of joy. Before I looked unhappy and angry most of the time according to her. She just laughed and laughed looking at me. I presume that being de-fanged I think there is no point (pun intended) in expressing anger!

June 22, 2005

Dearest Emily, my friend slowly dying of MS,

As I write I am watching deer that come to inhabited land because of the draught, I suppose getting moisture from the lawn sprinklers. I am listening to a favorite – Dvorak's Trio in E minor.

Since in my anger-management system the psychiatrist is constantly inveighing against romanticism I have become slightly wary even of my love for romantic music! Low, the psychiatrist, defines romanticism very broadly as any unrealistic feelings that everything could be perpetually perfect or beautiful in life – as in people wanting to think their own views of how to do things are always right and therefore they can critically chew everyone else out over any other viewpoint! A startling but eventually compelling thesis – namely that being opinionated, in this manner, is a fatal obstacle to daily contentment.

Actually I am writing you now because I am marveling at your pain tolerance. I just had my upper teeth removed and a denture put in and the pain killer seems to me to be quite inadequate, so I am on strike not adding the denture, which feels like a steel orange, into my already sore gum mouth and feeling inferior for being unwilling to bear pain. Without the denture I look like an amiable old crone – so I will have to figure out a solution – other than being, of course, a hermit!

You asked if I liked Graham Greene. He is a sort of sinner Catholic. I feel ambivalent about him. I find his serious novels fascinating but don't like some of the lighter ones at all – and of English Catholic novelists - much prefer Waugh in general. If I had to analyze it I would say he depicts the type of Catholic caught between a sense of obligation to God and religion but not enough fervor to surrender to God out of love or reception of love.

Therefore these duties become unbearable when they involve sacrifice of human happiness (whether real or imagined).

I am reading a fascinating series of Civil War novels by a man called Shaara – they are written as if he could know the intimate thoughts of Lee, Grant, etc. I picked them up to try to understand both Southern historical viewpoints (since I have been living in the South quite a while now) and men’s power struggles to understand better the men in power in situations I have left. I am so ignorant of history that I didn’t even know that States had the right to secede. Is that true? We read history only from the total Northern point of view in High School.

Shaara, who is a Christian, eventually, 500 pages into each saga, comes up with the view that the nobility of war is not the motives or politics but the heroism of men willing to die for each other.

Any day Carla’s 5th baby – a girl, will be born after high risk and lots of pain. I will go to New Hampshire, July 4-21, to see little Martina. (The baby was born on July 9th with terrible labor pain. I thought about Jesus suffering for us to go to heaven as like the mother suffering for the baby to come into the world. “How can any child think his/her mother did not love him/her watching a labor!”)

July 8, 2005

Long talk with Carla the night before the birth of the baby about how people know that their friends are pretending what they both know is not true. Why? Issues have to do with lots of shame and fear. She thinks I call myself an old hag even though we all know I am attractive in my own way. Why not admit it I look like an old hag if I don’t wear make-up and dress well, instead of hiding my relative attractiveness under an old hag look? I saw she was right, but woke up still wanting to be a dedicated widow, dressed very simply for many reasons. One of them is not wanting to be annoyed and fighting all day with a second husband, if a prospect turned up, unlikely - but more importantly, because I am in love with Jesus in a mystical way and He doesn’t care if I look like an old hag because He is interested in my soul.

June 24, 2005

From Anne to me:

I was praying for you this morning, on this beautiful feast day, and our Lord allowed me to feel His love for you. Ronda, Jesus delights in you. He delights in your mind, in your need to understand, and in the way your mental meanderings always bring you right back to Him.

Dear Anne,

I watched the last 2 videos of this beautiful real drama of the life of Teresa of Avila. It is not a documentary. It is marvelously done by a great Spanish actress - in Spanish with English titles.

June 25, 2005

Dear Jesus,

I am touched by Your words to Anne about being delighted with me. At first I thought, who knows if it is really Jesus, but it has begun to sink into my self-deprecating psyche that You really do delight in me.

Of course everything good in me You put there and everything bad I put there, but still I had to let You put it there – not the natural gifts but my use of them for Your kingdom.

Ahh. Somehow the de-fanging of the upper dentures has made me different inside also. Maybe because of all the acute pain during the transition?

I woke up this morning 3 days after the surgery feeling rather happy. The words that came to me were “Just you and Me, babe,” due to disappointments with various strangers and friends. I think You are strengthening me to see that my compulsive concern about where I live is silly because You really do want me to be a kind of free-lancer – a free spirit to send to different places in Your Church and this passionate desire to settle down and put in roots and belong is just my idea and doesn’t work because of the too-critical side of my nature. I am battling it in Recovery, Inc., but meanwhile and maybe all my life I will be a pilgrim for good and bad reasons – “You shall love your crooked neighbor with your crooked heart.”????

Anyhow for this moment let me enjoy the freedom of this thought.

Jesus I love You passionately. You are greater than all my crooked psyche woundedness issues. Yes!

June 25, 2004

Dear Anne,

Hope you never have such a problem. I was signed up for a talk today at the parish. Didn't think the pain from the tooth extraction Tuesday would last that long.

I was faced with - cancel the talk or wear the dentures impinging in a crucifying way on my raw gums or take out the dentures and give the talk looking like an old hag.

God gave me the grace to address the audience this way:

Dear friends. I had this option. I decided if the dentures hurt too much I am going to remove them. When I do, instead of gasping with horror at my old hag look - blow me a kiss. They laughed and laughed and when I finally took out the dentures they blew me kisses.

It was very sweet. A grace-filled moment few will think of opening themselves to. I felt kind of liberated doing it.

Concerning my grandchild coming soon, a friend wrote: "Oh, you can't think of anything when you are about to be a grandmother, you feel as if all heaven is holding its breath."

From Anne

Heaven Speaks about Addictions

July 27, 2005

Jesus

My dear soul, you are chosen to serve in the Kingdom of God. Nothing can refute this statement. I am Jesus and I need you to help Me. There is a temptation to believe that you will have many days in which to serve heaven. Because of this temptation, souls feel they can languish at times, certain that while they do not serve as fully as possible today, they will do so tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is not what I am calling you to. I am calling you into this day, today. This is the time to let go of any habit that is pulling you away from Me and pulling you away from service to Me. Dear apostle, you must give Me your addiction. It can never be a good thing to be overly attached to something that dulls your ability to love. Look into your soul right now. You will find that I am looking back at you. You know that I am asking you to put aside this addiction. You have known this for some time. The day is today. I am not looking for service in tomorrow. You may never see tomorrow because that is how life on earth is designed. Man never knows when he will be called home to heaven. There is a part of you that is fearful. You fear that you cannot be happy without this addiction. Will you believe Me when I tell you that it is quite the opposite? You cannot be happy with the addiction because it is numbing you from experiencing Me. I am in other people. I am in your loved ones. But you are putting this addiction in a place above Me and consequently, above your loved ones, as well as others. Dearest apostle, I will take this addiction from you. I will do this for you, if you let Me. But you have to be willing to accept My grace in your soul. I will do all of the difficult work, the work that you fear. You will remain in the present, in each moment, and you will have grace enough to walk away from this dependence. That is My promise.

(Now in 2013, rereading this locution to Anne, I am thinking my addiction is to working at too tight a schedule vs. being wide open to people who may want to see me in a relaxed context.)

Heaven Speaks about Abortion

August 1, 2005

Jesus

My children, you are all so precious to Me. There is a temptation for souls to believe that if they have made a grave mistake, they are not welcome in heaven or that they are not suitable companionship for Me. This is not true. And this temptation must be fought against. Sin is forgivable. All sin. I want to direct attention here specifically to the sin of abortion. This sin has become so common place in your world that some souls have come to believe it is not serious. Well, dear little soul, you must understand that it is the enemy of all things living who has spread this error. This is a trick, a master deceit of such proportion that it has resulted in the slaughter of many. Now, you may wonder at My feelings on this. I will share them with you. I am grieved, in the extreme. I am sad each time I welcome a rejected little one back to Myself. And they are welcomed home, believe Me. I am all mercy and love and these little ones are in no way at fault so heaven gives them great joy upon their return. In the same way, we will welcome you home, regardless of your sins. Be at peace. There are many souls in heaven who have committed sins of this magnitude. You might say heaven is filled with sinners, My friend, but these are repentant sinners. Would you like to repent? I know that you would and it is for this reason that I have come to you with these words. You are forgiven. I have many things to share with you that will help you to understand your situation. Rest your wounded little heart against Me now as I show you how to return in completeness.

St. Mary Magdalene

I send the most loving greetings to my friends on earth. I am delighted that Jesus allows me to speak at this time. There are great things happening in the world and the renewal makes its way bravely from heaven to earth and from soul to soul. We are watching and helping from heaven. One of the signs that the renewal is necessary is the number of abortions that are occurring. My dear sisters in Christ, this is an abomination. We cannot allow it to continue, neither you, nor I. We have to help our sisters to understand that there is a little life nestled in their womb, a life sent by God Himself. To think any differently is to become a plaything of the enemy. There must be no discussion about this point in the sense that you must never allow yourself to consider, even for a moment, that a pregnancy does not equal a life, a person, a divine plan. Do not back away from this fact, this irrefutable truth. I want to speak to the women who have had abortions and allowed their children to be taken from them in this way. Dear woman, if you think you have committed a graver sin

than me, you are wrong. Jesus loves me tenderly and I am a close friend to the Saviour. And yet, I would repel you if you knew how I had lived a part of my life. We are all the same in that we are all sinners. Nobody in heaven looks at anyone else with anything but love and understanding. This is because we all understand that given the right set of earthly circumstances, we could make grave mistakes, such as you did. Your circumstances contributed to your decision. I know this. Jesus knows this. All of heaven knows this. You must accept this, too. If you were in different circumstances, it is likely you would have made a different decision. But it is over and Jesus makes all things new. Let Him make your soul new and you will give Him far greater joy than you gave Him sorrow. I would not tell you something if it were not true. If you return to Jesus with your heart and ask Him for forgiveness, you will have forgiveness and He will forget your sins. He has certainly forgotten mine.

St. Mary Magdalene

My sisters in Christ, allow me, please, to help you. When you are caught in a web of guilt, it can be difficult to get out. It is actually impossible alone. The problem is that you can think so badly of yourself for your mistake that you begin to lose sight of your dignity and heavenly value. Jesus needs your help and you have to respond to Him. You know this. But before you can respond to Jesus you must allow Him to heal you. So put your hand out and Jesus will give a mighty pull. He will release you from the grip of pain that has held you captive. Jesus looks into your soul and He sees everything. He understands. You will face Him someday. It is inevitable. So face Him today and look closely. All you will see in His beautiful face is love. Jesus does not condemn you. It is the enemy that tells you these things. Jesus is all mercy, all understanding. Let Him take your pain and replace it with heavenly joy. Dear sister, do you think for a moment that the darkness of sin in the world has not claimed others in this way? You know that many have fallen victim to the falseness and the distortions of truth. You are not alone, by any means. Many women work hard for the Kingdom and give Jesus great glory. They, also, have allowed their children to be taken in this way. But they returned to Christ in sorrow and He forgave them. He offers this to you now. We will surround you with heavenly grace and then you, too, will work for Jesus and for others. You will give great comfort and joy to these children of yours in heaven if you return to the family of God. There is nothing that should stop you. Come back to the heavenly side where you are cherished, and may I say, so badly needed.

August 2, 2005

St. Mary Magdalene

Dearest sister in Christ, this is the time to heal. Jesus is sending this period for all souls to return to His Sacred Heart. His healing graces are never ending. There is enough for every bit of spiritual and emotional healing that is necessary for every soul who has ever been

injured in any way. I am urging you to take advantage of this now so that you can return fully to the family of God and work for your brothers and sisters who remain in darkness and loneliness. So many are unloved. If you spend this period of time working for other souls, in your life, wherever Jesus has placed you, there will be joy in heaven. You will give glory to Jesus and to your children who have come before you. They will be proud that you are their mother because you serve them on earth by serving Jesus. Do you believe me, my sister? I speak the truth. We in heaven never exaggerate and we never tell untruths. We speak carefully and our words are backed by God, Himself. Your children love you and have complete understanding of the fears that moved you to your decision. You will see them and you will spend eternity with them. There is only joy in heaven. Surely you understand that there will be no recriminations and you will have no grief in this divine land. You will be reunited with all of your loved ones and together you will explore the Kingdom of the triumphant souls, who have conquered the world and their humanity. So there is no reason for you not to be joyful and peaceful. Jesus loves you. All the saints love you. The angels work tirelessly for your return to complete joy. And your children wait to be united to their mother.

St. Mary Magdalene

Sisters, I thank God for you. Your kindness to other women will bring more souls home to heaven. I never judged another woman after my conversion because I understood why a woman would make the choices that she made. Some choices are wrong. We all know that. Who can say that all choices are the correct choices? Here in heaven, we look at events in the world. I, in particular, see women who are assaulted sexually. I am familiar with the emotions that can erupt in a woman after such a thing occurs, either in childhood or in adulthood. These emotions, if not brought to heaven for healing, can result in bad choices. Perhaps you understand what I am referring to. Our bodies are intended for the most beautiful service to the Kingdom. The sexual relationship between a man and a woman is holy and right when it is blessed by God.

If you think these locutions are really from heaven be sure to go to Anne: Direction for Our Times for more topics that have been addressed.

Return from Steubenville (Where I was giving Talks)

August, 2005

Praise the Lord. Steubenville is wonderful. Somehow the openness of the Franciscan spirit is wide enough to hold in embrace the liturgical tradition minded Catholics and the charismatics. I enjoyed very much singing old charismatic songs at top volume from the music ministry. The first night the “conservatives” stood stiffly but by the next morning

they somehow decided it was okay to enjoy it and blend with the charismatics lifting their arms and swaying. Fr. Michael Scanlon, President of the University, seemed like old Gandolf leading the hobbits. He witnessed to an extraordinary grace up in a para-sail when he thought he would die because of a screw up in the contraption but felt God the Father saving him.

August 7, 2005

Dear Fr. Michael,

It was such a joy to listen to you again. It happened I had a somewhat similar para-sail experience. I should have known my husband was close to death when he just shrugged his shoulders and walked away when I said I wanted to go up on the para-sail so I can see what the Ascension and the Assumption felt like!

Once above the Pacific after noticing how beautiful it all was, panic set in. "I don't even know these mechanics down there in the boat and I signed a total waiver before getting on this!" Then came certainty of death by heart attack from fear, and last prayers for everyone I ever knew and "into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

It was only 7 minutes but when I got near down to the boat they said we can give you another lift up if you like. I was shaking with fear.

August 9, 2005

(More from Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

My children, why do you hurry so? Why do you feel you must move so quickly through your days? This is not the way I intended the children of God to live... I want My beloved apostles to move more slowly and thoughtfully through their days. I want you to make decisions on what I am asking you to do and what you are busying yourself with that is not from Me. I want your way of life to change and I am asking you to make this change now. In the next week, think about each activity and decide, with Me, if it is something I want you to do or something you want to do. My dearest apostles, I ask that you begin to remove activities that do not further My will..."

From Joseph Conti, *Holistic Christianity*, "Before union, by three veils I was veiled from God" by the veil of my bigness, the veil of my hardness, and the veil of my cleverness."

August 14, 2005

Out of a letter to a friend concerning a conflict:

A good part of being in my anger-management group is that instead of enjoying conflict I now feel the underlying pain more. Or, with no fangs left, I feel less powerful and have less confidence I could win in any conflict, not that I used to win, but I thought I could.

Ha! Ha!

August 14, 2005

Concerning Consecrated Widows, which some bishops world-wide are experimenting with, in reply to my telephone messages Archbishop Raymond Burke called me on a Sunday evening to apologize for the delay in answering me. He said it is not helpful to direct widows to their Bishops. The Vatican is working on a rite for consecrated widows and needs those interested to write to them of their desires.

Write to

Cardinal Francis Arinze, Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 00120, Vatican City State, Europe

August 18, 2005

A hilarious moment. Marty's box involving parts for an Entertainment Center, somehow got dumped on his street near some grazing horses. He asked me to drive him down to take pictures of this box to prove to the Company that sold him the Center that the box was there. Anyhow while he was taking pictures I switched on the radio. Sometimes a piece of music exactly matches what is happening in life but sometimes it is the opposite. This was one of those. There was Wagner's Liebes Tod from Tristan and Isolde - one of the most romantic pieces ever written, accompanying Marty traipsing around this box on the road!

August 18, 2005 letter from Jim Ridley

Dear Ronda,

In a rare spasmodic attempt to practice detachment through the unpleasant discipline of mortifying my errant proclivities towards the hoarding of rubbishy ephemera, I was heaping into the recycling bin today the bulk of my precious ancient collection of Catholic newspapers, when one of the doomed issues suddenly escaped from the stack. It was a Sunday Visitor, dated August 27 (Claire's Birthday), 1995. I thumbed it open as the pangs of impending separation from my earthly treasures threatened to diminish my virtuous resolve and chanced to read on page six the following paragraph: "Fr. Gruber invokes the Benedictine tradition of peacemaking as he directs retreats and conferences on

gender issues, welcoming those who are disaffected and those who are perfectly enchanted by Church teaching. He has been joined by BRILLIANT CO-DIRECTORS, including philosopher RONDA CHERVIN..."

Dear Jim,

When I read your scintillating rambunctious outrageously funny epistles I want to insert you and a word-processor and printer into a cage and force you to write Catholic style books to rival Wodehouse - and I would throw in a banana every time you sent a page of this stuff through the bars of the cage.

I guess I'd let you have a porta-potty and a cot in there as well.

Remember this image! When Watershed begins I will slowly manipulate you into the cage! All for the greater glory of God.

Believe it or not such Providential moments as you finding the OSV piece about Fr. Gruber's retreat cheer me. I am such a melancholic that I easily think my "time is over" and the next talk should be my swan song, etc. etc. and so each of these compliments jerks me out of that state.

Dear Anne (concerning Hurricane Katrina)

I am so sorry you are going through these trials. Here is my take for what it is worth.

I think Jesus allows horrible natural events to take their course because of the many that will rush to Him in prayer in their fear.

But Catholics usually don't say that Jesus or God caused the event. Why not? What is the distinction?

Some natural disasters do not hit places riddled with sin such as abortion-America. Some natural disasters hit poor good people as when some earthquake had as its epi-center a Mexican Church with people at Mass.

The way I prefer to put it is this: America full of abortion and porn, etc. etc. is certainly due for disaster and liable to Scripturally described outcomes. Jesus in the N.T. talks about disasters falling on the Temple and Jerusalem, though He doesn't directly say this will happen to punish the bad. (At least I don't think he does - correct me if I am wrong) When disaster hits everyone should examine their consciences and go to confession and realize "you know not the day or the hour" and repent. Those directly effected by disasters we certainly hope made general confessions on their way to their deaths and certainly ought to pray for the reform of their cities, countries, etc. etc.

September 3, 2005

Jesus

You will be with your children today, quietly editing. Anne, push the booklets forward because they are an important component of all I intend to do. I would like them printed with an imprimatur, if possible.

I have many things to say about the hurricane that has wrought so much devastation. The first thing I will say is that I was merciful, even in My chastising of the earth. I was merciful because I took many souls to heaven with Me, cleansing them Myself. This mercy is very great and souls on earth will not understand the nature of this entirely. I wished to compensate these souls for participating in this time of darkness, a darkness that comes, not from Me, but from mankind's cooperation with the enemy of goodness. Anne, we are moving into a new time, a time of obedience and holiness. Ask souls to come to Me now. Ask souls to reject disobedience. Do not allow the unborn to be slaughtered. Speak up for Me, children of God. If a soul is following Me, they have nothing to fear. There should be a calm acceptance of the Father's decision to reprimand His children. Apostles, your brothers and sisters must come to understand that I am God. I am the God of love and kindness, but I do not see love and kindness on My earth. I see souls being hurt. So I am going to assist My children in understanding how I wish them to live. Look for My example in the Gospels. Be alert for My direction and be humble. Under no circumstances do I wish souls to judge others for these events. All men are sinners. Be humble and teach love. Apostles, this is time for service. You have been prepared. And I am with you.

Anne, I wish that message to be disseminated. The following message is for you. I understand your hesitance and fear with regard to prophecy. Nevertheless, it is part of your role. You will be given strength and assistance, both from heaven and from earth. You should state openly that I have given a sequence for the beginning of the purification. Nothing more. If asked about this event, you can say that you saw it in a vision, along with the other events. There should be a calm attitude in every talk. You will be joyful, of course, and model heavenly peace. If souls ask you directly about a region, you must say that apostles have nothing to fear. There is great work to be done. Even given the difference between earthly time and heavenly time, time is short. This is all good and necessary. I can only will what benefits My children. You have all been prepared and you have all been told that this period would come. If you feel fear, bring it to Me and I will eradicate it immediately. Fear is your enemy in this work but I can easily remove it for you. Anne, do not feel guilty if you feel fear as it is understandable. But do bring it to Me immediately. In answer to your question, I would prefer you do not discuss regions but give you permission to do so with your spiritual directors or bishop if you are feeling heavily burdened. The reason I prefer you to avoid this type of discussion is because I want everyone prepared. It is not only the regions affected who are being called to renewal. All

are being called to renewal. As you know, I am available for all of your questions in an enhanced way during this time. Yes, you should send this to your bishop and ask for his permission to post the previous message.

September 13, 2005

(Answer to a query letter about Consecrated Widows):

The Czech consecrated virgin who is working on the adapting of their rite to one for widows in conjunction with the Vatican Office of Rites - sent me a packet of materials.

How my heart leapt with joy reading as well as I could in my very poor Italian, French and Spanish accounts of actual rites of consecration already in place! In one part of Southern Italy they count about 20 widows in various stages of consecration - they have a whole formation program in place. The rites are beautiful to read.

Here is a song that 1000 Indian Widows from some movement called Hope and Life composed:

We are widows of Bombay

with hope and life

We no longer mourn and whine

in hope and life

In the past we were full of care

Now in our lives there is joy and prayer

We share our miseries and woes

Our sufferings on the Lord we throw

We spread his light, we spread his light.

I tried to read a very scholarly account of Rites of the past in Italian. It appears up until the 9th century there were rites and blessings of consecrated widows including blessing of their habits in Italy and France.

Gradually widows were encouraged instead in Medieval times to go into monasteries instead of remaining in their own homes.

Oct. 6 2005

Tired from speaking trip to Canada - Vancouver is beautiful and refreshing. I had a great time but exhausting trip.

The dentist said I had the lowest pain tolerance he had ever witnessed! Good part is that he gave me a refund of \$820 on my lower plate since he says I will never be able to tolerate it! My secure thought is that God will bless me specially for all the dental pain since it is the worst apparently!

October 11, 2005 HEALING AND WIDOWHOOD

Working on healing I got the sense that the healing was related in some way to the consecrated widow question. That Jesus wanted me to put being a consecrated widow first. It seems as if he meant in regard to my location, i.e. to go wherever I can best get approval from a Bishop for this vocation. But this morning I woke up with a more comprehensive sense of healing and widowhood, for me, and in relation to working with other widows:

I was brought up to think old=ugly. My parents ridiculed my paternal grandmother for being old, sick, and ugly as well as eccentric and crazy.

My mother, being a counter-cultural bohemian by choice, never dressed elegantly as did the upper middle class Jewish women in the neighborhood – West Side NYC – but wore interesting colorful pants and jacket like tops. When much older she compensated for her aging features with lipstick, powder, and colorful outfits.

My father left my mother and us when we were 8 years old, and married a young woman, more beautiful, with flowing long hair, wearing dresses vs. my mother's short hair and more masculine look.

Hence conflict for me. I loved the little pink dresses and black shiny shoes other girls were allowed to wear. We had to wear overalls.

When I was older I always wore long hair and dresses to look less like my rejected older mother and more like my father's 3rd more beautiful wife.

I married an older man – a father figure – with terrible feelings when he preferred beautiful little twin daughters to me, after their birth I seemed no longer to be beautiful

sweetheart, but like an old seemingly unattractive Cinderella to serve the little beauties (he called the daughters his little beauties)

Becoming a widow I tried lipstick and long flowy dresses trying to attract a 2nd husband unsuccessfully. Then maybe partly as an over-reaction to feelings of rejection I wore habit like outfits when trying out different forms of consecrated life.

In speeches I make jokes about when you are aging, look in the mirror and don't say "More and more everyday I look less like Marilyn Monroe" but instead say "Everyday I look more and more like Mother Teresa.

Being determined not to try to hide aging with make-up or attractive as possible clothing, is partly my mother's inherited counter-cultural approach; partly "if I don't even try, I am not being rejected for being ugly." Eagerness to get into some kind of consecrated look in clothing – blue denim, brown. But in the novel Last Fling I have the heroine wearing simple but colorful dresses.

Denture crisis brings up these issues. I thought the pearly toothed denture would improve my looks – instead because of the pain of them so that I don't wear them very often, I am now cast into this unexpected much worse, to my mind, old crone toothless image.

Finding out that in the US consecrated virgins and potential consecrated widows would not be allowed to wear any kind of habit at first depressed me – no way to escape into a "higher" status where plain same dress every day would solve the conflict of how to escape my dinned in early family sense of old=ugly and totally rejected.

(Note from 2013: I couldn't find a Bishop who wanted me as a Consecrated Widow. A spiritual director suggested I call myself a Dedicated Widow with a private promise not to re-marry and my own rule. In this rule I don't wear a habit but different blue denim or simple jumpers.)

Healing images in light of all of this –

To totally experience Jesus' love for me depends on bringing all of this to Him and seeing that He really loves old women – such as the old widow saints and His mother as a widow.

Jesus as the second bridegroom is a healing image for the consecrated widow even if she had a less convoluted familial history about ugliness.

I got a sense of how each individual widow needs to decide without pressure from other widows how to dress. Old black dress –forever, European widows did it by conforming to that cultural pattern. We don't have this now and so have more anxiety about it. Choices: noble older look; funny slightly masculine look (perm but pants); bag-lady look, etc.

Oct. 11, 2005

I had a beautiful day by the water fishing with the Winstons at Spring River, Arkansas. Lots of time to stare at the water and this is what Jesus seemed to tell me about all of that misery I vomited out this morning in the healing of memories about aging and ugliness:

I am your savior at every time of your life. Stay away from all those past miseries and just love Me and do what you want to do; be my pilgrim and don't let anyone put you on a guilt trip – "life is a cabaret" - see the humor, the sadness, the grief, and I will give you each day what you need because I am your groom.

Alleluia.

October 12, 2005 Healing Image

Now I look more like a funny little creature "smiler McGee (a name my daughter, Carla, gave me), laughing when she saw me without my teeth or dentures? vs. a noble philosopher. This makes me more approachable, less intimidating, goes along with de-fanged.

October 24, 2005

I sent the long healing reflection about childhood ideas of aging being awful to my twin-sister Carla for a reaction. Here it is:

"Dear Ronda,

Sigh, sigh...I think mother's great fussiness over what to wear (which bandana, belt, etc.) is a mix of much insecurity and a desire to be attractive. I also go through too much fussiness and feel insecure. What I try to find to wear is with half a nod to "looks" and the other half to something that will help reflect an inner look. The "costume" helps sustain an inner sense of beauty, and usually I want to wear something that will flow, but I've noticed I'm actually happiest with a camping, walking the dog clothes...it's not the clothes but the situation that is conducive to really forgetting myself.

I remember being puzzled as a kid when there were disparaging remarks about grandma - I didn't really understand them I think. I'm sorry we weren't taught to respect older people. We need to cultivate our inherent dignity. I must consecrate life like sacred dance. (My twin-sister is a Sacred Dancer). I wish you could have snuggled up to Martin (when he seemed to prefer the daughters) and said, oh Martin I need your love too. I was speaking about what to wear to a woman I know and she, offhandedly, waving her hand said, "Oh what do you care?" Healing, good. All for now....hope you get your teeth FIXED. I think you needn't have had to go through all this and it must be terrible. Your sense of humor is a life-saver."

From Ronda: Another image about the teeth issues: I used to say in speeches, instead of thinking of admired others as idols and then fallen idols; think of them and yourself as funny little creatures. De-fanged I look more like a funny little creature. Yes.

October 25, 2005

I gave a workshop based on my book *Taming the Lion Within* at Pecos Monastery in New Mexico. During that time I had a session with their healer Sister Miriam. Here is here advice:

She took my two shoes and laid them in a T shape with one horizontal and one vertical. She said the vertical cross is strong Ronda, the speaker and truth-sayer, etc. The horizontal shoe represents the needy desperate Ronda who wants father figures who is lonely, etc.

That second shoe doesn't need an actual father but needs me myself to love her: The weak part is not the true Ronda but is a part of me. For healing I need to say that I love that weak Ronda just the way she is; she is mine. I need to be Jesus to that part of myself. No one told little Ronda as a child that she could just be herself. (Barbra Streisand song: people who need people are the luckiest people in the world.) It is not wrong to be needy. I have to tell the weak Ronda that I will take care of her. (Very Jungian of course - not quite the way I would put it but I think there is something in it) The strong Ronda needs to say to the weak Ronda that she doesn't have to change for me to love her – that I will carry her into eternity. The strong Ronda is a strong speaker because she tells of her weakness. I should not be afraid of weak Ronda. She is part of the gift. Like St. Paul rejoicing in his weaknesses. See Jesus looking at that weak Ronda with love. I need to adopt that orphan Ronda vs. saying to her that I want to get rid of her. I need to give that part of me a home.

I reply: the consecrated widow is known for hospitality. I need to be hospitable to that part of me. But the Scriptures also say that the widow needs Church men.

Then Sister Miriam told me a parable about an ancient woman full of wrinkles who builds a hut in the black forest. Her mission is to put a light in her window in the darkness to welcome those who are lost. An old man is lost whose lantern went out and who is fainting from woundedness. As he is dying he lifts his head and sees the light and drags himself to the doorstep of this woman. She picks him up as if he were a baby and she rocks him and she pats him and says “there, there,” and he gets younger and finally is a new born babe and she lets him go. He is the rising sun and he brings her warmth.

I reply: the consecrated widow is a wisdom figure, a rock of comfort for the needy.

I need to rock the world and say “I love you. I need to embrace the whole Church even in its darkness?”

I don't need to do anything but love. God does the transforming. Go to the Ronda who went through the death of Charlie and say "I love you." I will not abandon you – I will not abandon the Ronda who suffered that way.

The strong Ronda has to embrace the entire darkness of life.

Sister Miriam gave me more of this image of an old wrinkled crone living in a cave in a dark forest with a lantern. Weak miserable desperate people find their way in the dark to the cave where she rocks them and comforts them back through their lives until they can see the little child God created them to be and become re-born.

October 27, 2005

My godfather used to say that I was like a little dog attached to a chain who leaps about happily until he feels the chain and then leaps up into the air with horror feeling the pain of the chain. So I am either up or down with no in between stability. This is still true after 45 years!

Climbing the Mountain

From Anne October, 2005 for me to edit, these are excerpts (The publisher of Anne's autobiographical books and locutions asked me to go through to check on any theological difficulties. This is a lengthy section. You can skip if you don't like anything about this style or writing. I included it because I think it is extremely helpful.)

If Christ is in each one of us, and this is of course what we believe as Christians, then we must venerate Christ in every soul...

We do that with respect and gentleness. Some might say, yes, this may be true but I see souls in error, in mortal sin, living far outside of the heavenly Kingdom. Well, dear fellow apostles, this is when the call to treat them as Christ is at its most profound. If Christ has indeed been driven out of a soul, through serious sin and a spirit of rebellion in that sin, then the call to illustrate our unity with Christ is compelling. How does Christ treat that soul? How does Christ view that soul? I will tell you. Christ does not glance at a soul and see the sin, although He is acutely aware of the sin. Christ glances at a soul and sees the wound that both caused the sin and was worsened by the sin. So in order for the Kingdom to come, and it must and it will, we must treat each other as Christ would.

Sometimes a soul living outside of the Kingdom is bitter. This bitterness is like a sore. When a soul in bitterness views Christ in us, it can be like salt in the wound or sore because our unity with Christ (shows) their isolation from Him. This is good. The soul then comes closer to an understanding of what it lacks. Our experience of this may not be pleasant. It may be necessarily painful because in its pain their soul may strike out at us. This can be understood as an almost instinctual lashing out or crying out in the distress of their

disconnectedness from Christ. We must accept these strikes as beneficial penance and part of standing with Christ as a companion on the Way of the Cross.

To translate, I am driving in traffic and I make a mistake perhaps, or commit a deed that inconveniences someone else. I give the other driver an apologetic wave. He responds by swearing at me and shouting, threatening, or what have you. This is shocking for a holy soul. We must offer this to Jesus. We must bring that soul to Jesus in prayer and petition. Our prayer will obtain critical graces for that soul. We must look at this person and see the wound, the sore.

To be more specific to the call to bring Jesus Christ to souls directly, consider a soul who is estranged from the Kingdom. Perhaps it is a family member or neighbor. It is possible that they may be unkind to us because our holiness is an irritant to them and to their wound. Is it then acceptable to be unkind in return? Not for an apostle of Jesus Christ who seeks to bring His love to them. Remember that it was after the crucifixion that the Centurion said, Truly, this was the Son of God. The soul only saw Christ through the manner in which Jesus accepted suffering from the offender's hands. Note this parallel.

A soul may be tormenting us but for this soul to experience Christ, we must accept it as Christ would. This should be in flashing red lights. We may be praying for this soul and beseeching heaven for the conversion of this soul. So we must not complain at a little suffering for this soul, particularly if it comes from the hand of that same soul.

It helps to examine our motives. Do we want this soul to be saved for the sake of the soul and for the consolation and glory of Jesus Christ? Or do we want this soul to be saved so that the soul will treat us better and make our life easier. I think perhaps it can be a bit of both and this is acceptable. But as we begin to lean more to the benefit of both the soul and the Kingdom and we will become more willing to accept the occasional bad treatment for the purpose of the greater good, which is the salvation of the soul and the consolation of Christ.

We must bring souls to Jesus, but we must not take Jesus and bash souls about the head with Him. We must bring Jesus in the spirit of love, not condemnation. The message is that Jesus loves the soul, not Jesus disagrees with the way the soul is living his life. Is it true that Jesus disagrees with the way some live their lives? Yes. Certainly Jesus was not always pleased with the manner in which I conducted myself. But it is best to let Jesus convey this to the soul. Jesus judges. Apostles are not called to be judges but delivery people. If we deliver Jesus to souls He Himself will correct them, tutor them, and illuminate their path on the mountain. You might say that the most profound thing we do for a soul is show them the mountain.

As in everything, the most effective way to teach something is to set an example by doing it so that others can emulate us after seeing how a thing is done. This brings us to the most important concept of all concepts.

We must always be ascending. What is the best way to love my neighbor? I love my neighbor best by climbing my mountain of personal holiness. It is not helpful for me to spend my time telling others to climb. It is helpful if I myself climb, thereby setting an example for others to follow.

....We should be gentle and loving with each other, always tolerant that no two servants are called to serve in exactly the same way. Each has separate gifts, also, so we must never think it is beneficial to compare ourselves with anyone.

We must compare ourselves to Jesus in love of neighbor. Scripture gives us ample example of the selflessness with which Jesus served His brothers and sisters. He was a dutiful son to His mother and father. He was a good friend to His apostles. Jesus was kind to strangers and those ill and less fortunate. He was patient in the extreme with the flaws of others. He saw each soul as a soul who was somewhere on the mountain and He viewed them with the patience of a teacher, who knows that the total cannot be achieved without walking through the sum. Jesus gave others the room to grow in the light of His love. Are we doing that for others? Or do we constantly point out the deficits in the holiness of our companions? Souls loved Jesus and sought out His companionship. They sought His love and tolerance, His acceptance and steadiness. This is our call to those around us. We must always rejoice in the holiness of our companions. Rejoice in each bit of progress or any bit of hope for progress. This will give us joy and we will not spend all of our time lamenting the failures of those around us, which is really our own failure.

....The Father in the Prodigal son story did not reproach his son. He did not sit down with him and grieve the lost years. He went straight to the celebration and rejoiced in the future service of the returned boy. This is the way our God reacts to returning children. He sees what the child of heaven is now capable of giving to the Kingdom. He sees the potential and the lovely swell of the family, given the return of a loved one. Remember that the laborers were all given the same wage, regardless of when they joined the work. This is an example of a good and gracious God, not an unjust God. We can use this to pull others in. Each servant is as necessary as the next.

Remember that there is little merit in loving those who love us, but great merit in loving those who are a cross to us.

It is through our closest relationships that we make the most dedicated progress up the mountain because those closest to us see our flaws clearly. We should pray for an increased awareness of our performance in the duty of the relationships closest to us.

It is within the structure of the family that many souls find great holiness. This is why Jesus is so determined to protect the family and this is also why the enemy is so anxious to destroy this heavenly structure. Family members see our flaws, yes, and often it is only a family member who has the courage to illuminate this flaw for us. We must not retaliate in anger if a loved one encourages us to alter our behavior. We should instead be open to the possibility that they may have a perspective that will benefit us. An arrogant soul cannot tolerate any criticism or direction. They will revolt and lash out at the one who dares press against their shell of self-satisfaction. We discussed the way of the cross and the pain that comes with it. Be at peace in this.

Before we take on to instruct someone or gently correct a soul, we must pray. We should spend time in silence and ask Jesus if it is He who is prompting us to assist a soul in this way. We should then proceed in all humility, certain that despite our closeness to Christ, we have a pack full of our own flaws to work upon. Our spirit should be one of kindness and tolerance. What would Jesus say to this soul? How would Jesus proceed?

...Truly, my friends, it is not good for a person to get away with constant bad behavior as it confirms their path. In cases where we are fearful of our family members, we must consider seeking outside help. We should confide in someone, perhaps a trusted priest who can advise us objectively.

Jesus understands that we are doing our best. We must understand that we are part of a heavenly team who shares our goals for all our loved ones. Remember that there are apostles the world over praying for our safety and peace.

The family is a microcosm of the heavenly Kingdom. Each family is a little Kingdom of God. This proceeds out in concentric circles, bigger and bigger. But it begins first with one soul united to Christ, then spreads into the immediate family, and then out and so on. We must do the work first in our own little soul, united to Jesus, then in our own little family, then out and out and out again, into the world, and eventually at one with the whole Kingdom of God upon our death. The work done within the family cannot be stressed enough in importance. It is here we learn how to be a Christian. It is here we learn how NOT to be a Christian. It is within the family that we learn about compassion and sacrifice and tolerance and forgiveness. Progress is made in quietness and the progress of one soul impacts the entire family. So we must be confident that our holiness will spread out into our families. It cannot help but do so. If we never say a word about Jesus Christ, but begin to live His message, we will benefit our families in ways we cannot understand. The holiness of one soul creates a receptacle of grace for all. Again, I stress, even if we are estranged from all of our family, but we decide to follow Christ in isolation from them, we will draw blessings down upon them all. It cannot help but be so, given Christ's goodness and desire to reach each of His children. We must be at peace in everything, dear apostles. There is no reason for anything else.

Sometimes in describing a thing it is good to say what it is not so that souls can move closer to truth by abandoning what is false. Love of neighbor is not judgmental. It is not unkind, ever. It is rather gentle and patient with the frailty of the soul, whether on the path or drifting in the world. Love of neighbor assumes the presence of the loving God in the soul of each person and treats each person accordingly. How do I treat Jesus? How does Jesus feel in that soul? How would Jesus like to be treated in the soul of the person in front of us? Jesus would like to be encouraged in that soul. He would like to be strengthened. He would like us to help Him to grow stronger in the soul and become the Divine Claimant of this soul. Jesus loves each soul powerfully and totally. We must look at each person as the most cherished child of the Father and we will begin to understand why we must love our neighbor. This soul in front of us is one that we can help escort through the heavenly gates, through our words, our actions, or simply our love.

We must walk gently with the feelings of others, with great reverence for the vulnerability of the spirit. A wounded spirit can be led into all kinds of trouble and we would not like to be the one who has inflicted the wound that caused the downfall of another. Human nature being what it is though, it is possible, indeed probable, that we will hurt others and cause damage to another at some time.

We will come to this realization in silence, not in noise. If upon silent reflection we come to understand that we have hurt another, we should reflect on what our Lord wishes us to do to assist heaven in healing the wound of the person we have failed. Again, this is not to discourage us, but to cleanse our conscience here on earth, where we can better provide recompense for our failures. It is often the case that our simple admission of wrongdoing can place the person on the path to healing. We should also pray for the healing of the soul so that heaven is invited by us to participate in the righting of the wrong. Heaven heals with far more efficiency than we can and the intercessory power of a repentant soul is powerful. God cannot resist the petitioner who seeks to make amends to others. God comes into these situations with great enthusiasm and effectiveness.

We should not carry the burden of our sin heavily. It is better that we be at peace in our failures while we work with heaven to remove the weaknesses that lead us to sin. We should work steadily with Jesus on our soul, practicing a little holiness each day through the challenges He has placed in front of us. For example, dear apostles, there is no point practicing piety on a day when we are surrounded by souls who annoy us and Jesus is asking us to practice patience. If we follow the path He has traced out for us, we cannot help but become a saint. If we seek to do it our way, we will have greater difficulty.

Always consider kindness. Gentleness and kindness are two attributes that heaven holds in the highest esteem. Our modern world seeks to eradicate these heavenly characteristics but through His apostles Jesus will flood the world with gentleness and kindness

In order to love our neighbor in the same way as souls love each other in heaven, we must begin to think like residents of that joyful place. In heaven, it is all about love and all about Jesus. The Savior, Jesus Christ, is well and truly united to each soul, to the extent that when Jesus enters a room or an area in heaven, nobody remarks upon it, because He never leaves any soul. There is constant unity with Christ in the soul. This is available to us here on earth. We are only separated by our lack of faith and lack of commitment to His will. If a soul commits himself to Jesus here on earth, and embarks upward on the mountain path through the service Jesus has willed for the individual, that soul is united to Jesus. Jesus is welcome in that soul and Jesus begins to work through that soul in the unique way that only He could have intended and planned. Each soul has a purpose and the purpose has so many facets over the lifetime of service, or indeed over one day, that we cannot imagine the richness of His plan. But we trust in His plan and that is all that matters.

What is the practical reality of this, we might ask. How does an apostle know if he or she is pleasing to God and indeed walking up the mountain path? Well, I can only speak for myself so that is what I will do. When I am serving heaven in unity to the will of the Savior, I feel stretched. I feel a sense that I am laboring. I do not feel a great personal satisfaction characterized by feelings such as “I am truly holy.” A more accurate feeling of the apostle ascending the mountain would be “I am truly learning.”

We should not dabble in false humility. If we are trying to serve Jesus, we must admit it. And certainly we serve in all of our glorious imperfection, so we must freely admit that as well. We can be proud of our commitment to Jesus without being proud of our spiritual advancements or proud of what heaven flows through us. Is a cup proud of the coffee it holds? Does a cup take credit for the quality of the coffee within it? The cup is simply the receptacle or vehicle that is used to transport the coffee from one place to the other. A cup is not proud, my friends, and neither should we be.

I repeat that we must never be discouraged or try to measure our holiness against another's. We must measure our holiness against Jesus Christ. In this way we will remain humble and concentrate not on the road behind us, but on the road in front of us. If the Lord gives us glimpses of His favor, we should thank Him. If He does not, we should not take this as a sign that we are not in His favor. If we are trying to serve and we are living in obedience to our Church, we are sure to make progress.

We should never be complacent. We must understand that if we are alive, there is work to be done in our soul. If we were finished, surely the Lord would have brought us to Him. Work steadily, dear apostles, and we will certainly become as holy as our Lord requires.

We are called to do extra, it is true, so with God's grace let us do the extra with cheerfulness that foils any plans the enemy has to turn us into discontents who add to the unrest in the world.

(At this time I was considering trying to be part of a writers' colony in one place or moving in with my daughter who was moving to a log house in North Carolina. I laughingly call these schemes the Queen Lear scenario.)

Pros of Log House

be with those I really love in the family sense of love

help my kids, grandkids in various ways

try out what could be THE long term solution to my aging life style issues

Cons

fall into big no-no trap of mixing family and business

Plan A for a monthly retainer of \$1,000 a month at the log house:

I have no other expenses. I have a room furnished with a bed and bookcases and table or desk and my own bathroom. Kids can use it when I am not enthroned but it has only my "STUFF" in it.

Between you and Steve I get

Steve: daily drive to Mass and back - mostly noon Masses

Steve: drives to airport and pick up when I give out of town talks or go for other out of town visits to Diana, etc.

You and Steve: dinner chez the family - other food I cook myself in family kitchen but Steve buys whatever I like at his general food shopping

You and Steve: help with computer right away

You and Steve: My retainer includes electric, gas, whatever such things.

Plan B – smaller retainer - same as above except I drive my own car, but Steve helps me with car glitches. I would pay my own car insurance including towing but for smaller things like pumping up leaking tires, etc. Steve pumps it up and takes it to repair.

If you are interested I will pray some more and we could write up a contract of terms

Carla wrote later:

You are incredibly foolish, you know. DON'T you understand that I'd love to have you with me even if you hadn't a red cent???

To which I replied. Deep down I do, but probably I'd rather buy love than trust in it!

November 16, 2005

Dear Carla, In the reading for today, from the documents of Vatican II

"Children, as active members of the family, contribute in their own way to the holiness of their parents. With the love of grateful hearts, with loving respect and trust, they will return the generosity of their parents and will stand by them as true sons and daughters when they meet with hardship and the loneliness of old age."

Since my parents had such complicated relationships to their parents and I did to mine, I rarely think in this way, but maybe you and Diana are breaking the mold on this to actually feel it in a more classical manner.

December 1, 2005

Dear Marty, Irene, Sr. Judith, Ariela, Joe, Bill, Anne and Fr. Kevin,

I have decided to leave our dear little Star of the Sea and St. Michael's.

This is not because I haven't felt loved, helped and inspired here but for other reasons which will come later.

First, though, I want to thank each of you: Marty for your eager warmth and deeply pious way of participating in the Mass; Irene for showing me what daughterly love could be as you take care of your mother in her later years;

Sister Judith for showing me so much about the Christian ideal of sacrificial love and for your insights into my deepest needs; Ariela and Joe for showing me how much love can be shown through hospitality of house and heart, and for the love of the gifts of life you manifest all the time; Anne for your lively mind, beautiful voice and demonstration of such fierce love for your children; Bill for your warmth to me and your modeling of love for family; Fr. Kevin for showing me how a priest could integrate spirituality and psychology and be so affirming and caring of me and all of us.

I have been struggling with this decision for many months. I know you have been praying for me and trying to help with advice. I realize that some of you might not approve of my decision to go to my daughter's in North Carolina and will question the reasons I give.

Since I have prayed much over this and discussed it with mentors and my long time spiritual director who has known me for 6 years, I am not asking for further counsel, but merely sharing with you the reasons I think are valid for me.

This has been a very hard decision because I love the spirit of Star of the Sea and St. Michael's and all the wonderful qualities you all and other friends here have to offer. Please forgive me for the qualities of mine you have found difficult and pray for me on my new venture. The Jesus, Mary and Joseph you all love so much will be with me.

Love and prayers, Ronda

In wrong place entries: I was working with what was the Heart to Heart file already and, senior moment, forgot to retrieve the little slips of paper that were in the file folder so I am going to insert them with their earlier dates but at the end not to have to change all the page numbers again.

October, 2005

I met a psychologist who was a widow on a plane flight. She shared that no friend can be like a husband and children. This gave me great pause and probably influenced the decision I made about staying with the adult children for at least a while.

November, 2005

I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My motive was to intercede for the Jewish people to find Jesus.

Highlights of the trip – at Garden of Gethsemane I prayed “Jesus, You could take me now or otherwise eliminate any more sufferings, but I accept whatever You want in Your creative plan to sanctify me.”

I thought how can I speak well to aging women if I don't feel in myself the pain of looking ugly (because of the non-dentures) and the urge to cover it up. (I chose pearly dentures to look better and now that failed also). I realize I wanted to look like my noble Grandmother Rosenson who I never met since she died before I was born, not like a funny little elf. I need to surrender this desire which involves vanity and envy of others.

Jesus, You were disfigured and You didn't look like the Son of God, but like a criminal! Just as you were still God in disguise, so to speak, I am Ronda in disguise, so to speak.

On the pilgrimage sometimes it seemed as if a Jewish person there who said he was Christian might have been faking it to keep a good job working with Christian pilgrims. We Jewish-Catholics spoke of this and how we felt distrust. I likened this to the way the Spanish royalty must have felt about those Jews who became Catholics but might have not had real conversions and then they could be in league with the Muslims of that time. Of

course they felt uneasy and wary. The Inquisitorial practices were horrible, but maybe a little more understandable given this reality.

I loved the modern round womb-like Churches such as the Annunciation. Lots of sense of Mary's love for me on this pilgrimage.

A few years ago I started sending a small sum to a foundation that runs a Christian school in the Holy Land for Christian Arabs. I picked out a young girl whose face appealed to me. I got a chance to meet her at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I was moved to tears to see this beautiful but sorrowful face with big black eyes, fearful – she is about 12 years old. The sight of her made me ashamed of some cynical surmises I had about possible these type of charitable activities being scams. It was such a person to person – Jewish grandmother Catholic encounter to with a sweet Christian Arab girl.

Later I confessed to cynicism throughout my life. How does cynicism help anything? Well one might avoid being cheated but at what a price in the blackening of the soul by suspiciousness!

During the pilgrimage Jesus seemed to say “I was a pilgrim, so was Mary. You are a pilgrim also – go where I send you and forget about a permanent place, at least for now.

Now, all the way back to April 24, 2005 when I gave a short introductory talk before Anne of Direction for Our Times spoke at a conference in Chicago. I loved Anne. This was the first time I met her. I was afraid she might seem phony – instead she was so honest, deep, funny, absolutely unpretentious. Here was the gist of my little talk making use of images that were on the minds of the large audience:

God works with me by means of Surprise

In my conversion – surprise God is not a truth but a Person: Jesus

The Passion (the Mel Gibson film) – I thought it would not be as beautiful as Jesus of Nazareth – surprise! It seemed to me as if The Passion isn't a film but Jesus intervening in our times through the screen.

Lord of the Rings: I thought it would be a violent boyish extravaganza – surprise – God is showing us we're not failed wanna be saints but heroic little hobbits and He, Gandolf, loves us for fighting.

John Paul II's funeral – boring long ceremony? Surprise, the grain of wheat died and it's the springtime of the Church JPII predicted!

Anne – just a sentimental journal? Surprise: Jesus telling me that I am not an over the hill creep whose mind is filled only with worries and schemes but the beloved child, friend and helper who He needs and wants and who I should trust. Alleluia. So listen up – here she is!

April 19, 2005

Election of Benedict XVI. I was in a restaurant – we moved to the bar so we could see who it was on the TV, bribed a waiter to turn off the muszak so we could hear. When it was Ratzinger, I leaped out off my bar stool and yelled out “We won!” and then cried and cried and cried. I had been so afraid it might be someone opposite to JP II. What will heaven be like. A Protestant eating at the restaurant asked me why I was so happy? I joked – well it’s like for you if they chose Billy Graham instead of Jimmy Swaggart!

He seemed to understand.

Way back to September 2004 – I dreaded leaving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in the oratory at the Retreat Center. Staying in a private home Jesus inundated me with rapture as if saying, heart to heart, you can come to me anywhere and you don’t need to grieve leaving the Center.

January 8, 2005

In a sermon the priest head of the Retreat Center said that we tend to think we deserve only rejection and punishment, but the true contemplative knows he or she is loved as in the Song of Songs.

Random thought: Do old people need more sleep, usually, because God wants to give rest to His beasts of burden?

Sense of being a speaker-missionary.

I read in Gabrielle Bossis’ *He and I*, “Take the place of John and Mary Magdalene (under the cross.) Be yourself, you, whom I wanted in this century, this period, this little moment of time on earth, my poor little bride.”

January 25, 2005

Worrying about approval to be a consecrated widow, Jesus put me into an ecstasy. I had a blissful sense that only He counted and that wherever I go I should go as His. During this little time of grace all the rest of the problems about where to live disappeared in the joy of my identity as His.

Good quote in the book by Yann Martel , *Life of Pi*, “to choose doubt as philosophy of life is like choosing immobility as a means of transportation.”

July 2005 Defending the Faith Conference at Steubenville – great sense of how Franciscan openness made it possible to combine charismatic music and orthodox theology and a real

consistent life ethic – every speaker mentioned helping the poor in some manner! Scott Hahn mentioned how Kimberly asked as their 25th anniversary present that they go to a poor country as a whole family and build a house for the poorest of the poor!

Kimberly Hahn said in her speech that anxiety is a sin of lack of trust!

The adoration chapels are not for seeing God as a sounding board for my worries, but to bury my worries in His heart.

July 22, 2005

Feeling de-fanged because of upper teeth removed for dentures – related it to before relying on knowing that I could make biting comments, even if I didn't. Also good for solidarity with the really poor who don't have dentures. I don't have to be like Dorothy Day or Catherine Doherty, God is making me poor in His own way, said Sr. Judith.

August 8, 2005

Someone sent a web link about 5 Languages of Love – a book that goes into how each of us expresses love differently and we can't expect the other to give the same way. They are

Affirming

Serving

Gift-Giving

Touch

Quality Time

I realized that I am mostly loving by affirming, quality time would be second, touch third and serving only selectively (i.e. help with intellectual and spiritual problems but not other nitty-gritty kinds).

But some of my friends who are not much on affirmation, touch or quality time are great at helping me and giving me gifts. I need to be more grateful and not wish so much for the affirmation or quality time.

August 27, 2005

Diana, my daughter who is a twin, as I am a twin, spoke about someone telling her that twins are always trying to bond in some perfect way with a twin substitute. We are so happy when we think we can.

I related this to unsuccessful attempts to force friends to be my twin.

August 30, 2005

It was moving to see the helicopter rescuers in New Orleans after Katrina lifting people in their arms off the roofs with trumpeters playing the Saints go Marching in after the storm.

Sept. 3, 2005 Charismatic Conference – where I gave 4 talks.

At a huge general assembly Fr. Faricy told us to ask forgiveness of Jesus for the sins our confessors said weren't sins. We gasped. He shrugged and said "So, I'm a conservative Catholic. What are you going to do, shoot me?"

He told us to ask Jesus what we need His forgiveness for? I thought of draining my energy on schemes instead of trusting Him.

At the last Mass there was such a wonderful mix of Anglos, Phillipinos, Hispanics, Blacks....it was wonderful. I thought "now the anawim are strengthening the speakers!"

September 12, 2005

I called a friend on telling an anecdote that seemed to me to indicate a callous disregard of the poor. I thought he would defend himself but he had tears in his eyes. I was ashamed of "hard-boiling" him in his sin by being so skeptical that he would repent. May I be so humble about my sins and defects!

October 5, 2005

Joan Andrews Bell, the tremendous Operation Rescue woman visited the Mahoney's here en route to an intervention against abortion. She and her husband adopted handicapped kids. They were so full of fun, especially Emiliano with prothesis legs, twisted arms, but bubbling over with joy!

I was so moved.

November 10, 2005

Listening to sentimental love songs on the radio at the dentist I am wondering, is this how men get out their emotions, by singing these songs or listening to them?

December 12, 2005

Dear friend,

About faith in God's providence concerning things one wants....

I have always felt that if what I want is not something I am sure is God's will, there is no reason to trust that He will give it to me.

I am sure it's God's will that I become a better person and I trust that He will give me the grace.

On the other hand, I see that God often works differently with others. If they will believe it was His grace if they get what they want, He may give it to them to win their gratitude. If I get what I want I do feel grateful, also, but it's not my main way of relating to God.

FULL CIRCLE - January, 2006 – May, 2007

(These journal entries follow the ones compiled in *Face to Face* and in *Heart to Heart*. They begin after I moved into the house of my daughter Carla, her husband, Steve, and the 5 children, Nicholas 16, Alexander 14, Maxi 9, Zacho 6, and Martina 6 months old.

This part of my journal contains quite a number of quotations from Anne – *Direction for Our Times*. I found these messages consoling and in a “voice” I can easily believe is that of Jesus and saints. If anything about them doesn’t appeal to you just skip them when they appear. It is a teaching in Catholic spirituality to avoid private revelations that seem either false or just annoying. Since no one is required to believe in private revelation even when approved such as messages of Lourdes and Fatima, we should not risk getting a distaste for spirituality itself because certain alleged messages are repugnant.

This part of my journal also contained many “words in the heart” from Jesus, Mary and Joseph for me. They are personal. I wondered if I should include them since some read, even if they accept in principle that Jesus can speak in our hearts this way, are still turned off by seeming messages to someone other than themselves. I know when I read such words in the heart to others, sometimes I can direct them to myself in a good way, but sometimes the style upsets me and I think – Jesus would never talk this way. This is phony. However, 200 words into this part of the journal there is an explanation that seems cogent to me. The Holy Spirit seems to tell me that given how neurotic my own self-talk is, and also how much the devil wants to talk me into his interpretation of the events in my life, that it is the strategy of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to convey these true words into my heart in this manner. So I am including them. Again, if you like the rest of the journaling most of the time, and don’t like these alleged sayings to me of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, just skip over them! Smile.

January 1, 2006

I have entitled this part of my on-going journals “Full Circle.” The one after *Heart to Heart* I planned to call “At the Gates of Eternity,” but when I moved back with this part of my family in North Carolina, I thought that “Full Circle,” expressed better what was happening to me. I made the decision quickly and will be trying it for a year, but my sense is it will work long-term. Most of my life, even when living with my husband and children I thought of my primary identity as being a Catholic teacher, writer, speaker. Not because I didn’t love my family dearly, but because, as a convert, Jesus seemed to be the highest and most profound reality – giving the hope without which family life would be temporal instead of eternal.

Now, in my old age (almost 68 – don't tell me that I am young at heart. I actually feel like 90) the need for the security of family love and the help they can give me (even though Carla and Steve are not yet back in the Church) as I become more and more disabled seems more important to me than reasons for living elsewhere.

I am enjoying helping the family in small ways. Taking the boys to the store to get gifts for the birthday of their father (distant because of the divorce of 2 years ago) in Los Angeles was so meaningful to me. My parents were separated (they had never married legally) and I have so many wounds from the estrangement from my father that I have a special need to see that these boys remain as close as conditions permit. I suggested they include personal individual messages of love and I added in my greeting a description of the virtues of each boy as I see them. Peter, their father, was grateful.

The house includes a large black Persian cat and two grey kittens. They can be found suddenly scooting around all over the rooms or supine occupying my desk. It is delightful to watch them. I think that is a big feature of old age – having time to just watch people or cats. After one or two tries as taking care of the baby, it was decided I was too spacey, so now I just get to watch her with no responsibility. There is that round sweet baby, sometimes crying but mostly enchanted with her large family.

Just now Steve's parents from England are visiting. His father is somewhat disabled and in pain. He is not a Catholic but agreed that his wife, who is a revert Catholic, and I, could lay healing hands on him. I was looking for a time to do it and picked out just before bed one evening. He shook his head, "I don't want to be anointed, I just want my bedtime cornflakes," he muttered. It was so sweet. As an older person I understood it so well.

Jo Jo and Richard, Steve's parents from England, being here for 3 weeks makes our household very much an extended family dwelling. He is a carpenter and she loves to fix things and clean. It all feels so old-fashioned and wholesome – the younger ones doing the work for money and the child-raising, and the older ones helping all day with what is good but not absolutely essential. I do dishes and laundry since Carla, Steve, and Richard are gourmet cooks. In the evenings we watch selected movies or play games.

Dear Jesus, Mary and Joseph, thank you for bringing me here with this decision and help us to overcome all small inevitable conflicts.

There is a conflict on my video-conferencing course in Contemporary Philosophy involving showing a movie about Gandhi. Perhaps some in the department who think this plan is watering things down don't fully realize how without Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. following his methods, we would not have the wonderful if incomplete, successes of Operation Rescue. In any case, after some chagrin I realized I have always taught in a way different from most scholars – more geared to changing the lives of the students as total persons, than going in depth into various theories. I have to accept that my more

personalist methods are what have made me the teacher and writer I am and that I can't simultaneously be a scholar's scholar in teaching or writing. Oh, my Jesus, keep me from letting the devil drain my energy by making me feel like a martyr whenever anyone in authority doesn't totally affirm me.

I was very tired between travel and denture woes (still persisting) when giving an out-of-town workshop this month. As usual I was thinking, it's too hard, I have to stop. Jesus, you seemed to say, "these women do so much for me and the kingdom; I want you to do what you can for them with these healing workshops – please accept that crosses that go with it. When you are too old the arms of the Church will carry you to heaven." I sensed Him kissing my forehead for doing it.

Recently quite a number of the workshops involve places that are neither "conservative" or charismatic but more middle of the road with their own virtues and deficiencies. I think the Holy Spirit is arranging this, possibly because those who remain in the Church are no longer militant dissenters, many of whom have left, but are open to input from any speaker, especially on universal issues such as anger-management.

January 25, 2005

My new pastor was an Episcopal organist who became suddenly disabled in one finger so he couldn't play well any more, and then became a Catholic and eventually a priest at around 50. He is now about 65. He happens to look a lot like Gandolf since he has a long grey beard and noble face. These images came to me about him.

Power

What is it like

with only a man's fingers

to fill a whole Church

with a Great Fugue?

What is it like

with only an anointing,

**a vestment and the sacred words
to fill a whole Church
with the presence of God?**

And

What will it be like

**When the vault of the Church
lifts off to show us Heaven?**

Gandolf will know.

January 30, 2006

Today was a funeral Mass. The priest wore a vestment with a tapestry type of pattern including black and white and the altar cloth was white but with big black strips. I thought this was wonderful for including old and new and tapping in that way to the archetype both of solemn black grief and resurrection hope.

During the Mass these images came to me:

Alter Christus

I thought of You, Jesus

first as truth,

then beauty,

then saving love.

Today the priest did the Mass

**as if anointing Your
crucified body
and our mystical one, too**

**so I could see, You,
Jesus, as tenderly
binding my wounds
with Your bloody shroud**

and teaching me

“To those who struggle

I am soft,

Won't you be, too?”

January 31, 2006

I have been reading many many books about different wars. I wondered why I felt the need right now to read such “masculine” books. The thought came to me, “Before I die, I want to have a God’s eye view of the whole world,” ???????

February 6, 2006

Fr. Ken came to bless the house. He was wonderful. Very gentle, humorous, appreciative of everyone, and charmingly open about his own defects, etc. Carla’s mother-in-law from England, Jo, a revert Catholic loved him. Her husband, a former Episcopal choir boy said afterward “A priest like that could make people want to turn Catholic!” Carla was her most ardent questing self which, combined with her beauty of person, drew out in me all my deep love for her. Jo said she felt such tranquility come over the house after the blessing. Fr. Ken seemed happy to be among us. Probably he will come back.....oh, oh, oh. Let it be done unto us according to Your will.

February 10, 2005

Joy of getting EWTN series on widows for 2007. My dear friend Anne Lassiter will be the co-host. Jim Ridley of Watershed wrote about this venture:

We whoop with glee and weep with joy for you two Wonderwidows, O Ronda and Anne, that you will soon at last become as renowned and regaled a celebrity team of apostolic teledowagers to the earthly millions as you have long been and ever shall be to the heavenly multitudes of angelic and saintly fans who are congregating now to cheer you on with avalanches of lavish grace and to chant your praises before the smiling Face of your Beloved, into whose saving embrace you will entice only He knows how many souls just as you have done to this little family of devoted friends who joins with yours our grateful alleluias. Deo Gratias.

A prayer-poem I wrote for my new pastor to affirm what he is doing:

PRIEST SHORTAGE?

Is Eucharist the easiest?

every single time

you can bring

the eternal-infinite

to every hungry beak.

Sermons?

Bounce for the bored

yet

steady for the scared;

Challenges for the complacent

yet

wisdom for the wobbling.

Ministries?

Loose the Holy Spirit

lavishly let

the laity lead...

- **faithful formators**
- **high-energy Hispanics**
- **Hmong heroes**
- **unvanquishable Vincentians**
- **committed cursillistas**
- **knowing knights**
- **surprising speakers**

so Father-man gets time

to tryst with his Savior

and even music make!

“With God all things are possible.”

February 17, 2006

I asked Fr. Ken about how people can cope with the terrible pain of vulnerable fear of rejection in connection with the book I am writing on healing of rejection. (This book was not published but is available on free e-books on www.rondachervin.com)

Among other things he said was that those who are overly needy are somewhat selfish only wanting to be ministered to. In the case of some, no one can ever heal them as long as they are in that state.

He thinks what is healing is not just more counsel or contemplative prayer, but also active works to help others.

Continuing with Fr. Ken's thoughts: underlying that extreme neediness is low self-esteem. We create a self-image out of our successes and failures. Such a self-image is always wrong. In forgiveness we discover we are made in God's image, we discover our God-given image and begin to trust. We need to see God forgiving. We don't have to be afraid of ourselves, we are worth more than a flock of sparrows.

God is simple, we are complex.

Growing in holiness is not something you can just force. He likes an image from teaching music. The student concentrates on his fingers and then becomes stiff, we need to play with our whole body. So in spirituality we need the whole self, relaxing the body, letting God integrate us. We need to "play" with the whole person and not be divided so there is flow.

Not try to do so much consciously, let God integrate us. Accept limitations of myself and then I can accept more from others and then I will be more compassionate.

We need a balance between thinking "I can do everything" or "I can do nothing."

February 17, 2006

Answer to a letter:

Here is my present thinking about "unbreakable" relationships with non-spouses.

Because we are made for perfect happiness in heaven, our life on earth even when reasonably happily married, will seem unsatisfactory and leave us restless. Relating to a "spiritual friend" or past boyfriend or girlfriend, in a way that doesn't involve the daily boring grind of concrete needs and petty personality conflicts, "who should take out the garbage," etc. creates the illusion of that perfect love we will have in heaven.

We really are relating in such friendships to the deepest lovable self of the other, but that is only part of the person. If married to that same person we would have to deal with all the daily boring and/or conflicting sides of each other which kill or dim the vision of the innermost self of the other.

It is possible that a good Christian friendship could arise but not on the addictive basis of I have to write to him every day and make him into a pseudo-husband figure. You would need to let go of all fantasies - "what if our spouses died in the next earthquake," etc. etc.,

and presume you will never be married to each other and develop a friendship of sharing no more "exciting and exalted" than you now have with, say, your best woman friend.

If this seems unbearable it is because you might need a combination of psychological counseling because the urgency is based on some deprivation lack in childhood you are desperately trying to fill, as well as more deep prayer to let God's total perfect love fill your heart each day - using the same time you pour out your heart to your e-beloved to be with Jesus.

I will pray for you. God bless you, Ronda

February, 2006

A salute to the Mass of Fr. Ken:

In the Eternal Key

Post-Vatican II:

More community,

less beauty?

Sad trade off.

His guardian angel

approached the Throne.

“I have a plan:

Make a musician priest!

“He will do the Mass as Easter- journey,

an a cappella song.

Like in a performance

each word will sound the right note.

“And, without knowing why,

the people will be soothed,
and exalted.”

And God said, “It’s a plan.”

Another, more universal prayer-poem about the priesthood:

Our Priest

Eagerly,

he emerges from his door,
not as if a cuckoo clock figure,
but as if on urgent personal business,
as he is.

Intently,

he speaks to us,
not as if to the distracted ,
but as if we longed to be reached,
as we do.

Tenderly,

he holds up the Eucharist,
not as if the bread were only a symbol,
but as if it were a body frail and broken,
as it was.

Carefully,

his hands enfold the cup,
not as if the wine were only sign,
but as if it was the holy grail,
as it is.

**Graciously,
he offers us the Mystery,
not as if a sop to the naïve,
but as if it were pure love,
as it is.**

**For such a priest there ought to be a flock of helping Sisters,
but since they are endangered species,
we will be his nuns.**

I also got linked up to a Lutheran college where they accept some RC teachers. One of them is busy teaching Newman with the obvious good results! They want me to teach part time there and also be part of a prestigious lecture series called Luther/Aquinas -to speak about holiness and the saints! Yipee!

My son-in-law is a movie buff and so we watch odd movies - one is an English series called Cracker about an alcoholic/gambler psychiatrist detective who psyches out criminals of a type I would never understand otherwise - like skin heads. It is a brilliantly acted program. So I am very connected up in a spectator way with "the culture."

March 19, 2006

On a visit to Corpus Christi - Fr. Ralph prayed over me. He prayed for my denture problems and it came out I was able to experience the same sensation as of before, but with no pain. I even like wearing them now. What a grace!

Working on a video intro to Faust the question came up why does Goethe have Faust saved without his repenting? I realized it is probably because Goethe, who was a weak Christian dogmatically, grasped that as dogmatic religion lost its hold an era of sin would ensue but was wanting to lay out the idea of humanistic altruism, as at the end of Faust's tale, and wanted to show God blessing such altruism as sufficient for salvation.

April 5, 2006

Roy Schoeman said about speaking and the fatigue and reluctance before and joy during and exhaustion afterwards – it is because the Holy Spirit is going through you with more than you have – like a huge wattage through a small circuit.

April 10,2006

Feel kind of tired and unexalted – maybe right for Holy Week. Jesus seemed to say that He wants not so much to inspire me now but to gently comfort me – I thought a kind of spiritual second childhood to be rocked in a lullabye of hope.

April 13, 2006

Watched The Passion again on Steve’s computer. It was so intimate watching it alone and not in a diffuse space. Felt again such a willingness to sacrifice and suffer in imitation of our dear Jesus. Will make my confession today about being so legalistic about sacrifice vs. generous and holy.

Holy Thursday

Instead of doing the foot washing as a very set ritual as usual with altar boys and deacons and lectors at the altar, Fr. Ken did it after the stripping of the altar and asked anyone who wanted their feet washed to sit at either end of the pews. Then he came down the aisle, assisted by altar servers and slowly made his way up and down the aisles on his knees, moving on his knees between feet, and kissing the feet as he went! It was wonderful.

April 15, 2006

May 1, 2006

At the airport going to Charismatic Liason conference I went to confession to one of the participant priests. He said “The Lord tells me He is crazy about you.” As a penance he said I should give myself a break!

May 9, 2006

Letter:

I just got back from interesting experience being a group co-leader at a Great Books Retreat near here with contemporary short readings from Gogol, The Bhagavad-Gita, Rezzori, and Flannery O'Conner - the theme was Order and Chaos.

There were about 70 participants - many of whom are retired people who have been coming for 26 years! One died of cardiac arrest during this weekend. He came from a Ukrainian Jewish family who had become Protestants way back. Among the leaders and participants were atheist political activists (Jewish and ex-Catholic background), a

Mennonite minister acting as a Lutheran minister part-time who doesn't believe in the Divinity of Christ, some strong Lutheran pastors and lay people, 4 Catholics.

Since most of them were intellectuals, I found much resistance in some to any questions that related ideas to trying to grow oneself vs. analyzing the wider scene or the lines of the readings. Others, mostly women, seemed to like a more personalist, existential approach.

During the weekend, I was thinking it was too tiring at my age, when an old (in their late seventies) agnostic Jewish couple approached me during the wine and cheese social. She was a sculptor and he a government contract person. One of their children, now 50, was developmentally disabled. They said this was the insoluble problem of their lives. They thought that had they developed the type of spirituality believing Jews and Catholics have they might be better able to bear this life-long blow - could I help them find God before they died. I shared as best I could and hope to continue by mail or phone. It touched my heart to be with them and got away from argument and dialogue to this more personal level.

June, 2006

Letter to a woman who thought God had told her to have an abortion but then wanted His forgiveness afterwards:

I read your story about your abortion. It was so, so sad. Do you know of the 2 biggest healing ministries to women who had abortions WEBA and Project Rachel. You might look them up to see if you could help with this ministry. They probably have telephone hot lines. I think it comes under how Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, no one cast a stone and neither will I, go and sin no more. You wouldn't have felt the need for forgiveness if you didn't know it was wrong on some level - but Jesus specializes in forgiveness.

In the Catholic Church we are taught never to do anything that is wrong and that if it seems the only way, it isn't really (as in giving babies for adoption - nowadays adopting parents will pay all expenses plus give generous amounts to the donor mother) we do have to discern, but that is between 2 good things such as - should I help women who had abortions or should I finish my Master's degree. You might want to work at a pro-life clinic...They don't use judgmental harsh people. They ask in the questionnaire for volunteers "have you ever done something seriously wrong and then known God's forgiveness." It would give you such joy to know a baby was saved because of your tremulous witness.

June 4, 2006

On the Eve of Pentecost I went to Hispanic charismatic prayer group meeting since there is no near Anglo one. What energy and power. I thought “the violent bear it away!” They pray so from the heart and the gut. My new theory is that since we Anglos are contracepting and aborting ourselves out of existence, let the Hispanics take the country and may the Catholic Hispanic charismatics one day be the bridge to the Pentecostal Hispanics. And then we’ll have a Catholic country!

June 13, 2006

I had a breakthrough on the Grieving book I am writing

Weep alone – you may drown in grief

Do not weep – you may become hardened

Weep with Jesus – you will have comfort and hope

This will be linked up to the idea that the purpose of God allowing the miseries of grieving is to gradually wean us from the world and bind us to Him who is The Way, the Truth and the Life, with each word being important – that the only way through grief is Him, and it is His saving truths and we need to hang onto in faith; and that Life is Him in eternity and hopefully reunion with the beloved ones - Life is a pilgrimage. Our home is not here on earth, but in heaven. Your tears are like a river to sail into the heart of God, etc. etc. etc. (This book was not published but can be obtained as a free e-book on www.rondachervin.com)

June 20, 2006

Birth of little kittens. Joy of watching them come out. I have them in my room – very archetypal – motherhood, nurturing.

My grandson Nicholas, with his long hair and Jewish face, looks like Jim Carviele – like Jesus – such a joy and grace even if funny.

June 25, 2006

Joy of swimming in the pool in my daughter’s house in North Carolina. Looking at the pine trees I am remembering that my first conscious experience of finding something beautiful in nature was seeing an umbrella pine in Central Park, NYC.

July 1, 2006

I started working on Called by Name: Following a Personal Spirituality – full of buoyant energy – Contents: God’s Way, No Way (when we’re stuck); My Way, Their Way (witness

stories of admired others), *Your Way* (guides for readers to search out their own), *Our Way*, *Home Free* (not that we've arrived, but that we know our quicksand and our life-line)

Then the next day a sense – this could really be my last book – make it short and sweet and be released from the pressure. Scary. What would fill the gap?

This morning I awoke with this poem in my head – maybe a poet is being born out of the womb of prose?

The poem is based on Carla, my daughter, being away at a family reunion. We couldn't all fit in the car with seat belt laws so I agreed to stay home with Nicholas and Max and the cats and the new litter.

This poem might sound angry but is really about how choleric melancholics like myself, need sanguines desperately. Maybe the key to my marriage as well?

COMPLEMENTARITY

Hostage of their joie de vivre

we angry drones work off our debt.

End of day, laid back

our little feet paw the air

Then settle under our melancholy shell...

dream of early retirement.

We awaken to the radiance

of our queens and princesses

drawing us back to service.

July 1, 2006 from *Direction for Our Times* – locutions to Anne:

Jesus

Be at peace, little children of God. I am with you. Do not think that you are orphans, abandoned to a world which lacks God's love. I seek to ring love into the world in a continuous stream. How My little apostles delight Me with their willingness to allow Me to use them for this purpose. I work without pause in each soul that welcomes Me. You may be asleep, or at rest in another way, and I am busy at work in your soul, preparing great gifts for your brothers and sisters who do not know Me. I am tireless. I am determined. I am forming many saints who will move up the mountain of holiness with speed in order to serve Me more completely. Do you wish to be one of these saints? Of course you do. We will work together, you and I, to move you more fully into My will. How I guard My little apostles. How I surround them with My protection. I watch your life closely so that every experience you have will benefit your soul. My little ones experience pain and carry wounds. This should not frighten you. I do not judge you for your pain. I look at your pain and remember My pain and I am compassionate. Your pain will not separate you from Me. Again I say, have no fear, I am working in your soul to bring My kingdom to earth through you. I will see to everything. Trust your Jesus and you will be at peace.

July 1, 2006

After working on the No Way chapter of Called by Name and remembering all those tremendous mystical graces, Jesus seemed to prepare me for a big intervention by prayer of quiet during my prayer-time and then when I hit the bed. He seemed to be telling me that He is trying to trap me into talking to Him in depth all day instead of being so busy being a writer of books I plan. He seemed to say that He was lonely – very few want to talk to Him. Have I gone back to thinking He is a carpenter and not the most interesting person in the whole world ever. I asked Him whether on earth He smelled like sweat and burlap and He smiled. I had feelings of tremulous hope that the gap if I stop writing will be filled by Him.

A long ecstasy prayer – like being seized.

Jesus: Ronda, I love reality – the cats, the wood of the house, water, trees. I want to work through your literary side, Ronda, not just the analytic side. That's why I have you surrounded by poets. I like old women, Teresa of Avila, Mother Angelica, Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

I awoke with the simple thought that Jesus is asking, as it were, “may I borrow your pen?”

July 2, 2006

Saw Superman Returns. Delighted at how they made him more like Christ – tortured, wounded side, the world does need a savior, almost dead, resurrected, ascended. Intervention of the Returning Jesus through the inspiration of the producers?

I was talking to the real Jesus about this.

Jesus: Do not fear. It will all be all right. be very small. Fly close to my breast like Lois Lane with Superman.

July 3, 2006

We have a pool. I love to swim. The parents didn't have much time to teach the littler kids to swim, so I bribed them with treats or cash if they would swim across the pool. It only took a little while and then they were having a ball swimming for hours in the pool in play.

I thought that is how the Holy Spirit feels when He coaches us to grow and we actually cooperate finally.

I finished Called by Name and celebrated listening to Mahler's Eighth selections – to bring Martin into it.

July 4, 2006

I confessed all the vanity about my books through the years.

Jesus: Let me hold you still and just look out and see, as if I were holding you in front of Me so you see what I see. I am dissolving you into Me!

Me: Transforming union?

Jesus: See the shine of the wood on the chair at your desk. I knew you would love that shine and that trees could become chairs. You like to see solids shine with light.

Me: Because you are a carpenter's son?

Jesus: The light shineth in the darkness... You have been sating your hunger for beauty through the poetry of Scripture all these years.

Me: (Feeling doubt about whether I am making all this up – I think): which pathos is greater: out of love for Love to believe I am loved or out of fear of being fatuous to reject even Love?

As I type these notes up from last night I feel touched. Why wouldn't my Jesus want to bring me new life in my old age through words?

July 6, 2006

As if confirming this new dialogue of Jesus and myself, Pope Benedict's Wednesday audience was about St. John the Apostle and how he represents Jesus being our close friend and in silence revealing himself.

I asked Jesus about Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda and Kirk Douglas and their attractive but tragic personalities in so many ways. (I am reading an autobiography of Jane Fonda).

Jesus: See how terrible it is to try to live without Me. I love(d) them very much and wanted them to find Me.

July 7, 2006

I watched a movie called Monster about a serial killer prostitute. Wondered what you thought, Jesus.

Jesus: Don't you think I forgive sins as much as a movie director would?

At the Mass was the Scripture where You are upbraided by the self-righteous for being with sinners – the sick need a physician. Help me to help all those in family or Lenoir Rynne College I meet who don't know Your personal love yet. Help me to accept the sacrifice of reaching out to people many of whom won't want to hear.

July 7, 2006

Reading an Amy Tan novel.

Me: Why do I like it so much?

Jesus: She reminds you of your mother, full of interesting feelings and thoughts. I want you to understand that I loved your mother with all her flaws and she is with Me and she awaits you and understands you now. I want you to understand her. She suffered very much.

I felt kind of numb hearing these words in my heart. I think it is always hard for us to really, really, understand God's love for those we have had lots of difficulty with. I need to ponder this locution. Maybe write my mother a dialogue,

Dear Nonna (Italian for grandmother which we all called my mother after she became such a happy grandmother)

Are you glad I argued and witnessed so much that you finally became a Catholic?

Nonna: Yes.

Me: I was so disappointed that you became a dissenting Catholic.

Nonna: I know.

Me: I wanted us to become closer because you became a Catholic.

Nonna: It was too much of a stretch because of my guilt. I wasn't loved unconditionally as a child the way you were. I was neglected and ignored. So I didn't have the cushion of love that makes repentance easier.

Me: I didn't know how to overcome the conflicts between us except by dutiful love which you scorned so.

Nonna: I was desperate – the great loves I had in the last part of my life was that of your twins and your sister, Carla. So those were the bonds I focused on since you and I were at such an impasse.

Me: Where are you now?

Nonna: I am in purgatory awaiting your full forgiveness.

Me: I am still serving you dutifully by praying for your soul, but I will ask for the grace to forgive from the heart. I am grateful for all you gave me of so much love as a child that I have so much more strength than so many, in spite of lots of brokenness, as a resilient person, teacher, speaker, writer.

Nonna: We will be happy together in heaven one day?

Me: Yes?

July 8, 2006

Blaka, who did the article in the local newspaper about the Aging workshop, picked up on something I said about living simply and giving to the poor. She wanted to do a feature on this. I was afraid it could seem like the right hand knowing what the left was doing and alienate everyone as a slur. I insisted she include how others help the poor hands on, which I don't and helping the family counts, too. etc. She said I could see the article first and I will let Fr. Ken see it too. Praying about it You seemingly said:

Jesus: Mother Teresa became well known because someone noticed and was inspired. Don't be afraid to be hated – “a prophet is not honored in his own town.”

Me: I guess if one person becomes more simple and generous it's worth the resistance? Fr. Ken thought it would be okay – he says he preaches that our luxuries belong to the poor also.

The mother cat was missing for 9 hours. I felt awful. It was I who let her out the front door to frolic a bit – and she came back a hundred times before now. Finally Steve whistled and she seemed to emerge from under the house – perhaps she had found wild cat nip since she seemed so groggy and numbed out.

I offered the Mass for her return and prayed to St. Francis and St. Martin de Porres. Thank you.

July 9, 2006

Thinking about the transforming union that is considered by scholars to be the last stage of the spiritual life.

Mary seems to be telling me to look into the eyes of Jesus whenever I feel anxious.

Read a wonderful passage in Garrigou-Lagrange quoting from St. Thomas, that just as an object falls more swiftly as it reaches its goal, so toward the end of our lives our love becomes more intense as we get closer to heaven.

Concerning something that happened that made me feel insecure, Jesus seemed to want to tell me that there is no security on earth. “When the earth shakes for you, hold My hand more tightly. Pray my name over and over ;Jesus, I trust in you.”

July 10, 2006

Fr. Ken came over and we watched Ninth Configuration – Blatty's great movie. This time round I saw one of themes as being how God uses the devil as a kind of shock treatment to show us how bad it really gets if we thwart His way.

Fr. Ken, so in the center every moment at the parish seems to like to relax and let others take over on social visits. During the night the Holy Spirit seemed to give me the lines of this reflection:

Not an ordinary guest,

My priest is always a priest.

He cannot not bless or pardon.

Out of toxic waste

He plucks flowers

And then we wonder

That we smell so sweet.

He witnesses

‘be not afraid’

And the waters

Of our indignation

Recede.

July 12, 2006

A friend is in trouble – a sort of panic. I am going to just give it to You instead of trying to “fix” him.

Jesus: Always think I love that one you are worried about so much more than you can. Offer to Me for him the pain that comes because you cannot help as much as you want to.

July 13, 2006

Relevant Radio show – interview about my conversion – with potential to reach 26,000,000– of course that is just potential not actual listeners. I have a mixture of pride and skepticism – my background is so different, who can relate?

Jesus: The Holy Spirit uses these witness stories. Look how you are reached by Scott Hahn and Mother Angelica even though they are so different in every way from you. What moves people is that witness stories show My love – how personal My love is.

July 13, 2006

Zacho's 7th birthday. A chance to be very tender to him.

I was thinking he would be so happy – he had painful stomach cramps and digestive problems and was half the day lying sick and quiet (very unlike him) so he looked holy – but he revived and loved his presents and loved being the center of attention.

Did the Relevant Radio. It went very well. It felt anointed, strong, and there were questions that could elicit important responses. It's a call in show. Chuck Neff was a fine interviewer – supportive and affirming. The staff liked what I said and wants to do others with me. I recommended a bunch of friends for interviews.

I finished the Amy Tan book. There is a climax scene where the American tourists and the Burmese tribe have an ecstatic mystical experience based on their old pagan rituals. It disgusted me since it was not our Catholic faith.

Jesus: Love is the bridge. When you see space between you and others of alien beliefs don't think of them as enemies but see where I have laid down a bridge.

July 15, 2006

I can see where You had a bridge there for me with the woman at the pregnancy care center in Hickory – who seemed to be a strict firm Protestant. I was so happy she was against contraception on the basis it encourages sex outside of marriage and she teaches abstinence.

A Jewish convert friend was very upset about a report that Pope Benedict condemned Israel's bombing of Lebanon seeing his words as anti-Semitic. She doesn't want to go to her usual daily Mass where the priest is likely to say something anti-Israel.

I wrote her: I realize I have quite mixed feelings - on the one hand I would die for Israel if it would help, and not for the United States unless against an enemy such as Hitler or Stalin - on the other hand I am ashamed of the US and Israel because of abortion - we have killed more babies in the US and Israel than any Arabs have killed our troops or Israelis, after all, and I have zilch trust in news reports about anything. It is certainly just as likely some news rep is misrepresenting Pope Benedict as not. I hope so. (Later I saw he was aware of injustices of terrorism against Israelis but was just responding to the reprisal issue.)

July 15, 2006

There was a visitor here, a poet friend of Carla. Carla spent hours trying to convince her of her beauty and power in spite of her low self-esteem issues. I thought she was being a sort

of poet-therapist like a dance-therapist. I thought she did it just the way Diana, her twin in California does with her friends.

I went to visit an old friend, Juli Loesch Wiley, who I hadn't seen in 20 years in Tennessee. She used to run around the country doing OR and talks. She has a wonderful word-mongering tongue like talking to peace activists about how abortion is nuking the baby out of the womb. She had a great take on immigration in relation to abortion: Since Roe v. Wade we have had 50 million abortions – a third of a generation who could have been entry workers – so we need immigrants for our demographic gap and we should thank God every day they are hispanic mainly Catholics vs. Muslim possibly terrorists as found in Europe with a worse demographic problem from so many abortions.

I was amazed at how this couple I visited are helping the old father (92 years old) – she hardly able to walk from rheumatic heart, diabetes, knee problems with her father holding onto her back to get around. She also adopted a Russian baby. She is walking the walk of pro-life big time – and for an intellectual activist this is so impressive.

July 18, 2006

The boys left for California to be with their father for the rest of the summer. It seems like their ghosts are here. I miss their unique personalities. I feel lesser even though I love the quiet in the house.

Jesus: See, you need the otherness of males around. It helps you to be more than your mind; to be a grandmother.

I am reading Trocchi *Cain's Book* about drug addicts.

Jesus: Feel the pathos. Desperate for happiness and no hope because they don't have Me.

July 19, 2006 off to ETWN – why do You want me to go off and share?

Jesus: Heaven is not a solo but a symphony.

I am thinking that that I should give myself time to observe and drink in all the good You want me to see. This is a preparation for heaven.

Jesus: Don't try to resolve so many things. Let Me dissolve some of them.

July 20 EWTN

In an off moment I was sitting in the lobby of the studio looking at TV sets with the various programs being shown in Spanish language countries, and other English speaking countries. They now have a wonderful mix with great speakers, Masses, music, classical

Christian art – many of my favorites. EWTN has become a repository of all the treasures of the Church, and overflowing with it. How wonderful.

Jesus: Remember Mother Angelica's motto: If you want God to do the miraculous you have to be willing to do the ridiculous.

Me: Yes, Jesus I do believe you have used and will use all my work for the kingdom and that I should just do what You seem to want me to do, without trying to figure out if it will work or not.

I visited some dear old friends: Rebecca and Richard Geraghty. Becky is slowly becoming more disabled from side effects of diabetes. She feels awful that she is mostly sitting in a chair. It seemed to me that she was an icon of the heart for her husband who lives so much in his head and that would be enough even if she couldn't do all the many things for him she likes to do that demand more mobility.

Seeing them together gave me a sense of how much God has planned for me to be more a single person as a future consecrated widow. Jesus with me is much better than me with a husband.

July 22, 2006 Feast of St. Mary Magdalene – my patron baptismal saint

I had expected that some in the parish would be offended by the newspaper article about simplicity of life to give more to the poor. Sure enough someone drew a mustache and beard on my face in the article that was put up on the parish bulletin board. I laughed when I saw it. We are supposed to rejoice when we are persecuted. I never can. But in this case it is easy since it is such a small little sign of rejection.

Jesus: Good. That is nothing to what I got preaching about the lilies of the fields.

July 23, 2006

Last night I went to the Hispanic charismatic prayer meeting at our parish. Full of very young people clapping and moving about – these usually so inward sometimes stolid looking folk. When I saw in the Psalm for this morning about rejoicing in the Lord I thought, they are doing it. I think it is so easy for me because it is a throwback to the Jewish worship tradition with dancing and swaying. I wish everyone would like it as much and feel so freed by it, but I suppose for those who only associate motion with popular dancing, it is hard even to want to try.

We talk a lot in my house with my daughter, Carla, who is an identical twin of Diana, of her need to try to cajole her husband into twin-like togetherness with her, into loving to do just what she loves. I think I have the same misplaced urgency about trying to get everyone to love what I love.

Jesus: In my house, many mansions.

July 23, 2006

I am wanting to keep one of the kittens for myself. But ambivalent.

Jesus: It is natural to want to touch what is soft and to love animals. It is my gift. Take the kitten. I am responding to your whim.

Me: Tears. Like in the musical Cabaret the old gal sings “A pineapple for me, for me,”....

Full circle back to my love of little cats as a teen-ager?

I watched an old early Ingmar Bergman movie: Shame. Wonderful acting of Liv Ullman and Max Von Sydow. Overall sense of meaning of forgiveness.

Jesus: Yes. Forgiving love is deeper than rancor.

I was reading Annie Proulx’s Wyoming Stories. One is about homosexual sex in two men.

Jesus: I want you to understand this more so you can “Hate the sin, love the sinner.”

July 24, 2005

Carla says she now prays in constant gratitude – for everything wonderful in her life – beauty, coolness of the pool, hotness of the sun, the family. What a wonderful change from years back thinking she was an agnostic. I like knowing she is praying in gratitude. A bond: I do that, too.

July 25, 2006

Inertia. I don’t even want to do what I love to do such as prepare talks.

Jesus: Don’t make decisions about that. Just accept it as a cross for now.

I watched an anti-war movie called Syriana with a complicated plot about mid-East politics and US strategies. I felt discouraged wondering how such types could be reached.

Jesus: I come to them in various ways to save them. From living at Star of the Sea, the Catholic village, you know there is no easy way to avoid all evil because the evil is within, not just in the surroundings. When I lived on earth I was surrounded by the evils of the Romans but I preached more about the evils within the seemingly good people.

July 26, 2006

I am working on a Catholic/Lutheran Adult Ed. Workshop on Pope Benedict’s Encyclical

- here are some notes:

Reading the Encyclical over again I notice how it coincides with what Jesus is telling me, that He wants me to see the world and others as He sees them as in this paragraph of Benedict XVI (Deus Caritas Est #17) Gradually His will becomes my will “The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God’s will increasingly coincide. God’s will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will...Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy. (Psalm 72)”

Went to bed with fear about teaching at the Lutheran college.

Jesus: Don’t worry about how many will like you. There are some I can reach through you. I promise. Look for the bridges.

I was praying the rosary quietly and almost asleep when it felt as if my body became lighter, as if my soul was leaving it.

Jesus: I am giving you foretastes of heaven to encourage you. A vacation from your worries?

This was a state of blissful release from the body, like coming into the center of Being. It seemed as if my soul was being knit with the souls of all those I love. This deep bliss lasted for a few hours. I came out of it the next morning feeling a little frightened. Would He put me in a trance?

Jesus, you have brought me to these beautiful states before without any more extreme graces, so I should not be afraid. Also, just I guess anything out of the ordinary slightly frightens us, even if it is blissful.

Why Lenoir/Rhyne – Lutherans? I asked again about my part time job teaching at this college.

Jesus: Look how desperate I am if I have to send out a de-fanged lioness to them?

I thought maybe this humor, my style, was proof that this was not Jesus but me, however, later I thought of St. Thomas More and the jokes about his beard just before being guillotined. High humor as sign of grace.

Later the Holy Spirit suggested I put the whole Lenoir Ryne College mission under the guidance of Mother Mary – asking her to show me what her eyes see. I suggested to Fr. Ken that I might invoke St. Charles Borromeo – counter-reformation doctor of the Church

– see myself as a missionary from our parish. He said he could give me a missionaries blessing just before I start. Lovely.

July 28, 2006

I went to our one hour adoration prayer – I hadn't been because it is an inconvenient hour. Immediately went into prayer of quiet. Fr. Ken solemnly processed down the Church aisles with the monstrance blessing us, but without a word. It was so solemn. I thought it was for healing but unlike at big conferences where charismatic priests do this with lots of excitement, this was a quiet way. I noticed that my gums didn't hurt during this, even though I had the dentures on. Spoke to Fr. Leo the next day and he alluded to how God can just take away pain. He cited an example of how when he was doing Operation Rescue there was a photo afterwards shown in court of a policeman with his fingers in Fr. Leo's nostrils dragging him to the police car. He felt nothing at the time and didn't even remember but his nose was badly bruised and bleeding afterwards. He said God can lift you above the rain into the sky above the clouds when He wishes.

I saw a movie Tsotsi about a young South African black thief and murderer who gradually becomes compassionate from taking care of a tiny baby found in the car he had stolen. It seemed contrived to some degree but then I thought of you, Jesus, and the conversion of "good" thief, who was surely a murderer as well as a thief, if his punishment was crucifixion.

Jesus: I see the heart of a man, like an X-ray. Do not fear. Movies can be like X-rays. Without the contrast of the violence that is real, everything, even religion could seem sentimental.

I have been reading of the Grimke Sisters – wonderful speakers for anti-slavery, themselves being refugees in the North from a slaveholding family in the South. They had tremendous courage and oratorical ability since they were the first women speakers ever on platforms normally reserved for men.

Jesus seemed to want me to take courage from them as a woman speaker, showing me how disarming a woman speaker can be just because there is so much skepticism about them – still there today in a lesser form.

Jesus told me about the rest that He promises to the heavily burdened:

“It is not a rest of Stoic detachment. In your turbulence, I want to stretch you toward My heart so that I can pour My love in and then you will trust me more and therefore be more serene. Let me!”

July 31, 2006

Jesus seemed to ask me: What are you running away from with all this reading and film-seeing?

Me: Fear?

Jesus: Come to me. That is why I have to slow you down. Nothing is more important now than your peace, so take time to sit at My feet and let me give it to you.

Me: Yes. Trying to breathe in the holy Name, Jesus, frequently, especially when that anxious feeling comes.

Jesus is telling me to be very still inside – wordless. As I am falling asleep, not even the rosary, but just the name of Jesus. To practice “death.” Death to my word-monger analytic self.

I didn’t interpret this as meaning I am necessarily literally going to die soon, or that I can’t think any more, but just to have a truly quiet time in my prayer once more.

Fear

Frantic cat

Wanting home

Stretched to the max

Across the screen door

Claws holding you fast

Turn around

And see your master

Close behind,

Ready to carry you inside!

Frantic human

Wanting home

Stretched to the max

Across the earth

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Hands holding you fast

Turn around

And see your Lord

Close behind,

Ready to carry you to eternity!

August 4, 2006

Getting ready for Newton talks on Deus Caritas Est ecumenical Adult Bible Study with Catholics and Lutherans, I thought, of course, Mary is our patron for ecumenism for she loves all the Christians for loving her Son and surely wants for them all He wants to give them!

From Anne the locutionary/visionary of Direction for Our Times

August 1, 2006

Jesus:

I send My apostles the grace necessary for a calm spirit. With this calm spirit, My followers will bring heavenly calm to a restless world that trembles with unease. Live your commitment to time spent in silent prayer and I will place these heavenly graces in your soul. Others will identify these graces in you because these gifts are contrary to the gifts offered by the world. This is another way that My apostles stand out. Do not spend a great deal of time discussing events in the world. Long discussions do not benefit the situation. Spend instead a great deal of time praying for the situation in the world. This will benefit the situation, along with those around you, and your own little priceless soul, which becomes more and more beautiful through prayer and silence. I want each apostle to understand that I have not abandoned this world. Consider this carefully. I am Jesus. I am God. I have not abandoned this world. Do not be afraid. I say this, dearest apostles, firmly. I do not want My apostles to be afraid or to communicate fear to others. Bring your fears to Me and bring My peace to others. This is your call, your divine task. Accept this call as seriously as you accept My love for you and your love for Me. Our reciprocal love is natural and right, holy and blessed. My peace in your soul is also natural and right, holy and blessed. Apostles, be disciplined in those actions that bring you peace and be equally disciplined in avoiding those things that cause you upset. Your Jesus seeks to comfort many. Very often, I will do this through you.

I did a talk on Pope Benedict's first encyclical at an ecumenical effort with Catholics and Protestants. I was anxious about it, because I don't know if Lutherans would like me.

The Lutherans were very nice and friendly. It went very well. Immediately a Catholic man noticed my large crucifix and said he used to wear one but now keeps it in his pocket. He withdrew it and put it around his neck. Another Catholic was feeling low and it seemed my talk gave him fresh élan – he went to confession afterwards.

Jesus: Did you see that I had built bridges? The man who put on his crucifix, the French woman, the Lutheran speaker who opened up and who you will now know better when he is your colleague at Lenoir/Rhyne. See!

August 6, 2006

Finished reading Juli Loesch Wiley's journal book that will be for my series: En Route Witness Stories. I am in such awe of her courage dealing with terrible temptations many singles go through, succumbing but letting grace bounce her back, and her great courage in the Pro-Life Rescue movement. Wonderful ending of her finally finding true love.

I finished reading an Anne Perry novel – Angels in the Gloom. It is about World War I in Britain. The hero is an army chaplain, wounded and exhausted from a heroic time in the trenches in Belgium. There is a moment when they really think it is more probable than not that Germany will win. The question keeps coming up, how could it be worth it for young men to die in horrible circumstances of bloody horror. The Anglican chaplain is busy encouraging the women of his home town where he is brought to recover from his wounds before going back into the trenches. He does beautifully in his sensitive ministry until the end of the book where the author has him admit that he doesn't know for sure about God's love but he is absolutely sure that Jesus' teachings are the only ones that make life or death worth anything. So, presumably, it comes down to that eighteen year olds should die terrible deaths out of national sentiment, not with faith that God will reward their sacrifice, but only a wish. I was so disappointed. It points up Benedict's thought in the Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, that Jesus is not an ideal but a Person who loves us.

An analogy came to mind – suppose a king promised that if you fought for him you would live in his castle as sons and daughters or as a bride. But then after you made the sacrifice, told you, no I just wanted you as soldiers – go and die in the ditch, you can't live in my castle.

For Jesus to promise us eternal life if there is none, just as a goad to do good on earth is so cruel. Only He could make such a promise, but if it is just a false one, then it is like a scam, and He is not the Son of God but only an idealist.

August 7, 2006

I saw for the first time, Fr. Paul Griesgraber say his Mass. He is a late vocation man I greatly urged on to try to become a priest. He seemed like an eagle priest. He celebrates it out of the deep contemplative, St. John the Evangelist side of his personality, not the charismatic side.

Advice from him for me: when a father tries to get his baby to sleep, he first relaxes her and then she can sleep. So when we are anxious, we need to pray to let God relax us and go into a sort of sleep state of grace before trying to do things that usually make us anxious.

On addictions – if a father does not have a sacred space inside himself but fills himself by means of addictions, then the children will also fill that space inside themselves with addictions.

I was visiting Diana, my daughter, in Redondo Beach, California, who left the sacraments when she was fifteen. She came with me to daily Mass –saying it was just to be loving to me. But she began looking for a sign maybe to return herself – she was looking to see if anyone would be friendly after the Mass. Instead of a parishioner being friendly, an alcoholic beggar came by outside the Church and said, apropos of nothing “if I hadn’t fornicated but had married in the Church I wouldn’t be in the state I am now in.” That seemed like a fantastic sign that Jesus wanted to forgive all the sins of D’s past and get her married in the Church. She decided to have her marriage, which was not in the Church, con-validated in the Church as a sign of her desire to have her marriage to Pete be a total commitment.

I was thinking about old, old, age.

Jesus: They are living icons of the death of pride.

Yes! I should look forward to that instead of dreading it.

August 18, 2006

Talking to Jesus about addictions:

Jesus: If someone is good and close to Me, but is still unbalanced he needs therapy, but if someone is a big sinner who is unbalanced it is because sin makes you crazy and so do destructive addictions like sex (outside of marriage), alcohol and nicotine. Such people need Me first of all; not your psychological advice. When they come into My orbit, rejoice in hope.

I had a beautiful quiet prayer time at Adoration in the parish.

Jesus: I will let you be tired so that you rest by prayer. Drown in Me. This anxiety is your thorn in the flesh for this time in your life. Gently bring it to Me and say your trust prayers.

I was thinking of telling my twin-sister who will come tomorrow for a visit, about my different twin theories and that Jesus is my twin, Jesus seemed to suggest: how about quadruplets: Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Ronda.

If to be a saint is to have nothing but love in one's heart, that equals nothing but Jesus and everyone He loves, which equals everyone.

August 21, 2006

Watching Carla, my sister, doing preparations for her dance workshop at the parish – thinking how so many of us gifted creative people with lots of experience still feel so insecure.

Carla, my daughter, was talking about how the favored child of parents thinks they can easily earn love by doing what the loving parents wants with all the strain of that effort. So the less favored child should realize that he or she doesn't have that strain. Giving up on pleasing may develop strength to stand more on one's own or, of course, make for compulsive efforts to succeed where success seemed impossible.

I was relating this to authority issues. I think that where a child has even one parent modeling authority matched by understanding of the child's personality, then that child is less wary of authority and more eager to obey so as to earn love. I usually, theological considerations to the side, act as if I can earn God's love by obedience. Possibly the child whose authority did not understand him or her is likely to feel "to heck with authority, I will be my own authority," and therefore have trouble with Church authority even when it is legitimate.

When I went to Lenoir Ryne College in North Carolina to begin teaching part-time courses, I was delighted to see a huge wooden rosary hanging on the wall of the little student chapel and even flyers about how to pray the rosary. It is very friendly there.

A Catholic faculty member, when I told him I was planning to offer as penance all difficulties about this new little job for the sins of Catholics that Luther revolted against, said that he once did all the things necessary to get a big indulgence which he then applied ironically to Luther's soul! That would be "burning coals" since Luther was such a hater of indulgences.

August 22, 2006

I was more relaxed with my sister on this visit than before. We had a tiff early on about Church practices but then my daughter Carla insisted that it was because we hadn't really accepted our major differences, wanting so much to be twin-alike – or, as I put it, we think twins should be clones. My sister suggested we pray together about it, and then I thought we needed to forgive each other for being disappointed. Our family was so alienated and she is the only one in the world left with our background, so it is especially painful that we cannot agree about our refuge: The Church.

Jesus: Just because she has wrong ideas about me and the Church doesn't mean her virtues aren't real. Delicacy, appreciation, sensibility, yearning, loyalty to Arthur, a woman without guile, like Nathaniel.

Me: Yes. Thank you, God, for my sister.

August 23, 2006

My sister Carla did a wonderful demonstration of sacred dance. An 86 year old Knight of Columbus looked luminous with joy to be following the steps. Fr. Ken loved it.

August 30, 2006

Carla had a friend visiting, a poet-horseman, Dave. About relating to him, Jesus seemed to say: I am bringing you to many different people to be a woman of more seasons, to walk on My bridges.

August 31, 2006

St. Columban in the Office of Readings: "Let us seek the fountain of light and life and the living water by despising what we see, by leaving the world, and by dwelling in the highest heavens. Let us seek these things like rational and shrewd fish may we drink the living water which wells up to eternal life."

Just as fish don't know land but do lift their heads out of water – so we don't know heaven but can lift our heads!

This message to the locutionary Anne, Direction for Our Times, seems so much to confirm what Jesus is doing with me now!

September 1, 2006

Jesus

A deep peace settles upon those who serve the Lord. This interior peace, heaven's presence, connects each apostle to their Saviour. I work in each soul without interruption if

that soul welcomes Me. Around the apostle, circumstances change. Others come and go in their life and perhaps there is suffering or persecution. My presence remains a constant, though, comforting, consoling, and directing. The connection between heaven and each apostolic servant is the avenue through which I return to the world. How heaven delights in each commitment. During this time many look to their Saviour with a certainty that I am calling out to them. Each apostle hears My call. You have heard My call. Consider today what your Jesus is asking of you. Consider how I am asking you to serve today. Dearest apostle, I must insist that you spend time in silence contemplating My will. I must insist upon this because I require your service in whatever way I have willed for you during this time. If you give Me your full attention for a period of time each day, I can instruct you and prompt you. Also, I can give you a very important heavenly attribute and that is the peace that I need you to possess. You must possess this for your own comfort, of course, but you must also possess this peace so that it flows through you into the world. Your world does not have peace. My peace has been rejected by your world. You, My beloved apostles, reject the world's discord and accept My peace. That is why you are so important to Me. I am your Beloved One. You feel My presence, do you not? Truly, I am with you. Dear apostle, I want to be with everyone in this way. Will you help Me? I know that you will. Spend time with Me in silence each day and I will provide you with everything you need and everything the world requires.

In another connection:

Jesus: Look to see what rattled you. You will see that I am directing you away from situations that will take away peace. You can reach people through your talks and the books but I want you to do that slowly and without haste and tension and false deadlines. See you are more peaceful at Lenoir Ryne College with lots of free time around the classes. Start at home by putting your time with Me first.

Yes, I want Your peace.

There was a talent show at the parish to raise money for Krystal who was in a nearly fatal car accident. I loved all the fun in the show and the willingness to do crazy things. I felt proud to be an American because of this good kind of zany American spirit.

There was a wonderful response to Taming the Lion Within on Relevant Radio – man writing on e-mail that for 52 years he has been hoping for such insights and felt peaceful already.

Jesus: Pause and taken in this joy of My using you these ways. Go with the fruit. I long to have my people at peace. To do more in teachings on anger, first you must be more at peace.

September 11, 2006

Feeling bad about Word Among us turn down of Weeping with Jesus about grieving.

Jesus: Let go of everything and respond to what comes along.

Hilarious but upsetting incident – I was following another driver to get to a destination – she got lost and I got lost following her; she found me, but then made a sudden turn and lost me again. Thinking the whole trip would only take about 10 minutes I failed to look for a restroom. An hour later stuck in an area with no gas stations I wound up in the cemetery of a large Lutheran Church making cell phone calls about directions. I thought of “relieving nature” on the grounds of the cemetery but then thought that even though there were no cars in the lot, someone could come out of the Church and there I would be, a Catholic, disgracing the grounds of my “separated brethren.” Finally I decided to use a plastic bag in the car I had been using for dirty Kleenex. Realized after awhile that I had missed the bag and done it on the mat in the back of the car. Ugh! Fear of horrible smell. Sense of shame.

Finally I just laughed and laughed and the next day found a cheap gadget in the camping department of K-Mart that serves this purpose called a portable urinal.

I described the incident to my parish Anger-group in relation to controlling my anger at the unhelpful lack of direction of woman who I was following. They laughed and laughed over it.

September 13, 2006

The college students like Voyage to Insight, my own text, being used in the class. This feels wonderful. I now feel almost certain it will work to teach there.

Thinking of Brecht(?) who had a poem that was something like

When I was young I hated everybody.

Then when I was older I liked good people.

Now I am old and I respect everyone just because they are human beings in pain.

September 14, 2006

Somehow this time it is too much. On the way to a weekend retreat I was giving, by air with terrible overbooking and other glitches, so it took me 24 hours to get from New Mexico back to Charlotte, N.C. I became convinced that I must really give up these exhausting trips – go to the ones I have scheduled – last one August, 2007 EWTN Widow Series and then stop. I asked Jesus “Do you accept my resignation?”

Jesus: Dearest one, you have served me so well as a speaker and writer. I know the cost. I am giving you more of the gift of counsel and these other openings as teacher at Lenoir-Rhyne and radio and TV. Just sink into my arms and let me carry you through the remaining talks.

I realize that part of it is Recovery technique is to see that realistically I can't change the airlines or the places I go to be good for me with all my physical problems. It is more realistic to stop going.

Fr. Ken thinks that doing radio shows instead could be good because conferences are preaching to the choir and radio reaches many others.

At Pecos touching to meet Gilbert – a Mexican American man who had seizures since youth and back pains. 60 years of trust, and then healed at 63.

I called my sister, Carla. I realize her voice is soothing to me. She was the strong one when I was little and I find her a motherly voice in her concern for my problems now.

September 21, 2006

Prayers for 24th Sunday “Bring us to the dignity which distinguishes the poor in spirit.” I never noticed this line before. I have no dignity because I am too rich in spirit or longing with spiritual gluttony to grab everything I can in this life?

September 22, 2006

I am reading a painful book about the Vietnam War that Steve gave me to read. Jesus, I am wondering what you want me to learn from it. How can we ever know what is right if we don't have the right information?

Jesus: When you read such books I want you to understand better, to have a compassionate heart for everyone. Are you an army general? Of course you don't have the information. You don't have to know; you have to pray and love.

Someone says that discussions between people with different premises are like chasing cats around a tree.

For example - a first question is:

Do all of us agree that Satan and his legions are real entities vs. symbols of human states?

A second question is:

Assuming we agree about Satan which is unlikely, would it be correct that when Hitler made a pact with the devil several times that he chose to be demonized?

A third question is:

Why is it odd that Jews in Israel, descendants of the victims of Hitler's demonic racism, whose ancestors did not leave Germany because they couldn't believe that Hitler's demonic plans were real, and then became victims, would now, hearing daily proclamations by Islamic leaders that all Jews should be destroyed, not think they need to protect themselves?

Such Islamic leaders don't sound like delightful Sufi mystics to me.

A fourth question is:

When a military purposely stations its artillery in civilian homes (Lebanon) or puts grenades in baby's diapers and sends them toward the troops of the enemy (as it is said was done in Vietnam by the Cong) are these neutral civilian targets?

Fifth question is:

Does the devil have any part in pre-marital sex leading IN PART since 1973 to 50 million abortions in the U.S.?

This doesn't mean that the rabbi isn't right that we need to love the enemy as Gandhi and St. Francis did, but such advice coming from someone who alludes to some of the realities I mention above would sound more real to me. I am teaching Letter to Birmingham Jail next week and usually teach Gandhi. These men knew personally what injustice to themselves was - so their urgings of non-violent resistance are more powerful. Are there American Jews being urged by rabbis to go to Lebanon in the cross-fire and practice non-violent resistance? I'm not being sarcastic. I would be thrilled to hear it was so.

September 23, 2006

I am working on the Aquinas/Luther talk. It seems okay, but not quite my way. I am still anxious about it.

Jesus: Be humble. It is natural that you feel anxious since it is not your usual audience. (The audience is mostly Lutheran ministers) Try to picture that I really will be there trying to enter into those present by means of the words I have given you. Just as I have made bridges at the college, so here you will find bridges. Offer to me those anxieties, much of which are from pride; that you fear seeming inadequate. Forgive those in the past who

didn't understand your way. I have used them in a different way. You don't have to please everyone; just Me.

Joy to finally finish the Aquinas lecture for better or worse. I was alone in the chapel of our Church. I have never been alone in the chapel. I was staring at a little statue of Joseph or maybe St. Christopher carrying the child Jesus. I thought that the priest carries an even smaller form of Him, the Eucharist.

September 26, 2006

Finally back after a transition to a regular prayer schedule. Jesus says: I have relieved you of many projects so you can put being close to me and following me first. And now I am giving you peace in prayer to encourage you. Otherwise you will always be harried and jumpy. I want you to be peaceful.

September 27, 2006

A priest in Hickory said in a sermon that we should never go out to our ministries as if it is just "I am going" but always "we (Jesus and I) are going."

Wonderful. I will start thinking this way immediately.

October 1, 2006 message from Jesus given to Anne a lay apostle:

My children, I am with you. Your God, your Creator, speaks this message in so many ways. In every daybreak you must hear My voice saying, 'I am with you.' When tempted toward despair because of crosses and hardships, you must hear My whisper saying, 'I am with you.' When you look at the work you must do and find it overwhelming, allow me to move you gently into it with perfect assurance that 'I am with you.' Dearest apostles, so brave, I am with you. I do not tell you that you will be overcome. I do not tell you that you have been given work that is impossible for you to complete. Those messages do not come from Me. Instead, I tell you that you will persevere and ultimately triumph. Our mission of mercy does not falter, even though the steps of my little apostles sometimes falter. This mission pushes through the world with a steadiness that defies all attempts against it. My apostles experience fear at times. This is not a problem for Me or this mission. Fear is to be expected. Bring your fear to Me and explain to Me exactly what threatens you. If you do this, I can remove your fear. I will convince you that in My presence, with My power everything is possible. You have an expectation of your little boat crashing against the rocks. I will never allow this. If I am steering the boat that is your work, you will be carried

safely. Push on into each day with courage, understanding that while you may not be able, I am able. You may lack courage, but I have courage. You sometimes walk in darkness, but I have the light with which to see exactly where your footsteps are taking you. Dear apostles, it is a time for hard work, yes, but a time for great glory, also. Rejoice. I am with you.

Oct. 11, 2013

Jesus: Come to me, raging lioness! what is this tempest in a tea pot? Fight with the demons here, because they are everywhere. Are you yielding to what Kierkegaard described as despair of possibility – that whenever things are rough you want to flee to a fantasy place?

Oct. 6, 2012 in New Jersey doing a Conference

Jesus says: Dear Ronda, I am drawing you out and in. I want you to stop doing anything you don't have to do. Stop pushing so you can spend much more time close to My heart, so that everything you do will be focused and have even more power to change hearts and minds. I will use prayer of quiet to draw you in. Don't resist, please.

Scott Hahn: God doesn't have employees but daughters and sons – therefore more time in prayer vs. ministry work.

At New Jersey talks for priests making this workshop-retreat, Scott Hahn interprets Jesus saying that “greater works than this will you do,” and “what is harder to forgive sins or say get up and walk” as about Eucharist and Reconciliation!

Mark Twain: history doesn't repeat itself but it rhymes.

Jesus: Hold on tight to Me in anxiety. Nada te turbe...Solo Deus....

Oct. 10, 2006

I am rattled by different frustrating situations. Fear Lenoir Rhyne College won't work for me.

Jesus: Of course you are jerked out of peace when a lot of happenings which you don't want come along and you feel frightened. All the more reason to flee to Me and trust and I will send you help; sometimes through others, Fr. Ken, family, friends, often unexpectedly. Now just open yourself to me by quietly praying My Holy Name and then I can tell you more.

See I give you prayer and quiet and it was interrupted but it was back when you returned. I am faithful. Trust Me.

Stay at LRC as long as you can, unless I give you something else with teaching. You have to teach. Now relax – be carefree.

Oct. 13, 2006

Why am I so jumpy?

Jesus: I have made you to be a very sensitive and relational person, like most women. You are picking up the euphoria of the students about Fall break.

Accept the pluses and minuses of your nature and keep offering the jumpiness for your deepest intentions – the family, students, but also come to Me and stay with Me in prayer until I can quiet you.

Oct. 14, 2006

My daughter, Diana, had a good talk with the priest at her parish about getting her marriage blessed. I have been offering endless prayers and crosses for this. Thank you Jesus, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus. Thank you Mary and Joseph, guardian angels, St. Diana, St. Helena, St. Peter.

I was kvetching (Yiddish word for complaining) about hard times with spacey or just inefficient conference organizers and someone paid me \$1000 for a talk when I had asked for only \$500! She said that the committee thought I deserved more! I felt ashamed at being so critical.

Oct. 15, 2006

Dear St. Teresa of Avila, on your feast day, help me to be holy. Help me really believe that “solo Dio basta” as you wrote – God alone is enough.

St. Teresa: We know you and love you. Listen little one, stop torturing yourself with worry and self-deprecation. Please, like me, let yourself sink into the arms of beautiful Jesus. Be a bride, not a fuss-pot. Now!

Jesus: I want to take you; not to ravish you but to pacify you. I want to pull you into My world, instead of the fretful world of your mind.

After this came a wonderful prayer of quiet in the chapel. Jesus said, see you need this peace I am filling you with, like a dry arid land needs the rain.

Yes, thank you, Jesus.

An analogy: Suppose parents satisfied every whim of a child so he or she never wanted to leave; it wouldn't be good; so we are prepared for heaven by foretastes and weanings.

Oct. 16, 2006

Sense of goodness of helping the family in small ways through this difficult time of Martina, the baby, up at night, etc. Being also, in spite of my jumpiness, a steadying person for the boys.

Jesus: Try not to evaluate things every minute, but instead trust. Where there is so much love, I am there.

Reading Lily's (nickname of Alice Von Hildebrand) *By Grief Refined*. Don't be jealous of Lily. She had her own crosses, you didn't have and she reaches different people and she loves you so much.

October 17, 2006

Dearest Lily,

First, how delighted I am to see *The Heart* will be re-published.

I am rereading *By Grief Refined* for a widow series I am doing on EWTN. I was so moved by the nobility of the way you express things. This time I noticed what you said about evolving thoughts of a widow about her spouse when the marriage was less than ideal. There are many healings for me living with this daughter. I cannot help but see all the good things Martin gave to the children that I couldn't give such as his joie de vivre and ability to take great joy in loved ones even when doing very poorly physically. Carla has all sorts of ailments with pain, cysts, lungs, etc.

When you wrote about using the time before reunion in heaven to become more the person your husband and God wanted you to be, I was struck by how I am actually more the way he wanted me to be than when we were together. They say that the bereaved one tries to replace the missing one by being more like him. So, I am a little more relaxed and enjoying of the pleasures of life vs. being too much only thinking about mission.

I hope you will pray for this EWTN venture. It is my first series. I think you would have done it better, but they have asked me and I must try to do what the Holy Spirit would want. Possibly there are as many widows out there like me with troubled marriages who will identify with those problems.

There were so many conflicts in our marriage that I have trouble thinking of the reunion even though I pray a lot for him and all the family souls in purgatory.

October 18, 2006

Aquinas/Luther Lecture

So many graces at the conference. A parish woman from Franciscan University of Steubenville who lives here prayed over me in a charismatic way just before I went on. A Pentecostal in the motel commended me for dressing as they do, long dress, and long hair! Lara Miller came running in from an auto accident where she was in the ER but bounded out once her wound was dressed to get to hear me! I saw that God used my weakness, because in my neediness for quick bonding I did reach out and bond quickly with so many of the people there. Jesus seems to say – trust, let me celebrate with you all these graces. And again, I was so envious of the beautiful style of Regis Martin and Amy Schifrin, but many in the audience liked the change to my very colloquial style.

Jesus: Different gifts. The Holy Spirit leads some to want to be saints because of the beauty of their vision, but they are lead through you to the concreteness of the struggle in everyday life.

Some notes about the other talks:

Pastor Amy Schifrin is a liturgist and she sung parts of her talk to illustrate points about how hymns carry holiness. Here are some of the points I want to remember:

In the elusiveness of sound, the hidden god is not exposed as an object for display, for sound...reveals without sight...In the human voice, the Divine voice sounds...sung into His sounding, the community that simultaneously listens for His voice as it proclaims His voice experiences the holiness that belongs to God alone...leading into entering into the sounds beyond human experience of the angel's at God's throne.

The sound comes in to us closer than the words, like a baby's cry. I related this to tongues or people praying the Latin Mass without knowing the meaning of everything.

The assembly's voices are the sacramental material in which God's glory/holiness is sounded. This happens in a different way when many sing together. (Ronda: another reason not to be a loner Christian?)

Regis Martin What is in common of Catholics and Protestants is the basic human hunger for God, for salvation; the sheer vertigo of the creature ordained by God to an end, a finality, he cannot obtain on his own." It is not a self-help thing, Not our charm, intelligence or even virtue can save us: only God.

Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon – a married orthodox priest, talked about how our strengths can be our doom. Especially type A personalities put the crusade, the work, the projects, above love, as did St. Paul before his conversion.

October 21, 2006

Letter to my sister, Carla.

The Luther/Aquinas conference was just extraordinary. The Lutheran pastors, and other people there loved my talk and me. I felt very loved by Dr. Yoder - the head of the department who you met.

It was enormously interesting to me. I've never met any women pastors - you meet them all the time. (My sister teaches at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley). I was all prepared not to like Amy but she is wonderful. We bonded instantly because of you, She has friends in Asheville, a couple, Lutheran pastors who just became Catholics and the woman is an iconographer. (This couple was Ruth and Richard Ballard. Because of Amy, who I never saw again, I became great friends with these two and we wrote the book together What the Saints Say About Heaven. Many Lutheran pastors are moving either toward Rome or Constantinople (Orthodox). I know there is plenty of movement the other way also. One of the participants was a Lutheran pastor who was previously a Jesuit brother.

Amy talked to me a lot about how your classes in healing through dance brought deep healing to her - a dance where you called out the names of your demons - she called out the names of the males who abused her as a kid.

In a peculiar way I feel close to Protestant women pastors - I know 3 of them now - because they are Christian women leaders, and so like me in that regard. It is very surprising to me that I am, as it were, entering more into your ecumenical world at this time of my life.

So, the success of this talk makes me feel much surer that it will work at this college for me and I don't need to keep doing out of town talks - I only have 3 left! I am doing more locally - my workshop on aging at a retirement village and a witness story at a parish in Newton.

Love and prayers, Ronda

Dear Jesus: thank you, thank you, thank you for this wonderful conference. You must be smiling at how frightened I was needlessly since you prepared so many wonderful surprises for me.

October 22, 2006

Dear Richard (The English grandfather of Martina, Carla's youngest child)

It feels strange having JoJo (the grandmother) here and not you! I miss your wry sense of humor and gentle loving way of looking upon our crazy family.

JoJo wouldn't say what was wrong but only that you were feeling very low. I thought you might not mind my sharing a few tidbits of my ideas about this from one who struggles with low feelings a lot.

Because you are a carpenter, a tool image comes to mind. You can't do certain jobs without the proper tools, right? The ideas and characteristics that got us through life in the early years or mid-years don't always work so well for the older years. A Christian psychologist maintains that older people bemoan the fact that they can't do as much and therefore feel useless, but that is not the job, and high energy and skills are not the tools.

What is the task, then? I think it is preparing for eternity by growth in love - such as asking myself not how much did I do today, but did I smile at someone who looked lonely even though he or she was not an attractive person or did I manage to thank God for some trait of my dead husband, and think of him gratefully, that I overlooked when he was alive, etc. All this can be done from "the rocking chair." Especially I think God wants to purify my memories by showing me the good images in slow motion so I can savor the meaning uninterrupted by workaholic task-orientation jobs!

Of course, if I were you, I'd be wanting to hedge my bets by going to Church (he is a lapsed Anglican) even if I had negative memories in the past. When my son committed suicide, my husband, who had converted from atheism at age 60 but only went to Church on Sundays, realized that only in Church did he get any hope, so contre coeur he started coming with me to daily Mass. It gave him some peace and hope for his son which he couldn't dredge up out of his own strength.

Suppose it is not only biology, but God's plan in old-age, to draw weakened little creatures to wish He existed and to try relating to Him even though they were full of doubts and "allergies" to Church?

I'll try not to bring this up again, but I felt impelled to write it even if you delete before you even hit this paragraph.

Love and prayers, Ronda

From Anne, Direction for Our Times

October, 2006

Blessed Mother

Little children, you are all safe in my Immaculate Heart. I am your mother. In a special way I protect you during this time. I shield you from influences that would lead you away from your path to my Son. You must cooperate with me so that I can protect you even

more. Often a mother has information that her children do not need to know. A wise mother shares the information only when it is necessary to help her children identify danger. I am that way. I am sharing information now because I want you to know where the danger to your spirituality lies. It is good to listen to your mother because she seeks only what is good for you. I know that my Son's beloved apostles understand this and this is why I bring this information to you, asking you to spread it further for me.

Children, our enemy wishes to draw many souls into a Godless void. This is being done in a manner that is underhanded. If a person was asked directly to reject God permanently, most would refuse. People would not want to permanently remove a chance to be with God, even if their faith is terribly weak and they never serve God at all. The enemy is not forthright, however, and souls are being deceived. You know this to a degree. I intend to advise you of a specific manner of conducting yourself so that I can protect you completely. In my Immaculate Heart you will find joy and peace. In my Immaculate Heart you will find comfort and gentle correction. I am your mother and I will help you.

Jesus: All will be well. Your concern at this time should be to advance in holiness and you will only advance if you remain small. Be at peace in everything because grace is more powerful than any bitter plans of the enemy. I am asking you to concentrate on your own movement to Me. For each apostle who gives Me their pride, I give the world My majesty, the majesty of Jesus Christ, your Returning King.

Oct. 24, 2006 We had a visit of Fr. Ken who spent a lot of time playing games with the kids – sweet, cozy.

Jesus: See I am making you more relaxed so that you don't get so rattled by trivia, so you can enjoy the people you love without needing so much to control them, be more of a background grandmother instead of the boss.

Oct. 25, 2006

I read Coleen McCollough: *The Touch*.

Jesus: You see without Me all they have is churning emotions and disillusion. Hopeless 'No Exit.' Lumen Christi, Deo Gratias.

I remembered how in JPII's Letter to Artists, he claims that even dark writing can serve God by showing how much we need redemption.

I got into lots of anger.

Jesus: A set back. Don't be alarmed. I am using all this as a test for your teaching on anger. You were angry, but you did not sin by harsh judgments. Just breathe in My peace by saying "Jesus, I trust in you."

I realized that it is average with a setback to think all ones work on anger is for nothing. Instead I need to just humbly admit that I slipped back. I should work through each incident seeing the fear, vs. romantic ideas of having become a totally perfect person. Ask Jesus to forgive the power plays, threats. Come to Him humbly and ask help not to be so angry.

For instance, about the heating problems in the house, it is average for me to experience cold as coldness and feel it as symbolic. Let me say, instead, we will try to fix the system. Jesus, Your heart is my real warmth. No one dies of a little cold, I don't need to work it up.

Dear Mary, Immaculate Heart, help me to do this right, for my sake and theirs.

Oct. 29, 2006

I played the CCC kiddie video about Fatima and felt moved myself.

Jesus: You prayed to My mother's Immaculate Heart for the family and there was much softening of hearts - yours and others. That is what I want for you. There will always be differences, but you don't have to be angry. The anger is coming out of fear.

Yes. I will try to just open myself to grace instead of being so anxious and angry.

Letter from my daughter, Carla, to the husband and son of a dear friend who shot herself after years of torment from manic-depression (I am keeping this in here even though I don't agree with everything Carla writes about suicide because it contains many other deep truths.)

Sajid and Josh:

There is much to say that it is hard to convey over the telephone and amidst the wild storms of grief. I will put in this thread what I am wanting to say when you two are able to have ears again: it does come, it does happen, the numbness and finally the way through to acceptance, please, please believe me.

It is so very odd to begin by saying that I know you both far better than you will know me. You were a huge part of my friend's life and she spoke.

Some things:

1. I have lost another very close friend to a gunshot and I can tell you for certain that the future will hold some comfort for you there. This is a way of making a Final answer; you will not be tormented with any thought of a changed mind or a hope for some saving recovery. Sandi very much wanted to go; she was sure that she did.

2. I have a very large and clumsy offering for you. I rarely purge my inbox, you see, and so I have some 273 emails from Sandi to give you one day, three-months worth. These vary from the short and sweet to the long and self-recriminatory. Some of them will be very painful for you to read. I will not touch these emails in any way because I know that you will want the whole truth, especially you, Josh. This is not the time for it, but rest assured that I will print every one of them and save them for you in waiting on your desire. They are yours as much as mine.

3. I will not tire of speaking about Sandi. She was a very dear friend and since our one "real" week of contact came close to the end of her life, we mainly had a relationship soul-to-soul - the sort in which much is revealed. I know Sandi. What I know of Sandi is also yours, whenever you choose to take it.

4. PLEASE both of you believe me: along with yourselves there are right now many many many people who will be feeling to blame for Sandi's death. They will all be wrong. For small transgressions: forgive yourselves; she did. Sandi understood better than most how painful this business called living can be and how many serious or foolish errors one may make along the way. I do not have to think about this one at all: Sandi forgave you every-/anything you may feel led to her death - I know this is true. AND, oh Josh, how she loved/admired/enjoyed/and was ultimately granted light by your existence. That she could not bear the pain of your suffering is simply how every mother feels and is not a cause or a reason for her self-termination...even if she sometimes thought it would be. Ultimately, Sandi chose to leave DESPITE her great love for you, not because of it. She simply could not go on. If she were here to say, and perhaps is through me, she would beg your forgiveness not ask you for apologies. She will be hoping that perhaps you, the great sun in her life, will be one day able to understand enough. Enough is an important word, Josh. Not completely - we never can - but enough. If you give it time, I know that understanding will come. Perhaps you are already within it.

5. Ultimately, Sandi believed in a good and loving God; this, despite her endless struggles with all sorts of pain. I know she did, for this was a very ongoing topic of conversation between the two of us. Whether you share her beliefs or not, it will help to understand that *she* held them and that in her mind, and in her own way, she was blasting a path out of the darkness and into the light. With everything of truth and small beetling faith that I have, I have reached into that darkness tonight to hunt for Sandi. I did not find her. I reached instead into the light and I did find her: a sense of her, blinking, still alive. I have a poor dingy sort of belief but dammit, it is strong enough to produce that sense of her fiercely enough for me to believe it. There is still a Sandi. Reach for her.

I have little more to say, Sajid, Josh. I hear in myself the echo of a very great pain but one I

survived and will continue to survive. There is nothing else to do except to continue to learn the gentle art of acceptance and letting go even when one most feverishly does not wish to do so. We could not give Sandi what she needed - it is my fervent prayer that Someone Else could, did, has, and is continuing to do so. It is my hope that if this Someone Else exists, we too may be able to tap our meager requests for some staunching, some peace, and, at length some joy.

Very much yours in suffering,

-C

Here is a poem she wrote for the poetry board they both wrote on.

Requiescat in Pace – for Sandi Blakemore Baig

Ah, there, my darling, will you be running
in those tall grasses now –
steeped in innocence, gone small, gone young?

The painful flesh has fallen:

 you free, you free, you free. I
 will miss those bold blue cat eyes,
 all the songs, and very much
 your brazen bell of laughter.

 I'm unwrapped

in this dreadful rasping pain: your son, your son,
and husband, giving mercy if I can

 (I can't I can't I can't) I can, I can.

My giggster friend, my Sandi-with-an-i,
we had our short time wondering; we cried
and waited, cried and waited, tried and cried.

Not with a not, but a shot - and did that Sandi spirit fly
in tessellations to a softer sky?

Ah, there, my darling, lovely one,
you always were a child:

a big audacious child afraid to die

 but more afraid to live, it seems,
 and I, and I, and I

will reach for/with you always, dear.

Good-bye.

I took my grandson Maxi to see Lenoir Ryne College – he was amazed at the number of books in people’s offices, more than his elementary school library.

He is developing religiously. Alex taught them the basics of the rosary, and now he starts it up himself.

Nov. 1, 2006

From Anne – Direction for Our Time:

Jesus

I am real, dear apostles. Do not worry that you have misplaced your trust. You will be rewarded for your service and commitment. The wise apostle understands that he has already been rewarded, of course. The wise apostle understands that being close to the King as a trusted servant is a reward in itself because through the proximity to the King, the servant becomes more and more noble. I am changing you if you are walking with Me. I am stretching your spiritual capabilities. My beloved lay apostles will find that the changes in their soul are constant, but gentle. There is great spiritual progress available in this time. This is My mercy and this is My plan. Through the holiness of the few, I will convert many. Be courageous while I make these changes in your soul. Be at peace. The Savior seeks to preserve His plan by calling more and more into the field of service. Rejoice when you see many responding. Understand that this plan is for all. You are called. You are listening to My direction and you are becoming holier. Through you, I call to others. Others listen and respond, and through them, I call out again, to more and more. In this way, a multitude is drawn into the safety of the family of God. Be at peace, little apostle. All is well and heaven is content that God's plan is proceeding. I will never leave you to execute My plan alone. You will always be acting with Me if you are acting for Me. Do you understand? I know that you understand because it is simple. I am with you. I will never leave you.”

This message helped me greatly as I was feeling discouraged about the student response at Lenoir Ryne College. Partly buoyed up by the message I worked on a changed format for the class and it seemed better. As when Jesus told the disciples to “lower the net again.”

Jesus: It is usual that in a new mission territory you can’t just use old methods. You have to let the Holy Spirit show you how. See how some responded to the love behind your efforts?

Nov. 1, 2013

I attended a sublime Mass for the Feast of All Saints. Deo Gratias. I felt lifted to heaven.

Nov. 2, 2013

Some of my friends wrote beautiful loving responses to my mini-talks on the web-site. It was so wonderful. I always think my voice is terrible because of my NY accent but people love it anyhow. Even Steve's father in England liked it

St. Thomas says that worry is an obstacle to contemplation.

Nov. 4, 2013

We had a glorious festival for Feast of St. Charles, our patron saint. They had tables in the Hall with some of the cooks in ethnic dress – especially Indian Saris and Guatamalan head dress and woven skirts and colorful blouses as well as Hmong Udon soup, Filippino food, Polish, German, Italian, Indonesian....etc. The food was wonderful, but especially the lovely feeling as if this was the true UN hosted by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, as it were. They also had soccer games and bi-lingual bingo and someone painting the faces of the kids. It was great at the Mass to have more of a mix of Anglo and Hispanic. Since none of my family came I was able to sit next to Senora Magdalena and then have other Mayans on the other side. It was a real tour de force for Fr. Ken as he spoke the prayers of the Mass alternately in Spanish and English. He looked exhausted but so happy to see his family all having fun.

Nov. 6, 2006

I decided to renew contract with Carla and Steve for one year. It feels realistic. Got to St. Aloysius earlier than usual. Prayer of quiet. I see that this gift of prayer of quiet is like a doctor anaesthetizing a patient. He wants to give me rest from the pain of life and slow me down - to make sure I am not worrying instead of praying. Like Mary "sleeping me" her child, as Carla and Steve call it when they lull the baby to sleep in their arms.

Nov. 7, 2006

Students acting badly – talk and laugh in class even when reprimanded.

Jesus says: They wanted to throw me off a cliff. You are going through what I did. Keep offering it up and we'll see what you should do.

Talked to other teachers and got good ideas for enforcing disciplining by threats of lowered grades.

Nov. 8, 2006

Victory over student rebels with my ultimatum. I hear Jesus telling me that He needed me to see where their pride and concupiscence is, so that I can teach them better. I need to see them more realistically. These kids don't need self-expression as much as they need discipline.

November 9, 2006

Feast of St. John Lateran. I am thinking that the Common of Dedication of Churches in the liturgy of the hours book coming before Common of Blessed Virgin Mary and others, is because of the Real Presence in the Church.

There is a lovely antiphon: Come let us worship Christ, bridegroom of the Church and from the Office of Readings: God wishes to enter your soul, for He promised "I shall live in them, and I shall walk in the corridors of their hearts."

Copy out for blog

Text of my mini-talk using the microphone for my web visitors (www.rondachervin.com):

Me, Speaking, Instant Spirituality #2 Inter-Generational Romanticism and Anger

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I was very pleased with your encouraging comments about my first audio mini-talk on Savoring the Good. Thank you for writing to me.

As you may know I am involved in the study of anger-management, especially the system, Recovery, Inc., devised by Dr. Abraham Low in the 1940's. In this mini-talk I would like to relate what he says about romanticism to the anger adult children have about their parents sometimes and the anger some parents have about their adult children.

Abraham Low defines romanticism as having glorious unrealistic hopes about life and especially about relationships. We all have a pretty good idea what that means in romantic love – such as a young man thinking his fiancé will be an angel in marriage because she is so sweet and so physically lovely, or a young woman thinking her fiancé will be an ideal husband because he is so understanding and strong during courtship. The marriage may be very good and even holy but it will surely not meet the romanticized expectations of perfection each one is cherishing beforehand. This often leads into anger, hot or cold, at the discrepancy between the dream and the reality.

What I have noticed in my own life and that of others is that the same kind of syndrome comes up inter-generationally. It wasn't until my parents died in their 80's that I finally stopped blaming them for everything that was wrong with me. Behind this anger, I now

realize, was a romantic notion of what a perfect parent would be like – she and he would understand the motives behind every single thing I did, always give these the best interpretation – in other words, they would adore me for the rest of their lives.

Disappointed in this expectation, I was angry at them, a lot of the time, in spite of great efforts towards Christian forgiveness. Somehow I never accepted the truth that everything about our lives involves suffering as well as joy, and that one of these sufferings is having parents who do not totally affirm and worship us, and even sometimes reject us partially, or totally, because of our real faults!

Now, then, what about our expectations of our children? We imagined that each one would be perfect in a different way – one a dandelion, one a lily, one a pine tree. They would share our most cherished values, especially the Faith. If they did not enter into the same professions, what they did would still be one of our most approved professions. They would have all our virtues and none of our faults! How “romantic!” How disappointing! Guess what? They had free will. They made their own choices. We cannot exempt them from the sufferings that followed from the bad choices. Only when we stop being angry at them for failing to meet these unrealistic expectations can we begin a grateful tally of all the good qualities they possess, many of which we helped them develop. By analogy – they have some of our virtues but in a different “musical key.” Only when we stop being angry at them, can we affirm and cherish them as we should, even as we pray for grace for them to overcome their faults in fidelity to the way the Lord is leading them.

Suggestions:

- 1. Make a list of every virtue each of your parents or parental figures possessed and say a prayer of gratitude for how these virtues helped you in life.**
- 2. Write or speak out a prayer of forgiveness for the negatives your parents had that hurt you.**
- 3. Make a list of every virtue each of your children have. Thank God for these good qualities.**
- 4. Write or speak out a prayer of forgiveness for the negatives that impact you in hurtful ways.**

Heh, I did it myself to make sure I was being authentic. It felt good.

God bless you, with love and prayers, Ronda

If you found this talk insightful, you might like my book *Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace* or the videos and CD's based on the book you can find on my website www.rondachervin.com

Nov. 6, 2006

Terrible day with disobedient LRC students – I was told tough love was the only solution, but I feel crushed and angry. I need to use my Recovery Inc. teaching: see their average not a romantic view where they would love me so much they would be perfect.

Jesus: I didn't reach everyone. I was mocked and rejected.

Me: I need your Holy Spirit to show me what to do. I don't want to give up. I don't want to fail.

Jesus: It is all right. I see your struggle and let's see what happens. You can shake the dust off your feet, but you don't have to.

I wrote a tough love letter to them – friendly but firm giving penalties for even whispering in class. I was afraid they would go on strike when they read it but they settled down very well and started getting friendly and normal again.

This is the first time I've been able to use tough love because I have too great a need to be liked.

Nov. 11, 2006

We did our Spirituality and the Arts workshop at the parish. Some came from Newton but the total number was low. Still it was more intimate because of that. Fr. Ken did wonderful talks. Here are some highlights from his talks and my spontaneous thoughts, and comments from the group.

I first gave my basic *Called by Name: Following Your Personal Spirituality* talk based on the booklet. I added in about how artistic types often don't fit any group spirituality. Also about Mary as dramatist stage-manager of the apparitions, and recommended JP II's Letter to Artists. He says that even the darkest art shows the need for redemption.

Carrie shared "I used to be an interior decorator; but now I live alone and decorate my interior!" She also says she plays sacred music when she wakes up in the night. In the old Cathedrals there were beautiful sculpture where no one could see them but God – now through photography we see them.

Someone said that modern art gives a sense of healing of individuality such as looking at Dali's eccentric clock painting. Another that art gives power to move forward.

We shouldn't be looking for a 4.0 in holiness, Fr. Ken said. Keep your eye on Jesus, not on myself, and my progress in holiness. I thought that choleric goal oriented people probably need to think of holiness as something to strive for more than more laid-back types who do things more organically.

Fr. Ken said he thinks of knowing Jesus not "face to face" but more seeing His back as he's walking ahead of him." James and John are behind talking about who will be the greatest and Jesus is walking ahead saying keep your eye on the path. We should be moving where Jesus is walking.

Later we talked about this – he is neither *braut-mystique* (bridal mysticism where Jesus is known mostly as lover) nor *apophatic* (imageless spirituality) – he thought it was more like glimpses. He might be working on a piece of music and then senses God on the horizon, beckoning. Only in heaven will it be face to face; now we have the foretastes. "Noli me tangere" Christ says to Mary Magdalene. "I have not yet gone back to the Father." I joked – we could call it *glimpse-spirituality*, but that sounds awkward.

I didn't like that image but allowing it to reach me I realized it is like that with peace-making where I am way behind where Jesus wants to lead me.

Fr. Ken mentioned that children are fascinated with churches – a sacred space, a sense of being pulled toward the transcendent God.

FR. KEN'S TEACHING at the workshop:

Transcendentals – the good, the true, and the beautiful. Von Balthasar – need for beauty, not only truth and goodness. Ronda: Do the Tridentine Mass supporters love the beauty of the chant so much as a balance to their emphasis on truth and morality? Beauty is the resplendence of God shining through creation. The role of beauty is to make the good and true attractive.

Lots of bad results came from the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This makes me the idol and arbiter vs. seeing that beauty is rooted in God, not in me. Good is what we should do; truth what has been revealed. In the West we have separated beauty from the good and the true. If the good isn't also beautiful then, Balthasar warns, people will seek beauty in evil. Evil can be attractive; but the good and the true are glorious. Note Balthasar's title: *The Glory of the Lord*.

Spirituality = the way we live what we believe. Moses is fascinated by the burning bush. God is a fascinating mystery that I cannot touch, or like Isaiah: a man of unclean lips – sense of distance, purging.

Holiness is a process – so we need not be discouraged because we are not there yet. Dogma is a door, not a wall. We are becoming.

It is terrible that the arts are being pushed out of the school curriculum. If we don't have time for the arts we don't have time to be human or godly.

The appreciators are an antidote to only wanting to eat, use, have sex. Great art brings even atheists into beauty.

But music now has become consumer oriented.

The arts can speak to you not in words. He remembers when he was 14 lying on the floor doing his homework and listening to the radio – Mozart's D Minor Piano Concerto – a mystical experience where he was taken out of himself, held there and it was as if his whole future was planned and he followed it. Music is a way to flow into the mystery.

You do the best you can. then God seems to move away. What you were clinging to was not God but where you were to be at that time, with the degree you could understand God then. The great moving away is death. When you die He is walking you out of life.

Desert vs. the promised land. His spiritual director at the seminary told him “between Egypt and the promised land there is always a desert and you must cross that.”

Beauty open us to this process.

The Reformation gutted the art, but they compensated with the Cantata about the Gospel.

If poor art, like charismatic songs, helps, how much more would great art do?

We become smaller when everything is relevant instead of great.

Non-fiction is like a reporter and what we see is not very good. Great fiction brings us into another world.

We live in a culture of anger, depression – things aren't going right, great losses of people we love, loss of job....

Depression is anger turned inward.

Beethoven is great for the depressed. He was born ugly, clumsy, rejected in love, was treated badly in his profession. then goes deaf – everything in his life blood is seeping away. He was going into despair. He wrote a lamentation. He became suicidal. But he was also writing the 2nd symphony. It is full of joy, and hope, and courage and inner vitality. It is the most optimistic piece in the world. Music heals vs. wallowing in our problems. Rhythm –

life, vitality. The enemy of healing is inactivity. His whole music was about overcoming, moving forward.

The Gregorian chant has some parts for the trained, some for soloists, but then also simply chant for the priests.

Fr. Ken doesn't see God as solving his problems, but pulling him out.

He prefers that people be enticed to pray more rather than feeling more obligated.

He studied the Mass in every detail in seminary so that he would feel pulled in to it.

November 12, 2006

Jesus: You need to believe more that every little sacrifice you offer is really a source of grace for family and students. Believe that I will bring good out of every evil.

Nov. 24, 2006

Last night I wrote the lecture for next semester's class in philosophy of human nature. It sounded good to me, but a little too hard. During the night I begged the Holy Spirit to help. I was almost ready to give up, thinking, hey, it would be better for the students to go to trade schools and vibrant Churches and forget about liberal arts all together. In prayer, it seemed the Holy Spirit forced me to see how hard it is for many of these college students (some are very good, of course) – such as, they hardly ever have to write in script because so much is computerized, so it is very, very, hard for them just to push their pens across the page to take notes. And, of course, they are mostly watching TV or doing web games so they don't have much vocabulary. I kept seeing the lovable faces of some who are having the greatest difficulty with college work and wanting to be able to help them so they can not only barely pass but actually learn a lot of deep wisdom.

When I woke up I was ready to simplify my lecture and assignments, make them very step by step slow, presuming much less ability.

Letter to a friend (my godchild Rebecca Geraghty) with diabetes who keeps having pieces of her feet removed.

Dear Becky,

I have been praying and praying for you, dear godchild. I keep thinking of the pierced feet of Jesus on the cross. Here are some excerpts from St. John Eudes. The whole passage is in the Office of Readings 33rd week Friday p.1269 in my book. I bet Richard has it. You would love to read from it - it is full of beautiful things.

"The Son of God wills to give us a share in his mysteries and somehow extend them to us. He will to continue them in us and in his universal Church. ...He intends to perfect the mysteries of his passion, death and resurrection, by causing us to suffer, die and rise again with him and in him. Finally, he wishes to fulfill in us the state of his glorious and immortal life, when he will cause us to live a glorious, eternal life with him and in him in heaven."

I find it helpful that it doesn't say He allows this to happen but He wills it to happen as I have always preferred to receive pain from his hand than the hands of "nature"? fate? other schlemiels like me?

Love, Ronda

Nov. 30, 2006

A woman watching my Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace on Johnnette's show thanked me so much because she doesn't feel so alone and she immediately got the book and went to a Recovery, Inc. meeting in Phoenix.

Jesus: Yes, all this work is good. See the good results of being open and honest and witnessing.

Thinking of Carla's letter to her friend who shot herself, it seemed as if the idea was that salvation is guaranteed. I asked in prayer: But, my Jesus, you don't teach universal salvation.

Jesus: You don't need to know the secrets of my mercy. You are to pray and teach and exhort; not to judge and know.

Billy Graham in New Orleans – had the whole stadium march out to evangelize the French Quarter. So great singing Saints Go Marching in. Well, we do that too with huge youth rallies with the Pope, etc.

December 1, 2006

From Anne Direction for Our Times:

Jesus

I speak with determination today. I look at My lay apostles, serving so diligently to prepare others for My return, and I am consoled. My heart sighs with the rejection of some but also lifts in hope at the acceptance of so many. Little apostles, you are pleasing to Me. You are laboring for heaven and you are teamed with heaven. Together, we are bringing hope to those who were formerly without hope. This is the way for you, the path to holiness. I direct

you in everything and you proceed along this path that I have marked out for you. All is well in your case. I want to explain to you why I speak with determination today. I am determined to push out further into the world. I desire that everyone have the light of heaven. I want confidence for all and comfort for anyone suffering. I send a great rush of grace for conversions at this time. This is a time for hearts to change. Because I desire this, a great many conversions, I am supplying all that is necessary to achieve this goal. You will find, My apostles, that may will be drawn to the truth of your mission. Accept this with profound humility. Show the world how small you are and they will see how great I am. This is the way to win souls for the Father. I am so pleased when an apostle accepts slights and insults with peace. I am pleased by this because it shows Me that you are truly accepting the call to imitate Me. It also shows Me that arrogance is receding and humility is spreading. Oh, what joy this gives to the infant in the manger. Accepting insults in humility is a most favorable gift for the King. Truly, I look at these offerings and I rejoice, graces flow unhindered and unencumbered, bathing the whole world. Never underestimate the power of you, the humble apostle, joined to Me, the determined God. Together we are changing the world.

I loved your message Jesus. Yes, I must be small and trust.

Dec. 2, 2006

It was a joy to be able to give to the Missionaries of Charity at the end of the year to feed to starving, knowing that by living more simply I can do more.

I am working on the book of a pro-life activist friend of mine called Emma's Journal. I watched the film Gandhi and had such a sense of her being in his footsteps and how I couldn't do what she did but I can support her now.

Jesus: I want special trust right now. Just do all your small tasks cheerfully and don't push anyone. Offer up not pushing anyone.

December 8, 2006

I had a crazy miserable experience yesterday and it hurt me so much in such an irrational way. I think it's funny. Lots of things that hurt are funny from another point of view.

My beloved priest friend, the pastor of our little parish, is a former Episcopal organ player. He has a long scraggly beard and looks like a Patriarch or a Russian elder or Gandolf of Lord of the Rings. I love the way he looks.

Suddenly he cut off the long beard for a Van Dyke short one and he looks like a photo of some 19th century professor type. I was stunned and realized with a bang, that friends have absolutely no power over their friends, especially new friends. Maybe it was a whim,

so maybe he'll let the beard grow again. From pictures that are around and in parish directories I think he's worn the long beard for many, many years.

Carla chided me. "He's your friend, You have to love him no matter how he looks. Would you want him to give you his beard instead of himself as your friend?"

Jesus seemed to laugh at me and seemed to say: "Well, I won't cut my beard off."

I talked to Fr. Ken. He just does this once or twice a year because he hates getting haircuts and beard trims, so he does a big one but then lets the beard grow back. I am much relieved.

I think my extreme reaction has to do with the idea from childhood that men who change in some way are due to leave.

A WHOLE BATCH OF BEAUTIFUL LOCUTIONS FROM ANNE

One is called: Heaven Speaks to those considering suicide

Jesus:

I have many things to say to those who are considering this act of self harm. I love you. I see your pain. I understand that you long for relief from your anguish. Please, bring your anguish to Me. I can help you. You are so valuable to the kingdom and I need you to help bring Me to others.

"How?" you say, in your great interior grief. "How could I possibly be helpful to Jesus and to others?"

I will tell you. Your pain is the pain of many in the world today. Many souls feel your grief, your hopelessness. Many carry heavy crosses of illness and addiction, loneliness and hopelessness, rejection and anxiety. Many of My children look into their future and see only more grief and pain and this takes their courage from them. Dearest friend, you must not do this. Do not look into tomorrow and expect today's pain to be repeated. You are not certain of such an occurrence. You cannot be certain because I, God, could change your life during this day, today. You must remain in this day, in the present, because I have given you adequate grace to deal with your cross. It is only when you look into the future and think that your Jesus will send you no relief that you find life unmanageable. Understand this. Your life is only unmanageable if you put Me out of it. If you let Me into your heart, into your life, I will make it not only manageable, but joyful.

You are sceptical. You cannot believe in a future with joy because the present holds such pain. I understand this, just as I understand everything about you. You may not know Me well so I will tell you something about Myself that may help you to decide that trusting Me is a good decision.

I have never been known to break a promise. Never. Today, I have a promise for you.

If you ask Me to help you, I will help you. Ask Me, My beloved one. You are important to this Kingdom and I have a plan for you. I need you. I need you to serve in a way that you do not and cannot understand today, in your great hopelessness. I will reveal the plan but you will have to be courageous and allow Me to move you from this place of despair to a place of hope in your heart. I will do so. I will move you along, away from your sadness. You must trust Me just a little bit and give me just a little bit of time. Even now, as you read these words, hope is stirring within you. This hope is from Me and it is the smallest indication of what I will bring to you. I am giving you courage. I am giving you hope. Rest with Me.

Say this, “I will rest Myself against Jesus and wait for Him to send relief.”

I will send relief. Do not be afraid. I am with you now and I will never leave you.

November 30, 2006

More from this booklet to those thinking of suicide. This is allegedly from St. Margaret Mary Alacoque:

Dear little soul, you are in pain. Your anguish feels deep, I know. Often, the most difficult part of suffering anguish is the perception that nobody understands the depth of your pain. One can feel very alone in such pain and when one seeks out consolation from others, one is often terribly disappointed. Please listen to me. I am your sister in Christ. I experienced great anguishes while I was on earth so I am rejoicing that God allows me to help you. When you go to another seeking comfort and you find yourself in worse shape, feeling even more misunderstood and alone, you must come to me. Say, “Margaret, I need help. I need help now.”

I, Margaret, will go directly to the Throne of God and I will remain there until you receive the comfort and courage you require. My friend, it is important that you know that you are not suffering alone. Jesus sees your suffering. He feels it with you and His Sacred Heart is moved to the most passionate desire to assist you. You must allow our Jesus to help you. When you make this emergency prayer to me, Margaret, you are really saying that you are willing to let heaven help you. How heaven rushes in at this time. You will know that I have heard you because you will feel a change. It may be just a whisper of a change, just a little

shifting. It will be noticeable to you as a feeling of calm in your Spirit. When you feel this little feeling of calm, you will know that you have been heard, that help is on the way and that you are not alone in your suffering. You have my promise that heaven will surround you until the frightening feelings pass.

I want to say something else. It is common for a person on earth to have thoughts that are not from God. Everyone on earth struggles with this at some time. We could say, actually, that everyone on earth struggles with this each day in terms of temptations. The battle is not finished until you die in your body and come to God's Kingdom. Given this, the constant need for struggle, you must view your thoughts of suicide as temptations. Do not be alarmed by these thoughts in that simply having these thoughts does not mean there is any reason to act on these thoughts. Do you understand? Do not be afraid. We, the saints in heaven, all had bad thoughts and temptations during our time on earth and we all at times failed to fight off temptations. The temptation to commit suicide is one where you must fight hard, with everything you have because of the nature of the consequence. If you take your life, you will not be able to go back and say, Jesus, I want to do better and serve you now. You take away any second chances for yourself to convert to Jesus and try again. Dear friends, this is wrong for you. It is not the answer you are seeking.

Jesus needs you to stay in the world until it is the right time for you to come home. This is God's plan and it is always best to follow God's plan. The last day of your life is determined by God. You must not think that the answer to great pain is suicide. This act of self harm is always a mistake. Always.

November 30, 2006

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

My friend, you have been hurt. I see that. I understand that you are carrying wounds that cause you to ache. You may not even understand the source of your pain and your wounds. You know that you are not perfect and that you make mistakes. Jesus accepts this about you and loves you most tenderly regardless of your mistakes. I want you to consider that others also make mistakes. Others fail in love and in kindness. Others are imperfect as we were all imperfect on earth. The mistakes made by others can cause us the greatest pain. We can carry wounds with us without even being aware that we are doing so. These wounds then spread to other areas of our hearts and result in a general state of pain that is hard to come back from.

Jesus suffered terribly on earth. He carried wounds, also. Jesus, in His most Sacred Heart, understands exactly how you came to be in such pain. He knows more about the source of your pain and hopelessness than you do. My beloved friend, I beg you now to turn to Jesus. He will heal you from wounds you do not even know you are carrying. You have felt loss in your life and there is emptiness. Jesus will fill you up again and restore you to a state of

hope and joy that will flow out from you to others. I am telling you that your great pain will recede. When your great pain recedes and joy takes its place, you will be so kind to others because you will understand how they are hurting. You will look at another in anguish and your heart will be moved to the greatest pity for them. You will say, 'I remember feeling that badly.' Only one who has suffered such anguish can really understand it. Would you agree? Do you remember a time when you spoke to someone about something that they had also experienced and you felt understood? It will be this way with your great pain, also, and someone who feels hopeless will gain hope from you. If you take your life, you will not be around to help this person in the future.

I want you to know that Jesus, in His most Sacred Heart, feels your pain. Jesus suffered so that we could be forgiven. The fact that Jesus suffered willingly does not in any way take away from the fact that Jesus suffered terribly. Perhaps, my friend, you can look up to Jesus and tell Him that you, in your suffering, understand something about His suffering. If you do this, all of heaven will rejoice because you will be on your way to becoming a saint. Believe this, my friend, because it is truth. Many will share with Jesus in His joy. Many will even respect His cross. But few are there on earth who will carry the cross and turn their eyes to the Lord in love during their suffering, which is what Jesus did. Do this, beloved one, and heaven will lighten your cross and remove this pain more quickly than you expect.

December 1, 2006

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

I feel such compassion for you, my friend. When you are carrying a heavy cross, it is difficult to see that it will end. Sometimes, you do not believe it will ever end. In terms of human power, maybe it is even impossible that your cross will end. But nothing is impossible for heaven. In heaven, you see, we live with miracles happening all around us. When you come to heaven you will understand what I mean. If your situation requires a miracle from heaven, you should ask for one. Miracles are not impossible when you keep company with saints. Saints, indeed, are all about obtaining miracles from God. God gives us these things, these miracles, because we suffered with Him while we were on earth. You will be a saint if you suffer with Jesus. And then, you will be able to obtain powerful graces, also. You will say, God, please help this person. God will do so when He sees that you are making the smallest effort to accept your suffering with Jesus. You have influence in your suffering. You have intercessory power, which means that if you ask for graces for another, God will grant them. This may be difficult for you to accept because you feel so sad or angry but I will use my influence to obtain graces for you to help you to understand. You will see that your suffering, your pain, is being used by heaven to help others. It will pass, my friend. You will feel better. I make this promise to you in the presence of Jesus Christ. He will keep this promise for us.

More from St. Margaret Mary Alacoque:

I am going to give you some advice. I am one who suffered great anguish on earth, as I said, so I am a good one to help you. Remain very calm during this time of upset. Do not panic. Do not act in haste. Let us, your heavenly friends, calm your spirit. If you deal with your pain in quiet, with an attitude of calm, you will be less likely to make bad decisions that create even more pain. It is best, indeed, if you can delay important decisions until you feel better. Be wise about your suffering and allow yourself to be quiet. This is not a bad thing. Spending time in silence, reflecting, will not harm you. While you are remaining in quiet, ask Jesus constantly for help. Ask Him to remove your pain as soon as possible, and ask Him to help others who are suffering this pain. You are joined to heaven, remember, so there are many of us in heaven who understand that you are suffering and seek to help you. You are not alone. We will never abandon you in your anguish. Ask heaven to send you calming graces and heaven will do so. Remember that you are important and that we love you very much. Your mistakes do not affect our love for you because we made mistakes, too. Heaven is filled with saints who were great sinners on earth. We repented and God forgave us. Be at peace about your mistakes because the experience you gain from your mistakes helps you later. Do you understand? God has a plan for you. Taking your life is not part of that plan. You are surrounded by saints and you are surrounded by angels. You belong to our family and you will have all that you need.

Blessed Mother

My dear little child, how heavy is your heart. I see that you are suffering and feeling alone. Dear beloved one, you are not alone now and you will never be alone. Even as you read these words, heaven surrounds you. The angels pray constantly for your recovery, for a return to joy for you. You must believe that I tell you the truth today. I am Mary, your mother, and I can only seek what is good for you. I will seek what is good for you right now, before the Throne of God, and ask the Father to send you heavenly gifts of courage and calm. You will move through this day that is already passing into the past and tomorrow will be better. Each day will move you closer to recovery. Do not think for a moment that God will leave you with pain that is unmanageable. God will not do this. Ask for help and you will receive it. I am here, with you now, and I will make sure that you receive all that you need to move past this period of anguish. Heaven does not will this for you. Heaven wills hope for you. Heavenly graces filled with hope flow into your soul now. Rest in God's grace and I secure all that is necessary for you. I am your mother. I love you completely. I will help you. May I ask you to help me with something? I ask that you turn away from anything that is causing you this pain. Walk away from habits that bring darkness into your little soul. I will give you the light to understand what is creating such pain. You will not be left confused. Your cross will be lightened. You have my assurance of this. Be at peace today because truly, heaven hears your prayer and moves to answer your

prayer. You will see heaven helping you in many ways, my beloved child. You are not alone.

To those who have left the Church

Jesus

I call out to those who have left My Church. Come back, I say. Return to the safety of the sacramental walk. It will be best for you and I want only what is best for you. Be assured of My welcome. Be assured that I want your return. Do not think that you are unwelcome in your faith. How could this be when I, Jesus Christ, personally call out to you? My Church on earth represents Me. It is My Church and belongs to Me. When the people of My Church accurately represent Me, you feel cherished. I want to restore you to your Church and I want to restore your Church to you. You see, My friend, it is best for you, given your call to holiness, that you proceed on the path that is protected by My Church on earth. I have so many ways to help you if you are following your faith within the protection of My Church. My Church has suffered, it is true. My Church continues to suffer. Part of the reason My Church is suffering is because you are away from it. My Church needs you. My Church wants you. You must return.

Beloved child, I am asking you, indeed, I am pleading with you to consider your circumstances. If there are reasons that inhibit a full return to the sacraments for you, I ask that you discuss these reasons with one of My priests. I will protect your desire to return to the sacraments. I will not reduce the standards of My Church for your circumstances but I will help you to adapt your circumstances to those standards. What is Jesus saying, you ask yourself. Let Me be more clear. This time on earth is a time where so many have compromised with standards of behaviour that the compromised standards have become the norm. I cannot and will not accept this. I do not accept this. If I were to accept this, I would have to change all of heaven and all of those who have served in times before you. Also, I would have to jeopardise the future of all those who come after you. My friend, listen to Me. Hear My words because My words are truth. Reject the rebelliousness of My enemy. Accept that you are called to follow Me and raise your behaviour to My standards. I will help you. You will be welcome in heaven if you accept that I am God. You will have to accept that I am God in order to gain heaven, of course. Will you not accept this fact now, before your time on earth is finished? Will you return to Me now given that ultimately you hope to do so? My heart longs for your peace. I see everything. If you have been hurt by those who claimed to represent My Church but who failed, I will heal you. Do not use this hurt as a reason why you step away from all that I offer for you through My Church. This has taken you in the wrong direction and others walk behind you. Please,

come into My Church. It belongs to Me, after all. You are welcome, regardless of your sins.

December 3, 2006

A good day. Steve's toe was hurting, so I helped more with little tasks. Yes, my Jesus, I can do little things patiently and sweetly.

Jesus: Now rest and be good to your students tomorrow. Stay in My heart and love everyone with My love.

December 4, 2006

It looks good with LRC students. I was happy to see one who had been in terrible trouble.

December 5, 2006

There was a Glorious concert at LRC. Jesus wanted me to have this beautiful gift for Christmas, shared with Carrie, to hear this wonderful music, and see my students who are in choir at their best, doing what they love.

December 6, 2006

The psalm prayer was from Psalm 36 "Give us true knowledge of Your mercy so that we may renounce our pride and be filled with the riches of Your house." I was thinking how pride is related to not knowing His mercy for others and for ourselves so that we judge them harshly and ourselves also thinking that it is all up to us humans to do things well and if we don't we are doomed. The Psalm says also "He so flatters himself in his mind that he knows not guilt." Yes, as if the others have all the guilt and we are near perfect!

December 5, 2006

Jesus

My beloved one, change is coming. You feel this. You are preparing to finish your time on earth and begin your time in eternity. That day, the day of your death, will be a joyful day because you will return to Me. Do you consider your death joyfully? Perhaps not. Perhaps you are afraid. Dear little child of God, I want to help you with any fears that take away from your peaceful consideration of the next life. You see, in our humanity, we fear death and suffering. I understand this perfectly because I also experienced a dread of suffering. I did not fear death, though. I knew that death would bring liberation for Me in that I would be free of the constraints I experienced in my body. Dear beloved one, it will be a liberation

for you, too. When your body ceases to live, your soul will become fully alive. There is nothing to frighten you. I will be there for you. I will take you to Me and comfort you. You will feel safer than you have ever felt on earth. Do you believe this? You should believe this, My friend, because it is the truth. Reject My enemy, once and for all, and rest in My heart while heaven prepares you to come home. I will remain with you constantly, helping you, consoling you, preparing you. At the end, you will feel My peace surrounding you. I will do this for you if you let Me. Right now, at this time, I continue to make ready your reward. You see, your reward is not final yet because you are still serving. Perhaps you are serving in illness, in weakness, or in sadness and grief. Offer it to Me, offer it all to Me, your Jesus, and with it I will do the most magnificent things for others still serving on earth. I will take your little offerings and use them to console the Father, who is rejected by so many. Our Father is so good. You will understand His goodness more fully soon, when you come to Me. I promise you, little beloved one, that you will rejoice in any offerings, however small, you gave to our Father during this final time of service on earth. Be filled with joy. I am with you and will never leave you. In your precious little heart, take My hand in yours. I will hold you steadily, never letting go, during the time of transition between your life on earth and your life in eternity. I am with you in each moment.

St. John the apostle

Greetings you to, my beloved family member. I am a quiet visitor in your soul. I am quiet because I am reverent in the face of your preparation. You see, the Lord has willed that you be given these words and graces to calm your fears. A steady stream of grace will flow into your soul at this time, preparing you to make the transition to the heavenly kingdom. How blessed you are! How merciful is Jesus to make these words and graces available to you! I am not surprised that Jesus does this for you. I am a witness to the great love Jesus holds for you. Jesus loves you so much that He cannot wait to give you heavenly gifts. He is giving them to you now so that you will have a foretaste of your reward. When you die, you will come into the family of God. We love each other very much because we love God and join God in His love for each of our brothers and sisters. This love is different from love on earth. This love never fails. This love never weakens or alters. The love we feel for you and for each other is a reliable and continuous state of existence. We see each other as we were in our humanity, flawed, and this makes us even more tender in our love. You see, dear friend, the times we failed on earth helped us to become humble. There is no arrogance in heaven and you are coming to heaven. I am telling you that if you made mistakes and committed sins you are exactly like the rest of us. Confess your sins and allow Jesus to free you from the hold they have on your soul. Jesus forgives. Jesus forgets. You must accept His forgiveness and allow Him to grant you acceptance for yourself. Jesus can make all

things new and He will make you new when you come to Him. Have no fear about your welcome. You will be welcomed by Jesus and by your whole family. I, John, am an expert on the love of Christ. I rested in the love Jesus had for me and I am asking you to do the same. Rest in the love Jesus has for you. Let it encircle you and penetrate you. You are cherished by Jesus Christ. He accepts you just as you are. Be at peace, my friend. Remain in heavenly quiet and allow Jesus to put the final touches on your soul.

St John the Apostle

My dear friend, how often have you known contentment? In your life on earth, how often have you sat in silence, thanking God for all of your blessings? Perhaps you are a wise person and you have done this each day. I am glad. Perhaps you have been busy and distracted and you have not done this enough. It is time to change. For a moment, thank God for all that He has allowed you to experience on earth. You have seen great goodness. Where have you seen goodness? Consider this question. Think back with me on the people you knew who were good. Why were they good? What was it that impressed you about them? You have also seen great evil. Offer God a brief prayer for those whom you witnessed working against goodness and then think no more about them. God will be merciful, particularly if you ask Him to be. Come back now to the examples of great goodness because it is in this goodness that I want you to rest yourself. You will always remember those who were better than you in terms of following God or following Godly principles. Be at peace in this. It is not to torment you that I bring these things to your mind, but to console you. If you think back on the good people you have observed, you will be thinking forward to the good people you are about to meet. Heaven is filled with people who made decisions for God. Heaven is also filled with people who chose against God, but who repented, allowing God to purify them. What you will remember about a good person is this. That person made decisions based on love. That person overcame their own desires for the needs or desires of others. That person often took a harder road in order to do the right thing. You will recall that the decisions to do the right thing cost that person something. There was sacrifice. Rejoice with me, John, as you consider the heroic goodness of another. In doing so you are becoming acquainted with heavenly principles, even as you remain on earth. This is a good exercise for you because we will bring you to the heavenly kingdom soon. Anything you need to be comfortable here will be given to you in terms of graces. I would like to see you at peace. I would like to see you accepting yourself as Jesus accepts you. Do you wish you had more to offer to Jesus? We all did and I mean that sincerely. Every one of us who considered our lives wished we had more to give, that we had been better, loved more completely and selflessly, served without interruption, and accepted the truth of God's presence. If you wish you had been better, you will fit right in with us in heaven. Be at peace. Contemplate the goodness you have seen and believe that Jesus accepts you, just as you are right now.

St. John the Apostle

Dear friend, we, your heavenly companions, whisper into the ears of your soul during this time. We are helping you to leave this world and enter the next. We do this to assist you and we do this because it gives us joy to see that you are nearly finished with your earthly labours. We are happy for you. Any expectations you have of heaven and God's kingdom are certainly underestimates because nothing can prepare you for the love of the Father and nothing can prepare you for the love of the family you are about to meet. We are all together in God's love and God's love unites us. This is the truth. Another part of the truth that will delight you is the personal, intimate love God has for you. You will experience this in Jesus Christ, our beloved friend and saviour. I lived for love of Christ on earth. In heaven, I live because of the love of Christ. How far short I fall when I begin to talk about the love of Jesus Christ. It is like trying to describe an ocean by indicating a small cup of water. Still, even though one is destined to fall short, one must begin. Jesus loves you so much that He lived each day for you, personally. The fact that He lived each day on earth for you personally, in no way detracts from the fact that He lived each day for me personally. Because of the nature of God, God can be equally present to each man simultaneously. You will come to us and you will be with Jesus. You will never be separated from Him again. You will know perfect security, perfect acceptance, and perfect intimacy with Him in heaven. My friend, there are those who will choose eternal separation from our beloved Jesus but you will not do so. You will choose Jesus. Choose Him now so that He can shower you with mercy, thus preparing you for your homecoming. Confess your sins. Admit to your failures. If you do this now, grieve for your sins, you will have begun the process of self-acceptance. Jesus forgives you if you repent. This is always the case. But you have the need in your humanity to accept yourself and become peaceful about your past sins. If you do this on earth, there will be no barrier to an immediate unity with Jesus, in other words, heaven. If you do not finish the work on earth, you will have a need to finish the work in the heavenly kingdom, that is, in purgatory. I, John, am encouraging you to at least begin this process now. Either way, Jesus is all mercy, all forgiveness. If you trust in Jesus, in His mercy, He will reward you with an unlimited amount of this mercy. Oh, my dear friend, take my words to your heart and believe them. I am trying to help you by giving you good advice and accurate information. Be humble and accept me as your brother, who gives wise counsel. I am praying for you now. Ask me to help you in this process and I will do so. Peace be with you and with all those around you.

Blessed Mother

My little child, how joyful I am to be with you. My heart rests with you as you contemplate God's mercy. There will be no difficulty with Jesus accepting you. If you feel the smallest desire to be with Jesus, to rest in His merciful gaze, you will do so. You belong to heaven, little child. Be very humble about your entrance into eternity. A good child, a faithful servant, comes to the door in humility. This is what you must do. God is great, very great. God is all goodness, all power. Comparatively, what are you? I will tell you. You are God's

beloved and immeasurably cherished child. You are like a small infant in my arms, in need of comfort and nourishment. Allow yourself to be a small and helpless infant and I, your heavenly mother, will give you all that you need to appear before God. I know about God, my child and I know about you. I know about heaven and I know about the family who prepares to welcome you. I know what you will need to be comfortable. Allow me to help you become comfortable. We are all here for you. We desire to make you comfortable. If you have a thought that troubles you, simply give it to me. I will see to it by either removing the thought from you or revealing God's truth about the matter. You will have peace. We, your heavenly family, surround you. We help to remove any bitterness that remains with you. I love you, my little child. You are dear to me. A mother does not leave her child when her child needs her and I will not leave you.

December 7, 2006

Peaceful day. Jesus: "Be still and know that I am God." Don't make idols of your plans.

December 11, 2006

How strange to be in the Lutheran chapel at Koinonia House where my new office will be. The look of the chapel is so Catholic since the pro-Catholic Lutheran Pastor Andrew has studded the walls with icons of the saints and even a picture of JP II and the words were the same as our liturgy, but no one kneels at the consecration or for communion which I did not receive. But I felt the grief of the separation. Lord have mercy and bring us so close that we have to reunite!

Jesus: You see all the bridges I made for you?

Yes, yes, yes!

December 12, 2006

Jesus (via Anne's Direction for Our Times)

Life on earth is filled with change. If you look back on any life, you can see marking points where that life changed. Sometimes change comes in a predictable and expected manner, as in the movement into a vocation for which a person prepared. Sometimes, change comes in an abrupt manner, as in situations where a person is injured or dies unexpectedly. It is this, the change viewed as a tragedy that I wish to discuss today. My friend, there are events in every life that stand out as difficult and life altering. This tragedy, this abrupt change of course, will stand out to you, I know. When you feel a sense of shock, a sense of stunning upset in your life, you must look for Me. I am there. I do not remain with My children, day after day, and then abandon them when they most need my support. Your grief is understandable and I will support you in it. You will not always understand why I allowed a certain thing to happen. In your expected inability to understand, you will

challenge Me. You will say, “God, how could you have allowed this? God, where are you? God why have you abandoned us?”

My friends, bring those questions directly to Me because I, Myself, am the most sympathetic listener when it comes to these heartfelt cries of anguish. You see, I made these cries Myself. In my humanity, on the cross, I felt abandoned. In My humanity, on the cross, I questioned the value of God’s plan. From My viewpoint, nailed to a piece of wood and raised aloft as a subject of total rejection and derision, it appeared that I suffered more than anyone. It appeared that none could know the extent of My pain. My beloved child, I tell you this so that you will understand that I, your Saviour, grasp the depth of your pain. I will walk you through each moment of anguish, surrounding you with heaven’s graces. No. You will not be left to walk alone through this tragedy.

St. Ambrose

My friend, rest with heaven a moment. At this time, it is important to remember that every life on earth is finite. When a child is born into a family, there is no way to know the extent of their life. There is no way to know the plan for that life. There is no way to know the sufferings and joys that will provide formation for that life in order to bring that child to knowledge of God to the extent that God has intended. We, humanity, simply do not know God’s plan. If we accept this truth, we will move through our lives with a greater appreciation for the possibility of change. As you walk the earth today, which one of you knows whether or not you will be walking the earth tomorrow? No person on earth today is assured that they will be on earth tomorrow. Clearly, it was the same in my lifetime. Nobody knows whether or not this is their last day to serve on earth. In the same way, perhaps you celebrate good health today. Does this mean you have a guarantee of good health tomorrow? Can you prevent a circumstance that will alter your health or your ability to serve tomorrow as you serve today? No, dear friend, you cannot. Accept this fact and you will serve in greater humility, aware that God could allow your course to be changed at any moment.

You, my beloved friend, are experiencing this today. You are stunned by the change in course that God has allowed for you or for someone you love. I understand. I want to compare your situation to that of Jesus Christ’s situation in His passion because we, as Christians, must compare every experience to the Lord’s experience so we will understand how to best conduct ourselves. Jesus suffered terribly before He died. His death was not sudden in terms of time in that He carried a cross to an expected death. That stated, can anyone be prepared for a torture and death such as He experienced? What preparation can there be for a mother to bring her to peace about such torturous treatment of her only child? Can a mother ever reconcile herself to a child’s death, particularly such a violent death? My friend, you are possibly shaking your head, saying, ‘No. It would be impossible for a mother to reconcile herself to the cruelty levied at her Son.’ I understand. I, agree

with you. Taken by itself, without the illumination of God, it would be impossible to accept such a set of circumstances. In the same way, if you take your tragedy by itself, without God's illumination, you may find it impossible to reconcile yourself to it.

Our mother, Mary, did reconcile her mother's heart to the will of the Father. She did this by joining herself to God's will in each moment. Mary never separated her life and every circumstance around her from trust in the Father's plan. This, most assuredly, does not mean that Mary was given extraordinary light to understand God's plan in each moment. On the contrary, Mary had to practice trust in a disciplined way because there were more moments of fog for her than clarity in terms of why God was allowing or advancing His plan in a given manner. Poor little mother, so worried for her Son's safety and happiness. Can we say that Mary proceeded wisely, despite her anguish? Yes, truly, we can say this. Mary proceeded wisely because she trusted that even though her Son suffered, even though her Son died, God's plan was the best plan, both for her Son and for humanity.

My friend, perhaps you cannot see God's plan illuminated in your grief and your pain. We understand. We will not leave you as you move through this period of shock. Believe me, one day you will see God's plan and you will look back to this day with perfect understanding, saying, 'Yes, I understand God's plan.'

St. Ambrose

Some of us walk through life trusting God. It is a habit that we have practiced for many years and it comes more or less naturally to us after a time. When a tragedy occurs in our life, we proceed through it in trust, despite our anguish, simply because this is what we have done in the past. Oh, my beloved friend, how priceless is the discipline of holiness.

Perhaps you do not trust God and you do not have a habit to fall back on. Perhaps you are angry at God over something else and now you are confronted with this tragedy. You are possibly experiencing a grave temptation to hate God because you are blaming Him for this tragedy. I can see how this would happen. I can see how events in your life have brought you this point. This is not a good place for you. You know that. You are angry at God and yet, God is not angry at you. You want to cast God out of your life and yet God does not want to cast you out of His presence. God, on the contrary, wants to pull you up against Himself so that He can console you. God has so many things to whisper in your ear. You will not be able to accept this tragedy if you do not allow God to help you. Fine, you say, rebelliously. I do not and I will not accept this tragedy, ever. Hmm. My friend, the tragedy is not going away, simply because you pledge to reject it. The tragedy has occurred. You cannot control tragedy any more than you can control death. You will die and this pain will have ended. What then? Will you wait until that moment to reconcile with God and your heavenly family? You are a person of good will. Surely you will not choose eternal

separation from God. That would not be good for you. Do you want to spend eternity with your loved ones? Perhaps you should consider that your loved ones wish to spend eternity with you. I can promise you this today. Your loved ones want you to be with them in heaven. They are telling me this now. They are here with me, watching you, surrounding you with prayer, and they are asking that you accept God's grace into your heart. You see, you are not alone. You are not abandoned. God allows all those who have gone before you to help you in times of difficulty. There are many here who seek your peace. Ask God to give you the grace to reconcile yourself to His will. He will do so. I will help you. Throw yourself into the arms of your beloved Saviour and allow Him to protect you and comfort you.

St. Ambrose

My friend, my beloved family member, I am going to help you. Take these words into your heart. The graces attached to them will sustain you. You will see that very often the kindest, holiest people are those who have experienced tragedies. They understand that great pain comes into every life. Sometimes, there is nothing to comfort you, no drink of water in your parched thirst for yesterday. Do you wish to undo God's will? Would you like to be one who rejects God's will and marks out his own path to Christ? This would be like driving a car while blinded. Only God can see your destination and only God can see the best course for you to travel to arrive there. Perhaps there is great guilt in your grief. Perhaps you hold yourself accountable for something that you feel contributed to the tragedy before you. Oh dear friend, please, give this guilt to God. Allow God to take this away and let Him do with it as He wishes. If you turn to God now, He will remove this burden from you and put it exactly where it needs to be. God will burn it up in the flames of His passionate love for you. If you need to confess a sin, do so. Otherwise, consign your guilt to Jesus as something that He must take care of for you. The Lord, in His great mercy, rejoices in exactly this type of request. Do not revisit yesterday, except as it causes you joy. I want to say a final word to you. The only way to travel the road to heaven is in trust. If you trust God, even the littlest bit, you will make progress and you will stay on the path to Him. You will proceed in some measure of peace and you will remain calm. Dearest friend, when you feel that you cannot remain calm, call on heaven. You can tell heaven that you have an emergency. Heaven will respond at once, bringing graces of trust and calm to you. If you trust in heaven, and you should, you will understand that heaven never abandons anyone. Heaven does not abandon you any more than heaven abandons those around you who also suffer at this time. Ask for graces for those around you and they will receive graces because of your request. If you pray for others in a time of such great pain, heaven will flood others with graces because heaven views this prayer, made in sorrow, as the most beautiful act of trust. The angels delight in this prayer and bring this prayer before the Father as evidence of man's respect for His dominion. God the Father, in turn, unleashes a torrent of conversion, healing, and calming graces for all involved in the tragedy. Truly, the

Father orders the angels and saints to benefit thousands from such a situation. Talk to heaven and you and all those around you will be blessed powerfully.

Blessed Mother

My poor little child, how you suffer. There are times when suffering is so great that a little one cannot even feel the comfort that is lavished upon them. It is this way for you now. In your grief, you stagger, but you are supported. I know that you do not always feel this support. We accept this. Later, when you come to heaven, you will marvel at the generosity of heaven as you understand the great lengths heaven went to in order to support you through this tragedy. Dear beloved child of the Father, rest in your little soul. You are like a wounded one who requires heavenly nursing. We will nurse you. I will watch closely and take each opportunity to send you examples of heaven's tender care for you. God has a plan and you are part of that plan just as I was part of God's plan. I am playing my part in God's plan now in speaking these words to you. Why do we use words? Little child, we use words to communicate truth because we are holy souls, filled with God's integrity. These words represent God's truth. If a person sends a letter, filled with love, can you say that the person sent words? Is it not more accurate to say that the person has sent love and kindness which brings also encouragement? On earth, in the limited view of those who do not yet experience heaven, perhaps it is true that a word is simply a word, representing a concept. In heaven, which is where we speak from, a word is much more. These words carry with them heavenly graces of truth, of comfort and of joy. My love for you, which is part of God's love for you, flows out from this page to your heart. My intercession for you is taking place as you read these words. Heaven is with you, I promise you. I am your mother and you are my beloved child. Turn your face to me and I will give you heavenly comfort that cannot be seen or understood. You will know that I am with you by the calming graces that come with me wherever I go. I am calm because I see God's plan. I will give you this calm and help you to see, at the very least, that God has a plan for you and that it includes this tragedy. I am with you, little dove. Your pain will not be without value and every tear you cry will be a tear that is noticed by heaven. Peace now, as we walk with you through this time of grief. We will give you the graces you need to cope today and to grow in holiness tomorrow. All is well. Heaven surrounds you.

I read an article Sister Judith sent about how the English Catholic Churches that had become depleted of late are now full up with immigrants from Brazil, Asia, Africa with vibrant ethnic flavor Masses, full of life and hope. They come and they find the one thing that is the same is the Church.

I recalled Mary Neill saying "Ronda, don't worry. It's not the intellectuals who will save the church but the anawim."

December 18, 2006

Asking Fr. Ken's advice about some family problems he said "Hardly ever when you want to help people, will they receive your help in the manner you want them to." For instance, if you give people money, it is theirs and they won't spend it as you would like them to!

Basically, as in marriage preparation, we have to say "I put up with you and you put up with me."

December 12, 2006

Tonight there was an Our Lady of Guadalupe procession from the center of town to our Church about ½ hour's walk. I loved seeing the kind of stiff seeming male Hispanic leaders tenderly laying flowers around Mary's lectern like base. In Jungian terms I suppose that is how they get in touch with their feminine side.

Only about 10 of the 200 people in the procession were Anglo's. I love Our Lady of Guadalupe so I thought I should go even though it was walking in the dark in the night.

I kept thinking of how 35 years ago Martin went on a business trip to Mexico and I went with him to see the shrine of Our Lady, and joined in by crawling on my knees on the cobblestones across that huge plaza in front of the Church to finally reach the tilma. During that painful crawl I offered it up for my students at the new teaching job I was to start at Loyola Marymount and for everyone in my family. So many graces came pouring down amidst all the sometimes terrible crosses.

In the procession tonight we had candles and it felt like somehow making a dent in the mentality of this Bible-belt area.

During the Mass there was mostly the usual charismatic style songs of the Hispanic choir, but it seems Father Ken, who is teaching formal music to the leaders, got them to be able to do deeply beautiful old chant songs in Spanish as well. I marveled at his pastoral heart to "hide" his own feelings about charismatic songs and to learn Spanish perfectly so they would trust him to move them along in the music. Maybe that's not how it really happened, but that is how it seemed.

Father Ken gave a rousing sermon about how fences and walls can't keep out God's love and how Our Lady of Guadalupe is an icon of God's love being greater than cultural barriers. I kept thinking how she "came" with these Mayans to this strange Southern part of North America – as the feminine icon of the Church who they are bringing in so many good ways to our less devotional Anglo Church.

December 13, 2006

Heaven Speaks to Those Who Struggle to Forgive

Jesus

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How blessed I am that you take a moment to read these words. I am God. I am complete, and yet your simple act of reading My words gives Me glory. You are important to Me and you are important to My family, which includes all men of good will. Because I love you and because I need your help, I wish to give you the opportunity to find greater peace in your heart. It is clear to Me that many suffer from hidden wounds. The only way for these wounds to heal is for the carrier of the wound to forgive the one who inflicted the injury. My dear child, this can be difficult. When a wound finds a home in the heart, it becomes comfortable there. It must be loosened and shifted. Both a willingness to forgive and a spirit of forgiveness are necessary because it is these things that make the wound uncomfortable. The wound then begins to dislodge. This reawakens the pain but only temporarily until the wound is removed altogether.

I want to begin this process in you. If you proceed in the process of forgiveness with Me, you will find that forgiveness floods your heart. Your wounds will be gone. I have the power to heal every one of your wounds. When you try to do this alone, you do not experience success and you find that bitterness persists. Bitterness characterises My enemy. Forgiveness characterises Me. You, a beloved little child of God, seek to find peace in your heart. You will only find peace if you step into the stream of goodness. This stream is like a river of grace with which I desire to bathe you, removing all pain and injury. What will remain in your soul is joy. This joy, this heavenly peace, will be obtained by accepting your flaws and accepting the flaws of others. You see, My friend, if you accept the flaws and sins of others, you will soften in attitude toward yourself. I love you. I accept you. I need you to accept yourself so that you will be at peace in My kingdom and it is through forgiving others that you will find acceptance of your own humanity.

St. Faustina

Oh my, how we suffer on earth. We are so very woundable, are we not? Our humanity makes us vulnerable and we are subject to pain. My friends, Jesus wishes to heal you from the injuries levied against you. It is possible that you are suffering from pains that were inflicted in the past. At this time, Jesus is allotting a torrent of graces because He wants His little ones to be at peace. If a person is at peace, that person can serve God with very little self will. There are different periods in the history of this world. At different times, Jesus sends different graces, always considering the appropriateness of the grace for the time. In other words, Jesus knows what His people require and gives accordingly. At this time, the Lord sees that souls are in distress. The great darkness has obscured the usual process of acceptance for others and many carry heavy burdens that they should have cast off already. There is a preoccupation with self that precludes God's children from considering the struggles of others. This preoccupation has inhibited spiritual healing for many. Jesus wills at this time to send heavenly help that will shake God's children out of this fog. You have been hurt by others. Heaven knows this. Now it is time to forgive those who have hurt you. Jesus is all mercy, it is true, but God is also all justice. Those who have hurt you will

be held accountable. Do you want this? Do you desire it? My friend, nobody escapes divine justice. Where does that fact place you in terms of the sins you have committed? Are you free from sin? Have you hurt anyone in your past? Be honest and I will ask God to illuminate your soul for you because you are in the same boat as those who have hurt you in terms of being held accountable for sins committed. Perhaps you have been injured grievously. Perhaps the evil committed against you far exceeds anything you have ever done wrong. Be at peace. God will make all wrongs right and the one who hurt you will have to deal with their own process. We are concerned with your growth today and your growth will be stunted if you do not accept forgiveness into your heart. You need bring nothing to this process but willingness. Tell Jesus that you are willing and He will begin His work. If you are not willing, I understand that, also. In that case you must ask Jesus to give you willingness. Jesus loves this prayer. Do not think it makes you unworthy of the process. You say, 'Jesus, I am too angry, too hurt. You will have to heal me enough so that I can even allow such a process to begin.' The heart of Jesus rejoices in this and He tells the Father that truly, this is a soul in which He can work. In other words, I am telling you that there is no reason to persist in bitterness. It is time to let it go. We will support you and sustain you.

St. Faustina

My friend, there is great opportunity here. Jesus is promising you that He will assume responsibility for your healing. This is the healing that comes from heaven, the authentic liberation from spiritual and emotional distress. This is not something that is obtainable from a worldly source because only the divine can make these promises and then deliver these graces. I cried many tears on earth. Do not fear tears. Tears provide the soul with moisture which allows for great growth in virtue and holiness. Tears are a sign that healing is taking place. Sometimes, tears flow out of the person and with the tears goes the hurt. Good bye to hurt. Welcome to forgiveness.

What does forgiveness bring? I will tell you. Forgiveness brings peace. Forgiveness brings self acceptance because you are able to say, yes, this bad thing happened to me. Yes, it was hurtful and I suffered pain because of it. Then you stop and say, No. I will not allow this injury to suffocate the goodness in me. No. I will not allow it to divert me from God's will in my life. I will not behave badly because someone else has behaved badly. If I do so, I am being tricked.

You see, my friend, the path of bitterness leads in the opposite direction of where you must go. Come our way, to heaven, and you will have joy. The enemy seeks to divert you by encouraging you to persist in bitter self-righteousness and indignation. You know that it is not Jesus who advises you to hold on to anger. It is His enemy, who is also your enemy.

St. Faustina

Ask yourself this question. Are you angry at Jesus? If you answer yes, you must tell Him and talk about it with Him in the silence of your heart. There is only one combatant here, my friend, because Jesus is most assuredly not angry at you. As such, you are fighting all by yourself. Day after day, you make a case against God, reviewing all of the hurts that God has failed to prevent. You find yourself softening at times, and then you hastily list the wrongs God has committed against you, backing up your case and affirming your decision to ignore God or even work against Him. If you could see me you would see that I am shaking my head sadly. This will never succeed for you. This state of affairs will really have to cease. I would like to say, ‘Stop this at once’ but who am I to give you orders? You would say, ‘Who is this Faustina who speaks with such authority? Faustina does not understand my pain or she would join me in my anger against God.’

You are wrong, of course. I would not join you in your anger against God because I know God. I am united to Jesus in heaven and I am continually suffused with His love for me. At the very same time that I am suffused with His love for me, I am suffused with His love for you because it is all the same love, from the same Source, and it includes us all. Do you understand? Will you try to stay with me while I attempt to explain this to you?

I exist permanently in the heart of God. You exist permanently in the heart of God in that He created you and He cannot fail to love you. He is enamoured with every part of you, every characteristic, and every possibility in your future. Your anger, your pain, your sinfulness, in no way diminishes God’s love for you. This is not even possible. God will never reject one of His children. It is His children who reject Him. My little beloved friend, you are like a small child sitting in a corner at a birthday party with his arms crossed. Will you do this in heaven? Will you come to heaven and refuse to join in our joy? No. You will not. You will have to work through this pain in purgatory. Now, perhaps you are getting angry at me. You say, ‘More injustice! Faustina is threatening me.’ I am not threatening you. You are my little brother or sister and God has given me the task of helping you to cast off your bitterness, allowing Him to replace it with His forgiveness. In order to do so I am using the powerful weapon that is the truth. You have a great many friends in heaven and they want you to begin this process now so that you are ready to come straight to heaven when you die in your body. I want this, too. Jesus wants this, also. We have many people here who are heavily committed to your cause. Won’t you come back to completeness now? I love you very much. I know all about heavy burdens that tempt one to bitterness. Sit in silence and we will begin this important work in your soul.

Blessed Mother

I am with you, my child. I am in all of your pain and I understand why you are having difficulty. Heaven sees everything. This fact should only console you because heaven

completely accepts humanity. Dear child of my heart, heaven was created for you. Let me repeat that for my little wounded one. God made heaven for you. This is your home. You will come here if you accept Jesus when you die. Accept Him now and you will live out the remainder of your time united to all of us, who seek to save others. I want to explain something to you so that you know that we understand your predicament. Your difficulty in forgiving is understandable. I had to forgive those who crucified my Son. My love for Jesus is combined with my respect for Him and it was this way for me on earth. He always served God's children. He always put the good of humanity first, sacrificing everything for every human being ever created. His love was perfect and perfectly selfless. Yes, I loved Him fully. In His presence I could only melt with the love He exhibited. When He was crucified, and even before that, unjustly castigated and slandered, my heart nearly broke. At His death, My heart stopped as well, in terms of its ability to recover and love. It was only through the grace of the Almighty God, who breathed forgiveness into me, that I was able to continue on in the world without my Son. I am telling you that you should not be ashamed to need God's help in this process. I, also needed God's help. God placed forgiveness in my heart and He will do the same for you. A final word of love for you is this. Remember that you have hurt our Jesus and Jesus willingly forgives you. Jesus loves you so tenderly. Forgive others as Jesus has forgiven you and you will know heaven's peace. We will help you. I am with you and I will never leave you.

December 13, 2006

I asked Jesus what I would do if I trusted in him about difficult family problems. He said "Wait till January 1st and in the meantime have a good Advent by just serving with love in the home."

December 14, 2006

From Heaven Speaks to those who have Rejected God.

Jesus

I speak today with the greatest seriousness. My beloved one, you were created by God. God did not create you to reject your place in His family. You are important in this family, which includes all of mankind. To cast yourself out of God's love is to cast yourself out of your family. You object to this, telling yourself that you do not reject mankind, only the Creator of mankind. My friend, this is like reaching into your chest and removing your heart with the goal of rejecting your heart but accepting your body. The body will not function without the heart. It cannot. In the same way, the family of God cannot function without the sustaining hand of the Father. Even the earth would fail to exist if the Father were to withdraw His benevolence. Your rejection of God proceeds from anger. You move to deny this. Perhaps you cite scientific evidence that claims to supplant God's existence. When you die in your body and you come before Me, Jesus Christ, you will be dazzled by

the extent of what humanity does not know. The body of knowledge on earth at this time, while exciting for you, is miniscule when seen against the light of the full truth that you will be allowed to explore in heaven. I bless all science of good will. God has been merciful in the extreme through science. Many men have studied science and been brought to a profound respect for the Creator through the knowledge they have gained. They will continue this study in heaven, of course, and be blessed even more. Additionally, many men who study science have served their family, humanity, profoundly through their cooperation with Me in their studies. Do you understand? They cooperate with God and God, through that cooperation, blesses humanity. It is arrogance on the part of mankind to believe that they have discovered anything that I do not wish for them to discover. You, as one of God's created ones, must come to accept that those using science to subvert Godly principles are working against the Creator. They will be accountable for any damage done to the Kingdom of God. I am merciful to those who repent and I will be merciful to you. I speak to you today, not to condemn, but to save. I am with you. Do not reject Me.

St. John of the Cross

My friend, you cannot persist in rejecting God. It is too hard for you. Perhaps you do not understand the burden you carry. I will tell you about your burden so you will understand just how heavy it is and perhaps agree to put it down for a moment. The weight of your burden is such that your soul cannot be lifted. I am strong in my determination and I am strong in terms of God's divine power. Try as I might, though, I cannot lift you. You are as heavy and immovable as ten tons of bricks. When a soul believes in God and respects God's dominion over mankind, that soul can be lifted like the lightest feather. We can give that soul comfort and consolation. We can gain graces for the soul so that it can feel our love and the love of the Creator. The soul who accepts God is light and can be drawn easily into the divine truths. The acceptance of God gives souls a buoyancy that keeps them up above the water line, faced into the light of truth. This light flows steadily into these souls and the love that grows in them nourishes both the individuals and all those around them. You do not have this. You have rejected access to the One who loves you unconditionally. We surround you, hoping for an opportunity to help you but you block us out. Consider those around you. Think of those you love. Do you wish them well? Do you desire their safety? This love you feel, this caring, is the evidence of God inside you. Though you purport to reject your God, you cannot do so entirely because to fully reject God, you would have to reject all forms of love. Please understand that there are only two ways to proceed. One is from love, God's way. The other is from hatred, the enemy's way. Ahh, you say, John is simplistic. I must tell you that I take that as the highest compliment. Heaven is simplistic in that it originates and is sustained by love. We will continue, you and I, to explore your rejection of God together. I am trying to help you, my friend, because I love you. You do not know me enough to love me but when you get to know me, you will love me. Thank you for entertaining my thoughts for these few brief moments in time.

St. John of the Cross

There are several ways to proceed. One, you can continue on in your rejection of God. Two, you can accept that God loves you and ask Him to make Himself known to you. Three, you can accept that God exists but continue to deny Him access to your life.

If you do the first, nothing changes. You will have the greatest difficulty when you die and meet God because you will have to accept that you rebelled against perfect love. This will be painful for you, in the extreme. God is merciful, of course. He will give you an opportunity to repent and if you do so, you will be taken joyfully into the family. At that time, however, you will have to begin learning all of the lessons of love and humility. This will take time but God has prepared a place for you to do this. It is called purgatory.

If you follow the second option and accept that God loves you, asking God to make Himself known to you, you will begin learning about God's love on earth, in your life and through your relationships with others. You will know joy, again, my dear friend, and you will have hope in your heart. God will flood you with graces, we will surround you and defend you as you grow in virtue, and upon your death you will be welcomed with the greatest joy and celebration. Truly, when you accept God and let Him teach you about love, the day of your death is a happy day indeed.

The third option is not the option I would take but it is better than option number one. You can accept that God exists but keep Him at a distance. This is better than option number one because you are giving God some measure of respect. God rewards all such respect with untold generosity. Also, if you at least recognise, even in the smallest way, the existence of God, you leave a door open to a relationship with God. Perhaps you are not willing or able to ask God to reveal Himself to you. Possibly you are fearful of what God will ask of you. This is short sighted because anything that God asks of you becomes easy when you embark upon it with Him. At any rate, though, at least tell God that you recognise Him as the Creator and there will be a link between you and your God. It will be like being in deep water and holding on to a rope. You may not make progress, in that you are not allowing God to pull you into the boat, but neither will you be lost.

I love you. My heart has the greatest interest in helping you come back into our family. You see, I am looking at you with heavenly eyes. I see all that you can do to help others know God's love. We need you so badly. You have potentials that you have not touched. Only with God's grace can your full potential be realized because God ignites the growth process, just as truly as he takes a seed and creates a massive tree. You have seeds of the greatest, most powerful goodness in you. Come back to God's love and He will ignite the growth process in each of these seeds. God, Himself, sowed these seeds and He has a divine

purpose for each of them. Be at peace as you consider your options. You have heaven's assistance.

St. John of the Cross

You have been patient with me and I am grateful. I have a few more thoughts to share with you so I will presume upon your patience for one additional moment. If you have held onto your rejection of God for some time, you will find that these thoughts are unsettling. I, John, speak of choices as though these were easy choices with no subsequent emotional effects. I know what I am saying to you in that I understand the emotional impact of making choice number two or even three. You will not be left to walk through this alone. Any aloneness you have felt in the past has been self-imposed. Listen carefully to this. I know that you have felt isolated and abandoned in your pain. Jesus felt the same way on the cross. In truth, He was not abandoned and neither were you. You simply locked us out. We, the saints and angels, cannot help you without some willingness on your part. The best we can do in these situations is to seek to protect you while we wait for the smallest opening in your heart.

I ask you to take some time in silence and consider these words. You will see that I am reasonable in my contention that if you feel any love at all, you are still interested in being in God's presence. To say that you do not believe in God or God's enemy is to simply deny a truth as obvious as the truth that water is wet or wind produces movement. You can argue about the truth, you can distract yourself and others from the truth, but ultimately, the truth remains. God exists. He loves you. To reject Him is to choose His enemy over Him. This is a mistake for you. Accept God again, if only in the smallest, most limited way. These words and the graces that accompany them are not simply for this moment. I am going to stay with you and remind you of them. I, John, love you and I will not give up on you. Feel the heavenly calm in your soul. There is no need for anything other than calm. If you are not ready now, do not be distressed. There will come a time when you are willing to accept God. I am with you now and I will be with you then, praying for you and gaining all possible graces for you. You may feel anger at me. You may say, 'John is a fool. I am ridiculing John and yet he continues to express love for me.' You are right. I love you even though you ridicule me. I am in heaven, you see, so I am like God. Even if you ridicule God, He continues to love you and hope for your return. So, in simply reading these words, you have had your first lesson in the unconditional love that is God's. Be at peace. You are not alone.

Blessed Mother

Dearest little child of heaven, you are not as intellectually advanced as you think. If you were truly advanced in your intellect, you would be working hard to become a saint because when one authentically applies the intellect to the consideration of truth, one is

enchanted with the limitlessness of God's knowledge. One then desires to proceed more and more deeply into these heavenly truths. This can be done during your time on earth.

You are loved. You are cherished. We in heaven have many hopes attached to your conversion to God in your heart. The first reason that we harbour such hope is that we see the goodness in your soul. You may detach this goodness from God, stating that this goodness originates in you. In other words, you claim this goodness as your own. I am Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, and I tell you today that any goodness in your heart originates in God. Do not claim something that came from your Father. Would you claim your genetic composition? Did you have anything to do with it? Did you choose it or design it? This is silliness, of course. It was chosen for you so that you could serve in the way God intended. Do not reject the one who lovingly created you to serve at this time. All of heaven is interested in your acceptance of God. You are that important to us. My motherly heart suffers at your rejection of God because I witnessed what Jesus did for you. Be at peace. I will help you and you are loved. Take John's advice and accept God into your life. You will be so grateful that you did.

December 16, 2006

Lily says with family what is needed is the apostolate of being. Yes, don't push, be gentle.

Difficulty with plans with a woman I was keen on teaming up with to use my book in parishes in North Carolina.

Jesus: You did go too fast, but I am bringing good out of it as always. Even though sometimes team things worked, it is better when you do it alone in terms of these personal coordinating matters. Just be patient. Put Taming (Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace) out there with the flyer and wait and see. The Holy Spirit is working with everything you do. Look at St. Vincent Palotti, many, many ventures. Some got blocked; it doesn't matter. Remember your main work is to let me sanctify you.

Memories of Dietrich Von Hildebrand by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D.

(This was for an article for the Von Hildebrand Legacy publication. It was not used because of a change in the organization's plans but I am leaving it here for those of you who have read things of his but don't know what he was like as a personality.)

It was truly a miracle that I met Gogo (as all his friends called him). Here is how it happened.

I was brought up as a total atheist, though my background was culturally Jewish. I studied philosophy hoping to find truth but only found skepticism, relativism, and historicism. I was looking for love but only found fascinating, sinful, disappointing relationships. By the age of 20 I was in despair of ever finding love or truth.

One Saturday my mother, who never surfed the TV, not ever, turned on the set in the middle of the afternoon, and there was a program called the Catholic Hour with two philosophers on it: Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Alice Jourdain. “Ronda, come see, there are some philosophers on TV.” To my amazement, these philosophers were talking as if truth, love, goodness and beauty were objective realities.

I wrote them a long letter describing my futile search and asked if they could help me. It turned out that Alice (Lily – shortly afterwards to become Gogo’s second wife) lived but 2 blocks away from me on the West Side of New York city. Neither she nor I, nor Madeleine (to be Stebbins) who was her roommate will ever forget our first meeting. Somehow, even though I was an atheist, I knew that there was something extraordinary in that apartment. Never had anyone looked into my eyes with such compassion and insight as did Lily. Afterwards, I danced down the street thinking, “I have met a saint.”

Impressed by my yearning for truth, Lily suggested that I make a visit to the classes of Dietrich Von Hildebrand at Fordham and if I was enthusiastic, why not transfer my Woodrow Wilson scholarship from Johns Hopkins graduate school to Fordham.

Stephen Schwarz escorted me to Fordham. Two things caught my attention. The first was that, unlike the professors at Johns Hopkins who seemed to me to be dessicated academics, Von Hildebrand and Balduin Schwarz were vibrant men, overflowing with joy. Secondly I noticed that they could refute skepticism, relativism and historicism in a few sentences.

I like to think that two of my favorite saints also had something to do with the miracle of my mother turning on the TV at that moment: St. Therese of Lisieux who, during her dark night, prayed so much for atheists, and St. Edith Stein – who, having been an atheistic philosophy student from a Jewish background herself, surely she would want me to meet her “cousin” philosopher, Von Hildebrand.

Of course, being such a thoroughgoing atheist who had been brought up to think that all religious people were stupid and weak, I didn’t think that the wonderful traits of Von Hildebrand, Lily, and the Schwarzs: Balduin, Leni (a convert from an atheist Jewish background) and Stephen, their son, had anything to do with their religion. I just wanted to be with them.

Zealous Gogo, at the urging of Lily, quickly arranged for my scholarship to be transferred and within a month I was taking courses at Fordham.

Ecstasy is the only word to describe my reaction to each of Gogo’s classes, as I realized that truth was real, and what glorious truths, such as proofs that moral values were absolute. Simultaneously I was lapping up the love the members of the lay community surrounding

me with. Getting to know them took place at lunches at the Schwarz house, and on the D-train of the NY subway from the Manhattan to the Bronx and back again, for I was able to travel a whole hour each way with either Gogo or Balduin who were riding up to the classes I was taking and they were teaching.

The miraculous events that led me to become a Catholic a year after meeting Gogo and Lily are told in my autobiography *En Route to Eternity*. A large part came from reading the authors recommended by them such as Augustine, Newman, and Chesterton. The night before my baptism I was visiting the Schwarzs who would become my godparents. Gogo was there. On my way home, I grabbed his arm and asked, "But suppose it isn't true, after all?" I expected some insight into philosophy or psychology of religion, but he replied with the simplicity of a peasant, "but think of the miracles!"

I found the personality of Gogo overwhelmingly. That the same man could be so serious, so deep, but also so spontaneous and affectionate, delighted me. We used to attend the same daily Mass, walking from different directions. Always I would find him singing opera loudly along the way. I often thought of this as the Italian side of his personality whereas the philosophical side was more German.

These personality traits of Gogo made whatever he wanted to teach me not so much didactic as enticing. And this was not only in the realm of philosophy. My father was a lover of classical music who filled our early childhood with the sound of music every hour he was home. As a teenager I rebelled and listened only to popular tunes. By college I gradually grew to love classical music, but had very little sense of choral music. I will never forget sitting in a room next to Gogo who was playing a 78 recording of Mozart's *Laudate Dominum*. To make sure I understood the beauty of it, he grabbed my arm with his hand and emphasized each climax of the singing with an extra squeeze accompanied by his radiant smile.

Another memory from these early days of the friendship, which would last until the end of his life, is of his insistence that those of us who rode with him on the subway from Fordham back to Manhattan pray *Compline* out loud in Latin. It was for me such an exemplification of the later buzz-word "counter-cultural" but also of freedom of spirit. In later years I followed his lead by insisting that friends pray the rosary aloud with me in airports during long waits at the gate.

Gogo played a large role in my marriage to Martin Chervin, a man from an orthodox Jewish background who had become an atheist as a teen but who wanted to know Christ. When I got interested in Martin as a possible spouse, I was on the verge of becoming a Catholic. At the time, he was a divorced playboy. I was confused. I thought a good way of getting rid of him would be to introduce him to Gogo and Lily and the Schwarz family. Surely they would tell me to drop this dangerous friendship immediately. Instead they all

loved him and encouraged us in what turned out to be a long chaste courtship and helped us get a dispensation from Martin's previous non-religious marriage. We went through a long process with the New York and Roman tribunals. Finally Gogo was instrumental in persuading a prominent Cardinal to intervene for a dispensation in favorem fide.

It seemed as if Martin would soon become a Catholic. A major influence on him was the reading of *Transformation in Christ*. He recognized the genius of Gogo's combination of consummate understanding of human nature with sublime faith.

Even more, my husband, who had the same kind of joie de vivre as Gogo, could only have understood a faith like Gogo's, which included rejoicing in the goods of the earth, as well as opening to the redemptive gifts. Before meeting Gogo he thought of Catholics as either tight Puritanical types or rebellious sinners. It took him many years to finally become a Catholic, because he detested the American post-Vatican II Mass. Shortly before Gogo's death he made a bargain with God that should Gogo survive longer, at a time when his life seemed almost at an end, he would take it as a sign to become a Catholic in spite of his dislike of the English Mass. Gogo was spared a short time longer and Martin did become a Catholic.

Gogo also had an influence on the conversion of my atheist mother. She was horrified at my interest in Roman Catholicism, but the personality of Gogo opened her to investigating the faith for herself. He decided to meet her informally at our home for individual teaching sessions to overcome her formidable doubts. In a charming gesture, the first time he came he presented her with a huge bouquet of peonies.

A few less important but telling memories:

Before his conversion, Martin and I were once traveling in Europe and went out of our way to go to Florence to see Gogo and Lily. I was praying constantly that whatever Gogo said would be a turning point for Martin to becoming a Catholic. We had a lovely visit but mostly the conversation was humorous and anecdotal instead of deep. At the end I was alone for a few moments and told Gogo how sorry I was that no important points had come up. Immediately Gogo's humorous expression changed to great seriousness and he exclaimed "What a sin on my part to have talked so much thoughtlessly!" I was touched by his readiness to acknowledge a fault even when it was unintentional.

Summers included a yearly meeting of a lay community that most of the Von Hildebrand circle were part of. I occasionally came to these meetings in Bavaria. The Mass was celebrated in a small chapel with parts of the congregation on either side – men on one side and women on the other. It always delighted me to see that, even after many years of marriage, Gogo could not bear to be separated from Lily – so throughout the Mass he would turn his head and gaze upon her with love.

A memory that fits with the name of the book *The Soul of a Lion* took place when Gogo and Lily came to Loyola Marymount University where I was teaching in the early 70's. Gogo gave the first talk. During the break, Lily told me that I must sit next to him while she was speaking and be sure that he stayed calm because he could have a fatal heart attack at any moment. During the question period the wife of a colleague of mine challenged Lily on some point. Gogo took it as an insult and tried to leap up to seize the floor. I grabbed him to hold him down. He turned on me swiftly and remarked: "Ronda, you can't keep me down. I am not a lamb, I am a lion."

We all knew that Gogo had a bad heart. Once, toward the end of his life, I had a nightmare that he was falling down a staircase to his doom. After that, whenever I was with him and there were stairs I pushed myself ahead of him so that I might cushion a fall.

As a professor of philosophy I have taught Gogo's books for decades with great impact. Some of my philosophy majors such as Michael Healy and James Harold, now at Franciscan University of Steubenville, went on to graduate school to study his thought. I cannot teach his ideas, or those of Lily, my life-long friend, without a sense of the presence of their minds and hearts and souls permeating my smaller personhood. What a legacy. Viva the Von Hildebrands!

December 17, 2006

Heaven Speaks to those who suffer from financial need.

(Those of you who know my, Ronda's, love of simplicity of life will appreciate how much these words, allegedly of Jesus to Anne would delight me.)

Jesus

I speak today with such love in My heart. There are those among you who suffer from financial need. You do not have enough money to sustain your family. Perhaps you do not have what you need to buy food or to pay for your shelter needs. My friends, you are not forgotten. Heaven will not abandon you. I see your distress and recognise your need. I want to ask you to look at your situation fearlessly. Ask yourself if you are in real danger of going without food. Are you in real danger of losing your place of shelter? Consider these two things as your basic needs. I am asking that you begin to think of your time on earth differently. Consider exactly what your body needs to continue in service to Me. Some of My children on earth have been blessed with great abundance. In some cases, this great abundance has created a craving for more that is undermining heaven's goals for the soul. Additionally, this craving for more has become a distraction, diverting some of God's

children from the task of growing in holiness. My beloved ones, if this describes you, if you routinely have enough food to eat and a safe place to rest, yet you continue to worry about money, then you must change your standard immediately. What will you do when it comes time to leave all of this? Will you object when Jesus does not supply you with these extra things in heaven? You may not want to come to heaven because there is no excess of material goods here. This is silly, of course, and I am being playful with you but please try to understand My point. Excessive material goods are a distraction. If you have financial needs that can be rectified by cutting back on your standard of living, do so at once. I will help you and I promise you this today because this is very important for you and for your family. I am asking all to reconsider their needs and use less when possible.

For those who cannot sustain basic food and shelter needs, I have something else to say. You are loved. You should ask Me to send help and I will begin to do so at once. My beloved children, I did not create you to go hungry. I did not create you to sleep in circumstances that prevent safety. I want you to know that during My time on earth, I often experienced hunger. I very often did not have a place to rest My head. Indeed, I was born into poverty and I understand poverty of the physical type. I want you to know something today. Financial poverty, physical need, does not equal spiritual poverty, meaning spiritual need. I am saying that you can be far wealthier than any king or queen, even if you are the poorest of the poor. Perhaps you are hungry more than you are fed. Perhaps you have no home. My beloved child, you will have a beautiful home here in heaven and in it you will entertain your loved ones with great bounty. You will have enough of everything in heaven and you will be treated as a royal personage by Me, your Jesus. Your time of poverty on earth prepares you for a time of great wealth in heaven. You must accept your circumstances in peace, even while you try to change these circumstances. I will not accept that you did not want to work to support yourself or your family. That is not an acceptable reason to suffer need. I want you to try to sustain yourself and those for whom you are responsible. But if, through no fault of your own you suffer poverty, I assure you today that if you accept this in peace I will reward you beyond your furthest imaginings. In places where people are poor, I am there with My greatest graces. Dear beloved ones, believe Me today when I tell you that people who come to heaven do not regret anything they suffered on earth. Rest in this thought. You will not regret your sufferings. You will only regret the times you failed to love. Ask Me for help and I will help you. Be at peace. You have not been abandoned.

St. Augustine

Dear brothers and sisters, we in heaven remember being on earth. We remember having great wants and suffering from poverty. Some of God's saints were wealthy on earth, of course, but many were not. The time in which you live is a time of great abundance for some. It would make God happy if this abundance were shared so that few experienced hunger that resulted in disease and death. There will always be poor, it is true, but this fact

does not excuse anyone from failing to assist them. If you are wealthy, you may say, 'What can I do?' I will answer you today. Give. Give often and give more. Work for others with your power and influence. Spread Godly principles of responsible use of material and financial wealth. Also, deprive yourself of something. Sacrifice. Perhaps you are in a situation where you were accustomed to a high standard of living and now you find that you have had to reduce your standard. Praise God for this. Rejoice because in this circumstance you will learn many things. You will learn to trust God. You will learn to have compassion for others. You will learn that not everything has to do with bodily comfort.

In looking back at my time of service on earth, I am aware that the time of greatest growth for me was the time when I suffered. This is basic spirituality of course in that it is hard to become holy if you never deny yourself. In order to become holy you must take up your cross. This cross can come in many forms and the best response to the cross is always to pick it up and walk with it. Move. Do not lament that the cross has been placed on your doorstep. Accept the cross as coming from heaven and, putting one foot in front of the other, climb the mountain toward Jesus. There are always those who suffer more than you and there will always be those who suffer less. Do not let poverty make you bitter. To do so would be to reject God's generous offer of holiness. During this time, many are suffering from financial difficulties. Is heaven any less present? This is the same as in many periods of history. Be at peace in all circumstances around you and you will find that God gives you what you need to serve Him in each day. If you are hungry, offer this to God, even while asking Him to provide you with more food. God will make you a saint quickly in these circumstances and you will experience spiritual richness. If you have enough and you are not hungry, deny yourself food periodically. Simply do not eat for a day and offer your hunger to God so that He can take your little sacrifice and obtain graces with which to feed others. Heaven will help you to understand God's will in either situation, either poverty or affluence.

St. Augustine

In a world where many have rejected God, it is necessary for many to learn about trust. Reliance on God is something that liberates a person. God can teach this lesson by withdrawing financial security. If you have lost your financial security and you are fearful, talk to God. Tell Him your fears. Tell Him about your obligations, particularly those you find you cannot meet. God will help you. There is no shame in not having enough money. Jesus, Himself seldom had money, not to mind enough of it. Did people look down on Him? Yes, they did. Did people have to take care of Him? Yes, they did, and they are being eternally rewarded for doing so. If you find that others have to help you, accept this with grace. Perhaps this is painful for you. Perhaps you find it humiliating. I understand. I am with you in this humiliation. Humiliation brings humility though and while I know the humiliation part is difficult, the humility part is heavenly and makes you open to God's

love in a way that delights heaven. If others have to care for you, sharing their food, shelter, time or wealth with you, accept this in peace. You may not have anything with which to reward them but God has all of infinity to bless them for their kindness to you. Indeed, your situation may be the best opportunity these people have to obtain holiness. Here is a snare. Do not become angry at the ones who help you, even if they give with superiority. If your circumstances make them feel superior, then they are in greater trouble than you and they have their own lessons to learn. You must pray for them and concentrate on the lessons God is teaching you today. Accept the help of others as though if were directly from the hand of God. You are in financial trouble. You pray. God sends help. Be grateful to Him and rejoice. Do not criticise the manner in which God sends the help. That is like being on a road walking, certain that you cannot continue as you are too tired. You have miles to go. A car comes along and offers you transport. You get into the car and begin to criticise the colour of the seats. Would you not shake your head at this foolishness? Would you laugh at the ridiculousness? Would you feel sad for the one who offered his help, only to be mocked and ridiculed by a mean spirited one? Be loving. Look with favour on those whom God sends to assist you.

St. Augustine

Dear friends, we in heaven see your needs. We hear your prayers. Come to God with everything. Be at peace in everything. Be like trusting children who know that their father will provide for them when the time is right. You will not regret trusting God. Trusting the Father becomes a habit and it will serve you well in every area of your life. Perhaps you have enough money and you always have had enough money. You, even more than a poverty stricken one, must learn trust because there is a temptation when you are wealthy to rely on your wealth to protect you. Oh my, such folly. Such perilous folly is this. Truly, this is living in a house with no foundation. All may be well when it is sunny but in life storms must be expected as they come with regularity. An abundance of material wealth makes it even more imperative that you learn to rely only on God. Ask me for help with this and I will teach you everything I know about trusting God.

If you fear for the financial protection of your family, ask me to intercede for you. Jesus has the greatest tenderness for the poor because He, Himself was poor. Jesus understands that you worry about providing for your children and taking care of each other. Jesus accepts that this desire to provide for your loved ones is a holy inspiration that comes from Him. He will reward this by giving you all possible assistance. Do not think that you are working outside of God's will if you strive to protect your family financially.

Also, do not be afraid that God will punish you if you are wealthy. God, Himself has allowed you to be wealthy but God did not allow your wealth simply for your personal comfort. God allowed wealth for you so that you could steward this wealth in such a way

that God could assist others through you. You will want to allow God to do this with freedom, which means you need to be praying for God's direction at all times.

Be at peace in all circumstances. God loves His children and you will not be abandoned. We, the saints in heaven, will assist you to find the right answers to all of your financial difficulties. There will come a day when you finish your life and all of these problems will cease. On that day, I, Augustine will be waiting for you so that I can congratulate you on the holy way in which you faced your financial circumstances.

Blessed Mother

My dear child, I am with you. There is a holy way to conduct yourself in your situation. If you pray, you will know which is the holy way that leads to my Son. I will protect you from choosing an unholy way that leads away from my Son. You see, little child, in everything you face there is opportunity for holiness. Heaven can use your day to move our goals forward if you are the poorest of the poor or the richest of the rich. All we need is your yes to Jesus. Say yes to my Son. Accept any crosses you have. We will help you to provide for your family. We will help you to have peace in any suffering. You will not be abandoned. I am a mother and I had many worries because of our lack of wealth. Many people assisted my little family. My gratitude for the generosity of others is still with me and God's gratitude for their generosity is still with them. Do you see? If you help others you will be rewarded for eternity. If you accept the help of others with dignity, you will become holy and set an example of dignified suffering. Beloved ones, I promise you that you will have what you need to become holy. Do not think that heaven abandons you with financial problems. Heaven helps in these matters as much as heaven helps in spiritual matters because we understand that all that happens in your life shapes your spirituality. Walk each day with heaven and you will see our help. I am your mother and I will not abandon you to these troubles. I will give you peace in all of your troubles.

December 18, 2006

Heaven Speaks to Parents Who Worry about Their Children's Salvation

Jesus

My dear ones, you worry for your children. I understand. Your worry is a sign that all is right with you because a parent who loves their children feels concern for them....

Perhaps you have always followed Me but your children have strayed from the path and are spending their time in the world, away from Me. This causes you grief, I know. Pray for your children but do not become preoccupied with your worry about them. If you are connected to Me, I will be with your children. I will wait for a moment when their hearts are open to Me and I will fill them with graces, healing their wounds and softening their

hearts. I do this constantly for holy parents and I will do this for you. Do not worry that God will abandon your children. A parent's prayers are powerful and these prayers are inspired by Me. Understand that you are working with heaven and with Me to convert these children. In order to console yourself, look at the love that is in your children. Look for any evidence of goodness. Remember the goodness your children showed to you when they were young. There you will find hope of that same goodness returning and growing when your child is converted. Be at peace, dear parents. God loves your children, too. Heaven will not forsake them. I see their wounds and understand what led them away from Me. I, even more than you, have compassion for their pain. I, even more than you, know how to heal their wounds and restore them to wellness, emotionally and spiritually. I am aware of every obstacle to holiness that they face, just as I am aware of every obstacle to holiness you face. I want you to be holy. The best way to help your children is for you to be holy. I ask you today to concentrate on your own holiness. If you do this, I will inspire you with exactly the right course to take to help your child. I keep My promises, as you know. Strive to be holy and I will help your children.

St. Monica

How heavy is the heart of a parent when their child has abandoned morality. This causes a pain that does not heal until the child has returned to God's path. I understand this burden because I carried it myself. Jesus seeks to help all such parents because He also understands this burden. With heaven, the priority is always personal growth in holiness. For this reason, God uses every experience we have on earth to make us holier and to bring us closer to Him. If we are close to God, God can use us powerfully and this helps the family of God. At this time, heaven has a need to bring light to a dark world. It is the darkness of the world that has distracted God's children. Perhaps your child is among these. Jesus is telling you that the best way to help your children is to become holier and holier so that His light can flow into the world through you. When a soul participates with God in this process of renewal through their personal holiness, God experiences great gratitude. God denies that soul nothing and the soul has great intercessory power. If you work for renewal through your attempt to become holier, God will reward you. Part of the way God will reward you is by reclaiming and healing your children. Believe this, my dear parents. It is true. Jesus promises all lay apostles that He will pursue full conversion of their loved ones. Jesus does not make this promise lightly. Jesus intends to keep this promise. If you work for Jesus, you are doing what you need to be doing for your children.

There is an excellent opportunity for holiness in this situation and that is by practicing trust. When you trust God, you are free to be joyful in His service. If you look at your children and feel distress at their condition, but then turn to God and trust Him with these children, you will know joy. It is good to tell God that you trust Him. It is good for God to hear this because it consoles Him. It is also good for you hear yourself telling God that you trust Him as you will begin to believe it because you hear yourself saying it. I am going to

give you this advice and then I will pray that you take it. Each time you feel worry over one of your children, say, "Jesus, I trust in you. Take care of this child." If you feel worry for one of your children one hundred times today, say this prayer one hundred times on this day. Believe me, Monica that it will work. I will be helping you with this and praying for grace for you. This is a new way to proceed because you are actually fighting the enemy's attempt to distract you with worry. I will be working with you and with heaven in the struggle to reclaim your child so you are not alone in this project. Show Jesus that you understand His great power by trusting Him.

December 20, 2006

St. Monica

There are good ways to prompt conversion in your children. The best way to prompt conversion in your children is to love them, even in their error. When you are with your children, show them God's love by loving them. Do not focus all the attention on their errors or on the areas where you disagree with them or where you believe God disagrees with them. Instead, shine the brightest lights on the areas where you agree with them, where you feel God agrees with them, and where you see hope of greater goodness. What is it that God is consoled by when He looks at your child? Find this in them and talk about it. Your children will see God in you if they see God's love in you. Treat these loved ones in error the way Jesus treated those who were in error. Jesus was kind and loving. Jesus loved each person on earth individually and totally. You must look at each of your children with the Lord's eyes and love them individually and totally. This can be difficult, particularly if your child is behaving in a way that is not lovable. In fact, it is most clear that you will not feel this love in your heart if your child is behaving in an aggressive or hurtful manner. This is no problem if you work with heaven because Jesus will put His love in your heart. In this way the renewal begins in your family. God's love is abundantly available. God's forgiveness is also abundantly available. Ask God to send forgiveness to you so that when your children look into your eyes, they see only love.

St. Monica

There are those among you who are wondering how to reconcile your feelings about your child's sinfulness to your faith. In other words, you believe perhaps that your children's soul is at risk because of the behaviors being practiced by them. You possibly feel concern about their bitterness or rebelliousness. I will tell you that each family on earth is a model of the bigger family of God. God is telling you through this apostolate that each apostle brings light to the world through their commitment and service. It is the very same in your family. If your child is in darkness and is being deceived into thinking that sinful behavior is acceptable, you have all the more reason to allow God's light to flow through you. Through being exposed to the light, your children will begin to understand what is dark.

You should tell your children in the greatest love that you are concerned. Tell them why you are concerned. Give them anything that will help them. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated and stand firm in your beliefs, my friend, but do not ever leave God's love. Most particularly, you must love your children while you are explaining your feelings about behaviors or attitudes that you find concerning. Indeed, it is at this time when you must allow the most love to flow through you. It is not appropriate for you to make judgments, of course. Only God can judge. Only God knows the true nature of the wounds in your child and if your child feels judgment from you, your child may turn further from Christ. Remember that Jesus came not to condemn but to save. Your interactions with a loved one in error must reflect the goal of saving, not condemning. Oh my dear parent, I feel your concern. I feel your heartbreak. Loving each other with God's love creates vulnerability to this type of hurt. Parents are well familiar with the hurt of rejection. I am cautioning you to love because heaven seeks to pull your children back at this time and heaven does this most successfully through love. Pray and be at peace. You have more help than you can possibly imagine.

Blessed Mother

My dear parent, how my heart hurts for you. I understand the pain of worrying over a child. I know that you worry because you seek to prevent additional pain for your child, regardless of their age. I know that you see their path and you fear trouble ahead for them. I also see this and I will help you to call your child back to God's path. We do this in great love and gentleness. This is the best way. I will give you my gentleness and with it you will melt your child's heart and create in them a longing for goodness. There is no circumstance that should cause you to give up hope. I will not allow you to give up hope. Even as you read these words I am obtaining fresh hope for you and with this hope I am also obtaining a spirit of calm that will enable you to serve in peace. We will surround this child for you. We will protect this child. If your child has died and you worry for their salvation, I ask you today to stop. God is all merciful. Trust in His goodness. The good God could not face a parent who trusted Him and disappoint that parent. Your greatest weapon in the battle to save your children is trust in God. Use this weapon and be at peace because I am your mother and I read your heart effortlessly. I will help you. Your battle is also my battle.

December 21, 2006

I spent a lovely overnight with the Ballards – a couple, both Lutheran ministers who became Catholics last Easter. They live in Asheville. She is a beautiful contemplative iconographer and he is hoping to become a deacon but is also a counselor as well as a theologian. We had wonderful talks. I hope they will become real friends. Heaven Speaks to

Those Who Fear Purgatory

Jesus

My beloved children harbour many fears. This is understandable. The fears of one can be transmitted to another and this is not good. During this time, fear spreads through the world quickly, almost instantaneously, through the media. Perhaps you rise on each day and look out and see that the sun is shining. It is a good moment for you. I am with you, you are fed, and My sun is shining. But this is not enough. You look to see what is happening in other parts of the world. Through communications that are often unnecessary for you, you learn that there is war, disaster, and famine. You look out again but the joy you had taken in the sunshine is gone. How can you feel joy when in another place there is war, disaster, and famine? You fear immediately that these things will come to you.

I want you to be aware of the needs of others and if a cross comes to you, I want you to carry it with dignity. But I want you to remain in your life, paying attention to your tasks. My friends, few are serving in the area where I have placed them. They are isolating themselves, listening to events from everywhere else in the world. In the meantime, events in their own areas pass unheeded and untended. It is true that I will use communications to further My renewal. I will use everything I can to save souls. But I want less time given over to the consideration of the crosses and challenges of others and more time given over to the crosses and challenges in front of each one of My children. My enemy is using these communications to inflate the fears of My children. Fear is not from Me. Because there is disaster in one area does not mean that you are assured of disaster in your area. Children, listen to Me. It is good to sympathise with others through constant prayer and concrete assistance. It is not good to be inundated with images of disaster. This is not from Me. In each of those situations, there are holy men and women acting as apostles and helping Me. They are becoming saints through these situations. My angels are present, as well as My saints. I am present. I am sustaining many and reaping a harvest for heaven in every event that occurs in your world. When each soul completes their time on earth and comes to Me, there is justice. You do not see this on your televisions. You do not read this in your newspapers. I am barely represented in these communications so you must not look to these communications for truth. Look to Me, in prayer, and there you will find truth.

I make reference now to the fear harboured by many that they will suffer unbearably in purgatory. My friends, you see unjust and seemingly unbearable suffering on earth and you are fearful. You then transfer this fear to Me because if injustice is allowed on earth, surely injustice is allowed in the heavenly kingdom. This is simply not true. There will be no injustice here and you will not suffer physical pain in purgatory.

Perhaps this does not comfort you. Perhaps you understand how sinfully you have behaved and you fear just punishment. If you feel this way, you have not spent enough time resting in My companionship. You do not know Me. You do not understand heaven or its many kingdoms. I do not hold this against you. I understand and it is for this reason I am giving you these words. Do not be afraid of the process of purification that awaits some of you after your death and before your entrance into heaven. There is nothing to fear. You will find that I am all compassion and mercy. I do not seek to condemn you, but to save you. I am your friend and I love you. Even if you are not My friend now, at this time, I have hope that you will change your mind and become My friend later, at the time of your death. A friend does not prepare pain for a loved one coming in from a long journey. A friend prepares a time of recovery if it is necessary and that is what I have prepared for you. Think of time in purgatory as time for recovery. You will recover and grow in purgatory if, together, you and I, find that you need this. I will take care of you, always.

St. Andrew

God's friends in the world have a certain amount of trust in Him. There is not enough trust in Him, it is true, because there is really no way for a soul on earth to fully understand the Godhead and what flows from Him. But the small amount of trust that souls on earth have for God is well placed and benefits each person immensely. Truly, a life lived one way would be lived in a completely different way if a person allowed heaven to place greater trust in their soul. I am telling you this today because I look at you and I want you to live differently. Your life can be altered if you trust God. You will bring far more souls to the Father if you trust God. Yes, it is all about trust. Many say they trust God but then they fear purgatory. I am not trying to catch you in something. I am trying to reveal to you a possible discrepancy in what you say and what you feel. It is good to identify this discrepancy if it exists, in order to correct it. If you follow God, you do so because it is the right thing to do. You are wise. I tell you today that it is the right thing to do because God is good. God is all love and love generates, by its nature, mercy. It can do no less. A loving heart is a soft heart. A loving heart is also a wise heart and in its wisdom the wise heart understands what is best for the recipient of perfect love. In this great love and wisdom, God allowed for repentance. He did not have to do this. He did not even have to create us and when you get to heaven you will understand how good our God is and how infinite is His love. But God, in His love, did create us and allowed for a life for each of us. God understands our weakness and delights in the process of perfection that we embark upon through fidelity to Him. God's expectations are realistic and compassionate. God expects that we will experience our weaknesses and God understands that at times we may travel down paths that lead away from Him. God could have said, "You cannot be admitted to heaven unless you become perfect on earth." He could have said this, my friends. He is God. But He did not. He said, instead, "I will allow for the imperfections of My beloved

created ones. I will help them by allowing them, if necessary, to complete this process of purification in the safety of My kingdom.”

Purgatory is another extension of God’s generosity. You will be safe there. In considering this as a possibility, you must rejoice. Fear of purgatory is unnecessary and inappropriate.

December 23, 2006

I read this wonderful, wonderful book *Left to Tell* about Immaculee, a young African woman from Rwanda who was hiding during the genocide in a bathroom with 6 other young women and survived. Her family except for one was massacred. She asked to go back to her village, having been saved by the French, and when she saw the man who slaughtered her family, broken, now a prisoner of her tribe’s soldiers she was able to forgive him. Asked by the soldiers why she did that since he deserved hell, she, all of whose possessions had been destroyed by these enemies said “forgiveness is the only thing I have left to give.” It is a stunning book.

Jesus: See what I can do? Please dear Ronda stop being afraid – there is nothing I won’t do to help anyone to love others who prays for that.

Sweet, sweet e-mail:

Love you, love your work, love your web mini-talks!

Please continue your work and thank you for sharing yourself with us.

Merry Christmas and may you be abundantly blessed.

In Christ, Elizabeth Lowry

December 26, 2006

Carla Eaton sent me Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius* for Christmas as asked. I had worn my cassettes down playing it at all the family deaths for months over and over again. I love the exalted pathos of it. This time I was sure Blessed Cardinal Newman, who wrote the poem, must have inspired Elgar melody by melody since Newman as a musician. I thought “It is Newman’s Jesus, that I love. This is Your song, Jesus.

Jesus seemed to reply: Your books are also songs of Me. Thank you. Please let Me sing a song of peace in your heart at this Christmas time. Just pray My name and look at Me as a baby in the pictures around you.

He also seemed to tell me: “Of course you feel that you can’t be holy with your jumpy nervous temperament. You just have to see this with humility and call upon Me constantly

to live in you, like St. Paul did. Who would have thought the St. Paul who arranged the stoning of St. Stephen would make it?"

December 27, 2006

Dear Paul, (I don't remember who this is, but the letter has relevance to anyone with his problems.)

I have been praying for the gift of counsel, but I am really not a psychological counselor but a mentor literary and philosophical counselor, also a prayer warrior. also since my son Charlie committed suicide at age 19, I am traumatized. I cannot deal with others about that subject, but I can talk to you about despair in general: Here are some suggestions after praying for you about an hour. I would ask you to consider them even if they seem impossible for you:

1. Go to confession and go to at least Sunday Mass. (Maybe you still do)
2. I find truth is the best remedy for despair - either read the Vatican Catechism - you can find it on the web, or Peter Kreeft's Summa of the Summa slowly - if you disagree, dialogue with me about them.
3. Pray the rosary every day.
4. Go to the web to Recovery, Intl. which is for depression, anxiety and anger - they are free groups and surely there are some in Boston area. They were founded in the 1940's and operate a little like Twelve Step - free, except by donation. They helped me enormously with anger. I think you have lots of anger.

If you want to trust me enough to try any of the above, I think God will give me the grace to help you. Because of my son's death I will spend any amount of time to help anyone in despair, so don't hesitate.

Shalom, Ronda

December 28, 2006

Dear Jesus, Mary, Joseph,

At my suggestions and the desires of some of the strongly active pro-life people in the parish we had a special Mass of Reparation for abortion on the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Fr. Ken did it beautifully, emphasizing how this feast had fallen out of popularity but now has a new meaning. Others were planning to do the rosary and intentions but they had been sick during the holidays and didn't do it, so Father Ken quickly asked if he should lead it. I know he is not fond of out loud rosaries so I was surprised. In the biography of Mother Benedict Dus, foundress of Regina Laudis it

mentions that she used to say she needed to meet the expectations of each sister. In a certain way Fr. Ken wants to “be all things to all men” because he wants to meet our expectations. I thanked him for making the sacrifice of saying the extra Mass. He said “that’s what it’s all about.” Why do I keep forgetting that?

I was feeling such gratitude for him and for our friendship.

Jesus chided me gently: “Friendship is a necessity, not a luxury. You might not have survived here without him.

Carla Eaton recommended the film *Joyeux Noel* about French and Scottish and German soldiers during World War I having a cease fire and celebrating Christmas together.

I thought: in purgatory we will be stretched to really believe that good is stronger than evil.

Dec. 29, 2006

I saw a fantastic TV spot showing a young woman cast down by fear of her pregnancy and offering help in such a way that someone seeking an abortion might call the Pregnancy Line. I checked the web and it was a pro-life message with links to local pregnancy counseling centers that are pro-life. I sent a contribution to Pregnancy Line – Virtue Media.:

Here is another audio I put on my new web: *Me Speaking #3 Healing of Envy* December, 2006

Envy! What a role it plays in many of our lives. It could begin with feeling a sibling got more love in the family because he or she was prettier, brighter, or more talented. In school, envy of classmates who were better looking, or stronger, or richer, or had greater ability in sports or academics, or the more popular. At work, envy of those higher up on the ladder or those more sought after socially, or those with more sex appeal. In Church life envy of those closer to the priest, or of the priest himself by those who wished they had that vocation, family Christians envying the freedom of the singles; and singles envying the married and the parents. And, of course, we can envy those who seem more holy than we are as in “how come she thinks Jesus is talking to her specially? If He talked to people that way, it should be me?”

Think about the horrible feeling in ourselves when we envy such as low-self-esteem in the area where we can’t compare; bitter resentment that we don’t have what the other does, admiration sullied by dislike of the one who is envied. Often there is a desire to find fault with the envied person, to run them down, or gloat over their failures.

One of my main areas of envy started with my unidentical twin-sister, Carla, a dancer, who was ethereal and graceful where I was clumsy with nervous jerky hand gestures. In later years I envied anyone with that kind of graceful beauty, such as certain women prophetesses in charismatic renewal who spoke with hands upraised in voices flowing with supernatural grace.

What heals such envy?

First, I believe we have to admit to our envy, no matter how shameful.

Secondly, we need to trace childhood feelings of being less lovable because not as good in some respect as someone else.

Thirdly, we should bring to Jesus our feelings of being less than another, our fear that He loves us less because we lack some quality another has more of.

We can ask Him to tell us how He loves us even if we feel inferior.

After we have let Him show us in whatever way He wishes that we are lovable, we need to repent of any ways we have hurt those we envy by gossiping about them, or tearing them down.

When we are healed we will be able simply to admire those with qualities we wish we had more of; rejoicing in being able to enjoy their gifts.

Here is when healing of envy began in my life. I was visiting a monastery of contemplative nuns. While waiting to speak to the Superior, I sat in the chapel and observed them one by one coming in for prayer, able to sit in perfect stillness, rapt in communion with the Lord.

I thought to myself, how can Jesus love such a fidgety wretch as I am, who can't sit still for more than 5 minutes. I will never be holy.

Jesus seemed to speak in my heart with these never to be forgotten words: You will never be a woman of that kind of peace. You are a Jewish convert and you carry the Jewish yearning for the Messiah. In the Church, your name is not peace, but yearning.

If you have any envy in your heart – why not try the steps I just suggested. May God bless you and help you to understand your own special loveliness.

Segment 4 Me, Speaking: “Self-Righteous Anger: Sending Others to Hell in a Hand Basket”

As most of you know, I have been studying anger management and relating it to Catholic spirituality for a long time. An area I struggle with a lot is self-righteous anger. Self-righteousness is tricky. Here are some helpful distinctions:

- **Unrighteous anger** - we are in the wrong but we blame others, or things such as computers, or even God.
- **Righteous anger** is good. It pertains to situations where we are angry at injustice and our anger is proportionate; not harsh, eager to right the wrong, and to forgive, such as Jesus' anger at the Pharisees which didn't keep Him from reaching out to Nicodemus or to Saul, the Pharisee, after his stoning of St. Stephen!
- **Self-righteous anger** is anger for a good reason but is tainted by arrogance, harshness, and reveling in our superiority over those who offended us by their sins. When we indulge in such anger, we are probably eager to consign the offender to hell in a hand basket or whatever way would be even swifter! Examples would be anger against someone who rejects the divinity of Jesus or rejects the Church; someone who exploits me or someone dear to me; a spouse whose betrayal leads to divorce.

In situations such as these, here is what goes on in me:

- sorrow for the objective injustice and for the offending person who is wrong-headed or cruel;
- rage that I am unable to force the other to change;
- a burning feeling in my chest – a sort of emotional “heartburn” as toxic fantasies of their defeat course through my feverish brain.

Every time the Holy Spirit tries to remind me of the words of Jesus “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” I mutter those words quickly, but then revert to a cycle of

- recalling the words or deeds of the offender
- gnashing my teeth, sometimes literally!
- and then rehearsing words of sarcastic refutation, plots of vengeance; or plans of disdainful rejection of the offender and withdrawal.

What I am doing with self-righteous anger is what Dr. Abraham Low of Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression, calls trying for “a symbolic victory.” What does that mean? Well, because we don't have the power to win over someone such as the defamer of our most cherished beliefs; or the exploiter of the weak, or the one who betrayed us personally;

we want to defeat them in some other way. As Von Hildebrand writes, the self-righteous person wants to seat himself on the throne of truth and hurl denunciations. Less dramatically, this is done by condemning or ridiculing the offender in our conversations with allies. I cover my feelings of weakness to bring about justice by the superior feeling of being JUDGE.

When we have sent the offender in a hand basket to hell, symbolically, through denunciation in our heads or in our conversations with others, we feel powerful.

But only for a short time, because real power is not in hate but in love.

As part of His prophetic teaching role, Jesus did denounce the sins of others, but one on one he was always eager to forgive and save - even in the case of Judas.

I challenge myself and you, the listener, to make a list of old and present enemies: either those you hate from a distance such as politicians or those you know personally.

Then, consider:

Is my sorrow and anger helping these others to change?

- 1) What could I do that would help bring about change? We should never resign ourselves to evil in others if we can make a change for the better. Certainly, if everything else fails, there is always prayer. Walking away from a situation is also a form of change**

but then we needn't spend time afterwards in venomous descriptions of the offenders.

- 2) Would greater forgiving love in Christ of each person, cast out self-righteous anger from my heart? Say a prayer for this blessing with respect to each person you are angry at.**
- 3) Can I try to give up symbolic victory hot or cold in my thoughts and conversation?**
- 4) What would be left if I let God cast out the anger in my heart: only sorrow and forgiving love?**

December 30, 2007

I watched movie Joyeux Noel about French, Scottish and Germans meeting between the trenches in WWI to celebrate Christmas. Afterwards I thought I should ask Jesus about war.

He seemed to say: I cannot prevent the consequences of worldliness in all its forms of power and greed but I can bring good out of evil as in the respites in the film.

December 31, 2006

Is Gregorian Chant the sound of trust?

Praying about the Order of Consecrated Widows that is starting. Had given myself a Jan. 1 deadline to see if the Archbishop wanted to advise me. No answer. But my sense is that Jesus wants me for this new thing (revived of course) of Consecrated Widows under the bishop, not to be sister in an order of consecrated widows. I think I am more of an individual, like Catherine de Hueck Dougherty or Dorothy Day, or Lily.

I am not part of a group of lights, but a single light on a candle stick?

January 1, 2007

More from Anne – Direction for Our Times

Jesus

I, Jesus, take delight in My apostles. I look into the world and see My friends, serving each other and growing in love and truly I experience delight. My friends, you will be well rewarded. The holier you become, the easier it will be for you to come to heaven. That is My goal for you, that you become so holy on earth that your death be a time of great peace and joy. How I anticipate the homecoming of each of My beloved servants. I plan for the day and prepare for the great rejoicing that will take place. You will be welcomed into eternity by a multitude of apostles, all of whom served before you. You will recognize your friends and family in heaven and they will assemble to greet you. Such joyous reunion. Such well-earned reward. My friends, your life will pass quickly, far more quickly than you can imagine. I speak to you today to remind and encourage you. I remind you that you are committed to Me, to My will. Begin each day remembering that you have made a commitment to serve heaven on that day. If you pledge your allegiance to God, you are on the side of God. If you are on the side of God, you are working against God's enemy. I want you to reject all that comes from the enemy. Be diligent about your time in silence and I will reveal anything that I wish you to reject or abandon. I draw you into My heart, further and further. There is always a need to advance. Today, I call you to make an even greater commitment to advancing in holiness. I will help you, of course. I will make your path even more clear to you. I come today to remind you of your pledge, but also to encourage you. I look into the world at this time and there is darkness, it is true, but there is also light and that light comes from your commitment to Me. The angels see your service and they rejoice. The saints see your service and they applaud. Our mother, Mary, sees your service and she is comforted. I, Jesus Christ, see your service and I experience delight. You are part of a team, My team. We are the team that brings salvation and we do that through love. In your heart I am placing a love for humanity. You will experience this love individually, for each person with whom you come in contact. This is how I experience love. I love all mankind and I do this one person at a time. You must do the same. Love those around you, particularly those in your family. Treat each person with dignity and respect because if people see that you are good, they will understand that I am good. Be at peace. I am with you in everything and your service delights Me.

January 4, 2007,

My baptismal feast. Elizabeth Seton, a nun widow, my beloved friend.

I am working with Anne Lassiter on the Widow series for EWTN. She is so much more empathetic and compassionate. I realize I am less empathetic because I am jealous of the widows whose marriages were better and therefore are grieving more than I did. I need to get healing on this. I was thinking that this made me less able to do the series.

Jesus: No. Because of your difficult marriage you threw yourself into My heart early on. This makes you able to speak survival to the widows and unhappily married potential widows who will watch. Let Anne carry the compassion part. That's why the Holy Spirit led you to choose her. Now, stop, don't rush along. Stop and bring to Me again your hurt at the problems in your marriage. I brought so much good out of that evil. I saved you from the pit of despair. Martin is trying to help you now from heaven. He understands his sins better and your sins of desperation and retaliation.

I realized I am envious of my sister's marriage!!!! This explains a lot of the tensions in relating to them as a married couple!

January 6, 2007

There are a few reasons I am writing to you, Father, (the head of the Retreat Center where I lived for several years):

As I slow down it is so clear to me in my prayer times how much your spiritual way is with me, even if only in the tiniest form compared to your version of it. Thank you. You once said about what to do all day - have your prayer times and then respond to what comes along! For workaholic projectitis types like me, that is so radical and I mutter this advice to myself from time to time.

Epiphany – Father Ken's sermon was about the many parts of the Epiphany scripture about the whole world being united by faith in Christ, as contrasted with our desire, often, to define ourselves by division – as in I am this color and they are not; or this race, etc. I thought of how I used to divide myself from the congregation on Sunday on the basis of they not being daily Mass Catholics (I mean those who could easily go to daily Mass but chose not to). But since being at St. Charles I am getting the grace to love to sit at Sunday Mass and revel in the faithfulness to Jesus expressed in regular going to Sunday Mass. I think this change comes from my spiritual friendship with Fr. Ken so that I see some things the way he might see them – an opening to other ways of understanding things. Maybe less critically?

Jesus seems to tell me: I love to see my beloved disciples at daily Mass, but I also love to see my disciples who come only on Sunday. You cannot know how many times during the week they lift their hearts up to me. After purgatory everyone will be with me every day for all eternity.

At the Hispanic Mass tonight they sung Silent Night in Spanish syncopated. I was feeling very tired and kind of glum and it amused and revived me greatly even though musically it is so weak.

Jesus seemed to tell me that I am tired because I am sharing in the family anxieties about work and finances right now. I have to give those anxieties to Him whenever they come over me.

Watching a film that none of us liked much at home this evening with lots of us joking about its defects, I enjoyed the humor and closeness.

Jesus: Stop trying to control everything in the house. I love everyone here and you will all help each other.

Since I am old I need to have Carla even more. Just seeing the “caretaker” helps. This is part of the new plan we are trying. It is good for me to humbly accept her help. She has a great heart for helping me. I was touched that she folded some of the garments that were mingled with her wash. I have never folded garments myself ever. It is good for a grandmother to help a lot and be helped a lot.

January 8, 2007

I bought some copper toned brown material in crinkle cotton which seems as close to sack cloth as one could easily wear for summer dress – got the idea while hand sewing it that I could be a penitent dedicated widow.

Jesus seems to say: “Identity” through garb is important. I want you to be happy in your dedicated widow image. Don’t over-analyze it. Do what seems good to you. That something makes you feel free, even in the sense of playful, is good when it comes to choices between good things. You are trying to do something symbolic to be liberated from the insecurity that goes into having to wear acceptable clothing to society, where you want your clothing, the Cross, the Miraculous Medal to be a statement. Look how much good the teens themselves and those who see them get out of wearing Catholic T-shirts.

I spoke to Fr. Ken about this and he thought it was right on, based on what he thought was the need to have varieties of expressions for this renewed vocation in the Church. It made me glad that he confirmed it since I am so aware of the role of self-deceit in life.

January 10, 2007

First day back at the college. Good warm talks with Pastor Andrew and others. The course evaluations from last semester were available. I was discouraged by some nasty remarks. About 1/3 disliked the course and gave it an overall rating of C or D but 2/3 liked the class and were between B and A. More A’s than C’s and D’s. Even though I know it was an

experimental first time teaching these students at the college and that there were lots of rough spots, I felt bad and wanted to stop teaching after this semester.

Jesus: I wanted to flee from the Garden of Gethsemane. Offer the pain for precisely those students who rejected you. You have a lot of wonderful things in the course, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Try your new method this semester and don't make any decisions to leave until you see how it is going.

January 11, 2007

Response to letter from a man who is into international business systems:

Dear Frank,

On the abortion is murder question and punishment: Since it is the doctor who performs the killing it was doctors who went to jail in the past, not the woman. I think punishment was lighter not because it was not thought of as killing the innocent but because of compassion for women in panic and guilt about sex outside of marriage.

On the missionary issue - Jesus said "go out and baptize all nations." He didn't just die for his tribe but for the whole world. If you read the missionary documents of the Church since Vatican II they are written to include respect for the truths in other religions but still conviction that everyone needs Christ. I like to say about this "How could you know Jesus and not want everyone to know Him?"

January 10, 2007

I saw young woman from class last semester who was suicidal. I had intervened to bring her to counseling and I pray for her every day. She looked great and said she was much better and responded to my hug. Deo gratias. Alleluia.

Jesus: Of course sometimes even when you pray I allow bad things to happen for my own reasons, but please have more trust that I can help.

At the swimming pool during visitors' swim there was an older woman talking to her friend: "Can you believe my husband is such a micro-manager he takes out the dishes I put in the dishwasher to wait to be full and re-organizes them." I thought this would be a good one for "retired couples" woes! (When telling this anecdote I find many say, well, of course, I do that also!)

January 13, 2007

Jesus: Don't be anxious about anxiety!

January 15, 2007

I wished I could hug every black person I saw today for Martin Luther King Day as if it were their feast day, but figured they wouldn't really like it if I did.

Father Ken was commenting on the idea of perfection in the words of Jesus, as in how could He grow in perfection as the Scripture seems to say. He thought perfection meant having completed the work He was sent to do. I piped in "so when we are told to be perfect He means that He wants us to become what He wanted us to be, to finish our work on earth? Yes, Fr. Ken said. I can't be without flaws, so I prefer this meaning.

Trying to explain about dedicated widow garb – in prayer I could find some reasons I haven't articulated too well yet:

solidarity with others who are dedicated to the Lord by a special dress even if it isn't a habit?

being, like them, more covered vs. sort of loose hippies dresses which seem too wide open.

It is appropriate, not scrupulous, even for an old woman to not want to look open to men if she is only open to Jesus.

Pastor Andrew loves having me come to the Lutheran services and pray for the unification of the Churches. He seems to love my spirit.

January 20, 2007

There was a blue grass concert at parish. At first I just loved it. The loud music distracted me from my problems. I said to a friend: see there is more in life than my problems. But after about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour I could hardly stand it and just longed for classical music. Is it that popular music is too horizontal? If the words are religious as in Gospel then I like it better, of course. Maybe classical music is a miracle, given that the other kind is so much more easily appreciated by the masses.

January 21, 2007

I love how at the Hispanic Mass they have the birthday children come to the center in front of the altar to be hugged first by the altar servers and then the family and the priest. How their specialness is in this way appreciated within the Church family as well as their own!

Jesus: be gentle with those you love who are suffering and gentle with yourself, too.

January 23, 2007

About my fatigue and digestive problems that have me so worried about the future, I think I am afraid that if I cannot go out to teach I will just fall into the quicksand of too much leisure.

Jesus: It would frighten you to know all the sufferings you will have before you die. I promise to make you holy. For the rest, trust and see what happens. Your trust in Me is more important than any happening in the future.

January 27, 2007

I felt gratitude for friendship of Pastor Andrew, Chaplain of Lenoir Rynne College.

Jesus: See the bridges I told you I had put there for you to cross?

I came home and in spite of the usual fatigue after the long Friday ending with the evening Mass (so beautiful always and so consoling to see the indefatigable sacrifice of Fr. Ken), I felt as I was going to bed on the verge of a new breakthrough.

Jesus: I want so much for you to break through – interiorly to a much deeper trust. Let me do it in you. Your only agenda: Be Mine – Mine whether you are sick or tired or joyful. Sing My song all day.

January 28, 2007

Looking through gorgeous elaborate gift book called In the Footsteps of Jesus: Pilgrims in the Holy Land, hadn't noticed before that they had this droll way of describing the history of Jesus and of pilgrimages as if every picture was an illustration of a newspaper article such as DEMONIAC'S WITS RETURN and Pigs Jump to their Deaths. They have artists' works from all eras and I was thinking how Heaven loved seeing artists tracing the great holy events of the Bible.

January 29, 2007

I have a strange rebellious student – he wrote in his journal hand out about how he was reincarnated from a cow – wonderful, no one bothers cows; and then a mouse where he was alarmed that humans were so afraid of him and eventually was eaten by a cat. Presumably tongue in cheek but he was also sassy to me in class.

Jesus: He is lost right now. Pray for him and ask Me to cast out the demons.

January 31, 2007

I am reading Toni Morrison's book Love – entangled loves. A climax line is this: “Dreams are only nightmares with lipstick.” Cynical but interesting in terms of fantasies of perfection that we co-dependents tend to indulge.

Jesus: Only my love can transfigure tangled human loves by bringing mercy and forgiveness when there is so much knotted love and hate – also the prayers of Our Lady of Knots.

February 1, 2007

The following is notes for a mini-talk:

I happened to be commending the young (to almost seventy year olds anyone under 50 seems young) manager of our neighborhood Eckerd's drugstore on the pleasant way he treats customers. He replied with a grin, “Well, sometimes I'm grouchy, but it's no fun.”

I laughed as his nifty way to put it.

I rarely describe myself as grouchy. Usually I am either happy or furious. So, I wondered, it sure isn't fun to be furious? Wouldn't I rather be having fun?

In Abraham Low's anger management program one of the phrases we are supposed to repeat frequently to ourselves is “anger is your worst enemy; humor is your best friend.” Surely humor comes under fun.

So, let me take a typical event that makes me angry and see if I can transition into humor and fun right now, on the spot, as I compose this mini-talk for you.

I have a tall, handsome, sportsman student in one of my classes who clearly hates my style of teaching or the content, or both style and content. This he indicates by a yawn of sophisticated boredom or a sneer. Often he opens a book unrelated to the class holding it visibly in front of him while I am trying to pour my pearls of wisdom into his skull.

Enraging.

Between classes I plot suitable punishments for the young man's behavior, gnashing my teeth while doing so. Of course there is nothing wrong with constructive plans for insisting on better classroom manners. It is the gnashing of teeth I need to get away from. Would humor help?

How about laughing at myself for my vain wish that all my students would love and adore me as the greatest sage they've ever had the privilege of having as a professor? How about marveling at the brinkmanship of a student playing games with me at the risk of flunking

the course if he misses most of the relevant instructions for what is wanted on papers and tests?

Ahem. So far this humor seems more bitter than side-splittingly funny.

Okay, how about thinking up a truly funny way to trump him next class. How about kneeling in front of his desk and begging him to pay attention to my wisdom lest he wind up unable to graduate because of this one course he forgot to make up after flunking it?

Or, starting the class with a prayer like this: “Dear Lord, please put directly into the heads of any students who don’t like my teaching style, whatever truths You know they need to improve their lives.”

Ha! Ha!

Sounds a little manipulative. Could put off a serious non-Catholic student who never conceived of mingling humor with prayer.

How about reading the Scripture passage where, after his beautiful sermon, they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff in his home town. And then add as commentary – “I’d rather you threw me off a cliff than just ignored my teachings.”

Hard to pull off, I think. Could make the whole class think I am a melo-dramatic freak, not to mention so vain as to compare my speeches to those of Jesus.

How about just catching his eye when he walks in the classroom, smiling and waving at him. If I can’t catch his eye I could call out when his name comes up on the attendance roster, “How ya doing?” and then wink if he looks up.

Jesus seems to say to me in my heart, “Ronda, you can’t laugh in a good way unless you love someone. Why not start with forgiving a student who might be so caught up in either error or despair that he has no room for truth or even respect for authority figures?”

I consulted other faculty and administration. More simply, they regard such behavior of a student as a violation of professional courtesy. I decided to pray a lot and apply the penalty in the syllabus of asking the student next time he acts up to leave the class with a 5 pt. penalty off the grade. With grace I was able to talk about the rules beforehand with sufficient emotional control and then when he violated them again to tell him to leave. He declared –“I will be the first martyr.”

It turns out he is rather well known for this. His advisor is going to talk to him about accepting the rules or taking a Drop/Pass in the course.

Later reading journals by other men and women on sports' scholarships it is clear that many of them simply regard the purpose of college, not at all as the Mission Statement would have it, but simply as a sports' arena. They get athletic scholarships and, more or less, the fee they have to pay is to sit in these core classes they have no interest in.

Perhaps we liberal arts profs are simply holding chairs in a cultural survival that has evolved into another form – sports and professional schools?

Jesus seems to say – “I love everyone. In these circumstances they can still be reached by philosophy courses in the framework of faith in Me. Most of them already love me. So even though this mind set of many of them makes it harder, let the Holy Spirit work through you as long as it is possible. Try to see some of the sporty students who are so difficult, as “poor” in culture. Your cultural riches were a gift. Follow St. John Bosco and don't let yourself feel superior because they make you feel insecure being big males who don't understand your type. But they have good will because they love Me.

February 2, 2007

Mary: You were so pessimistic about family problems and you gave it to me and then when you came back from the college it was so good in the family in its own way. I am making your family into an affirmation house for those I want to heal. See how good it felt.. You can try to be the spiritual part of making the home a place good for people to visit.

Amy, a poet guest of my daughter was overwhelmed to have a birthday party – she never had a real one with presents and candles in her life as an adopted child

February 4, 2007

Me, Speaking #5 Liturgy as Encore February, 2007

I took a new friend of mine, Amy, to a Mass. She was baptized in the Episcopal Church but not brought up to be religious. Watching her watching the liturgy, so familiar to me, I thought of this analogy probably because my priest is an organist and Amy is a cellist.

Suppose an organist started his daily practice each day with a favorite Bach piece and ended his practice with the same piece. Over time it would become “his song,” and he would never tire of it. It would become the framework of his time at the organ.

Similarly, the priest intones the words of the liturgy every day and on the weekend many times. He must experience it as God's song. And think that if he sings it well enough to his tired flock, it will sing in their hearts as they go through their difficult week or day. It will become the framework of their lives.

I am thinking of a lovely way Catherine De Hueck Dougherty, of Madonna House fame, used to console the burdened. She would say, “everything happens between 2 Masses.”

The same might be said for the repetitious words of the rosary. Often boring for children forced to repeat them in family prayer, for devotees they become Mary’s song and we her choir.

After Vatican II there was a move to replace the simple rosary, thought to be said in too rote like a manner, with the Scriptural rosary, broken up on each decade and sometimes each bead with Scripture passages. I liked it at first, but then found it required too much effort. I was relieved to read in the book of some psychologist of religion, that the rosary, like prayers in several other religions, is like a “mantra.” the purpose is not meditation on religious mysteries, but letting them soak into the unconscious. Isn’t that true of our favorite songs, whether they be popular or classical? We have taken in the meaning of the song so that at the very first notes the entire mood of it infects us with glee or hope.

Praying in tongues is much the same, especially singing in tongues. An interpretation helps but we don’t want to hear more and more elaborate interpretations or variations. We want the meaning permeating the melody to lift us into another realm – the kingdom of heaven.

I think of daily Mass sometimes as keeping one foot in heaven – especially so that the other foot doesn’t get caught in the quicksand of my often compulsively anxious thought patterns.

It is considered to be a sign of success if at the end of the concert the people rise to their feet and yell “encore.”

Our whole lives of liturgy and rosary and praying of the psalms – what are they if not encores?

In heaven, I imagine that musicians get to play along with their favorite composers. To extend the analogy – what will be our joy one day to attend the heavenly Supper of the Lamb?

February 6, 2007

Today I learned the shocking news of Peter’s death – former son-in-law, father of 4 grandsons who live with me. Martin and I lived together with this family for many years. I loved him very much and prayed so much he could be freed from his alcoholism which led to his death at 53.

The next morning after the news, praying the rosary in the car with the boys Nicholas and I felt Peter’s presence. Carla had a long good healing dialogue with him and “saw” him whirling around happy. Patricia Treece, my friend and god-mother of one of these

grandsons, saw his grandmother and an angel with him at his death seemingly alone in his apartment in L.A.

Carla's friend, now mine, Amy, is our visiting poet, cellist, nurse. I taught her the mercy chaplet and the rosary. She loves it. Fr. Ken came over to be with the family about the death, and the boys opened up some also; lots of sharing on their best memories. Sign of how good it is to be a flexible personality type in these circumstances. I had a heavy planned agenda of how to deal with everything, but Carla invited Fr. Ken and said the boys were not ready to talk about their father, but then after more desultory dinner conversation they were. Carla will go to the Memorial Mass for his soul Fr. Ken will celebrate.

Feb. 10, 2007

I was upset about something in North Carolina and thought of escaping.

Jesus: Where are you running to? Everything is in Me. Quo vadis? Surrender.

Feb. 11, 2007

I had an insight at Mass about all these fantasies of flight whenever I feel blocked even on trifles. I thought I should try for Lent to give up fantasies and commit for a year to stay.

Carla thinks my fantasies of flight are a safety valve and I can't get away from it.

Jesus: When you feel hurt, rejected, try showing the pain vs. anger or rational pleas.

I would curl you into a ball and bring you to heaven except that I know you want to do the last bits of good you can do on earth...so grin and bear all the uncertainties, aches and pains, anxieties, disappointments. I will bring good from everything.

At Mass, I meditated on poverty of spirit – I thought that fantasies of escape are ersatz riches.

Feb. 13, 2007

Carla loved the Mass for Peter and Diana said she would go every week if she had such a priest. All this was deeply moving, thank you, Jesus.

Some of the students seemed to have gotten a lot out of the chapter about excuses in my ethics book. Jesus told me I should not think in academic terms but of my work as ministry and witness.

February 17, 2007

I blew up a photo of Peter holding one of the boys as a baby – since no one could figure out which baby, it seemed like the copies I gave each to hang near their beds represented Peter’s “archetypal” fatherhood. These little things a grandmother could think of are so important to me and to them.

Feb. 21, 2007

Someone blew a shofar for Ash Wednesday and about 500 people were there! The choir did an Allegri-like piece that Fr. Ken and Peter composed. It was sublime.

March 13, 2007

Letter to my chairperson:

This is a very sad letter to write. I have tried 3 different strategies for reaching the largely Freshman students in that philosophy class. Nothing works in terms of making it seem good to me to struggle on for another semester in the Fall. I could give you 25 reasons but most of them you could think of yourself. I think, bottom line, that I am just not able to teach well when there is so much resistance no matter what the cause. I searched my soul and went back over my whole teaching career on this discernment:

I did great with hippish students of the late 60's because enough of them were seekers to make up for the party types. Then I went through about 13 years of misery trying to reach those party types.

I did great with seminarians for obvious reasons - they loved having their mandatory philosophy taught with a mix of spirituality and psychology because that is how they think.

I had fair success with grad students at Steubenville - a strong Catholic school, but not well with the undergrads who were the opposite of party types but so uptight they wanted only formulas not creative explorer type teachers, or so I analyzed it.

I did very well at the tiny college with seminarians and small classes of previous home-schoolers.

Now, at Lenoir Ryne College, I am back to struggle and mostly misery.

After discussing this with my spiritual director, I am feeling that I don't want to teach the Freshman classes even though much good was done and some students were very responsive. I would be happy to try classes for majors and/or electives on a Tues/Thurs basis in the Fall if such classes should open up.

I regret the inconvenience to you of this change of plans.

Let me know that you received this letter. With prayer and sorrow, Ronda

Dear Jesus, I didn't get a clear word from You, only a sense that I should consult Fr. Ken who thought this was the right decision. I do trust that You will give me whatever would be good to do in the future instead.

Jesus: I am trying to heal you of this father wound where you think that God hates you unless you are doing things that are painful because your own father was a Stoic who wanted boys. Your father did love you and delight in your feminine traits but he couldn't show it until later in life. Remember he told you that you were such a loving person and he appreciated that.

Remember the Holy Spirit told you that holiness is having nothing but love in your heart – not resentment and rage, surely.

God the Father accepts your decision. Forgive the students for who they are. They can be saved without philosophy. I save, not philosophy, even your way of teaching philosophy with Me in the center. They do love Me and know Me.

Now make an act of forgiveness of them and ask pardon for your anger at the frustration of trying to teach them. Make the rest of the semester even more beautiful and loving.

Ronda: Dear Father God, You created all human beings, and only a small percentage to be touched by you through liberal arts, per se. I know you do reach them through great books and thinkers with truth and awe, but usually through beauty and truth itself as it comes in their lives. You know my desire to reach them through words and philosophical truths but I know You are going to be helping them without my mediation in Your own ways. Please forgive my anger at them. I offer now the frustrations of the rest of this semester for graces to be poured upon them directly. May none of them be lost and may I someday see them radiant with joy in your kingdom of heaven. Amen.

March 16, 2007

Fr. Ken talked in my class at the college. Some listened raptly who never listen to me! One student wanted to see our church afterwards. Tears of joy came thinking of how wonderful Fr. Ken is.

Jesus: Right. You are not a lone ranger. You need Fr. Ken and Pastor Andrew and Phil and Larry and Marianne and Bev and Karen and Doug. So, Ronda, you want to retain your link of LRC and enjoy the good part. I want you to just sit here in Church and luxuriate in the good around you, the beauty, the family, friends, the parish, the Trinity.

March 17, 2007

Fr. Ken gave a sermon about “I make all things new.” He challenged us to think what that means for each of us right now. I think I don’t need to dwell on patterns that repeat in the family, the school, but hope for newness in me as well.

March 23, 2007

I am feeling so confused about staying with the family or moving out to an apartment right next door to the Church. My daughter, Carla, thinks that I need to always have a fantasy about going to another place because the fantasy works as a kind of safety-valve.

Jesus: I don’t want to tell you about the future because I want you to cling to Me so closely in prayer that it doesn’t matter where you are. Please trust and pray every prayer with personal yearning.

March 25, 2007

I am doing an idea-edit for a book by wonderful woman writer, a Christian therapist, Clare Ten Eyck who lives far away in a different part of the country.

Due to lots of anxiety at this time, I rather suddenly decided it couldn’t hurt to consult her professionally about my own problems. These concern, among other things, the need to constantly fantasize about leaving my present situation with my dear family.

As I began the telephone therapy sessions my prayer was: Mary, help me to submit to Jesus as the Lord of my future. Blessed Francis Libermann (a saint who was consumed with anxiety), Karl Stern (a Jewish convert who was a psychiatrist), and Mary, Exalted Widow pray for me.

Here are some notes from the first session – not direct quotations, but my way of putting the insights Clare gave me sometimes in other words.

Spiritual warfare involves the devil attacking the weakest psychological place in us. Look at the anxiety attacks when they come to see what other emotions are going on.

I said I thought fear of rejection was predominant, but the next Monday I was anxious for a long, long time, about 5-6 hours without any rejection theme around that I could find.

In spite of lots of therapy in the past – over a 55 year period would add up to about 7 years put together from different times of crisis, Clare thinks that even though it is the same wound, God wants to heal me in a deeper way each time the wound opens. I need to believe this vs. just wanting to blame other people in the present crisis.

She asked when was the first remembered feeling of anxiety.

I remembered staying with grandma while the separation of our parents was going on. She suggests writing these memories in the third person to get more into how a child would experience it vs. a present day hind-sight analysis so I will start with that memory.

GRANDMA AND FIRE ISLAND

The twins were 8 years old. Carla and Diana (I changed my name to Ronda after the separation. Ronda was the name my father wanted to name me when I was a baby but my mother's choice, Diana, won out – I hated the name Diana because I was called Danny for short, a boy's name but ironically, after I changed my name to Ronda they called me Ronnie, another boy's name)

They had visited their grandmother and grandfather in their summer house in Fire Island before. But this time would be different because neither of their parents would be with them during the visit. On the ferry when their mother turned them over to their grandmother she said, "I'll be back to get you soon," but did not specify. She told them nothing about the reason for the visit being that Mommy and Daddy were breaking up. Both parents thought that having fights in front of the children was wrong. They had never heard any arguments between their parents. They had never been separated from their mother before for even a whole day. Their father often left on business trips.

Diana felt anxious, therefore, at being parted from her mother.

She didn't like either of her grandparents. Her grandfather was a stiff old man from Colombia in South America – a Sephardic Jewish Mason (the Mason part she only found out decades after his death since it was a secret). The worst part about him was that he was a dentist and the pain of his ministrations was the worst she had ever known in her childhood years. Her grandmother was a loving woman but crazy and also a cleanliness fanatic. At all visits to her house, she insisted first on scrubbing the little girls' faces and necks and hands and arms and also combing the knots out of their hair. Also she tried to teach them little things about her Christian religion. Since Diana and Carla's parents were militant atheists they ridiculed Grandma Grace as being stupid and weak.

For these reasons, Diana felt anxious about this visit. She refused to eat some of the things her grandmother prepared. She felt compelled to learn the little song, Jesus, loves me, this I know but later in bed made fun of it with her sister.

NEXT MEMORY OF ANXIETY

After the separation their father moved to an apartment with his new wife and step-daughter about 10 blocks away. Diana and Carla moved with their mother to a house on the same block. Instead of the beautiful apartment on Riverside Drive overlooking the

Hudson, they now lived in an apartment near Central Park. It was large but had mice and cockroaches. Their mother took a part time job and therefore was not home when they got home each day from school as she had been at the Riverside Drive apartment.

Ronda (name changed at her insistence), 8 years old, felt afraid to walk home because on the same block was a bully. He was an Irish Catholic kid, Johnnie, maybe about 6 years old but tough, and he liked to force even older kids to cross the street to the other side or he would threaten to ride into them on his tricycle. So brutal was the face of this little kid that both girls were frightened of him and felt they had to obey him.

They told their mother. She said that next day she would leave her job earlier and meet us at the corner and talk to the boy's mother. Diana felt sure that her powerful mother would be able to solve the problem immediately. The three of us walked down the street and sure enough the little boy appeared on his tricycle and told us to go over to the other side of the street. This was his side of the street. My mother started trying to reason with him. Out of a second or third floor window a large unkempt fat woman leaned out and yelled "Get out of here. Your girls must have been bothering my son."

Ronda was sure her very eloquent mother would have a good comeback for that. She was shocked when instead her mother suggested they cross the street and then suggested that in the future they should take a long detour and come home by a different route.

That made Ronda feel much more scared. She didn't want to walk blocks out of her way so she convinced her twin sister that they should run all the way from the corner to their apartment house, as if playing a game, so they wouldn't get anywhere near the kid.

Early Third Person Narrative involving sensuality:

Little Diana and Little Carla were 2-3 years old. (Their father always played classical music very loudly in the evenings when he came home from work. He especially liked sensual music such as Ravel's Bolero) After their bath they were used to coming into the living room and dancing around naked to the music. One evening their play became noisy and more boisterous than usual. Their father suddenly barked, "Enough is enough," and smacked them on their behinds. Neither parent had ever spanked them before and their father never spanked them again, which may explain this memory being so strong for both of the twins. Diana always thought Daddy had only spanked her, but she asked Carla who said it was both of them.

I tend, still today, to relate sensuality (nakedness?) with rejection.

Clare says that shame comes when we feel rejected for no reason we can fathom. So this could be a repeat of the feeling that my father rejected me for no reason. That he set me up to be sensual with the nudity and music and then spanked me.

This could explain my persistent syndrome of expected to be rejected by men just for being spontaneously me. I usually think they will reject me because I am sharp and argumentative as my mother was, but Clare thought that argumentativeness could have been the defense I threw up against my parents' sensuality and that of others.

Of course my intellect is also my gift but it could be refined by the intuitive feminine, Clare suggested.

Now, I am thinking that intuitive feminine is associated for me with sensuality and therefore I am suspect of it, unless it takes a religious form as in the much more physical charismatic prayer mode with the swaying and clapping and dancing and singing in tongues and laying hands on men as well as women.

When I woke up the day after the evening phone session these things came to mind in prayer:

Sensuality is also vibrancy which is a trait I share with the more sensual members of the family.

Jesus seemed to want to tell me these things:

Since your mother made an idol of spontaneity, I thought you needed discipline through your father.

I gave you the legacy of vibrancy, but I wanted it to be controlled so I used your father to keep you from living out the tragedies coming from the sensual in your mother's life. But with the separation, My plan was for you to develop on your mother's philosophical lines. Her love of you was tainted by the wrong sensuality but she gave you the warmth that you have by her strong love of you.

I have used your sensuality to make you a vibrant speaker and teacher and a vibrant mystical Catholic. You are sealed in My heart and you don't need to be afraid.

With the bully on the street, I was there, so you weren't hurt, just threatened. I sent angels to protect you in those streets of New York.

In spite of all these beautiful insights and messages I had one of the longest anxiety attacks this morning after the session. Until typing this all up I felt kind of hopeless about the whole enterprise of digging this all up again. But now writing the words it seemed Jesus sent, I feel hopeful. I am thinking it would be natural to feel more anxiety having to remember all this again all in a clump.

Maybe this is my 70's crisis?

March 27, 2007

Forgiveness of sensuality in the family and in myself:

Dear Jesus, I give you the pain the sensuality of others in my family caused me for their journey through eternity or for their conversion on earth. Send the Holy Spirit to show me how their sensuality was related to weaknesses so that I can more easily forgive.

Forgiveness of:

Parents: Because without their sensuality I would not even exist to know and love You and all the other realities You created that I love.

My mother: Part of it was her way of compensating for her childhood deprivation from her own mother's coldness. She was seeking love desperately from women and men through sex.

My father: Stuck between his own Don Juan father and puritanical mother he didn't know how to love daughters. He had hoped we would be sons, so he treated us like sons. I forgive him for not giving me a good start with men and thank you for the healings I got visiting him in his late life.

Myself: I forgive myself for seeking love through sex as a teen, desperate for approval and love from male figures.

I accept that because you use sex to bring new human beings into the world You have to give us such a strong sensual drive lest we be self-enclosed prideful Stoics instead of vibrant relational husbands and wives and pro-creators.

I thank you, God, for sending me all those wonderful pure men, my god-father, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, Charles Rich and the many priests who have fathered me so much in spiritual mentoring.

Thank you Jesus, for being my true love as a widow dedicated to the Lord, and all through my life as a Catholic by coming into my body in the Eucharist.

This exercise suggested by Clare left me feeling joyful, hopeful, and with new energy.

March 29, 2007

I got a good idea to do courses at my friend Karen's house, Lenoir Ryne, and the parish on SPIRITUALITY OF THE EMOTIONS. These would be very practical sessions – over 10 weeks once a week with a teaching and then an exercise they share about next time.

I think the fresh energy comes from the work with Clare.

I talked to a friend about heavy problems at a place I used to be.

Jesus: I want you to show compassion to each of your friends in their troubles but not to think you have to solve them. Focus on things you can do such as spirituality of the emotions. You are not good at mediation or diplomacy so you cannot help much except by listening and prayer. Don't get into needing to know what is happening in those on-going conflicts. It is all in My hands. I love each friend more than you do.

April 1, 2007

Session 2 with Clare

I told her my father said that he was not sure about having us but that mother wanted us.

Clare pointed out that we need the father for protection. It is his body that protects us. I have lots of reasons to feel unprotected – my father's leaving when we were 8. If my father had approached the bully on the block then the mother probably would have scolded the kid, but my mother wasn't a powerful protector in that instance. I added that since Martin got deathly ill, I didn't feel him as being such a protector anymore – latched on to spiritual friendships with men to find protectors. I could forgive myself for that more than I do.

But I have had good male friends and priest figures who have been protectors in different ways.

My present situation isn't very secure. The qualities that were missing in childhood after Dad left are still missing, said Clare. Even if our security is in Jesus, practically we have to do certain things to provide safety for ourselves. It is not wrong to assess what will give me security. Clare says GOD WILL DO EVERYTHING FOR YOU THAT YOU CANNOT DO FOR YOURSELF.

If I felt really safe, I would not have to fantasize about other possibilities. I feel fragile. Therefore I try to find safety.

Clare prayed in tongues and gave the interpretation herself that Jesus will tie up the loose ends in a totally satisfying way. He will break the bondage through the generations, cut the cords, and set the whole family free. She saw a waterfall opening up and pouring down on the family.

April 3, 2007

Carla said that I want to live alone and also have someone to talk to every minute!

True.

Jesus: I am using her to help you. Be not afraid. It is a hard time for you. Hold tight.

April 4, 2007

Ros Moss, my godchild, well-known from EWTN told me about her idea for an order of sisters. I felt attracted if wary.

Jesus: For now encourage her but don't leap.

April 5, 2007

I thought maybe Ros' order should have consecrated widows around it. She doubted that. She thought it would be hard enough helping older women to adjust to her community without having other options nearby.

My daughter, whose house I live in, but who is a lapsed Catholic, wondered why I would even think of moving in with strangers when she loves me so much. I said because I want to be with Catholics. That is the conflict. I want to be with Catholics spiritually but with the family for emotional reasons, especially because most others don't understand my personality, but also because I love them so much.

Jesus: I know your pain to have no one in the family who knows Me in the Church as you do. I honor your pain and I WILL SAVE THEM ALL! Do you believe Me?

Ronda: Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief.

Ros Moss was visiting. She says only Jesus can heal Carla, not me, and she needs to know it is Him when He does it by ruling me out.

During the Mass I strongly felt I should leave the family house and live nearby, still visiting and helping the kids in the faith, unless God sends me a strong sign otherwise.

April 8, 2007 Easter Sunday

I thought of all the good, especially the grandchildren and Amy that came from being with the family.

Worrying about the future, Jesus seemed to say "You have given your whole life to the Church, the Church will take care of you."

April 12, 2007

I took the apartment adjacent to the Church. Carla is relieved I will still be nearby vs. moving far away and is willing to go with the plan for my taking dinner and swim, etc. with them every day.

I wanted a one bedroom but they only had a two bedroom on the ground floor. I am hoping to make the master bedroom into a hospitality room.

This evening after the decision was made Carla said maybe she'd like to try a small Mass once – such as the Friday Latin one, and then she sung the Salve Regina in Latin two times over! It was wonderful and seemed to show in some way that my leaving wouldn't impede spiritual progress.

I spoke to Clare, the therapist. She thought it was a wonderful decision to move, not coming out of neurosis. If one lives in a very tense place then it is harder to draw close to God. Spiritual growth she thinks takes place more in solitude.

I thought if God gave me a way out I should take it.

Clare said that in prayer she thought I need to spend more time with Mary so I can see how she is trying to mother me all the children miscarried and on earth. I could use the quiet prayer time to open myself to Mary. I could ask Mary to lead the prayer. She might want to do something new such as rocking me in her arms.

I thought that, of course, it is painful that my place of refuge didn't work all together as I hoped. Mary wants to be my refuge. Clare said I need to allow her to nurse me and take me through every stage of life.

Clare prayed in tongues. I felt the warmth of Mary surrounding me and recalled that Mary gives the Medjugorje visionaries hugs before she leaves them. Clare said she felt the presence of Mary tenderly embracing me. She heard Mary telling me “You will rest beneath my smile.”

Clare said she saw a large Jesus behind Mary in the rays of divine mercy pouring that mercy on the apartment. She had a sense that in that apartment I would be satisfied.

I could let the apartment be rather bare.

After talking to Clare I did feel as if Mary wants to be with me there in the apartment.

Mary: Yes, I do, my poor little Jewish Catholic philosopher, so zealous and so sad.

I thought I should call her Mother Mary.

Ronda: Mother Mary, lead me in prayer

Mary: Like Martha you are busy and troubled about many things. I want to bring you into my Son's peace. Sit quietly in this chapel where He dwells and breathe us in, JMJ. Pray, Jesus, Mary, Joseph bring me peace...and stop scruples that offend against trust. You will be distracted. That's all right. I am your mother.

Prayer of quiet came right away.

Mary seemed to tell me that it was not a mistake to have lived with the family. "There was much love and healing. But without much quiet prayer time, you cannot become peaceful. Put that quiet prayer first in the apartment. You are not too busy. Your angel will remind you. No strain. Pray "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, peace" silently during Mass.

April 15, 2007

Tears of joy at Maxi's (my 4th born grandson) first communion with Carla there. I thought, the Church is my womb; the priest is like St. Joseph bringing Jesus to us. Each time He is born again in the Eucharist.

Carla said about the move that I shouldn't feel badly. She wants her house to be a cave of refuge for everyone in the family where we can come for healing of stuff out in the world.

April 18, 2007 – I love walking over the Church before bed and early the morning. Truly my celestial living room.

April 20, 2007

Vigil of the widow dedication. See www.rondachervin.com under Widow Options for more about other consecrated widow ways of life.)

Jesus: Dear one, don't upbraid yourself about many ways you have tried to do this before and your whole mixed widow story. All along I have been your 2nd bridegroom watching, waiting, calling, embracing. You have always been mine and I am yours. Just rejoice in your dedication and we, myself, Mary and Joseph, will do the rest.

April 21, 2007 We had a beautiful dedicated widow ceremony. I like Clare's image of resting under the smiling Mary – my friend Karen found me an image of Grunewald's smiling Madonna on the web to put up.

DEDICATED WIDOW SMALL CEREMONY FOR Saturday April 21 around 11:45 AM

Fr. Ken: Ronda Chervin, daughter of the Church, what do you ask?

Ronda: I ask a blessing from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and the intercession of Mary, Exalted Widow and all the widow saints on my life as a widow dedicated to the Lord.

Fr. Ken: What is the rule of life you plan to follow?

Ronda: (with flexibility due to family or work needs)

Private promise not to ever remarry.

A simple life – giving everything away to the poor or pro-life I don't need as a necessity.

Daily Mass and frequent Confession.

Daily Rosary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours and Office of Readings and other spiritual readings.

Silent prayer in adoration of the Eucharist or in my oratory at home.

Most of my time will be devoted to my family and apostolic endeavors such as writing, speaking and teaching.

Consultation on major decisions with my pastor who is my spiritual director.

Fr. Ken: (laying his hand on my head) I bless you, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as a widow dedicated to the Lord.

I felt very, very happy doing this with the widows who came to the workshop praying also and accompanying me back to the apartment where Fr. Ken blessed it.

April 22, 2007

Telephone session with Clare Ten Eyck:

Clare:

“Think of your home as like the house at Ephesus. Mary will be tremendously present with you. Every move you have made to different locations has added a piece. God uses each one. Each move gave you something. Ask yourself, where was God in each move and what was the gift He was giving you? How did He use you?”

At the new apartment immerse yourself in His presence. Let the Holy Spirit and Mary guide you in prayer as if you were one of the widows allegedly with Mary at Ephesus. Let her guide you moment by moment in your outside work.

With the students it is only because you are loving that any truth will reach them. Truth without love is not truth. John Paul II wrote that when you speak the truth it carries a blessing and when the heart is ready, the grace will come.

It is not wrong to just say to Jesus, “Here I am, help me.” That is poverty of spirit. Not just asking Jesus to save me from some mood because He wants me to get back to work quicker.

Bad moods? Enter into the moods and take them to Christ. Don’t just try to distract yourself.

Clare thinks I have to get into the feeling. Every feeling has a root so we have to go into it.

It is more difficult to break a family unspoken commandment such as my Nietzschean family code that you can only be joyful, than to break one of the real commandments. I am learning from a new friend who is obviously vulnerable that weakness makes people lovable whereas my family code is only smartness and efficiency is lovable. We are afraid that if we show weakness we will be rejected, especially in close relationships. We suffer more if close ones reject us than audiences, for instance.

Clare prayed in tongues. I heard Mary say through her tongue that this will be the best part of my life. She saw Mary singing joyfully that I am letting her serve me! She wants to minister to me. I will have an even more fruitful ministry, maybe like that of Corrie Ten Boom who did so much towards the last part of her life.

Now I will work on my assignment: “Every move (from place to place since being a widow) has added a piece. God uses each one. Each move gave you something. Ask yourself, where was God in each move and what was the gift He was giving you? How did He use you.”

May 3, 2007

I was taking Senora Magdalena home but realized my car was by my apartment. (Senora Magdalena is a Guatamalan grandmother who walks 3 hours from the house of one of her grandchildren to get to daily Mass, rain or shine! We daily Mass people take turns taking her home when she comes. We can’t know which grandchild she is visiting to know when she is coming since she doesn’t speak even Spanish but some dialect and couldn’t understand us if we called her). I invited her in to see my oratory and family photos.

May 5, 2007

I got all upset trying to figure out how to cut for the pattern of the blue widow dress. Someone who was going to help me had to do something else and I used the “s” word twice

trying to get it right myself. She heard me. She was not alarmed, though she was afraid I was angry at her, but I felt despair thinking how bad I am to care so much more about the dress than about minimal politeness and refinement. Then, today I got so angry at a student who was protesting his well-deserved grade that I yelled at him to get out of the classroom – there were 2 other students there waiting to hear their grades. Feeling I was losing it, I desperately asked Jesus for advice.

Jesus: You are afraid of being vulnerable and then you lash out . Those who are vulnerable for any reason cannot overcome weakness very often of whatever kind. I allow you to become unable to control your anger so that you can also experience the humiliation of being unable to simply be what you want to be. It is not important to be efficient or even to succeed at many things. Experiencing My loving mercy is more important. Forgiveness is more important than efficiency. Learn this.

I thought, maybe I need to speak much less. Jesus didn't say no!

May 6, 2007

Jesus seemed to want to tell me “I have made you My bride but not yet the transforming union. This is why you still sin so unexpectedly. Hope, dear little one, I will melt, mold, fill and use you even more.

At confession for anger Fr. Ken said that I should let the energy of the anger fuel the thinking; gathering the response so that it is objective, listening to the others more carefully to see what is behind their words.

I made a visit to Los Angeles where my daughter, Diana, was for having her legal marriage blessed in the Church. Such a beautiful thing to see the love for each other they pledged, as the priest said, after so many years knowing each other's flaws.

I made a pledge that if Diana went to confession I would give up complaining and negative remarks. Even though I have not been “perfect” about this, I have been doing better. I think my guardian angel stops me from obsessing with complaint every day.

May 16, 2007

A very hard day. The nurse of the eye doctor put in a very stinging dilator. I got freaked and even though I was relatively calm, objected to her not warning me, I felt rattled.

Jesus seemed to say: I want your program Spirituality of the Emotions to be very strong so I am allowing you many examples from your own life of where you over-react. Also, you are forgetting My project to make you a saint. Giving up complaint will be a very important step. Now go to sleep early and “rest under Mary's smile.” Don't push.

I woke up in the night after reading a wonderful novel by Doug Norman about Jesus where He became a teen boy to reach boys at a prep school. I was surprised how well the author carried off this seemingly impossible gimmick. When I woke I felt Jesus' presence in the room and I started to sing "Oh one of these mornings, bright and early I'm gonna spread my wings and fly. Fare thee well, my darling, fare thee well." I related it to leaving this earth in death someday. Later I realized it was Ascension day.

May 17, 2007

Jesus seemed to say: See with My eyes. Do you see how people drink too much to deal with pain instead of turning to Me? Pray for them when you see this. I will be able to use you to help them when your heart is larger, filled with compassion instead of judgment. Let me widen your heart. I do this when you let Me. Open.

May 19, 2007

It seemed to me that some who drink too much do so because they don't know how to let out the pain in their hearts and that makes them heavy-spirited. I could be grateful that I am able to let everything out more even though that has its own shadow. I need to picture the people I am alarmed about someday in heaven free and joyful.

Fr. Ken says that in such situations one needs to remember the pain of the person who is taking a false path – and keep remembering this all the time one is in their company.

Tonight was the first time Fr. Ken brought Jesus in the monstrance to the chapel for Me to adore Him that way. (This Church does have formal Adoration prayer on Friday evenings. Having him in the morning each day was a privilege because I am a Dedicated Widow.)

During this time Jesus seemed to tell me: "You are used to being high power all the time. It will take you a while to come to peace. Putting your time with Me first will help. Yes, detach from worry about health and give as much as you can to the poor. (I found a Catholic doctor who seems to understand better that I don't want to pay for preventative things that might never come to pass). Each time you want to clutch things in time, open your hands and let Me loosen your grip, finger by finger. Are you not My bride? See how I am giving you prayer of quiet in My presence in Adoration and in the Church each morning to encourage you.

I decided to put my long quiet prayer time in the morning as soon as possible instead of shoving it in later when I am more tired and also to accept every suffering I will be sent for the rest of my life. I want transforming union not for my vanity but for the sake of the Church. John Paul the Great, Mother Teresa, pray for me. Several other people started coming the hour before the daily Mass each day. (Daily Mass is at noon in this Church) It

was so sweet to be with them. Carrie who is so contemplative and can be absolutely still sits next to me, I think as her penance, since I am so jumpy.

March 20, 2007

Jesus seemed to tell me to get to know more of the parishioners. Right afterwards a woman I had seen and liked felt pulled toward my pew to say hello.

It is almost Pentecost. I need to be more free in scheduling and follow the Holy Spirit; pray more in tongues.

I am reading Pope Benedict's letter about the Eucharist.

Jesus seemed to say: See how I raised up Benedict. What a strong but gentle document for you, My children, to live by.

I am so glad to be just 1 minute's walk to the Church. I thought humorously: "My next door neighbors are the only perfect people in the world: Jesus, Mary and Joseph!"

When I come to pray in the morning to Church with liturgy of the hours sitting in a front pew, Fr. Ken is often setting up for the noon Mass before entering into his morning schedule. If I have a nice insight I tell him about it or ask him questions. I realized this is kind of a Catholic version of the rabbinical practice of the teacher and students in the Schul reading from the Talmud but lifting their heads to share ideas and questions throughout.

May 23, 2007

A Question of Being

Martina at 14 might in this way confront Steve-Daddy-God

(Martina is my youngest grandchild. Her father is an agnostic at best. I wrote this poem imagining this now 1 year old one day being a teen and asking her father these questions):

Why, Daddy,

when your perfectly equilibrated scales

never failed to weigh misery

greater than pleasure,

did you still choose to create me?

Why, Daddy,

**when your perfect predicting eye
saw me one day flexing my freedom
to kick you in the teeth,
did you still create me?**

**Religious ones,
of course, would say
the beauty of my person
is worth any price of pain,
not to mention weighing in
your sacrifices
toward more joy for me
than youth gave thee.**

Do you agree?

**If you say yes, my sire,
will you say yes to your
heavenly Sirewho
suffered for eternal joy for thee?**

No one liked this poem in the family. Ah, well. I liked it. It's okay.

May 25, 2007

Jesus seemed to say concerning fear of having offended Steve with the poem: "You cannot be prophetic voice without offending others sometimes. Always try to speak the truth with love but if someone is offended apologize for any roughness on your part instead of

being defensive and rejecting them. Mercy above all. But I, Jesus, spoke prophetically as well as mercifully.

Fr. Ken thinks the Holy Spirit, moving as He wills, could have come to the Anglos first in charismatic renewal in the '60's, but then used these gifts now more for the Hispanics. I thought about how we anglo-charismatics went from the Holy Spirit to Marian devotion, to Eucharistic Adoration and maybe in our workaholism we need Adoration more now. "Be still and know that I am God." The Hispanics, especially Guatamalan Indian ancestry Hispanics here in North Carolina, have a better sense of stillness and worship to begin with.

Fr. Ken had bells sewn to his bright red vestment for Pentecost. I thought that bells have little tongues inside and this would be a musical type of tongue – recalled Poe's line "the tintinabulation of the bells, bells, bells," that my mother loved so much.

Jesus seemed to tell me tonight: "You make life harder than it has to be because of anxiety. As you put being with Me first you will gradually be less anxious, for you will value your work and the reactions of others less. You need to do this to prepare for heaven where you will not work as such."

May 27, 2007

Jesus threw me into prayer of quiet. "If I could teach St. Catherine to read I can teach you to relax!"

The message is to speak much less.

May 28, 2007

Psalm 5 "But I through the greatness of Your love, have access to Your house." Wonderful confirmation of spending lots of time in the chapel praying.

Jesus seemed to say, "See I brought you here. Please trust Me." I loved the spray of red chrysanthemums in front of the altar for Pentecost, like tongues of fire.

At RCIA Fr. Ken said you can either go to Mass full of yourself trying to fit God into yourself or you can come to Mass to go into God. I thought I need to come before Mass and be more silent. Fr. Ken says that those who long for silence before Mass might be closing off to the community just as those who talk too much before Mass might be closing off to God.

May 31, 2007

After a visit of Fr. Ken to our family dwelling I mentioned how intense our family is. He thought that the intensity is good, challenging!

Jesus seemed to say: You don't have to figure everything out. Just be loving and watch what I am doing.

June 1, 2007 Locution to Anne of The Returning Jesus

Jesus

Heavenly consideration is the compass which will insure a true course for each apostle. In every situation, consider heaven's goals for you and for those around you. The apostle who gives thoughtful consideration to heaven's goals will be known for speaking less, rather than more. This apostle will make decisions in My company, aware of My goals. I would ask each of My apostles to practice this today. Move into your day gently, aware that I may wish to adjust your course several times. You expect one thing, perhaps. But I, your Jesus, may need something else from you. You are committed to a certain plan, perhaps. But I your Jesus, may have chosen a different plan altogether. Only with thoughtful consideration will you be alert to My will in each situation. Apostles, you have been prepared to serve in the manner that I require you to serve. You have been taught many things about holiness. If you are humble, you are aware that there are many things still to be learned about holiness. If you are humble, you may protest, saying, "Jesus, I am not ready. I must become holier still." I understand your weaknesses and struggles. I do not fear the limits of your humanity. I have factored your weaknesses into the plan I have for you. You should never be afraid that you lack the holiness to complete the mission that I have willed for you. I will make you holy if you proceed according to My directions. You shall have all you need. Please begin to use all that you have been taught. Begin to see others as I see others, in need of love and tolerance. You have been taught not to make judgements. Do not make judgements. You have been taught to spend time in silence. Spend time in silence. You have been taught to trust Me. Trust in Me now, today. You have been taught not to be afraid of the future. Do not fear the future. Dear apostles, you have been taught to pray. Pray. Now, today, every day. Pray. Ask Me for mercy for this world. Ask Me for conversion graces for this world. Ask Me for the Spirit of truth in such an abundance that all eyes will be opened to God's truth. My beloved faithful apostles, I want you to use everything you have been given to serve Me so that others may be saved. I am with you. I will direct you in each moment. You must be at peace so that others can learn about peace. You must be calm so that others can learn about calm. Do not underestimate the power of setting an example of heavenly consideration. It is this consideration in each apostle that will ultimately allow Me to reclaim a multitude of souls for the Father."

Everything Jesus allegedly said in this locution fits so well with what He has been telling me.

I had a wonderful healing incident with a friend and mentor. I was having anxiety attacks because I thought I had to confront him on something and was worried that if he didn't accept what I suggested he would reject me for pushing him. This opened up the whole father wound and also the rejection of so many at Loyola Marymount because of my strong magisterial teaching stance. Now, with this relatively new friend, I knew he agreed on the teaching I wanted to give, but not necessarily on strategy for parish ministry concerning that issue.

After many hours of anxiety I got to talk it over with him and he had even broader plans for accomplishing my goal. I told him about how afraid I was of rejection from him and he laughed loudly and said "how could you think that? You're crazy."

It was such a strong proof of how right Recovery, Inc. is with the tools "people are not transparent." and "feelings are not facts." Here I was, "imagination on fire," picturing disaster for this treasured friendship and there was not a speck of truth in my predictions.

I felt a little humiliated that my friend had to see once again what a pathetic insecure person I am, but more than that I felt enormous relief and joy in his love for me just as I am.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus, Mary and Joseph for this grace.

June 5, 2007

Jesus: If you speak less it will be easier to be more sensitive and not make mistakes in being unloving by blurting out truths without thinking of how the listener will receive it. Ask your guardian angel to remind you.

June 6, 2007

Meditation group first meeting at Lenoir Rhyne College

. Jesus: I want you to enjoy me together in unity and to share from the heart. That is always good.

June 7, 2007

Jesus: It was a good day. Many graces and good encounters. I want others to give you help such as Carrie and Dorothy. I know how hard you try to improve. Be of good cheer. We are with you every moment. Now be carefree.

June 8, 2007 Office of Readings Friday, 8th Week in Ordinary Time from Gregory on Job p. 314.

“A weak minded person is frequently diverted towards pursuing exterior happiness when the breath of popular favor accompanies his good actions. So he gives up his own personal choices, preferring to remain at the mercy of whatever he hears from others. Thus, he rejoices not so much to become but to be called blessed. Eager for praise, he gives up what he had begins to be; and so he is severed from God by the very means by which he appeared to be commendable in God.”

(If we strive for good but get ridicule) finding no resting place without, he cleaves more intensely to God within. All his hope is fixed on his Creator, and amid all the ridicule and abuse he invokes his interior witness alone. One who is afflicted in this way grows closer to God the more he turns away from human popularity. ...pours himself out in prayer, and, pressured from without, he is refined with a more perfect purity to penetrate what is within...it is united within to one who hears from on high because it is cut off externally from the praise of men.”

Jesus: For now have adoration 1 hour a day and little courses and e-mail on anger management. Set aside other ideas and try not to pressure yourself; be available for My call in people’s needs around you.

June 17, 2007 to May 11, 2008

(Note: Originally this part of my journal I entitled One Foot in Eternity, but since now I have “kidnapped” this title for the whole compendium of journals, I will just put this part into Full Circle)

June 17, 2007 Beginning Adoration M-Th an hour before Mass.

Jesus’’: I am drawing you inward to Me now and weaning you from everything else, even the beauty of the ocean. All this (beauty you can’t have now) will be in eternity for you. I am separating you a small distance from the family. You love them and they love you but you are not to think of them as soul-mates. Now steep your soul in us, your holy family. Rest.

June 18, 2007 - They ran out of toilet paper in the house of my family. I got very upset but didn’t show it too much and went out and got a package of 6 rolls and brought it back as a BIG GIFT.

Jesus: I have to laugh with you, my dear, when you get so fussed up about trifles. Your daughter is trying very hard to make things better but sometimes she is too over-extended to take care of some things that matter a lot to you. When you get into such a snarly reaction, please laugh and offer it up for their souls more quickly.

Jesus: I laughed, too. You need to laugh a lot more instead of making everything into a tragedy.

June 21,2007

I told the Recovery, Inc. group about the family example and they laughed and laughed and it made me feel good that they laughed.

June 25, 2007

I wasn't anxious about men in authority so much before Martin's death because I had him as my security and "tough guy."?

June 23, 2007

My friend Carrie, a bit older than me, said that at some point we see that we are on our own personal exodus from this world.

June 24, 2007

I went to the Hispanic charismatic prayer meeting and put in a kind of fleece that if they let me address them with a kind of witness talk, then I would keep coming but not if they refused. They agreed and I got to talk to a leader who wants to be a deacon one day but then the meeting went on too long and they said to do it next week instead. This made me want to give up, but then the next morning one of the young women told me she was assigned to translate for me next week, so I realized they did want me to speak to them. I am too impatient, giving up too easily. I asked Jesus and my guardian angel to guide me more closely.

I realize that the Hispanos have a sort of John the Baptist way of preaching to try to break through the terrible apathy of people, especially the youth.

Jesus: The Holy Spirit will bring things out through you as a bridge but not necessarily what you want. I want you to make a leap of faith and let me harvest what comes from what you say. I can touch many hearts and minds through your boldness even if some cannot understand your ways. What is there to fear? Think of St. Paul. I have made you a strong woman, stronger than you think. I use (your) fear so that you will be a little more meek and therefore better received.

June 26, 2007

Adoration Prayer:

Me: I am so emotional. How come I test out on personality charts as equally a thinker?

Jesus: I gave you a good mind as a brake on the suffering you would have without it.

He also told me that He was glad that I have friends in the parish such as Dorothy of the great sincerity and Carrie – so contemplative and Bonny’s lovely voice and smile, and Amy’s sense of humor even in travail.

He doesn’t want me to waste time on comparisons, just ask for the beautiful gifts you see in your friends.

I keep getting ideas about an association of dedicated widows. Jesus seemed to say “I said you shouldn’t join anything, not that you should not found anything.”

June 27, 2007

At the LRC meditation group we pondered St. Cyril on Mary’s title as Mother of God. One of the group probably doesn’t accept that title. I thought if she is only the mother of His humanity it sounds as if he had multiple personality disorder! Then an analogy came to me: Even though parents pro-create and don’t exactly create the souls of their children a mother wouldn’t say “I am not the mother of John, only the mother of his body.” The parent is the parent of the whole person.

I also thought for myself that since God, not the devil, created my body I should be kinder to it and also accept my aging body with all its woes and see that offering physical pain is as valuable as giving a workshop.

June 28, 2007

My pastor is so healing because he combines beauty of soul with love of the heart whereas others have beauty of soul but more coldness of heart and others have love but it is more smothering. I suppose he would not think of his soul as beautiful, as such, but yearning for beauty of soul is part of beauty of soul as in the Augustine quote he likes so much about yearning to pray is prayer.

I was wondering why Fr. Ken didn’t announce to the whole parish that we have adoration now. I thought he wants to see how it goes. He agreed that was the reason. Since he has such a virtue of prudence he thinks more in terms of process whereas I want to race to closure. Of course prudence and process have to do with rhythm which he senses as a musician.

I should pray for more prudence vs. urgently needing immediate responses to everything.

Jesus: All of creation is process, otherwise there would only be God. I brought you here so that Fr, Ken’s virtues could anchor you and give you more peace and less restless need to flee.

First Spirituality of the Emotions in the parish. 25 came. There was such love in their faces for each other during the sharing part! It went beautifully.

Jesus: Of course. Do you forget that I love you and want to use you for others?

June 30, 2007

I got to give this witness at the Hispanic charismatic meeting: My being a dedicated widow, a charismatic since 1969, and that in the beginning we were mostly anglo and few Hispanic charismatics but now much more Hispanic. I told them “You are the future of the Church”. We anglos have many good things but you have more children and therefore more sacrifice and holiness. I told them how we anglos are less now because of abortion and contraception, such a great sorrow. And that I am studying Spanish to come closer to them, also about my free room in my house for guests they could bring, for dedicated widows and also for the Hispanics in the parish. (Later one of them said that in their community they take care of all their own and they don’t need my room.)

They clapped when I said they were the future of the Church.

Jesus: I don’t want you to be so pessimistic. If I give you an idea, try it, and in some way it will bear fruit. A prophetic voice does not mean controlling what will come. Follow the Holy Spirit more freely with trust.

I am now the proud owner of Conchita and Felix – un-identical twins (named after the widow saint Concepcion de Armida (Conchita was her nickname) and her priest spiritual director)

The female cat is a calico, long hair, and he is grey and white long hair.

And they have just arrived and are taking their first smelling tour of my apartment.

They are very sweet and I hope I will be a good mother to them.

July 1, 2007

Jesus: See I have your life now in a good balanced pattern. Be grateful and now rest, carefree, please. There is nothing you have to do that is hard and we are with you. “Love and do what you will.”

July 3, 2007

Fr. Ken and Ben, the seminarian intern came to dinner with the family. I was worried about arrangements involving Ben’s allergy to cats, etc. and got all glum about the visit. Ben’s sharing of horrible traumas of his past life was so good to hear both to know him

better and that the former Catholics in the family and future ones should understand how great grace can be in healing the past.

Jesus: “I told you so! Please trust Me more. Please!

July 5, 2007

Recovery, Inc. tool I hadn’t heard before: “WHEN OUR WILL TO EFFORT IS GREATER THAN OUR WILL TO COMFORT WE GET BETTER.” Wow!

July 6, 2007

At the Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction Friday nights, Fr. Ken dons a full white vestment and carries the monstrance in procession around the Church into the aisle passing each adorer. I think he says prayers for healing for us as he does it. With his long beard and slow procession he looks like a medieval hermit. I think that my low blood sugar after years of high blood sugar with diabetes is a grace from these prayers.

I thought of starting Legion of Mary door to door here.

July 5’ 2007

Concerning starting my own group of Consecrated Widows, I had written to the diocese about it. They sent back lots of questions.

Jesus: I want you to be at peace more than I want associations. Think of St. Faustina who I told her order would begin before she died but it didn’t, except in germ. I want you to put it in outer boundaries and with My help stop the racing thoughts and now just respond to Sr. S. and/or the Bishop’s openings. You don’t need to know. At EWTN when you describe your way of life some will be inspired. Widows will be inspired who don’t do anything like trying to be consecrated widows or become part of an association or any group. They may just decide to go to daily Mass. Ronda, you are not the Holy Spirit. Let Him work with the openings we arrange. Now rest your feverish head in the lap of My mother and rest under her smile.

Maxi is being trained to be an altar server. I mentioned that he needed to make the sign of the cross more reverently at Mass. He must have taken it to heart because when showing off to me how he could do a cannonball into the pool today he made the sign of the cross going down!

July, 2007

I am reading about God destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though we don’t think exactly in OT ways about God, I think God certainly empowered the allies to stop Hitler.

But then as we became more and more powerful our history started looking more like how successively Greece, Rome, France, England, Germany, became corrupted by power each with its own specific flaws of character, a la St. Augustine's theory in The City of God. Our flaw I think is because of affluence.

I happened to listen to parts of the opera Boris Gudonov on the radio. It led to a whole line of thinking about how history is really tragedy, but because we were brought up right after WWII we tended to think that our history was not tragedy but victory. I thought and thought about this.

Jesus: I am the ONLY Way, Truth, and Life. The only way out is up!"

(The Ascension and the Assumption as archetypes of this!)

(I sent the gist of this to a few wise and Christian friends and this answer is the best so far from Gabriel Meyer, writer and journalist):

"Yes, I, too think that postwar American culture largely blinds us to the essentially tragic nature of history. As Newman says (darkly and unsparingly), "Everything in this world finally disappoints." There is a positive way to look at this, viz., that since our nature is made for God, only He can finally and adequately (or better, sufficiently) address the fundamental desires of human beings. All other things, even the best (love, art, beauty, etc.), are created to be appreciated, and received gratefully, but, in the end, reveal their radical insufficiency as ends. All created things are doors, opening onto the greater reality they suggest, but do not, indeed, cannot embody, and to which they invite. That, again, is to say that history is tragic because:

a) it, as human enterprise, is destined to fail (the apocalypse); in the end, God comes to save us from history; or, better, to reveal history as a drama of salvation;

b) it never fails to be paradoxical: victories are always simultaneously failures, failures contain their own victories, etc.

"Which is, again, to say that history is partial, never whole.

"The terrible truth, of course, is that this knowledge never permits us to refrain from acting in it decisively, and often sacrificially, as Jesus did (e.g., the last emperor of Byzantium in 1453, sacrificing himself to save his people even though he knew that the Ottomans would likely win and that his empire was doomed.)

"Like you, I think that unwillingness to sacrifice is a key element in the failure of contemporary western society, and its current crop of ills. We want to be the world hegemon and have the perks associated with that, but we want our wars to be short, decisive and bloodless (for us). This attitude, of course, is itself a sign of corruption.

Hegemons, by nature, are called not merely to power, but to sacrifice -- committing life and treasure to the defense of the defenseless and to the imposition or restoration of order.”

July 8, 2007 It is darling Martina’s 2nd birthday. We had a beautiful celebration as Carla always makes it. What was especially sweet was the love on the faces of the boys and Steve and Carla and Amy.

Jesus: They (Carla and Steve) are suffering so much (trying to stop smoking) – be very gentle with them.

(They went back to smoking then, but now in 2013 both of them have given it up, Carla for many years with the help of the e-cigarette and Steve with will-power – of course graces he doesn’t believe in but I do.)

July 9, 2007

For years I have been fantasizing and plotting how to wind up in an old age home that would have the Eucharist and interesting conversations both. Well, my parish now, with Adoration and many deep and interesting people to talk to, most of them around my age, is really a form of this and cheaper, too. I don’t have to organize the building of it or administer it!

July 11, 2007

I had a dream. In it I was in a car and a priest was the driver. He said, “I love you and I will take care of you.” I felt so safe. I realized I am usually in my life in the driver’s seat and it is scary! At Adoration I saw that the priest was a symbol of Jesus and He wants me to feel loved and secure regardless of the ups and downs of life.

I met a parishioner whose son of 11 drowned in a pool. I had been trying to find the family to see if I could help them in their grief since I know what it is to have a son who died. I told him that my manuscript Weeping with Jesus was an e-book and he grabbed onto that more than to the offer a visit by me. He read 50 pages in one evening. How wonderful that God is using my writings now more and more. Amy said that she thought that my writing is my true self, even more than me in conversation where I can seem more gruff. Probably so.

July 12, 2007

Jesus seemed to kiss me on the forehead because of the link with the father of the drowned son and others in the Spirituality of the Emotions group. This particular image came many years ago, shortly after Charlie’s death. I was on a long car drive to the ordination to the priesthood of a friend. I took a nap and during that nap had a mystical dream of Jesus

kissing my forehead and leaving a triangular white mark invisibly, such as one might find on the forehead of a stallion. From time to time the same image comes.

I also got a word that when people are very broken God wants to help them through us, but still they have to face the limitations of human love just as everyone has to and eventually come primarily to God for that healing.

July 13, 2007

My second session in the parish for Spirituality of the Emotions went wonderfully. I was so scared there would be people coming who were uncontrollably emotionally disturbed. Either they are on medication, which I am told is excellent for some people, even if medicines can be abused and bad for others, or God's grace descended, but they are getting the idea of analyzing daily life in terms of trying to reduce negativity and they like the prayer being part of it. I managed to write the drafts for all 7 sessions, and the next five audios will come all together this week.

My plan is after the 7 to work on one emotion at a time. Yesterday a friend came over – (mother of 12! now dealing with the empty nest - and our conversation raised to consciousness a lot of rejection feelings I had from a group of highly scholarly people who don't understand my "touchy feely" methods. So on the spot we did a phenomenology of feeling rejected by critical people. What emerged the most was that emotional health means that we value our own and God's approval and worry not at all about the approval of others. Of course if we had rather critical parents we will feel the sting, but we have to bear that sting and then lift it to God and let Him give us love.

A spirituality book I read had this provocative line in it:

"Most people prefer to be deemed lovable than to experience love itself." Is this an explanation for why workaholics like me often choose projects over quiet prayer time?

I thought some more about this. It's not that simple. There is nothing wrong in itself in wanting to be lovable if that means lovable because of being a good person with lots of love in me. In heaven all we will experience is love and being loved but here on earth many of us are called to be more active and have our minds on doing good and then feeling good that others think we are lovable. This might require a lot more thought than I want to give it right now.

July 14, 2007

Jesus: You can still do lots of things in one day but then you become rattled. Plan for less if you want to keep in peace.

July 15, 2007 Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Mary seemed to tell me that when I rock (dovening in Jewish worship) while I pray, it is she rocking me in a cradle, so to speak. A very comforting image.

There was a glitch on getting my messages on the web. I was less upset than usual.

Jesus: Good. You don't get so upset as you used to. All these projects are good, but see, my mother's only project was Joseph and Me. For you that means don't worry about success and follow up on projects. Have faith that I can use you in many different ways.

Me: This would mean surrendering Spirituality of the Emotions, Association of Widows, Deacon Candidates and their Wives, and all these projects to You. I understand that you want me to do them quietly but not to clutch on follow up plans for fear I will have nothing to do and everything will dry up. There will always be the journals and, Jesus reminded me, if I become a saint people will read those journals! I think He was amusing me with this proviso.

Two little children came into the chapel during Adoration with their mother to light candles. I greeted the mother.

Mary: You can greet all mothers the way Elizabeth greeted me. That is a little pro-life deed for you.

Mary also told me how much she loves one of my new friends and is helping her to know Jesus in the Church. I should love her by meeting her needs, not necessarily her wants, and then trust.

July 19, 2007

Metaphysics of Priesthood

**A good priest IS his priesthood;
in time, less and less non-priesthood.**

He wears his soul on his vestment.

**His people feel they know him well;
Though he talks little about himself,**

**For more and more his self-revelation
is word and sacraments.**

“Not I, but Jesus lives in me.”

Jesus says:

**“Behold, my beloved son,
In whom I am well-pleased.”**

**I was reading a book about Sarah Web Rice, a black teacher, servant and ministry woman.
It was an oral history book.**

Jesus: See all the goodness in her and how I helped her in spite of her sins?

**Notice all the good things that happened today. You have prayed mightily for these graces
and we, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, have granted them.**

Me: Yes, thank you Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Jesus: Now rest in my arms.

July 21, 2007

**Jesus: You will have peace when you realize in depth that it is not you but I who am the
Savior of the world, including the savior of you!**

July 22, 2007 Feast of St. Mary Magdalene

**Jesus: I could make a saint of Mary Magdalene, so surely you don't need to think your sins
of the past stop me.**

July 26, 2007

Even though I generally hate Philip Roth's porno novels, I read this one, since highly recommended, about his trip to Israel. Here are some marvelous quotes from *Operation Shylock* (p. 332 ff) on Jews and conversation:

Jews among Jews are famous for “angry disputes, verbal abuse, malicious backbiting, mocking gossip, scoffing, faultfinding, complaining, condemning, insulting – the blackest mark against our people is not the eating of pork, it is not even marrying with the non-Jew; worse than both is the sin of Jewish speech. We talk too much, we say too much and we do not know when to stop. Part of the Jewish problem is that they never know what voice to speak in. Refined? Rabbinical? Hysterical? Ironical? Part of the Jewish problem is that the voice is too loud. Too insistent. Too aggressive. No matter what he says or how he says it, it's inappropriate. Inappropriateness is the Jewish style. Awful. (from the thoughts of a Chasidic Rabbi Chofetz Chaim: ‘For each and every moment that a person remains silent, he earns a reward too great to be conceived of by any created being.’ “Grant me that I should say nothing that is unnecessary and that all my speech should be for the sake of Heaven,.” ...when a Jew is as angry as you are, there is almost nothing harder for him than to control his speech. ..Where did the Jew get it in his head that he has always to be talking, to be shouting, to be telling jokes at somebody's expense, to be analyzing over the telephone for a whole evening the terrible faults of his dearest friend?

In his old age Chofetz Chaim extolled his deafness because it prevented him from hearing (that kind of Jewish speech). According to Chaim making derogatory remarks (called *loshon hora* (Yiddish?) about others even in jest, even without mentioning names, even if it is common knowledge, about relatives, about in-laws, about children, about the dead, about heretics and ignoramuses and known transgressors, even about merchandise is all forbidden even if someone speaks badly of you. Otherwise all you have is “everyone feeling wronged, being hurt, bristling at insults and slights, everything everybody says taken as a personal affront and a deliberate attack. “Between Anti-Semitism on the one side and *loshon hora* on the other, being squeezed to death is the beautiful soul of the Jewish people.”

Back to Roth's character who says (p. 21) “The conflict is not just between Jewish people but within each Jewish person. “Inside every Jew is a mob of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. Is it any wonder the Jew is always disputing? He is a dispute, incarnate! Is it any wonder that he is always talking, that he talks imprudently and impulsively and

thoughtlessly and embarrassingly and clownishly and that he cannot purify his speech of ridicule and insult and accusation and anger?

...They came to Freud, the talking Jews, and what did Freud tell them? Keep talking. Say everything. No word is forbidden...and to Freud they spoke such loшон hora as was never heard from the mouths of Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple.”

July 30, 2007

Mary: Every time you think of someone’s unloving faults, stop and pray a Hail Mary for that person.

July 31, 2007

I was expecting that as we got closer to the Presidential election there would be more tension in the parish over the abortion issue in relation to candidates. Sure enough, I got into a debate about this yesterday.

I realized it was a Recovery, Inc. example, especially in relation to the concept of needing to accept the averageness of other people vs. projecting ideal situations of perfect agreement and basking in the truth with others and then being outraged when that cannot be achieved.

Here is how I analyze the averageness of this conflict:

It is average for many Catholics to distrust Republicans, identifying the Democratic party with compassion and thinking Republicans are hard-nosed capitalists, etc. etc. And, of course, some Republicans fit that stereo-type. In fact because of some social justice issues, I would vote Democratic myself if abortion (the 50,000,000 million dead babies) were not an issue. Therefore such democrats want to down-play the abortion issue so they can vote democratic.

As one mentor pointed out, many of these democrats are not pro-abortion, even though they will vote Democratic, even voting for a known pro-choice candidate.

It is average for some Catholics, often even more Catholics who left the Church and returned, to think of pro-lifers as judgmental if not fanatic. Since some returned Catholics suffered themselves greatly as children from harsh conservatives, we are tarred with the same brush, especially when we vehemently defend pro-life positions.

It is average for some leaders in situations where there are several viewpoints expressed to hope for mutual influence and growth vs. the tendency of pessimistic melancholics such as me, especially because I am also a Crusader, to go for fight or flight (leave, not the parish, but the group where disputes arise or fight with even great sarcasm) and want an immediate total public condemnation of the opposing viewpoint. “Symbolic victory?” – as

if some penalty for the opposing voice in my parish would solve the national problem which we are too weak to win at this point?

It is average for me to hate ambiguity, and hate to have to endure any ambiguity for the sake of preserving the good part of any situation.

Jesus seemed to counsel me concerning this situation: “Pray to the Holy Spirit for those who disagree with you on election and the abortion issue. I want you to stay in that group, at least for now. The leader of it says he wants you to express your views. Especially for the sake of your upcoming anti-contraception work in this setting you should not flee from the group.”

I replied: Only you, Jesus, know how painful it is for me. With my pro-abortion childhood I am horrified that Jews after the Holocaust would be blind to the torture of the innocent in the womb. But, then, to see any in the Catholic Church, my refuge from error, not be crusaders against the slaughter of the innocent babies in the womb seems even worse.

But I love the leader involved in this group I am in right now, and also love some parishioners who will probably not vote Republican no matter how loud my voice. Send the Holy Spirit and my guardian angel to show me when to speak up and when to shut up. Send Mother Mary and St. Joseph to surround me with love so that I don't get rabid about this issue. You, Jesus, when on earth, were not a zealot, but a savior. I offer the pain of not speaking at the wrong times for the saving of the lives of more babies, whether because of legal changes or the changes of heart which my leader thinks are even more important.

August 1, 2007 - message via Anne or Ireland – Direction for Our Times

(From now on I will copy the locutionary Anne's way to just put what I think Jesus said as “Jesus:” instead of saying every single time something like” it seems as if” which is awkward, but I do mean “allegedly.”)

Jesus

A small child often prays that God will help him to be good. This prayer is pleasing to God. Indeed, which prayer is more pleasing? A child prays this prayer in humility and simplicity from a pure heart seeking even greater purity. It is this purity of heart that all apostles must seek. Each day should be filled with brief prayers of this kind. If an apostle wishes to reside with the Father, that apostle must become the child of the Father. God has no equal. Do not seek greatness. Seek goodness. My beloved ones, you know that I love you and that I am grateful for your service. You know that I am pleased with your progress. Do you wonder why your Jesus calls you constantly further into holiness? Do I do this for My benefit? Yes. I do. I take great joy in seeing you advance, it is true. And yet, it is for your own personal benefit, also, that I call you to strive for higher heights. I want you to become

as holy as you can. As your holiness increases, my friends, so does your peace. As your peace increases, so does the peace in this world. It is for many reasons, all similar to these, that I beckon you to come further and further into My heart. You are called to come closer to Me and move further from distractions. You turn your face toward heaven and in doing so you turn your face away from the world, which seeks to draw you away from Me. For today, pledge your allegiance to the Father and then strive to become holier. “Father, help me to be good.” In each moment of your life there is an opportunity for goodness. Find the opportunities and try. Exert yourself, my beloved ones. Work for your holiness. If you were participating in a game, you would try to win. I want you to participate in your movement to holiness. I want you to make efforts throughout each day to choose the holiest course. I am with you in each moment, helping you. If you, my beloved apostles, will work with Me to become holier, I can reach others through you. You are loved.

August 1, 2007.

Conchita (Venerable Concepcion de Armida, the grandmother saint of Mexico who I have mentioned earlier in this journal) from Seasons of the Soul:

“In wintertime, the soul does not have to wander, but to recollect herself...for veteran souls, I might say, it is the period in which they fly to the tabernacle with greater enthusiasm, and there they allow the poison to drain away, the bad blood to run off, burning at the feet of Jesus all the wood that has been pruned, watching it kindle, in the pain, but at the same time consoled for these pieces of the heart are incense for the Beloved.”

Me: Reading Conchita – I will never be like her, loving suffering and abasement.

Jesus: Now, she had a saint for a mother and a beautiful childhood. From where you come up from, you are doing fine. Leave it to me. I have St. Conchita; I want St. Ronda.

Me: I keep thinking now things will be easier because the outer form of my life is easier.

Jesus: Only I know what you need to be unified, so lie still under the knife of life as it comes to you.

Me: I will try to surrender.

(I asked Mary to pray in me, and she seemed to say):

Mary: Pray Yeshua Shalom

August 2, 2007

Fr. Ken likes the idea for a Returning Catholic like program but with another title. The idea is to have us go 2x2 with each pair having a Hispanic and an anglo and have the group including planners, speakers, intercessors as well as door to door people all be magisterial Catholics.

Jesus: You see I am working on you to be less pessimistic. I want to channel angry energy into good plans.

Me: Great joy in finishing final version of EWTN widow series outlines.

Mary: I will give you joy in having sister souls as you live this way. Be of good cheer.

August 5, 2007

Jesus: We, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,, will help you now that you have made prayer your priority after daily Mass, to make us the center and highlight of your day, gradually subordinating the works so that our spirit may be infused in them more. I want you to have plenty of time for all widows: dedicated or otherwise.

August 6, 2007

Mary: Dear little one, busy and troubled about many things. Of course, we have used you in spite of your faults which you are so ashamed of. I want to teach you to breathe better, as my son Fr. Ken suggests, especially when you pray. Let me breathe in you for the rest of this prayer time.

August 6, 2007

Ragpicker Priest

We clutch our rags of sin

tightly around us

as if adornments

or, at least, necessities.

Our priest deliberates:

tear off those rags?

I've power and wit

But, maybe not.

**Naked, they might rush
to buy but another
tattered coat
from Satan's supermarket.**

**I prefer to weave
a cloak of hope
and offer it from
Jesus' bargain basement.**

**Sundays,
I invite them:
"Come and get it,
Confession is at 4."**

**"Robes of hope
for rags of sin,"**

**The rags they shed
I offer to the Prince of Peace
For nothing less than heaven!**

August 7, 2007

Me: I feel as if almost everyone has some impossible trait that blocks them from progressing.

Jesus: That is true, but they survive and make slow advances. That is grace. You also have impossible blocks but with my grace you make slow advances!

The parish had a cook out for altar servers. I brought Maxi. He loved playing with groups of boys: hoops, volley ball, and touch football. I came back to news of more Book Nook interviews at EWTN. I felt overwhelmed with joy that these books will get more publicity and readership.

Jesus: You wrote all those books for Me. Of course I want them read. Let us rejoice together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

August 8, 2007

I am having anxiety about the EWTN trip.

Jesus: You are not going alone! Your Holy Family is going, too, and we will help you. It will be easier than you think. We want to “show you off.” Take everything that is difficult from moment to moment and see it as humorous.

From Conchita – A Mother’s Letters

“Love achieves all things! Love is giving. When this donation is not yet perfect it is desire; when it is accomplished, love is peace; when it is eternal it is bliss.”

August 9, 2007

A delightful sign from God. During Mass yesterday I got as a possible name for the outreach to Catholics no longer attending Church could be “Home is Where the Heart Is.” Father Ken liked it. Then last night Mary Schunke, who is one of the team, handed me a note saying she got in prayer that a possible title would be Home is Where the Heart Is!

Jesus: See, we are encouraging you.

Me: Also eleven people are interested in a follow up for Spirituality of the Emotions. This feels like a confirmation that it is something good to continue. More people than I guessed. Alleluia (You can find audios of this series on www.rondachervin.com audios)

Today I added up all the different things I will be involved in at the parish in the Fall and was delighted: Eucharistic Adoration, Christian Writers, Support Group for Spirituality of the Emotions, Why Catholic, Widows and Grieving, Home is Where the Heart Is, Library Expansion, RCIA, Hispanic Charismatic Praise and Worship

I feel giddy with joy that all this has unfolded for me. I am so happy.

Also, as if in confirmation of Association Widows of the Holy Family, Fr. Ken gave me a beautiful icon of the Holy Family. I put it above the Chartres lamp so it will glow at night.

Envy: We are seldom envious of others for being more loving. We are envious mostly of their natural gifts and that is a form of spitting at God for giving us less natural gifts than someone else – telling Him that natural gifts, which are only means to building the kingdom of love, are more important than love which He gives each of us abundantly for the asking and is the greatest gift!

I am thinking of the envy I saw in women who used to come up to me at talks and say “I can’t say anything to someone like you with all your credentials and accomplishments because I’m only a housewife,” as if loving many children every day were less important!

This must be related to “blessed are the poor in spirit?”

August 20, 2007: End of 7 Day trip to EWTN potentially reaching 70 million people and re-runs! So draining and awesome. Draining because most of the series was taped and only the camera and the tech men who don’t smile and clap – they sometimes smiled or affirmed after a show but not during it. I live so much on affirmation!

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We saw you through. You were too tense to talk to us much, but we understood that. We used Recovery techniques to help you. We and your angel use everything we can to help you.

Me: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Jesus: Now we will bless the effort. Let go. Be at peace and be carefree, do everything slowly.

August 22, 2007

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We are teaching you through your work on Emotions. Keep working on peace above efficiency, slowly not jamming in so much in each day. Do slowly first what has to be done and then even more slowly the other things.

Von Balthasar The Three Fold Garland: “When giving her assent Mary was alone, since at receiving one’s decisive mission for life, everyone must stand alone before God and say yes.”

I was thinking that my decisive mission in the Church is to popularize Catholic wisdom for the laity and being a wife and mother made that mission different than if I had tried to reach the laity as a single person or a Sister. But there was always tension between home and apostolate and I need to accept that this was a cross to have to feel inadequate as a

mother because of always having my mind, if not my hands, on my spiritual work. Golda Meier wrote eloquently about that. Even though she deeply loved her children she felt called to her political work and always felt she had cheated them even when they didn't feel that.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: We want you to rejoice now in these last years of your life in how we used everything in your life in spite of your sins of co-dependency and anger.

Because popularizing Catholic wisdom is my vocation, I think that brings me especially close to seminarians and priests who have the same call.

The class at Lenoir Rhyne College in Spirituality of the Emotions went wonderfully. It was so healing after the miseries of last year this time to have students who liked me and were eager to hear what I had to teach vs. so many in the core required courses who either tolerated or persecuted me.

August 23, 2007

It was a joy to go through my EWTN series using Recovery techniques of pre-spotting the averageness of the problems and working around them vs. being overly angry at every glitch.

I see that now that I have no huge "glamorous" projects in the offing or the intense creativity of writing, that I need to follow Mother Teresa's maxim: "to do little things with great love."

I am also reminded of my friend and publisher Jim Gilboy who says of difficulties "I will do whatever it takes to get this done." I am thinking of the many steps to make it possible for Senora Magdalena to get that video. (I had Terri, at the parish, make a photo of myself with Senora Magdalena, who I described earlier in this journal, who walks 3 hours to get to daily Mass. We drive her home when she comes. So I featured her photo on the EWTN widow series as an example of making sacrifices to get to daily Mass and then got a copy of the video of that program to give to her and her family.

August 25, 2007

I was anxious about a car glitch and so worried about what it might cost I got into endless speculations of ways to get rid of the car and pay someone to drive me around. I asked St. Joseph for help. He seemed to suggest calling my son-in-law, Steve, who remarked wryly: A person doesn't cut off his foot because he has a splinter in it. Why not wait until you have the estimate?"

It turned out to be a little thing Steve could fix himself in a few minutes.

I went to the charismatic Hispanic prayer meeting and sat through the whole meeting understanding the Spanish better. Miguel, who wants to be a deacon, is such a strong leader. My thought was that since when we go door to door doing Home is Where the Heart Is we cannot know until the door opens whether the person is Hispanic or Anglo it is especially important that we go 2x2 with a Hispanic and an Anglo evangelist. It also shows that our parish is both.

Jesus: I want you to see what I am doing with the Hispanics – the fire, the energy, so that they can feel your appreciation as an old charismatic speaker, and you can be a bridge.

August 27, 2007

Ruth, my friend the iconwriter gave me the exquisite large icon she made of St. John the Baptist. She said that the Holy Spirit told her to give it to me.

Jesus: About John the Baptist, if you want to suffer for Me, like him, you will not be afraid and peaceless.

August 29, 2007

I was upset about a Sister who gave a talk here. . I endorsed for progress not perfection in correcting her without being as harsh as I formerly would have been.

Jesus: I am working with those who are still in the Church. Offer it up. Stay in those situations which arise and when you feel you have to correct someone always do it “speaking the truth with love.”

August 30, 2007

I somewhat comically told Father Ken I was going to ask him before next Lent what was fundamentally wrong with me. He replied immediately:

“You don’t have to wait. I know exactly what’s wrong with you: it’s that you think there is something fundamentally wrong with you.”

I laughed and laughed but saw the truth in it. In Recovery, Inc. terms it is the tragedy queen syndrome. I want dramatic things to be wrong with me vs. I’m just the usual careless but ardent Catholic who sins many times a day in spite of all the effort and that’s okay (it’s not going to earn me hell, I mean.)

September 1, 2007

Thinking about women past a certain age not wanting to have photos made, my experience was that I felt much more ugly after my husband died because even though his attitude

toward my looks was sometimes critical, he could remember what I looked like when I was younger. And, besides, he often touched my face and that made me feel loved.

It is important, I think, that when we look at ourselves in the mirror or in photos that we look to see if our expression is loving vs. do we look good. It helps me to think of how beloved the old lines face of Mother Teresa is. We should also think of how the Ascended Jesus must have looked down at Mary's face on earth which was surely older than her face when he looked up at her from his babyhood!

Sept 1, 2007

Jesus – from Anne of Direction for Our Times:

Dear Apostles, I send you a spirit of gentleness. Because you are called to treat others as I treated others, you are called to be gentle with all those around you. This call to gentleness in no way diminishes the call to live in the truth. If you preach the truth as I did, gently, you will draw others to us and to unity of thought and action. In this time, when it is so important that souls be brought back into the family of God, we must be ever so careful to be gentle with others in each interaction. I am Jesus. I am filled with love for each soul you encounter, regardless of their condition. View each person through My love and treat them with My gentleness. My dearest apostle, in order to allow yourself to heal from any wounds you yourself suffer, you must allow Me to minister to you. I am tender hearted with your failings. Remember this and do not turn away from Me when you feel you have failed. If you do not allow Me to minister to you during periods of unrest, you will be vulnerable to the distortions which can be sown by the enemy. Apostles walking with Me inspire hope in the world. This is the plan. But My friends must remember that apostles walking with Me also inspire fear in the enemy. The enemy's fear causes him to lash out at the friends of the Returning King. Be at peace in this as it has always been this way and there is no reason for anything but confidence in My plan for each day of every life. At the same time, be prepared to do battle for your holiness as I did battle. If you remain with Me, the battles will make you stronger and holier. That is My goal. Accept the gentle ministrations of your Saviour in silence and you will then be an able carrier of this gentleness to others. Beloved friends, so loyal to your God, you will stand out if you are gentle and it is this that I need from you. I need you to stand out as calm and gentle representatives of the different way. The world will remember you for your gentleness if you allow Me to teach you. You are not called to change the world. I am called to change the world. You are called to represent Me accurately so that I have the opportunity with each soul you encounter. Through your love, your kindness and your gentleness, you will create heavenly opportunities for Me in the people around you. I will never miss an opportunity, I promise you. I make the best possible use of your efforts. I thank you dear friend. Your fidelity to the Father will not be forgotten.

When I was thinking of leaving North Carolina, I heard these words in my heart:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph: Just trust. You belong first to us in the Church. You are a pilgrim widow. We want it all to us now.

September 4, 2007

Amy suggested I do a 365 meditation book since she likes daily meditations.

JMJ: Yes, but do it slowly and of course we will help you to transfigure it so it is not too “just do it, folks!”, but really possible for the reader to combine the insight and the prayer.

First sample meditation:

CONTROL vs. RELEASE

“...that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will.” (Philemon: 14)

Parenting, managing a work place, or policing, are examples of necessary control. Micro-managing or trying to fix everyone, however, is excessive and inappropriate. Why is it wrong to try to straighten people out? Isn't loving concern a virtue? Yes and no. Wishing others to do what is good is right. The fault lies in trying to override their right to make free decisions.

God, whose judgment is perfect, rarely coerces us. When Eve ate the apple and Adam followed suit, God did not blast the apple out of their hands or reduce the serpent to ashes. At the Passion, God did not annihilate His son's torturers. So why do *we* think that we have the right to badger others? “Let go, let God,” is a phrase we need to tell ourselves frequently, so that we can release others into the hands of the Lord.

Prayer: Father God, you are the Lord of our lives. I want to release to you each person I try to control. (List each person) I release (name) _____ into Your heart and hands. Forgive me for my controlling habit. If you want to use me to help them, show me a way not to command but to suggest in a gentle and loving way. Please pour out Your graces on them that they may be ultimately saved.

“Into Your hands I commend my spirit and the spirit of (name)_____”

I started working on this book with Amy's editorial help but it never got finished, however the idea eventually became *The Way of Love: a 100 Day Spiritual Marathon*. See my web for information.

Sept. 6, 2007

A friend said that he had given up even wanting to control other people.” Astounding!

Talking about Recovery, Inc. and why I am so fond of the phone members even though I cannot see them, a friend said, “it is not because you have the same problems, but because you have the same lifeboat.”

September 8, 2007

Hispanic Prayer Meeting.

I wanted to say: do you pray for us? Do you think I am the only Anglo who needs to cry aloud to God?

Me: Jesus, why do I like this so much in spite of everything that is different from my beloved 9 AM choir with beautiful traditional music?

Jesus: It gets you out of yourself and your little mental knots and worries into My reality. Also because of the force of the others – you experience the Mystical Body through them.

Regarding a dispute with some others, I wondered if I was wrong to press the Church’s teaching.

Jesus: No. That’s why I gave you the icon of John the Baptist. He was murdered over a sex issue. You must fight for what is right and even if you slip into uncontrolled anger in spite of your efforts not to, that doesn’t mean you are wrong in this case. Accept the cross of fear of being alienated if that comes. I will be with you.

(The following Stations of the Cross for Widows I put up on my web. I did it myself a few times with each widow reading a Station in various parishes)

STATIONS OF THE CROSS FOR WIDOWS

Blessed Mary, exalted widow, you followed your son Jesus on the way of the cross. Show us how to unite our sufferings to those of your son.

The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

Mary, did you wonder why your son, who was to be judge of all the living and the dead, had to stand before a Roman judge to receive an unjust sentence? Now that we are widows, we sometimes question God’s providence. Where is the drunk driver whose hit and run sentenced a husband to death? Why did God permit that a doctor made a mistake which led to a husband's death? Why did God permit that a doctor made a mistake which led to a husband’s death? If the paramedics came one minute earlier could they have saved him?

If there was anything we did or didn't do that hastened the day or the hour, why did our husbands have to suffer death instead of us?

Jesus, You are the Lord of my life. I know that you only permit to happen those things from which You can bring good. Help me to trust that You knew the day and the hour of my husband's death and that he is enfolded in Your Sacred Heart, now as then.

Second Station: Jesus Accepts the Cross

Mary, nothing you could say would have persuaded Jesus to evade the cross. At the time before our husband's deaths, many of us spent long hours at their bedsides, anticipating the separation that would come. We had no choice but to accept what we could not change. The heaviness of the cross often drained us, even as we persevered in hope of remission.

Jesus, You accepted all the crosses of enduring the human estate which lead to this end-time final wooden cross. Help us to know that You were with us during the drawn out pain of our husbands' last times on earth. Many times You wanted us to rest our weary heads in Your lap so that You could console us, but we were too busy coping to come to You. Now, as we look upon the second station and see You accepting Your cross, let us also see that You were holding us up as we helped our husbands.

Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Mary, you had to see your strong, manly son, fall down under the terrific weight of those beams. Did the waves of weakness you felt in your own body remind you of the grief you felt when Joseph died? We felt our own physical strength dwindle slowly until post-funeral time when we could hardly rise from our beds.

Jesus, when widows collapse under the strain of early widowhood, You never chide us for not taking up daily life tasks with our usual efficiency. Instead You are at our sides each

day and hover over us in our now solitary beds, sending invisible graces. May we never doubt Your love for us as You bring new strength to our new state of life.

Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

Mary, since the film, The Passion, we have no trouble imagining that encounter. Deeper even than shared joy is shared agony! Some of us widows looked into the eyes of our husbands as they left this world. Some of our spouses die away from us, or, instantaneously, without warning, with no chance to say goodbye.

Jesus, You knew Your mother's heart inside out. It comforted You to receive that last touch and glance, but also grieved You that You must be the cause of her pain. We thank you for family, friends, priests, and parishioners who were with us as we made the way of the cross with our husbands. And even if we were alone we believe that You, Jesus, Your mother, our angels and the widow saints were there. Let us never be so frantic in our widowhood that we push away the love of those who reach out to us.

Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

Mary, you wished you could carry that cross for your son. You must have sighed in relief to see Simon bearing the weight. As widows, even after many years, we can feel lonely, overwhelmed, and hopeless, desperately wishing for help.

Jesus, You, the God-man, let another help You when You were unable to keep going. Why, then, should we be too proud to beg? So often a cry brings assistance that never comes when we hide our weakness. In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit promises rewards to those who aid widows. Show us who can help us in our neediness...and, if there is really no one, let us always fall back on You, second bridegroom of widows, to strengthen our backs even if You allow the cross to still weigh us down.

Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Mary, most likely you knew this valiant disciple and saw the imprint of your son's face on that cloth, long after His ascension. Did you wipe the face of St. Joseph, and was the image of his face with you long after? When words can do little, gestures can do much. Some of us wiped the feverish sweat from the brows of beloved husbands. All of us treasure the image of our husbands, if not on a cloth, then in photographs.

Jesus, we hope our husbands asked forgiveness for their sins before their deaths even if we did not witness this, and so we believe that they are either in purgatory or heaven. We know that the full resurrected body will not be theirs or ours until after the Last Judgment. Yet, as we struggle along without them, we like to imagine the faces of our husbands looking down on us with compassion and, often, humor.

Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

Mary, refuge of sinners, more than any other witness, you understood how the cross of Jesus was part of the Father's plan of salvation. In your terrible distress at seeing your son fall once more, did you think of us sinners, through the centuries, coming to repentance? Did your heart rejoice to see us repenting as we prayed these very stations? During our long widowhood we have ample time to remember our fall from grace, those times when faults and sins hurt our spouses.

Jesus, give us courage to confess the major sins of our married lives in the sacrament of reconciliation. You want us to have peace. Help us to believe that, now in eternity, our husbands have repented of their sins against us. They are not now judging us harshly because they are participating in the compassionate love of Your sacred heart for themselves and for us.

Eighth Station: The Women Console Jesus

Mary, we imagine that the women who braved the jeering crowd to console Jesus on the way of the cross, may have, also, surrounded you when Joseph died. Surely they would not have left the mother of Love alone in her hour of need!. When we first became widows, more seasoned widows came forth to comfort most of us and inspire us with their survival skills and their trust in you and in Jesus.

Jesus, deep is the consolation You wish to pour into our frazzled and forlorn widow hearts. You would have us know that we are never, never, never, alone. But we need much grace to stretch ourselves beyond our senses to know You now in an even more intimate spiritual way than before. Only You can settle us down in the peace that comes with Your presence.

Ninth Station: Jesus Falls Again

Mary, in spite of your exalted unique privileges as Mother of God, you must have felt your status in the world fall when you were no longer known as the wife of Joseph but, instead, as a poor widow. Most widows in our times find our new state to be a “come down.” We find that instead of checking the “married” box on forms, we must, now, check the “widow” box. Sometimes our social life falls because we are not part of a couple. Often, our income falls as well.

Jesus, throughout Scripture, Your people were exhorted to honor needy widows. Purify our minds from negative images of widowhood in our society. Show us if You want to provide us with second husbands. In your new covenant we are offered a new consecrated state, living to serve Your church. If our new vocation is to have You as our second bridegroom, show us how.

Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped

Mary, stripping the clothing off a person by force is always a violent act. We wonder if you kept some of your son’s things after His death? Perhaps, you even kept some of Joseph’s

belongings? We cannot know for certain. After the death of our husbands, many of us found it a painful process to go through their possessions. It is as if we were stripping away those clothes, and stripping away the memories connected to those clothes. In another sense we feel stripped of everything our husband's presence meant to us, especially on anniversaries, birthdays, family holidays, and religious holy days.

Jesus, even though You teach us not to grieve as unbelievers do, You wept at the death of Lazarus and surely at the death of Joseph, (though it was not recorded.)

We might be surprised at some of the forms that grief takes, such as mourning over the clothing of a husband, We beg You to turn each experience of loss into gratitude for the good times and hope for reunion where our resurrected bodies will be clothed in unimaginable splendor. Let us also be glad to be stripped of the need for any useless things that we might have more money to give to the starving and homeless.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Mary, you had to watch one of the worst deaths ever devised. Nails, blood, wounds, horrible agonizing pain. At the crucifixion your face was surely not the beautiful one we know from the apparitions. As widows many of us witnessed the awful, gut-wrenching, unforgettable miseries our husbands had to go through. Crucifixion is ugly. Death is ugly. We watch ourselves becoming ugly –and not only because of the inevitable aging processes. Faces, previously more often expressive of light hearted joy, now, manifest more heavy sadness.

Jesus, our spiritual journey is to be an imitation of You. Can we imagine You running from the cross out of fear of marring the beauty of Your countenance? No.

We should wear our lines of grief, created by the endurance of love (till death do us part), as badges of honor. It is not wrong to dress attractively if we are hoping for a second husband, but if we want to live only for You, forgive us our feminine weakness in being overly-concerned about looking good and feeling depressed when we can't. Substitute for vanity with beauty of soul; shining in eyes that brim over with empathetic love for each other suffering person we encounter.

Twelfth Station: Jesus Died on the Cross

Mary, how often God surprised you, from the Annunciation on through all the mysteries of your life. Perhaps, you were hoping that somehow the resurrection would occur right at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Instead Jesus gave you the gift of the motherhood of His church, symbolized in the person of John, the beloved apostle.

Jesus, until the last moments, most of us prayed our husbands would be restored to health and in accidental deaths or those by suicide or murder, we might even have prayed over their bodies that they, like Lazarus, they could be raised from the dead to be with us on earth. Even as we pray for the souls of our husbands, show us who You want us to love in an intimate close way now. As we mourn, let our tears never blind us to the need for love in the people around us.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken from the Cross

Mary, great artists and sculptors have depicted the tender moment when you held the body of Jesus for the last time. Did you also remember holding the body of St. Joseph for the last time? How often we, widows, wish that we could see our husbands, once again, in the flesh and embrace them in love.

Jesus, You want us to grieve but not to beg for what is not Your will. Instead of physical contact with our husband's bodies, You want to stretch us to make contact with them through prayer. Please wean us from wanting what is gone and help us to want what we can have in a spiritual way now, and in eternity. Some widows experience the souls of their spouses with them always, and others, rarely, if at all. Help us to trust in the signs of eternal life You choose for each of us as individuals, Many of us have found healing graces through groups on bereavement and grief. If we could benefit from such ministries, help us to overcome our desire to hide our pain. Let us not reject what would bring hope.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Buried

Mary, some who write about you believe that Jesus first appeared to you, His mother, privately. We do not know how that was, but we do know that you understand how we feel at the burial of those we love. Even with the numbness that often comes with a death, the farewell at the gravesite is always poignant.

Jesus, You want to increase our faith in life eternal. In the meantime, You teach us to believe in Your mystical body, experienced in its highest form on earth at Holy Mass and in the reception of Holy Communion. Help us to believe that our communion with You at the sacred rites is also a communion with the one to whom we were joined in the sacrament of marriage. You have made saints of some widows, known to us, or hidden from the public eye. What more can we pray for than that, like them, our hearts be free from doubt, bitterness, anxiety and despair and be filled, instead, with the joys You send us (even as we suffer) and with love, love, and LOVE.

September 11, 2007

I am all tense about the announcing by me of the talk on Natural Family Planning I arranged. Suppose people hate me. I ran this through Recovery Inc. They said I was taking on too much responsibility. Yes! As coordinator, I only have to set it up. It is not my task to force others to come, or to make them agree.

September 12, 2007

Note: many of the alleged locutions that come to me from now on seem to come from the common voices and Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I interpret this to mean that they want me to be close to them as a family since the name of my little group is Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: See how we use the orderly traits in your personality to have you do positive things for the kingdom because of the required organization skills. Stop flagellating yourself. Your virtues from us outweigh your faults from you! Rest under our smile. You were hoping you could become peaceful all the time? It is all right. It is slow. We have to do it slowly because without your tumultuous excitement you would do nothing all day but read.

Little miracle: a woman Elvia from Venezuela originally but now a US widow sent me an e-mail about Dedicated Widows. She wants to visit me. It got lost in e-mail trash somehow but I went to trash to get something else and it leaped up. Thank you JMJ, widow saints, and guardian angel.

Mary: I am smiling, dear little Ronda. You don't really believe we are helping you, do you?

September 13, 2007

First group of Personality, Character and Prayer at my dear friend Karen Miller's house in Hickory, NC. 12 came. It went even better than I thought. It was more intimate because we know each other better from the previous series, Spirituality of the Emotions, and because it was in the small room. I felt the Holy Spirit with me in my responses.

Oh Jesus, Mary, Joseph, our angels, Augustine, St. Dymphna, Nouwen, Low, thank you for this answer to prayers and the help to me in giving these teachings and sharing my struggles.

September 14, 2007

I am reading Benedict XVI book *Jesus*. His theme is so simple and beautiful: Jesus brought God to man in a new way and to all.

September 16, 2007

Charismatic prayer meeting:

In the midst of the loud music, with a woman drummer who looks like a little girl, I was feeling delight, but then I felt my soul kind of leaving the world, not words, just taken up, lifted up in a soft quiet way.

After releasing a person I was mad at to God, I felt lots of sweet love for her.

September 17, 2007

What a beautiful end to Abishag, the lady of the Song of Songs, a novel of Pat Looper (a member of our Christian Writer's group.) I cried. I realized that my Song of Song times with Martin were real; that my hopes gave way to disillusion didn't mean the ecstatic love wasn't real. Like Ecclesiastes, - a time to sing, a time to mourn. In emphasizing that fantasy and idol worship leads to fallen idols etc. I had lost the memory of the joy in that romantic love.

RCIA about the first rituals for our candidates and catechumens Fr. Ken emphasized the need for touch – sacraments are physical. Laying on of hands give a sense of support. We experience God in things as Catholics vs. just thoughts or visions.

Fr. Ken took us through the beginning of the Bible – literal means what it, the passage, meant to the person who wrote it, not like a newspaper or history book. What counts is who, not how.

September 18, 2007

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph:

You can't figure it out when you think about people you love but can't help much with advice. You must trust. Remember we want to make you into a saint and you cannot become holy by figuring things out and trying to tidy them up, but by trust. Pray "Jesus I trust in You, throughout the retreat this weekend. Pray "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Trust" on your chaplet beads, since there is no peace without trust.

September 19, 2007

I went through a horrible mess with a scam. (It seems as if some Nigerian and South African thieves hi-jack g-mails – a known scam - and wrote to all friends in my name out of my whole 400 or so contacts on e-mail, asking them to send money to get me back to the USA from Africa where I had lost my wallet and papers and was marooned, presumably. I was very upset but didn't all together lose it. There was so much love from those who called, worried about me, and even strangers wanted to give money. I thought I should be in solidarity in my small way with all those who have been hurt much more by criminals. Some actually went to their banks to get money orders to send but, happily, bankers know all about this and disabused them of the need to send me money.

September 20, 2007

I suddenly saw a photo of a beautiful red poppy. It reminded me of Frank Sullivan on his death bed back in 1975 and how I got not a direct word from God to console me, but suddenly saw a beautiful poppy growing out of the crack in the sidewalk outside the hospital and it consoled me with a message of resurrection because of its beauty.

September 22, 2007 On Retreat at Cistercian Center in Georgia:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph:

We have brought you away so that you can see what is important. See how much you love your little apartment where you live with us! See how much you love St.Charles and Fr. Ken. Even though living away from the family is more detached, you will be able to love them better because of being more detached.

I had lots of prayer of quiet in the monastery chapel.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Here let us drown your anxieties in our love for you.

At confession I talked about not trusting that God can help my dearest ones even in a pit. The monk said that you can't just try to trust, you have to ask for the gift of trust. I did and I felt much peace.

More from Pope Benedict's Jesus book. He writes that the prophet does not have human security but talks to God as a friend. I thought, this is like Jesus, Mary and Joseph wanting to talk to me as a friend day by day!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Because you half don't believe it is really us, you don't take what we say to heart enough.

The Beatitudes are, first of all, says Pope Benedict, about how the disciples are poor, hungry, persecuted. He mentions that after the Babylonian exile 90% of the Jews were poor, so that it could no longer be thought that goodness leads to riches as many thought before that.

Writing about the Beatitudes, Pope Benedict says that anawim means meek. I thought that since anger is pseudo-power I need to be much more meek. Jesus wants to build a kingdom without power.

He notes that the diaspora was to make space for God in other lands.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: You cannot have it easier. If you have a prophetic gift, you cannot think that those who will not follow the truth will always still shower you with love for other reasons. You can speak the truth with more love, definitely, but still you will be persecuted.

September 23, 2007

I am re-reading *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton about South Africa. How it fits Benedict's Jesus book since it is about building the kingdom through love not violence.

Dealing on retreat with fear of being alone, I realize it would be good to think that even if everyone I love would die today, I would not be alone because Jesus, Mary, and Joseph would be with me. Let me ponder that and throw myself into their arms.

I thought, Jesus, you have not asked me to be alone on earth. You know, that as a twin and one with a mother who was so close, that it is worse for me than for some others to think of being alone. But You want me to ponder it so that You can deliver me from that fear. I am one with you, the Holy Family. It is not an accident that I call myself a Dedicated Widow of the Holy Family.

In my mind's eye I danced the hora with all three of them: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They seemed to tell me that I am a Hebrew Catholic woman and should be very joyful, exultant as in the Magnificat.

Mary: I am your mother. I danced with Jesus and Joseph in our home. Don't you want to dance?

As I often do, I am attracted very much to monastic ways, but also feel alienated when I am there. Mary seemed to say: we do other things with monks. You are not a monk. You are an old ecstatic charismatic, Catholic woman, one of a kind, so dear to us.

September 27, 2007

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Mass and adoration are the intense times of focus on God which will gradually expand to all day. Start the Jesus prayer to pray constantly.

September 29, 2007

My printer broke down and Carla and Alex couldn't fix it. I called a few places and they said it was probably dead. I felt led to go to a Knights of Columbus dinner and lo and behold there was a young man who fixes these things and comes to the home. Alleluia. Thank you St. Joseph for this help. (I always pray to St. Joseph for material helps.)

September 30, 2007

After a long hiatus 9 year old Zacko, one of my grandsons, suddenly said he wanted to go to Mass and then even though he seemed bored during it said he wanted to make his first communion and go to the little catechetics class! Alleluia.

October 2, 2007 Feast of Guardian Angels

I have prayed more this year to my guardian angel than previous years but still I could be more conscious of his presence and guidance and so today I pray:

Guardian angel, how much I need you. In spite of being a spirituality teacher, I have so much more to be purified of in my knotty, feisty little soul. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph joked they would like to micro-manage me if I would let them. Join them in that humungus task. Is there something you want to say to me today?

Guardian angel: Yes. Go more with the heart even if it hurts.

I am typing Charlie's suicide letter and Martin's poem, for Carla to send to a poet who lost someone to suicide. I had a sense of how only a suffering that great could make Martin cling to You, Jesus, as his only hope.

October 3, 2007

Fr. Ken went on priests' retreat this week. At the same time roofers hammered away during Adoration. I realized Mary must have heard this sound of carpentry. She probably prayed in depth in the night. But after half an hour I decided she probably went out to milk the goats when it got too bad. I wrote this poem about the week with the hammering instead of Fr. Ken's music.

Sede Vacante – September 30 – October 6

No glorious organ music –

Instead

Bang, bang, bang

Vile hammering on the roof...

Beneath, your flock

Abandoned,

Grazed aimlessly...

Ruefully we pondered

in our fright

“with what could we dare

to bribe God

to make it

that our returned

shepherd

live so long

that he will

bury each of us

before, for good,

508

he also depart.”

October 1, 2007 Dictated to Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My beloved apostles, please be alert to My will. At no time should you fear that I do not have a perfect plan for you. Sometimes you make decisions that are not consistent with My plan. Sometimes these decisions cause you pain and cause others pain. It is most especially at these times that you should seek Me because I will adapt My plan for you to fit your present circumstances. I am always seeking to bring you closer to Me, never more so than when you believe you have left the path through temptation or sin. When should you believe that you are on your own? Never. In which circumstances will My heart be so hardened that I will refuse to rush in with forgiveness and grace and an alternative plan for you? Such circumstances do not exist. My dearest little apostles, be assured of My willingness to work with you in each moment, regardless of your condition in that moment. In humanity, there are moments of such holiness that even heaven stops to marvel. In humanity, there are also moments of weakness and cruelty. Please believe that heaven takes the bad with the good and moves each willing soul toward greater and greater good. Heaven draws you away from temptation and away from the pain of sin. I am good, My friends, as My Father is good. You, My beloved apostles, are called to resemble Me and be good also. You strive for this, I know. Today I ask that each apostle consider that I treated others with kindness. I have instructed you about gentleness and today I instruct you about kindness. Little apostles, the hearts of others are easily wounded. Can you remember when someone treated you unkindly? Do you remember your pain? I was treated unkindly at times and My heart felt this same pain. We do not want this for others. We want others to understand that God loves them and you, My friends, will do that when you treat them with the kindness of the Father. I will help you if you allow Me. I will teach you to remain silent in the presence of other's faults and I will teach you to speak openly about their strengths. Pause again and try to think of a kindness that was shown to you. Do you remember how you felt at that time? You felt grateful, did you not? You felt steadied. I want to flow through you to others. You will allow Me to do so if you work each day on being kind to each person you encounter. Their pain will lessen because of your kindness. The pain of the whole world will be reduced if each of My beloved apostles learns to be kind. Begin by being kind to yourself. I accept you, My friend. You must accept yourself. Be at peace in My love for you. I do not give you an instruction without also giving you the grace to carry it out.

October 4, 2007

I am feeling anxious about the new group in the parish I will lead.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: You are pre-carrying the emotional brokenness of the ones who will come. We don't want you to do this as a sage only, but also as an intercessor, which means suffering with them.

October 7, 2007

I felt your blessings, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, on all the work I did in the parish announcements at the Masses of activities some might feel alienated by such as the talks on why contraception is wrong and natural family planning right or the door to door effort.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We do bless you. We know what it costs you and it is good and we will bring the fruit.

October 8, 2007

I had a long talk with Fr. Ken about a diocese wide youth chastity retreat where he thought that, if reported correctly, it was coercive to try to get them to make a chastity pledge out of fear of STDs. I wondered if it was because teens are rebels that they need to be free of pressure. He said it is not pressure but illegitimate pressure he objects to. I asked: but didn't Jesus use threats of hell? And why wouldn't they freely make a chastity pledge anyhow if they come from real Christian homes? Home-schoolers would certainly take such a pledge.

I asked Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and they seemed to say:

"Since sin is so tempting, they need a counterweight of fear, but it should not be so overwhelming that there is no love in it. You can't control the way others teach or omit to teach. You teach it right and pray for them."

October 9, 2007

Pope Benedict XVI "It is not the word of the prophet mainly but the sufferings that bring down grace." I realized that there is no way I can take a prophetic stance in the parish without suffering.

October 12, 2007

It seemed like a hard day. Then at the Hispanic Adoration where they prayed and sang in tongues with tears and there was one who swooned in the spirit, I realized it was a day of love, even if it was hard.

October 15, 2007

Another Personality Typology

This is a typology many centuries old. I, Dr. Ronda Chervin, believe that it is separable from its history and its real value lies in helping us see the negatives and positives of nine basic ways that we may choose to deal with the basic difficulties of life after the Fall. As you read, see if one of them fits you a lot of the time and pray for insight and grace, and a plan to avoid the negative side of your predominate way of dealing with the evils and pains of the world.

1. Crusader – come against evil forcefully

Positive: energetic leadership and courage

Negative: rage and vengeance

Suggested prayer: deep, quiet prayer for divine help

2. Helper – desire to help with any need of others at any time

Positive: good-hearted, compassionate, good deeds

Negative: smothering, nagging

Suggested prayer: trust in God to help when your help fails or is rejected.

3. Organizer – tries to overcome conflict and chaos through harmonizing needs

Positive: prudent, dedicated, moderate, sense of balance – good administrator

Negative: sometimes fails to acknowledge depth of problems and pain involved in an effort to smooth things over. Can compromise in illegitimate ways as in appeasement.

Suggested prayer: ask to be more in touch with the Cross of Jesus and of others

4. Creative Person – tries to bring beauty and innovation to ugly or dull situations

Positive – brings more beauty, delight, freshness, breakthroughs

Negative – in transcending to creativity sometimes ignores small important needs of others, may dislike necessary detail and shirk it.

Suggested prayer: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you in each moment what is good to do even if it is dull or annoying.

5. Thinker-Spectator – seeks truth and wisdom

Positive – sees overall picture, wise, sage counsel

Negative – can become too detached, may seem cold to family and friends, may not see what needs to be done in the small picture.

Suggested prayer: Pray to the Holy Spirit for greater commitment to God's will in daily life, and more warmth of heart.

6. Follower – is willing to obey and serve a leader

Positive – will do much work as a humble helper without questioning everything or rebelling. Great when it is a good leader.

Negative – may follow a bad leader out of weakness and then feel crushed if the leader fails. Lacks initiative. Lost when there is no leader around.

Suggested prayer: Study Church teaching and history to avoid exciting but false leaders. Pray for discernment about leaders.

Pray to serve what is good in what leaders want vs. blind service.

7. Pleasure Seeker – full of love of life, wants to maximize joy and avoid pain

Positive – fun loving, brings joy to others through cooking, celebrations, humor, lightness.

Negative – can be unfocused jumping from pleasure to pleasure and/or addicted to destructive means of lightening pain

Suggested prayer: Gratitude for the good in life, but praying for acceptance of pain in life and for courage to avoid addictions.

9. Controlling – Protective - to avoid evil, chaos, and suffering for others tries to control misguided others.

Positive: Willing to go to great sacrificial lengths to protect others. Is often right about what needs to be changed in others so they will suffer less.

Negative: domineering, micro-managing, coercive

Suggested prayer: Pray of trust that God can ultimately protect others. Accept God's love for free-will.

10. Peace-making – eager to bring peace to self and others by avoiding task-oriented blind sighted mechanisms for living that ignore deepest needs of human beings.

Positive: available for counsel, good at overcoming anger in self and others. Can be mediators.

Negative: Can be too optimistic. Can be inefficient and unreliable due to lack of attention to needed requirements of family or work life. Can seek “peace at any price.”

Suggested prayer: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what is needed moment by moment to bring a limited peace even if overall peace is difficult to achieve. Ask God each day – what can I do more to make life better for those around whether it is congenial to do it or not.

October 17, 2007

I felt deflated, crushed, by the tiny attendance at the anti-contraception, natural family planning talk. Only the Pastor and two others people came and the NPF doctors had come from hours away on a Sunday to give their talks.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We bring good out of all these snarls and seeming defeats. Each defeat has much to learn from. When they happen, run into our arms and hide until the storm passes and steadily and slowly do deeds of love to regain peace and steadiness of soul.

October 18, 2007

At Adoration prayer:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: “Now, little Ronda, you have done a lot for us and our Church. You still have many details but these are not hard for you, so we want you to start now to breathe in our names and go very slowly and know that we love you for your efforts and we will take care of your family and everyone you pray for so faithfully. Trust!”

I was wondering how it is that Fr. Ken understands me so well but I don't really understand him? The Holy Spirit seemed to say that since he is my pastor and director he

has a special grace to understand me and others. I don't have to understand him, it is good enough that I love and admire and pray for him.

October 20, 2007 from a letter to an old friend who is a Jewish seeker,

Is there a feminine spirituality? Yes and no. Many think spirituality itself is feminine whether attempted by a woman or a man because they think the soul is feminine in the sense of receptive.

I disagree. Even though there are mystics like John of the Cross who are very poetic in a surrendering feminine way - though his commentary on his own poems is supremely logical and masculine - I think in general women have more what is called Braut-mystique (Bridal Mysticism) - which is a bridal type of sense of surrender to God as the beloved and men tend more to think of God as a leader, the following of whom leads to eternal happiness.

There is lots of this in my book *Feminine, Free and Faithful* which I will send you if you want it. (This book, one of my best, by the grace of God, is still in print. See www.rondachervin.com)

I had a student last year who seemed in hopeless difficulties. I prayed for her and gave her extended time to finish her work thinking she would never do it. Along came a whole folder of wonderful work. Alleluia.

October 21, 2007

Thou shalt not judge! I was busy judging certain people for not coming to Mass this morning and discovered that they had come in behind me so quietly I didn't realize they were there! I think You laughed at me, Jesus.

Charismatic Hispano/a Prayer Meeting

Miguel told us: the praise of God makes us humble, to forget ourselves and praise God.

I was thinking about the contrast between the 9 AM Mass high choral music and this charismatic electric guitar and drums....

Holy Spirit: The great music takes you from your head and will to your soul. Charismatic music takes you from your head and will into your heart. Both are good.

Fr. Ken thought I like the charismatic because it is so emotional. True - Jews are basically Mediterranean in our emotions. He said he thought Gregorian Chant might have been a controlled form of praying in tongues also in its Jewish origin.

I thought of how, in a certain sense, the Sunday 9 AM Mass is in a minor key and the prayer meeting a major key – Is Jesus, perhaps sometimes heard in a minor key (source of all beauty and hope) and sometimes in a major key (purifying fire)?

October 22, 2007

After the Meeting of Home is Where the Heart is – Hogar es donde esta el Corazon – our joint hispanic anglo door to door effort, I was so exhausted. I saw why the Legion of Mary has it so organized so they can know what each team member is doing, etc. Fr. Ken said that this is better for us because the emphasis shouldn't be on what we are doing, but on each person we meet. How challenging. I realize I often substitute hard work and planning for that sense of one on one relating.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Now you don't need to push for any of these apostolates. We want you to let go of all of that right now. For Home is Where the Heart is, be now a team member and facilitator, not a leader. The framework is in place and what is left is you following the Holy Spirit in little deeds of love, the Mass, prayer and talking to us all day from the heart. Measure the day by love.

October 24, 2007 Adoration

Jesus: I know how weak you are, especially being brought up as a hedonist. So I don't want you to look ahead to horrible crosses and shudder. I give you remissions and then crosses which seem unbearable and remissions because I want most of all not sacrifices but trust which brings peace.

October 25, 2007

Going door to door, the people were so sweet. A special grace to encourage us certainly but also I think an old granny like me and a youngish looking Mayan woman, who could seem like a grandchild, appear harmless.

October 26, 2007

Holy Spirit: The world will not get better unless there is real conversion. Don't expect good news about the world. Treasure each good thing you hear about and pray for mercy on individual souls and for the conversion of the world. They need to see where sin leads.

I am reading Von Balthasar's 3 Fold Garland about the sorrowful mysteries. I am thinking, only You know how superficial I am; maybe not compared to many others, but in my constant flight from suffering. Even a little down feeling because of rain and gloom is enough to throw me.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Don't worry. We are deepening you.

Balthasar says about Jesus "You squander Yourself in the Eucharist."

What a poignant observation. Yes, because even with we who want You each day, we are mostly distracted!

October 27, 2007

Scare from Carla, my sister, that her husband might be close to death. I was anxious all day without knowing why (twinny ESP stuff?) I became more anxious afterwards as I busily collected phone numbers to call to cancel all my activities if necessary to go to be with Carla in Berkeley, California. Seems the prognosis was exaggerated. I spastically prayed the rosary and night prayer and morning prayer but only now am calm enough to talk to you, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, about it.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: There is lots of love in your concern but also lots of peaceless, knotty emotions of wanting to "save" and "redeem" your sister instead of giving her to us. Please give her to us. We know her even better than you do. Don't you think that the woman who dances so beautifully about us is dear to us?

Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give her to you and Arthur also. I can't figure it out. I can't make anything better except by just hugging her with words and forgiving him for all the mounted up grievances.

I am playing Bach's violin concertos – they are Your PEACE. Let that peace flow over my frantic little soul.

About the Hispano/a Prayer Meeting: Jesus, Mary and Joseph: We wanted you to experience our joy in these children, to share it with you.

October 28, 2007

I am reading Hans Urs Von Balthasar who writes in an intriguing way that many reject the real God who is Jesus because He didn't win us by power to remove all sufferings on earth.

Me: But we want to remove those sufferings out of compassion.

Jesus: Yes, but the compassion is more important than the suffering. The compassion opens the heart. I want to open hearts, not to remove all suffering. The poor you will always have with you. So it all comes down to trust in My promises of heaven. I can take care of the poor and the sinners."

I didn't take this to mean that we don't need to do everything possible to help others, but that we shouldn't let it lead us into despair.

November 1, 2007 – from locutions given to Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My beloved apostle, I understand your struggles. You are becoming holier and yet you do not think you are making progress. Dear one, can you accept that the holier you become, the more holiness you crave? Can you accept that the more you become aware of your own flaws, the more willing you are to accept flaws in others? I am at peace that you are coming to know Me better. Each day brings growth of some kind for you, even if that growth originates in mistakes acknowledged and corrected.

I understand you dear apostle. I know that on some days you are ready for the battle of holiness and that on some days you feel you are not strong enough for the battle. This is what I want to tell you. You rise each day and pledge your allegiance to the Father. This commitment of your day insures that your Father takes you each day in the condition He finds you. Each weakness is used to increase your humility and illuminate for you the path to transformation. Do not become discouraged by the need for improvement. If you but continue on the path you have embarked upon, you will experience greater holiness. It can be no other way because those who pledge allegiance to the Father are cared for in every detail. Our greatest goal for you is holiness because only in holiness will you find peace and joy. Look around you. How many have committed themselves to holiness as you have committed yourself to holiness? If you look at others, you will see that the Savior can count only a few as His committed apostles. And yet, every person, regardless of their condition, longs for the holiness you seek, even if their longing is denied and ignored (R.C. by themselves). My heart is moved to such pity for those who do not seek Me. Let your heart also be moved to pity. Show constant compassion, never judgment, to those who do not understand what they lack. I am trying to show you, My beloved apostle, that you have begun a journey that must be taken by each person who will spend eternity in the family of God. If others delay the journey, that is their affair. My beloved apostles understand that this journey, the journey to holiness, is the most important journey they will ever take. This is your first priority, My friends. Continue to make your pledge and I will see to it that you become holier.

November 1, 2007 All Saints

I desire to learn Spanish more quickly. I asked Fr. Ken whether he thought if I learned it they could let me be a teacher in the Hispano/a prayer group. He said it was a very good idea and he thought they would. I am feeling exultant about this possibility. Fr. Ken also

said I could be a Eucharistic Minister and bring Holy Communion to Mary Jo, another daily communicant in the hospital. This filled my wish of many years to be able to bring Holy Communion to the daily communicants who would want Him more often than the once a week possibility.

In prayer today Jesus, Mary and Joseph told me that since I am too weak to want to suffer in union with them except with tiny penances, they have to use passive purification and by accepting heavy sufferings in my life I will be sanctified.

Nov. 5, 2007

Jesus, Mary and Joseph: Every day for you will be cross and resurrection. There is no escape from the cross and, for you, part of the cross will be that it is unpredictable so you cannot evade that.

Me: Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

November 6, 2007

Regarding few people taking advantage of my Healing of Emotions groups, Fr. Ken remarked “people are looking for relief more than for healing. That’s why some prefer drugs to religion.”

November 7, 2007

I was discussing with Fr. Ken the sentence I got through Anne from Jesus: “I don’t lead all to Daily Mass.” I had asked her why it wasn’t part of the rule of the Returning Jesus Apostolate and she said that Jesus said He does not lead everyone that way.

Fr. Ken said he thought that since daily Mass is not obligatory it is more of a spirituality than a necessity for those who can go who are seeking holiness, but he said he wasn’t sure about that answer.

I asked Jesus again, and it seemed He told me that it is such a source of pain to Him to have so many at Sunday Mass receive Him by obligation not out of love and that He wants the daily Mass time to be just those who love Him in that way. There may be many reasons why someone who loves Him doesn’t respond to Him in the Eucharist the way those who go to daily Mass do. But, whatever the reason, (I thought, suppose they dislike the priest, or don’t like leaving the house, or don’t like being in groups and being seen by others, etc.) He leads them in other ways. He didn’t mean that He doesn’t wish they would love Him in the Eucharist enough to come if they could.

I thank you dear Jesus that by bringing me into the Church with the Von Hildebrand circle of daily communicants I could come into this mystery which is the center of my daily life. May I always receive You with fervent love.

November 10, 2007

Poem about a spiritual friend:

How heavy love is!

Were not my own sufferings

heavy enough

not to have to,

inescapably,

bear yours, too?

And, added on,

our differences,

like a tug of war.

How much it

sometimes costs

to have to hold hands

so tightly

that we can't

be pulled apart.

Jesus smiles at me,

Waiting for me to see

that the weight of

the bond of love

is better even than

voluntarily

giving up candy for Lent!

November 12, 2007

I was feeling anxious about substituting a land phone for my cell phone in December. I realized it was a trust issue. Do I trust the ones I lean on the most here in Morganton to be there for me, or do I think that any conflicts will lead to total rejection so that I will need the cell phone as I flee Morganton by car? I mentioned this fear to one of them who laughed aloud.

Regarding conflicts and plans, the Holy Spirit seemed to say “Don’t do anything you don’t have to do that involves confrontation or fuss. That will give you more peace. Just pray and put these matters into the hands of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This is the spirituality they want from you now.”

November 13, 2007

Why am I so rattled?

The Holy Spirit: Because you are afraid to confront men. The answer isn’t to avoid men or avoid speaking the truth if you disagree with them. I want you to speak the truth, but then to receive the healing in the fact that good men don’t reject you for it. Accept as a cross that you will feel a little rattled just the same when you do it.

November 14, 2007 – day my mother died in 1987

God bless you, mother, on your eternal journey on this anniversary of your death so long ago!

Happy comic incident:

Since even though I adore my dentures now, I still don't chew well, I have nightmares about having someday to live on that awful stuff they put in feeding tubes - Ensure, and I have been dreaming of French potage soups for years with no idea how to make them.

A friend I haven't seen in 50 years sent me an old food mill and a recipe for leek soup. This is a simple manual gadget that dates back a century at least. I was afraid of the mill and decided to try it out on apple sauce first. I didn't know how much water to use so I threw the whole water and cooked apples into the mill and got a sort of non-cider drink instead of apple sauce.

On the soup, the amounts were right but I never noticed it had 2 notch-like links to put over the bowl the puree seeps into so I had it slanted badly and then realized it is probably

made for right hand people since the left hand way didn't seem to work well. Finally I noticed the second notch to balance the mill over the bowl and then realized you have to keep pouring the liquid through again and again, not just once.

But it came out silky, and tasty, just with salt, and exactly that fabulous taste of French soups in the winter I remember from some trip.

And now I can make lots of these soups and live happily ever after.....fat chance....but at least I don't have to worry about only having tube-feeding stuff – Ensure.

(Note in 2013 – I never stopped making these soups with this grinder. The leeks were too expensive, so I started making the potage with left-overs, especially when visiting homes where lots of left-overs get dumped, and calling it “garbage soup” for fun. You will read more about this in subsequent journals.

November 17, 2007

I am thrilled with the door to door evangelization – how welcoming people have been to us, even inviting us in. Another Anglo woman going door to door was so edified to learn that her hispano partner, who is being deported after living here 8 years, instead of being bitter thinks that Jesus wants him to go home so he can witness there to family and thrilled with another partner who told her about how he found Jesus who healed him of alcoholism and other vices.

During the Hispanic prayer group I felt such a soaring of soul and then these thoughts:

We think of heaven as

absence of tears and sin

But what about the positive?

What will it be like to have

Nothing ugly...only beauty!

Nothing gauche...only graceful!

Nothing discordant...only harmony!

Nothing clawing...only peace!

Nothing sour...only sweetness;

Nothing perplexing...only clarity;

Nothing frightening...only love.

Only Jesus can bring us there!

Maranatha!

November 21, 2007

Thinking about the affinity of the dedicated widow with her pastor: of course, like nuns we are doing the same liturgy of the hours every day and going to the Mass and less busy with family, so, like him, just living for Christ and the parish.

November 24, 2007

I went to Asheville to visit Ruth and Richard Ballard (a couple, Lutheran ministers, who became Catholics a few years ago). I went out with Richard in the cold to pray in front of the abortion clinic. It is so wonderful to see a woman speaking into a microphone since we can't go into the parking lot saying in a sweet Southern accent: "I had an abortion years ago and it always hurts even now to think of it, please come and talk to me before you go in." Also there was a Black Pentecostal man who goes to Messianic Jewish services and who comes every day they do abortions and blows the shofar for repentance. It sounded like such a lament. I was thrilled with the zeal of my friend Richard to go out in the cold every Saturday to pray.

I talked to Ruth about my anxiety and frantic drivenness. She thought I should avoid being *consumed* by the projects. If I am letting God work through me it would not be frantic. Franticness is from Satan. He takes our virtues and distorts them. He wants to turn my intensity into frantic activity. She thought I should hope to be not carefree but crush-free.

November 27, 2007

A not so secular secular Christmas? (I always get bent out of shape because of my daughter making a glorious early Christmas but does not go to Mass for Christmas. This poem gives her side and brought tears to my eyes. If you don't get the poem right away, her explanation (included below) of it does make it clearer.)

Near the Beginning

We've made an early tree.

We'll halt for bliss

you see.

**You don't? You do! We're taut, we're skinned,
we're night: we're hosting suns. We entertain
our blasts of music: velvet, pierced and aching,
spilling comets. When
all our lost ones, slight as lights, as broad
as sound come winking, stand alive, we'll know.
We'll know to bow and weep; to weep and bow.**

**Our tree will die
early, before the kings arrive, but we
have licked a finger, pointed at the sky,
and written something / nothing / radiance
exploding, losing light;
our strong amen.**

=====

(explanation for a friend not me)

CL: for you, I'll unwrap at the risk of boring everyone else: it's Christmas, yes it is already, and I insisted on starting it immediately after Thanksgiving, as I'm usually not let to do. Last year, times were even more straitened and my mother bought us a little plastic tree. It was a good brave soldier but this year, Steve who doesn't really love the holiday so much, nevertheless felt it might be important to get a real tree and soon. He and second-oldest son (Alex) are half murdering this 10-footer through the door and it tilts naturally into a ramp or slope and so then we are holding it up with wire loops and Steve laughing and involved and looking like a ranger in a plaid lumberjack shirt and Alex wondering if one might fall

asleep holding a tree and me with 12 huge boxes of "things" to put on a tree or the windows or everywhere there's a little slot...oh, and the last-year tree mounted just outside the front window, still the sturdy little soldier and Martina and I going out into the freeze to put plastic bright ornaments on it because it was otherwise sad...anyway, finally it's all done. 18 Santas beam or glare from behind various plaster or fur beards: they stand on the window shelf looking like God or Fr. Ken dolls (the local priest who comes to call now and again and is very enjoyed so long as he promises not to proselytize), a very loosely-slung net of lights around any window that can take it, and oh, the TREE, the huge TREE. I sit in the dark-that-can't-anymore-be-dark and through my fuzzy eyes (terribly near-sighted without contacts) each light practically booms with halos, winks bigger and bigger. The mind explodes in a muddleworks of Christmases, each one full of whatever brand of hope that this big-little and really terribly tough family of mine has wintered in the past decade. Last year, the boys had a father and he arrived in a large white limousine to collect them. He arose from the back seat and executed a bow. Another year, whilst that father and I were in our own death-throes (of divorce) we nonetheless struggled together with just the same sort of tree, for the sake of the children, yes, but maybe for ourselves as well. There were trees cut from the mountains of Sedona: thirty dollars and you cut it yourself. Those were strange, spare, haunted and very tall beings - but oh, what you can do when you decorate such a tree on three levels: the in, the middle, the out. And I spiral gently backward, down and through and there is the small fake tree Diana and I put up every Christmas: a glum and gloomy and ancient fellow with red, blue, yellow-tipped branches (not many of them and all bent and twisty) but still loved, so very very loved. And the first-ever house we saw in California that was so brilliantly garish with decor that all the adults snorted in distaste but the little twins in their blue coats knew they were in heaven and danced their strange dances and told each other stories in strange tongues as twins must always do. Anyway...trees. This is an early one, by which I simply mean that it will be very shaggy and dry by Epiphany (by which day even Christmas-mad Mama will admit that the tree should come down). But we will make ourselves a grand Christmas this year, oh we WILL. Everyone very much wants to do so: it's been a tough tough year and even tough tough children get scraped down to the bark sometimes. But you see, CL, the whole black night of the soul is taut and stretched and too many people bowing their last bow and then dying...going where? Going. But I give you this: whilst there are two or three little mamas, you and I, anyone else who needs this year to glow, there will be houses wreathed in magic, dancing children, spots of brightness, and you know, CL, YOU KNOW: we are enough. We have our dead ones coursing through our own blood now. We are enough.

November 28 2007

Great answers to prayer: A woman in one of my Spirituality of the Emotions groups was having difficulty with her son-in-law. The Holy Spirit told her to try to see him not as an in-law but as if he were her own real son and it changed her whole attitude.

Cindy is a woman who wandered into our Church with her husband one evening. She has terrible problems with alcohol and nicotine addiction. She is becoming a friend. She told me today that she had a dream vision of Jesus and peace. She recently moved here and said I was her only friend.

November 29, 2007

Fr. Ken thought of a metaphor he told us about during a dialogue at a daily Mass last week. Just as before the rocket goes beyond gravity there is this enormous concentrated energy and power for the lift off, so, by analogy, the part past the gravity of our daily life concerns and terrible earthly conflicts is where we enter into the place beyond gravity, the kingdom of God. This seemed to me also a metaphor for death struggle and then liberation into the eternal. Later I thought, was the resurrection of Christ from the tomb that kind of lift off of His body beyond time and space and gravity into a new form – his Resurrected Body?

I took a nap and woke up feeling as if Fr. Ken and I were at the top of a Chagall painting, flying. Then like the line from Goethe Martin loved so much which Mahler enshrined at the end of the 8th symphony: “Alles vergenliche nur est un gleichness.” (sp.) I felt reconciled and blissful and something to do with the idea of Scripture as archetypal – a category above literal or false and that after all the battles in the Church, one day we will be lifted off and up into the pure kingdom of God.

On another subject, I thought the good part of being a twin (I have a twin sister) is wanting to be so close to others; bad is how awful it feels that the fit is never perfect. (Since this time, my twin and I with my daughter twins have spend a lot of time analyzing this state of being. The point is that the fit with the original twin was never perfect either, but was so much closer than what came afterwards in friendships or marriages that we look back and pretend it was.)

November 28, 2007

Nothing difficult going on. Why do I feel so anxious and fluttery?

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: If it is important for you to know why, we will tell you. Otherwise pray against the devil, St. Michael's prayer, and just keep going with what you planned to do, and offer it up. Believe that offering it up *is beneficial*.

November 30, 2007

I was thinking about how easy and good my life is right now and wondering why I wasn't happier about it. I thought with horror, is it because there is nothing I do now that brings the type of applause speakers get? Do I want admiration instead of love.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Silly. We applaud you for all your efforts and intense desire to be a more loving person. Now is a kind of sea change to a quieter life in your old age. You must quietly trust as this process goes on. Be of good cheer. We are helping you. Just pray "Jesus, Mary, Joseph give me trust" when you feel anxious.

Fr. Ken said that it is not wrong to think of the priest celebrating Mass as a performance. Ideally performance = forming something into the perfect shape, which is the way Fr. Ken tries to celebrate Mass, and does, so beautifully.

I could think about performing my little deeds of love as perfectly as possible.

December 1, 2007

At Spanish prayer meeting, a sense when reading the Gospel of St. John in Spanish that these were the words read by our De Sola ancestors who were Catholic.

On my grandfather's side we were the Jewish branch but there was a part who converted centuries back who probably prayed for the Jewish ones to know Jesus, and who read Scripture in Spanish.

December 1, 2007 Message to Anne Direction for Our Times

Jesus

We are a faith of waiting. You wait for Me to return to the world and I wait for souls to return to Me. You feel a longing for Me and for goodness that causes you pain at times. I feel a similar longing for souls in the world who have rejected Me and so suffer the pain of separation from Me. How they hurt. How their wounds disturb them and cause them to hurt others. My heart sighs with loneliness for them. I ache to comfort them and console them. I long to heal their wounds. You, My beloved apostles, comfort Me in this grief by sharing this experience with Me. I am comforted by your fidelity to Me which is reflected in your fidelity to the cause of your brothers and sisters. As I wait, so do you wait and as I suffer, so do you suffer. I speak to you today, though, to remind you of something. As I rejoice, so should you rejoice. Rejoice with Me at the return of many souls just as perhaps others rejoiced at your return. Rejoice with Me at the healing of many souls, just as perhaps others rejoiced at your healing. You will rejoice that others return to Me through your consistent and humble service. We are a faith of waiting, it is true, but we are also a faith of rejoicing. The Father's goodness spreads out over the earth in this time in waves of

kindness and benevolence. You, My beloved apostles, gently push these waves out with your commitment to My service. The great mercy of the Father draws souls to My heart, the heart that burns steadily, a furnace of divine compassion and love. We are waiting, yes. But while we are waiting, we are preparing. You prepare to receive your King and I prepare to receive the fruits of your service. Be at peace, My beloved friends. We serve together, we suffer together, and we rejoice together. Be assured that you are loved and that your loneliness is temporary. I am returning.

December 6, 2007

A milestone: a Hispanic neighbor woman in our apartment square, mother of little ones, knocked on my door when it was dark already. She mentioned she needed diapers. I offered her money but she said she didn't need dinero; she needed a ride to the store. Of course I took her. She only asked me, I realized, because we had gone door to door and stopped at her house. It felt so good that someone was not afraid to ask me. That's how neighborhoods used to be before everyone became afraid of each other. I could speak to her well enough in Spanish.

December 8, 2007

Make a hermitage of our hearts Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to tell me.

December 9, 2007

In a sermon Fr. Ken said that Advent is about awaiting the joy of salvation and we cannot do that if we don't remove from our hearts the obstacles. Then we will be lighter. I thought without self-righteous anger I will be lighter.

December 7-11 two dear old friends, Daniel Varholy and Anne Lassiter visited Morganton to do videos and discussion of my Spirituality of the Emotions for Watershed – a Catholic media enterprise.

Dec. 10, 2007

In a talk Daniel gave at the parish he said about Jesus as Word that Jesus is the articulation of the Father. God wants to be articulated in the word which is each of us.

In a beautiful poem to St. Philip Neri by the English martyr priest Robert Southwell Daniel read these lines:

“Thy soul became as purest glass/Through which the Brightness Incarnate/

In undimmed majesty might pass/Transparent and illuminate.

It seemed like an image of Fr. Ken's way of pouring himself into his Masses.

Poems written by Daniel – some read at my Writing Group – much appreciated by the members.

(Untitled)

The lateral wastes of

The mind-clinging to judgment,

The dark grooves of anger

And sorrow's abyss

Images foil as smudge pot linings,

The pile of pine needles smoldering,

Their fired breath curling onto clay walls.

It is a curious dance, the waving and wending

Of human memory

The imagination of desire

And the cultivation of presence

Singing Fields

I roam in singing fields to you—

The days that fold into laments

With roaring sound-track waves that groan

In grinding flashes slivered still

Into the house walls of my heart.

Amidst the darks and tendriled cold
I offer up to You alone
My inward pressed astonishments;
The inner tempest brewed to kill
Off hope may wrack its bladder breath

Upon the altar stone within
My soul, for smearing winds who seek
To still my life and muzzle faith
Will vainly pass through agonies
Of love's desire I offer you.

Night Fishing

The water's flow that frames the night
And passes round our ears at rest
In Jesus' presence held aloft
On monstrance height directs our hearts.
The flow of prayers that guide the soul,
The tide of holy fond desire
Is brushed like ocean's breath to press
The sails that bear our souls to God.
And in the night of vigil tasks
Our souls will call for other souls
To gather here at prayer and have
Their angels carry grace upon

The water's flow of night that waits
For dawn to bring to those who hope
For prayer and those who have lost sight
Of hope's embracing harbor hold
Something of peace and holy rest
To form the heart and hold it dear.

The Anchor

The anchor hope entwines our thoughts
The subtle yearnings of the heart,
An ancient anchor left from ships
In village squares, the sole remains
Of giant rigs that loom and pass
Through thoughts of youth a child beholds.
Imagine then a boat to match
The iron vastness in the square.
And anchors have their stories too,
The relic deep that took the pope
Away from Rome, his loving flock—
The Martyr Clement bore the weight
An anchor gave to drag him home
To God through ocean's depths and grave.
Did Clement wonder too when young
As little boy at anchors seen
Upon the shore, of what their tale

Might be or what their past and song?
For Clement's anchor has a cry,
A widow's sad lament that calls
Through water's vastness fastened far
Into our hearts to find a saint
Who died yet lives in Heaven's light,
A martyr's hope, a *Papa* still
Who guides his flock to God amidst
The tempest groans of sea and storm.
So anchors have their tales to give
And hope is tempered long from trial.

The Geransene Demoniac

O ye sepulchers
O ye white washed walls—
Boxing us in
With your dead mandate,
Which you do not abide,

I am hungry in the land of tombs

Wailing at the city's gates,
The hounds of night with their
Braying grate
Scorn my warming heart.

I am hungry in the land of tombs
Caught in the vineyards of death
With the demon-cruled chatter
And the rabid dance
Of the swine at Gennesereth.

I am hungry in the land of tombs,
Hurt by the raging rant
And caught in a darkling wind
Of those who cannot love,

I am hungry in the land of tombs
Ripping my own flesh,
Burnt into a rille
Until He set me free
With His life breath
Drove the beasts afar
Into the swine of Gennesereth.

Southern Coasts

On southern coasts amidst the palms and oil,
Between the big box stores and malls who spread
Their coats like ranging cattle on the plain,
There still remains a gentle sense of place
To screen the heart from toxic gasps that lull
One mightily away from home, the hope
Of being true to something resonant
Within that finds a super-store a chore,
That shopping heavy labor is indeed—
What loneliness there is in concrete spread
In vastness forming full consumer shrines
With holocausts on offer that attend
And wait for purchase, friendly wave and swipe
Of credit card for satisfaction spent.
Away from here my heart in yearning calls
And then so far removed from AC gasps,
The stir and whirl of fetid air I turn
To hear the bay front winds and smell the fog
And sense the fish and creaking sound of boats
That brush their docks and paint the night with sounds;
This coastal bend is here waiting for hearts
To listen in their stead, recalling still
The simple life that's lived within a place.

Night Watches

**Adoring hearts wade through the darks of night
And cling to Jesus fastened to His cross,
The monstrance cross of gold with Jesus placed
At cross's center on the heights that rise
From Reredos enconced with His dear saints.**

**And crickets pulse while eyes will strain to see
The Lord's own heart that passes through the eyes
Of man to touch his heart and dance there still
Amidst the tiring trials of labors here
Below, for hearts will dance that do adore.**

December 12, 2007 Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

**Anne thought maybe she would come in the summer and she could enjoy Fr. Ken's Mass.
She said it was the only non-Tridentine she could love to be at.**

**Many, many roses and some petals were strewn on the altar, by devotees of Our Lady of
Guadalupe. So lovely. The next day Father said I could take some home.**

I am reading Pope Benedict's Encyclical Spe Salvi on Hope.

December 13, 2007

**It is the first day of the car being up for sale. The idea is to quit driving and hire the
grandsons who need the money to schlep me around. I feel a little anxious but basically
light and joyful . I feel more drawn to the quiet life.**

**Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We appreciate all the work you have done for the kingdom with
cars and the great sacrifice it was to drive (being a zero sense I am a very tense driver).
We honor your sacrifice of 43 years of bad driving. Now we are releasing you from that**

burden . Your angel is relieved also. We love you, save souls. - (note all the little jokes – I say all day “Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I love you, save souls.”). Trust in us.

December 14, 2007

From a letter to friend with 4 children under 7.

“I think Christmas is a difficult time for Moms. My daughter Carla is the only one who loves it - she sets up zillions of lights on Thanksgiving day, inside and out, has 25 Santa Clauses, 3 Nativities and 5 presents for each family member bought on e-bay. I supply the Advent wreath and prayer and the Mass - guess what Christ-MASS I usually intone sarcastically every few days. Maybe she'll come this time. I have 3 grandchildren going to Mass and catechism, so that's pretty wonderful. One is an altar boy at our fantastic polyphony incense English high Mass.

I finally figured out why Christmas is hard for me. I remember with joy Christmas as a child. Even atheists give in and have a tree and presents. By contrast as a mother you have all the work and none of the childish unencumbered glee.

In any case, this is probably the most difficult time in terms of burdens of parenting you will ever know, especially for a creative person who is not an earth mother type. The only mothers I ever saw who were easy with it were this kind that let the kids run the house totally while they sit and drink coffee and eat cake. I knew 2 of these - one had 10 children, the other had 5 (she said finally she realized that the best answer to grandparental criticism of her as a mother was to say "I let my kids bring themselves up!" So just figure if you can survive each day you are doing A plus for you. Only God knows the sacrifice and the love behind the sacrifice. Well, may be I also do!

Shalom, Ronda

December 17, 2007

A beautiful reading from William of Saint Thierry Office of Readings: Everything that Jesus did appeals to us, stirring up our love “You know that this disposition could not be forced on men’s hearts, my God, since you created them; it must rather be elicited. And this, for the further reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness.”

Jesus, please gentle my heart to believe this and not dream of coercing people to do the good.

From a letter to a friend who was complaining that her husband won’t help her clean up the house for Christmas guests.

“From praying for you sporadically throughout the night and early morning I came up with a fantastic solution that will keep you laughing all day long: Imagine a new TV series where you have this gimmick: The living room of a couple: Each wife and husband secretly writes a list of all the qualities he or she has difficulty with in the spouse and a hidden list of all the virtues and other attractive traits of the spouse. Only the viewers get to see the list of positive traits.

Then, presto, it's the next day and each one gets a look alike spouse who has none of the bad traits and none of the good traits.

So you have a man who looks exactly like J.R., for example, and he is a militaristic clean up order freak. The house has only one picture on each wall. Each kid has a closet with 5 of each type of garment, and 5 books. Hubby leaves for commute to work at 7 AM and returns at 7 PM. Wifey has the care of the children all day long since she home schools with no relief. Hubby never says anything interesting, amusing or delightful. All he says on the cell as he drives home is: "Baby girl, when I get home I am expecting the dinner on the table and the kids all bathed, etc. etc. etc." Try it as a thought experiment!

December 20, 2007

I often think that God works with me especially by surprising me. What a surprise it would be if He mostly wants me to do little deeds of love in my old age vs. writing and speaking! This thought came after helping a Guatamalan grandmother, her daughter-in-law and baby take frozen turkeys from the parish to their homes.

December 21, 2007

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: See how we are using everything in you for door to door evenagelization and other works: your friendliness even to eccentric people, since you were so used to such as a child. Just relax and go with the Holy Spirit.

I was thinking during Las Posadas taking place in the Church for the hispanos (as) that the Church is their home, not just a place to go on Sunday for Mass.

And, also, how the widow is a sort of grandmother-figure in that home of the Church.

Because God released my tight grip on having to write books all the time between teaching and talks, I now have so much time to do anything that comes up around the parish and I see how God is using everything from the past - for instance now many of my friends are bi-polar people - two men came into the Church building and were perusing the library - one was a bi polar slow strange man with red around his eyes and the other a bi-polar ex Air Force man who takes care of the first one. I find I am so friendly to such people because we (my twin sister and I) were brought up to like eccentricity and even though this is different we tolerate it much better than conventionally brought up people would. Also, going door

to door, all the friendliness comes out as I try to link up with whatever is in that house when some invite me in - such as one is an older Episcopal couple with books and classical music around. It is a whole new adventure for me. I just invite them to visit our Church and make friends vs. apologetics which I thought I was going to do. My door to door partner, a young Mayan single mother, came by and saw my sister Carla's pictures and tells me she is longing to do sacred dance so I will loan her the video of my sister doing it.

December 22, 2007

Thoughts about the priest on or off the altar:

Some priests carry over a certain formality from the altar to the rest of their lives – a certain stiff distance that makes them not too approachable.

By contrast, some priests carry over from their life off the altar onto the altar an informal slightly ingratiating demeanor which distracts from the sublimity of the Mass.

Our priest is almost 2 different persons: with vestments (Mass, Reconciliation, Baptisms) and without

- one a sublime disappearance of personality into the august role;
- the other a delightful, wise, amusing, individualistic friend.

I realize, this is unusual, and makes it seem as if it is almost not the same man! As if I know 2 men: Fr. Ken, and Ken. Even though slightly disconcerting, I don't think this is a flaw at all. I think this is the way it should be.

At the hispano(a) prayer meeting I thought about how we talk so much about enculturation and that this is enculturation to the hilt, but not as we expected it. It is the baptizing of a very masculine culture and of the popular culture of electric guitars.

There was so much energy in the room filled with about 250 people, mostly very young. I thought of the Scripture "the violent bear it away." Being the only Anglo or Americano as they say, in the group, I feel by now like a sort of mascot.

The leadership seems to have accepted me. I am learning Spanish with a wonderful teacher from the group, Guillermo. We are working on a translation of my basic anger management talk to give as a teaching to this group.

I was happy with the meditation on Christmas given by Miguel Sebastian, one of the leaders who wants to be a deacon one day. He preached on the contrast between the way Christmas is prepared for in our culture and Mary pondering everything in her heart. He suggested that the best preparation for Navidad would be to go to Confession.

There was a special greeting one of another for Christmas at the end of the meeting. One of the leaders made a point of giving me a hug. I went up to commend the head, Rafael, on the excellence of the way the meeting is run. He said very simply, “Stay with us.” I felt moved since I have been so hoping that I would be accepted by them even though I am so different.

December 24, 2007

Such a beautiful line from St. Augustine in the Office of Readings: (Men of good will) “sweetly linked by the bond of unity.” Yes!

The Holy Spirit suggested to me to call godchildren and/or their parents this Christmas. I called an old friend of mine who honored me by having me be godmother of one of her children and confirmation sponsor of another. She shed tears of joy to hear my voice again. I forgot that even though she had 10 children when I met her, she somehow thought herself unworthy to receive Holy Communion even though she went faithfully to Mass on Sundays. I persuaded her to receive. Now, some 30 years later she says that she remembered how I went to daily Mass always and now she goes because she feels so lonely with the children all grown up! Jesus, in the Eucharist, helps her each day.

A charming incident. Carla thought Fr. Ken would be hungry saying all those Masses (7) between Christmas Eve and Christmas. She insisted we take him a plate of food and sure enough he had been eating fast foods and was delighted.

December 25, 2007

Due to large gifts from other family members Carla and Steve could have a lavish Christmas as usual for the kids, especially important because it was the first Christmas since the father of the boys died.

December 26, 2007

I got this wonderful e-mail from a Catholic Canadian man (not of Jewish ancestry) who is doing RCIA programs in Israel for Jews who I send a little money to.

“Dear David, Kathleen, Athol, Ronda (we are all part of the Association of Hebrew Catholic),

I just wanted to wish you a most merry Christmas season and update you on our Christmas event here. Christmas Eve was the most amazing evening. I gave my multi-media intro lesson to Christmas at Notre Dame of Jerusalem church. I advertised late and so I didn’t know whether even 20 people would show up. But in the end the room was packed with some 150 Israelis – I taught all of salvation history leading to the coming of Jesus, Messianic prophecies and the gospel point blank, and they were all riveted. You

could hear a pin drop. People were sitting everywhere on the floor, overflowing out of the back door. Then we had midnight mass and the auditorium was also packed with some 500 people! Wow. What is God doing with His people these days? Amazing.”

I am reading a long bio by Eileen Egan about Mother Teresa. Astounding!

December 28, 2007

Feast of the Holy Innocents: Office of Readings, Saint Quodvultdeus: writes of Herod doing it because “fear was destroying his heart.” How related to those who do and have abortions. Lord have mercy.

A phone call apprized me of a new venture in Southern California some old friends of mine are starting. Immediately “visions of sugar plums danced in my head.”

I went to Adoration and Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seemed to tell me:

“Little one, for now peace and a more quiet life. Don’t jump. Let things unfold and then we will tell you what offers to take up and how such as if this California venture is really off the ground you could teach there for a month in the summer. How many times have we told you not to push? You can’t help getting excited about plans because that is part of your Crusader nature wanting things to be better for yourself and the Church, but if you rush and push and try to coerce, you are not respecting PROCESS and then a lot of peaceless energy is wasted.”

I was feeling bad about getting over-exuberant and a little sassy at a social occasion with two men friends. I asked the Holy Spirit why I was like that. The Holy Spirit seemed to tell me that because my father and Martin and Charlie never wanted to talk to me about my ideas, I get a little over excited when any men friends want to have conversations with me. That is not something bad to feel, but part of my need for greater peace. Over-excitedness should not lead me to self-flagellation.

Now comes the part I am not sure is the Holy Spirit since it could be just me analyzing something. It seems to me possibly that I am a little manic-depressive and that workaholism in the past and rage, hid this, but I don’t need to be afraid of it. It is not extreme. The Holy Spirit seemed to want me to see that they use my enthusiasm in good ways and the melancholy swing to force me to be close to them for hope.

December 31 2008

Letter to my sister, Carla, whose husband is nearing death:

“I was reading a comic book in Spanish about St. Francis and I was thinking, of course, we need to pray for Sister Death as he did. Anyhow here is my attempt:

Dear God, you know how my sister is suffering, wanting this suffering to be beautiful in a spiritual way in the midst of so much practical turmoil. Please give her strength to live through this and let her fears be transfigured into awe at the mystery of Sister Death which brings us not to the nothingness we imagined as atheists, but to new eternal Life. Amen.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to want to tell me about my feelings of rejection by my family. They used their rejection of my writing and “wisdom” to have me put all that energy toward being a teacher and speaker to others. In what I thought was a charming joke I heard in my heart: “We use your journal writing to do a hermeneutic on your own neurotic interpretations of your life and also to counteract the devil’s hermeneutic” (as in my going into a guilt trip over being over-excited talking to male friends just because they actually like to dialogue with me).

Senora Magdalena, the 77 year old grandmother who walks to Church sometimes 3 hours was able to show me with sign language and mixed tiny bits of Spanish and English that after the noon Mass for day before New Year’s she wanted to stay also for the 5 PM Mass and could she stay at my apartment. I was delighted. She had a long sleep in my chair while I went swimming at the pool and then I gave her some lunch and then I realized I couldn’t talk to her. She only speaks some Mayan dialect. What could we do? I played the Kyrie of Bach’s B Minor Mass and she listened very intently standing near the computer with the disc in it as if expecting the choir to show on the screen perhaps like on a TV performance? It felt very good to have her here.

It was good to see our seminarian Ben visiting. He is radiant with happiness as a soon to be deacon.

New Year’s Eve adoration I asked Jesus, Mary, and Joseph about the Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd, an emerging community who would like me to join them. (I met the foundress and one of the members during my EWTN widow’s series where they came to talk about their community, so I knew I liked them). My spiritual director thinks it’s a good idea. Jesus Mary and Joseph seemed to say “Yes, but don’t push. Let it unfold in good order. Yes, a branch here in Morganton with you as the head here but under Sister Elizabeth Seton as the head of the wider group would be good. We would like this, but if there is too much opposition, realize it is not the key. Your vocation is to be some form of consecrated or dedicated widow, but it doesn’t matter so much what form it takes. When you feel anxious and want to push sing “Ich bin dein, und du bist mein,” (words from a famous Bach Cantata which mean “I am Yours and You are mine.” I thought that if I become part of this Order I would take the name Sister Conchita (after the grandmother Mexican widow saint who wrote so many books.) Later I realized that this was the Vigil of

the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, and that I almost always get special graces on her Feast days.

January 1, 2008

In the process of calling mothers of godchildren, godchildren, and old friends I came to my old friend E. She is the only close friend I have had since my conversion in 1959 who is an atheist and fairly pro-abortion, but she doesn't bait me on these subjects. She came from a weak Protestant Kansas farm background, came to her beloved NYC and got a Ph.D. from Columbia in English Literature and married a Jewish agnostic. We met in the park watching our kids in the sandbox and we have been friends for 43 years but I rarely see her since she lives in NYC and I have been living all over. When she was diagnosed about 10 years ago with Parkinson's disease I prayed over her but she is now many phases worse and can hardly talk. Last time I saw her she told me that she couldn't read any more but only listen to tapes and I bought her a huge set of the plays of Shakespeare on tape. Anyhow I have prayed for her every day all these years and today on the phone I could hardly understand her but she suddenly slipped in that she is now praying a little. I was overjoyed to hear this. I asked her how this happened and she said, "Well, I have to deal with finalities now." It seemed to me such a huge sign to keep praying for those we love no matter what and never to give up on them in terms of hoping they will let the love of God come in if only out of desperation toward the end.

Poem of Carla, my daughter, for the mother of a little girl who died in an accident.

Early Friday, when your parents were
aghast in a drown of dawn, still rinsing hope
from a draining vigil, when the air still bore
the mark of claws, ah Sarah, did you hover
helplessly alive if not anymore
a grin on wheels; a pair of giant eyes
no longer pinned to a page? Did a ghost curl down

once more as if to let a mother nestle
those soft young bones, that tickle kiss of down:

**the terrible sacred whole of you, the round-
ness losing roundness? Sarah, you were eight
and now forever eight. Your father's hands
are empty of you. His to remember: laughter
and running legs, the tiny face that flew
enormously above him. Papa's arms
were everything, when brothers still were brothers,
on Thursday morning, time and time ago.**

**Now the sun will rise as brightly
as if no misfortune had occurred in the night.**

The misfortune has fallen on me alone.

The sun - it shines for everyone.

Friedrich Rückert

January 3, 2008

Sister Elizabeth Seton, founder of the Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd got permission that I could start a branch here. She thought with all my background as a Benedictine Oblate and my time in other communities I could make final vows right away. I wanted to leap ahead and do this but Jesus Mary and Joseph seemed to tell me to do what Fr. Ken suggested which was to do a one year time in the habit (no veil until community larger and more approved by the Church before making final vows since this is the way the Church does things.) I feel very peaceful. Hard to think that after all my tries with this, the family will think it is just a silly whim or a compulsion, but I have to accept that. I will visit the little group in Allentown, PA. in March for the final vows of one of the sisters who has been in this new group for a long time: Sister Marion of the Eucharist.

January 4, 2008

My 49th year as a Catholic! Alleluia. I woke up feeling unusually peaceful – a good sign.

Got rid of the car. Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to say “See, we liberated you from the car. Now rest in the bosom of the Church.”

January 5, 2008

Confessed to trying to get symbolic victory by detraction. Fr. Ken said, well symbolic victory is really symbolic defeat from the point of view of the Christian way. (I have explained this Recovery, International phrase earlier on. Go to word find if you want to understand this paragraph better. It is really such a key to the anger we express in telling others about others!)

January 7, 2008

I am feeling agitated about ordering the habit tomorrow. I wondered why. Vanity? Thinking I would look uglier even than now? My hair is my glory? Individualism? Wanting to look my funky dedicated widow in A-line single color dresses and denim jumpers? I went to prayer and Mother Mary seemed to tell me that wearing the traditional Sister’s garb would be good because of carrying on the tradition and also that it would be more of dying to self and letting only Christ live in me. The question came to mind that if Ven. Conchita, whose name I am taking, founded an order of widows she would surely want the traditional habit.

January 9, 2007

Lamentations of a Pastor

When, O Lord,
will my flock desire
sacrifice more than comfort,
beauty more than hoopla,
relationship more than answers,
healing more than relief?

And Jesus replied (to the imaginary pastor of my prose-poem):

When you desire
only Me

**and Mercy
all these things
will be added unto you,
and in the final kingdom
they will not have to choose.**

January 9, 2008

I was thinking of what Mary thought about how messy the life of the Church would be after the Ascension. I seemed to get these humorous words back: God is not a sugar daddy.

January 11, 2008

The habit came in the mail yesterday. I will not wear it until after the March 25th reception into the community. I was dreading getting it thinking it would make me look more ugly and I would feel awful. Surprise, well God likes to surprise me, is that it is a tailored garment that is actually kind of stylish and attractive with the cap that looks kind of Amish. But not “me.” I like loose garments with a free-spirited and eccentric look. Turmoil. I had thoughts it was a sign I can’t be part of the order.

This morning I woke up full of insight. Because I lost so much weight a form-fitting garment reminds me of how I looked as a teen and young adult and those were my most sinful times of my life before I became a Catholic. So attractive = sinful in my mind. Also, since I couldn’t be popular with the in-group because of being much poorer and also with such a different family background, I became popular with the out-group in college by acting “bohemian.” So I associate hippie type clothing with being popular with the out-group. So I fear to lose out-group identity by looking like a conventional Sister of the past.

But it seemed to me Jesus, Mary, and Joseph might be telling me that the habit and cap makes me look like a GOOD old nun which is really my deepest wish – to be a good widow-bride of Christ. So that outer look might help me try to be what I most deeply wish to be vs. overly individualistic. My dress will be a counter-cultural sign in society and in the Church since there are so few Sisters in habits around these days.

Trust?

Fr. Ken thought that habit was not the right thing for me for consecrated widows; that it looked like impersonating a sister. Sister Elizabeth says she is open not to different ones for each group but a different one than that particular one that seemed to me so difficult for

me. I came to adoration and I thought I might wear the one that suits her and Sr. Marian because they are dear women whom I want as sisters.

At the prayer meeting I asked for a word on this and Jesus seemed to remind me that He told us not to worry about what to wear. The hispano leader Rafael gave a strong prophecy “I want you to be free from fear and sin. I know how lonely you are.” The particular habit began to feel to me in my mind like walking into a straight jacket! I started thinking I would do better having my branch wear denim jumpers and a bandana.

I spoke to a few close people who know me very well and they thought this community idea was a mistake –I have deep psychological motives for it that would not be valid: such as deep need to be taken care of by parental figures or a desire to fill in a somewhat lonely and less exciting time in my life.

The canon lawyer here says we could have different habits but one rule.

January 13, 2008

I talked to Sister Elizabeth last night. She is open to the alternate habit for different branches, but will pray about it. She was especially opposed to within the same branch different habits. I woke up with energy, joy and hope after feeling much deflated thinking it was an impasse. I prayed for the intercession of Mother Teresa and Jane of the Chantal. Sister Elizabeth seemed impressed by the argument that jumpers are \$5 in the thrift shop vs. heavy expense for dress-like habits. I would like to wear denim jumpers and a denim bandana.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, said “Yes. This would not be contrary to our words to you and Fr. Ken’s.”

(Well, reading this now in 2013, it seems confusing since Mary seemed to be favoring the traditional habit. I prayed about my judgment on this now, so many years after and I think it fits with one of the locutions in Anne – Direction for Our Times where He said that he will always help us with “plan b” if “plan a” doesn’t work out whether by our fault or otherwise. Of course this is only true when it is a choice between 2 goods, since an evil plan He will never help us with. Or, another way to think of it is that the “words in the heart” are a conversation not a command from on high where the supernatural being would be mad at me if I don’t do what he/she recommends.)

I will await Sister Elizabeth’s phone call on Thursday when she has talked to Fr. Becker. But I am thinking if it is a “No,” that I am supposed to start my own independent group here.

Poem by Carla Conley

Sevenfold

The baby sees monskas and robids; she sees skakes
and skittery rabbits. "Now, I'm getting smart,"
she says, and she is proud of this. She's able
to scry the blood of brothers in the mouth
of the ground: she's both a shepherd and a wolf
afraid of lambs or anything that dies.

Today, she runs indoors as if a zipper
were chasing her: the whole bright air outside
has teeth. It is an airplane passing by;
a metal monska robid. Close the sky
and shut the sound off, Mama. We can hide.
We use a blanket, loose as the restless skin
of a snake: there might be lions packed inside.
We find our courage slowly. It unravels

by fruit and seed, by deed, by circumstance
and circumvention: something like a spool
reels in because it must; reels back again
also because it must. It is a robot,
a rabbit and a monster. It is Adam

and it is evening. We will wait for Papa

to turn the stars on, battering resigned
wanderers with mercy and with signs.

January 14, 2008

As I proceed to become Sister Conchita I think I should be more silent especially before and after Mass unless people need to talk to me,, and not give advice unless asked. I should avoid a compulsive need for approval expressed by telling everyone everything even when inappropriate. I could talk to Jesus, Mary and Joseph about everything instead.

January 17, 2008

Today I spoke to Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton and she said I could lead the branch in Morganton NC with the alternate habit if all the sisters would wear the same alternate habit. What she especially objects to is having each sister look different. We would wear the dress habit of the Sisters in Allentown PA at the ceremonies and retreats and meetings.

Adoration:

Now I am Sister Conchita, Consecrated Widow of the Good Shepherd. Thank you Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Ven. Conchita, St. Jane of Chantal, St. Francis de Sales, Little Therese, guardian angel. God the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, I give you my heart, soul, mind and body. “Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me, ich bin dein und du bist mein (I am Yours, and You are mine – an aria of Bach I love.)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to reply that I should not fear. If others join me, they, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, will “micro-manage” me to do it right because it is so important for the Church.

Mary, I will rest under your smile and enfold the branch in the rosary.

Because of the snow – rare here, once a year at most – there was no one else at Adoration and I could dance and sing and crouch at the altar for surrender and beg Jesus, Mary and Joseph to make me holy so that I could be like them, with nothing but love in my heart.

Letter sent to my e-mail list:

Dear friends,

In my Recovery, Inc. for anger, fear and depression it is taught that we should not be so afraid to make mistakes. If you think this new plan is a mistake, as do many of my family and some friends, please pray for me. If you think it could be good, please pray for me. I am very joyful about it.

There is a widow in Pennsylvania who started a community called Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd. The rule is a mixture of my Dedicated Widows way of life and the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane of Chantal. She thought I might join them, but I said I wouldn't leave my present place and that I don't get along with other leaders anyhow, etc. etc.

Now I am going to try starting a branch here in N.C. – different from Dedicated Widows which will continue on, is that I and any who join will wear habit and be called Sister - The branch in PA wears modified formal habits but I want us to wear blue denim jumpers (hey, only \$5 all sizes at ye local thrift shop) and bandanas - a la Little Sisters of the Poor. My name will be Sister Conchita after Ven. Conchita of Mexico the grandmother saint.

Who knows, maybe no one will join me and I'll just be a loner outpost but maybe some will want to try from this town, nearby, or some might want to move into an adjacent apartment and try.

If you know anyone who could be interested the contact info is Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton in PA 610-439-8646 and mine is chervinronda@gmail.com

Love and prayers, Ronda

Because of the snow we didn't go door to door but the Holy Spirit gave me a push to visit anyhow a woman in a nearby apartment who is deeply grieving, who lost husband, baby, teen son, and parents. She was glad to see me and even though a Baptist, was willing to walk over to the Church with me. I sat holding her hand and praying aloud with her and then thought to sing Amazing Grace. She said it was her favorite song and favorite also of her husband and son, and it meant so much to her that I sung it.

As I parted from her I thought – that's it – just go with the Holy Spirit on these outreaches – not too tense about results.

January 18, 2008

I became so ecstatic about the new widow's group that I thought I would jump out of my skin. Who could I talk to who would understand. Just then Rosalind Moss, my godchild and super-speaker EWTN Catholic Answers evangelist, called me and she was ecstatic about her religious community. We talked for 2 hours with much joy and mutual good advice. We totally affirmed each other's different calling.

January 20, 2008

Jesus, Mary and Joseph: You are on the right track, now ride on it, serenely praying constantly.

January 21, 2008

I was happy to hear Sister Elizabeth likes the idea now of my doing the denim thing.

Also a got a great compliment from Fr. Ken. Someone mentioned seeing me on TV and “wow, you’re a famous person” stuff. I commented: “well I’m much better on TV than in life, as anyone in this room can testify.” Hearing this usual self-deprecatory mode, put in, “You’re wrong, Ronda, that is not true.” He repeated it twice and I am still taking it in with joy.

January 25, 2008

Answer to a letter from a woman who read my book on Healing of Rejection on my web (under free e-books).

Dear Mira,

I was thrilled anyone actually read one of my e-books because I don't get to know if any one does on my system, but then sad about the reason you give. I have been thinking about it all day and thinking of couples I know without children who have had similar problems.

I don't know you, so I can't say specifically but here are some general observations about a situation that I don't think has anything to do with rejection actually.

1. Friendship is a combination of common values and common need. Often happy couples without children are so close others don't feel they need anyone else. They may also have a tendency to mother/father each other and this also makes them less needy.

2. My experience is that if one of the couple dies all these acquaintances rush forward to be friends, as well as nieces and nephews and siblings etc. also because they feel needed. All motherly/fatherly people only want friends who need them, not happy people who don't seem to need others.

3. I have that right now. My twin sister didn't bear any children though she wanted them. She has always tried to be close to my children and my grandchildren. Now when her 90 year old husband ,is dying, all of us are rushing into intimacy and availability for her.

Let me know if any of this sounds true. I've never thought it out before.

Reply:

Hello Ronda:

Thank you for replying- come to think of it, I never did see it the way you put it and neither did my husband - it does make sense. Long ago a friend (who later broke off relationship with me) had said that people were envious of the relationship my husband and I had with

each other. So thank you and next time my husband feels low and unwanted by society I shall recall your email! God bless!

January 27, 2008

(I started teaching in a program for the Diocese of Charlotte for training deacons and their wives.)

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: “Little one, you have done so much for us; we wanted you to affirm those deacon candidates and their wives: pass the torch.”

January 30, 2008

I crawled the stations to offer it up in my Spiritual Motherhood prayer.

Jesus added that I might offer the pain I feel for bad things in the Church. That I will take as equivalent to “some only go out by prayer and fasting.” Your hurt will be your spasms of truly righteous anger. Let it all out in sound when you are alone. Groan in the Spirit.

February 1, 2008 from Letters given through Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My friend, heaven has accomplished many things with your service to the Kingdom. Shall I tell you what we are achieving together? First of all we have increased your holiness. It is true, dear apostle. With your cooperation, I have been able to advance you in virtue. Consider where you were in the holiness walk when you first committed to serving as My apostle. Consider where you are now. You will see that you have advanced, even though you also see that you have additional work to do in this regard. I want you to understand, though, that progress has been made so that you will rejoice and have hope for additional progress. This is good for you and good for heaven. Next, your service to the Kingdom has been used to bring light to other souls. Think for a moment. Is it not true that you have tried to treat others more like I treated others? Is it not true that there have been times when you returned love for hostility? Have you not discovered that you view even your enemies with greater compassion? Think dear apostles. Have you shared My merciful message with others? Have they benefited? Without your cooperation, this could not have happened.

Yes, many have benefited because you have chosen to serve Me. Would you like to know of another result of your service? Heaven, as you know, is filled with perfect love and comfort. I love all of humanity, of course, but not everyone returns My love. Because of your cooperation, I, Jesus Christ, have received a greater amount of love and comfort from your world. You, in your determination to serve Me, have bestowed upon Me the greatest consolations. The light from your willingness to serve as I wish you to serve has given Me

comfort in a time when My heart aches with loneliness for so many. You have truly become My friend and I hold you in My heart most protectively. All of the intentions in your heart now move to the regular beating of My heart. I will not abandon you and I will not abandon your intentions. Together, we will see to each one of them. The loyalty you feel for your loved ones is shared by Me in that your holy desires become personal to Me as they are personal to you. Just as you are determined that your loved ones be healed, so I am determined that your loved ones be healed. These are joint projects embarked upon by the Saviour and His beloved apostle. You are never alone in your concerns or your crosses. I thank you for helping heaven to accomplish so much and I will reward you, in part, by keeping the promise I have made to seek conversion of all of those dear to you. Be at peace in every trial, please, because I am with you.

February 6, 2008 Ash Wednesday

Letter to my sister and other friends,

How you would have loved our Ash Wednesday main Mass - introduced by the blowing of the shofar and the Church packed with hispanos and anglos (readings in English and Spanish) and a few Hmong and the choir singing an original composition, like the Allegri Miserere, created by the pastor and the choir master. Making use of the Old Testament reading about calling the assembly together to do penance since the people was having so many troubles, Fr. Ken's sermon theme was the power of the community doing Lent together vs. mostly thinking it is all about our individual salvation, also key, of course.

The best tonight was at the end of his, as usual, wonderful sermon, suddenly he got fiery passionate and called out for us to repeat after him "Juntos, Together, Juntos, Together," over and over again, charismatic style. The Hispanos started the applause. It was thrilling.

This morning I thought - process! Father always counsels me that things take time. After years and years, maybe this is the year the Anglos, Hispanos, and Hmong will be much more JUNTOS, TOGETHER, and each of us will have greater strength as a result.

Feb. 8, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph seemed to want to tell me to just be as quiet as I can and let them make me more gentle. I wrote one of my one page things about it:

Gentle vs. Rough

"But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children." (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

What a lovable quality gentleness is! Gentle people are soothing. How opposite to those of us who could be described, at least some of the time, as kind of tactless, rough or defensively confronting. If gentleness has its source in sympathy for the difficulties and hurts of others, roughness usually comes from impatient annoyance.

There is a famous hymn by a minstrel, Matt Talbot, called Gentle Woman about our Blessed Mother. Certainly she was also strong to be able to withstand incredible sufferings, but surely the mother of the Lord and of His Church would have to be also filled with gentle tenderness.

If we are called to be gentle with others, do we not also need to be gentle with ourselves? Of course we need to repent with fervor for our sins, but self-flagellating blame of self for every mistake or flaw comes from pride.

Think of roles in life where you have been gentle. Thank Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, for that virtue. Consider the people you can be rough with. Ask the Holy Spirit to melt your heart with forgiving compassion toward them.

After writing this I took the kitties for their walks. (The neighborhood I was in during this time was not good for letting the kittens out free because of all the parking right around the apartment, would bring each of them out for a little supervised walk). I thought that Jesus, Mary and Joseph have been trying to “gentle” me in many ways: through Adoration, through the pets, through sending me more sensitive broken people who will not fight back if I get rough, music, the influence of St. Francis de Sales who is so gentle and melodious even though apparently choleric by temperament.

I was feeling discouraged about door to door ministry because about half our team dropped out because of busyness. Even so about 5 people came back to the Church! Then on Thursday 2 non-Catholics seemed as if they might drop into the Church and see. One clearly was praying to the H.S. to find a new Church.

Fr. Ken said: if you think of that ministry as God’s work instead of yours you will be less concerning with success.

At the Hispano prayer meeting the theme for Lent was real conversion of heart. Miguel gave a stirring speech but then the Holy Spirit really seemed to come with even greater power when he called forth all those who feel guilt about sins of the present or past. I went up with others for the extended time of prayer by the intercessors. I began to have such a sense that I am so knotted up trying to unravel past sins that only purgatory can help. I began to long for purgatory as the only chance for purification, and then came a desire to do corporal penance, especially for my daughters to come back to the sacraments. In the

midst of the “altar call” part of the service, Miguel begged us to go to confession. One of the intercessors, an older man, had tears pouring down his face. I thought I should read Conchita again, since she is so strong on the need to choose to suffer.

From February 10-17, 2008 I was away in Berkeley California visiting my twin sister at the death of her husband who was 91. I am not going to say much about this to honor the family’s wish that I put less about them in my journals, only that it felt very loving to make the sacrifice of the long trip, and good to share the pain of my sister by being there for her worst moments such as when his corpse was wheeled into the prayer room of the crematory or when it was pushed into the ugly oven. She was always draping everything in the great beauty of her soul through the dance that was done during this time. It was good for me to hear all the tremendous admiration and love for my brother-in-law who I rarely got along with. Also wonderful to be at daily Mass with my sister.

Just before I left North Carolina I got these locutions that seemed to come from Arthur on the other side:

1. “Ronda, you never understood. My soul was like a labyrinth(in the bad sense) and so I was desperate to have Carla’s sincerity. Your marriage to Martin was the same.”

2. “I longed to be one with everyone and everything, because I felt so different. I tried to do it with my body. Now when my body is turned to fire and ash I will be more one in spirit with God and with everybody and everything.” This locution I read at the cremation and it also went into a booklet for his funeral.

At the cremation a friend read this poem or Robinson Jeffers:

It nearly cancels out my fear of death , my dearest said,

When I think of cremation. To rot in the earth

Is a loathsome end, but to roar up in flame – besides, I am used to it,

I have flamed with love or fury so often in my life,

No wonder my body is tired, no wonder it is dying.

We had great joy of my body. Scatter the ashes.

It gave me a different more positive image of cremation which I thought I might want to do in solidarity with the poor since it is so much cheaper and at my Church my ashes could then be buried right next to my beloved chapel where Fr. Ken prays every day for those buried there.

Diana thought about the blue denim jumper and bandana that it made me look more available vs. trying to be the center of attention.

On the plane coming back:

Ronda: I feel numb from the pain of “biting my tongue” and the grief that the differences with strangers and also those close cannot be overcome more easily so that I can be more one in many ways with them.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Dear one, we embrace you in our family. You belong to us. Hide in our hearts. Now just do some slow Jesus, Mary, Joseph prayers of the heart.

Ronda: Good. I feel calmer.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: Now, coming off a lot of tension, you must not do anything unnecessary, and go very, very slowly.

During this time I got to have a visit with Sr. Mary Neill, O.P., who lives not far from my sister in California, with whom I wrote 4 books years ago. She is now retired as a professor and doing spiritual direction. Here is some of the wisdom she imparted to me:

Our fundamental problems are unsolvable. We have to grow into the solution. It is a process. I thought of how much better I am doing on co-dependency. I thought that was unsolvable, but now I am home-free, even though the tendency is still there with tension when the buttons are pushed. In Recovery this is called a set-back and it doesn't mean a relapse!

Mary Neill thinks we are good and bad according to our personality type. (I have earlier in this year a description of these types 1-9) As a Crusader (One) I have both the drive and passion for truth that goes with this and the shadow side of rage wanting to coerce others. She thinks the rage comes from thinking that others who are not struggling so much have it easy in life. She calls this the Power Wound. She counsels to avoid getting into the game of these more laid-back people, by letting go, letting God and remembering Merton's adage: there is more at stake than being right.

The Holy Spirit works in this mix of good and bad traits. I have to practice trustful letting go when I feel rage and the desire to coerce. She asked, can you love without understanding or approving? I gulped hard. Usually not, but this is a great goal.

Look for the inner unity under the differences.

I need to surrender that I will always have this broken passion to rage and control; the ego creates drama. But I love God with all that passion and rage for good. I need to praise God for my temperament. “He has made me wonderful.”

What is the one word for what I want now in my life from God? Mattie asked me. Peace seemed like the right answer but I don't like peace really. Praying on the plane going home I thought it was more like FREE especially in the sense of being light vs. heavy with rage. She mentioned that Ones prefer system to relationship so I want everyone to be in the system of the Church right away vs. trusting in process and Providence.

She thought bad-mouthing myself as I do is part of this coercion syndrome. INSTEAD I NEED TO KNOW THAT EVEN IF MY PERSONALITY IS RAGING MY INNERMOST ESSENCE IS TO LOVE. I am more than my personality.

She recommends deep breathing, which Fr. Ken also recommended.

Also she recommended a book by Byran Katie called Loving What is Real. The schema of this book is this:

- 1. Isolate a thought that is bothering me.**
- 2. Ask, is that absolutely true?**
- 3. How does that thought make me feel?**
- 4. Can I let go of that?**
- 5. Turn-about: I cannot change the feeling but I can change the thought. For example the thought "I have to be powerful enough to control these people" can change to "Jesus won by love not power."**

Ones tend to see everything as a problem. She remarked that if you think this, then all you will get will be problems.

I love others as I love myself: with a lot of judgment in it!

What if Jesus wants to save me now, not just at the end. Reap the harvest. Don't be too busy flagellating myself to notice the harvest!

February 21, 2008

Today is the Anniversary of my son Charlie's death. RIP dear Charlie. Each anniversary since 1991 is different. This time I have much more of a sense that he is interceding for us, especially his sisters. Just the same I asked for a sign and a friend came walking into the chapel at Adoration and said that she talks to Charlie! Also she said that she wanted to learn the rosary today. That's a sign surely since she had difficulty praying the rosary due to her mother issues.

February 23, 2008

For the book of meditations I didn't finish:

Respectful vs. Ridiculing

"...whoever says 'you fool' shall be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:22)

For many years when I read or heard the above words of Jesus I would think to myself, "He's gotta be kidding! Maybe the word that is translated "fool" is something much worse in Aramaic"? Surely yapping at someone, especially in the family, with a phrase such as "don't be such an idiot," couldn't be a sin!

Spiritual masters claim that when we are free of mortal sin or even temptations to it, then the conscience begins to upbraid us for lesser sins. The analogy is often made to first washing the big stains off a window but then noticing smaller smears.

Right now think of people you would describe as respectful or reverent toward others. Isn't it relaxing to be with family or friends who never ridicule others, especially not the all important ME. Our defense mechanisms can take a vacation, and we feel open to sharing problems we would never tell someone whose response to our narrative might be sarcastic blame.

Some psychologists analyze respect vs. ridicule and sarcasm in this challenging way. A person with good self-esteem and humble acceptance of his/her own limitations looks for the good in others and draws it out. A person who feels inferior and insecure likes to shift attention from his or her failings by pointing fingers at others. If others are fools then I am smart. If others are beneath contempt then I am on a pedestal. I may be unsuccessful in reaching many of my goals, but when I ridicule others I am admired for my witty remarks.

Try tracking impulses to ridicule and sarcasm and catching yourself before you sin in this way. Can you bring yourself to show respect for the virtues of others even when they are exhibiting their worst qualities? When her husband was making a fool of himself in public, a loving wife I knew used to take his hand. The love conveyed in this gentle touch would often change his mood for the better.

Jesus, since the Scriptures show You sometimes using sarcasm toward Your enemies we know that this can sometimes be right. But usually you are depicted as gentle, compassionate and respectful even to public sinners. Help us to know that we are worthy

of respect as the sons and daughters of the Divine King. Basking in the glory of Your love, may be turn to others with true respect

Fr. Ken doesn't think there is a de facto schism in the Church over moral and other teachings. He thinks there is just lots of confusion. I thought "Fr. Ken is a 'bridge over troubled waters.' During the prayer meeting I felt great love for those I think of as being on the "other side" of the Church.

February 25, 2008 COMIC RELIEF?

Sadness a la Chili Pepper Chicken

Ronda to daughter Diana

Ah, to have the comic talents of Diana, creator of the recipe, to describe the horrible platter staring up at me from the counter tonight!

Ravenously eager to savor the same taste sensations I had enjoyed at Diana's house and then at the visit I had with Diana at Aunt Carla's house in Berkeley, I jumped on Alex having a cold and not wanting to go swimming to substitute his being the big shopper for the ingredients.

"Expect frustrations every five minutes you won't be disappointed," the slogan of Recovery, Inc. will be fleshed out chicken-chili style:

1. Couldn't get diced chili peppers at the local gourmand emporium, so had to make a special trip to the fancier store only to find undiced chili peppers. Got only 4 ozs. figuring it was only a supper for 2 (me and my friend) not for a huge family gathering.
2. Decided that using thighs with bones and skin would cut some of the cost for all the other ingredients, only to discover that the whole blood-soppy plastic tray of thighs yielded about 1 cup of chicken after stripping away the bones. Never noticed this before when gnawing the bones to the bone.
3. While waiting for the thighs to cook, made a mish-mash of all the other ingredients in a casserole dish, figuring to hide the chicken underneath afterwards.
4. Proudly put the dish in the oven the night before since today was a very busy day. Figured I could warm it up today. Figured I'd do 1/2 hour of cooking and then 1/4 hour of warm up today.
5. Started typing shorthand notes at the computer. **TOTALLY FORGOT ABOUT THE CASSEROLE!**

6. 2 hours later, smelled a pleasant odor emanating from the oven (just 2 feet from the computer by the by).

7. Oy veh! Ran to open the oven. Even though the shredded cheese had developed from a mirthful orange pattern on top to a dark brown moving toward black hard as a rock crust, it was late, so I just shoved the whole thing into the fridge hoping for the best.

8. Only good thing was my friend had terrible pain in her mouth due to ill-fitting dentures and told me even before seeing the gala casserole dish that she had to bow out of dinner tonight in favor of only eating cottage cheese and juice all day.

9. Heated up casserole dish with a little water on top so it could kind of steam to eat by my lonesome from time to time all day. I was brought up never, never to waste any food.

10. Not wanting to overcook it again, I only left it in the oven for 10 minutes.

11. The final expensive gourmet dish now consisted in:

a) a few small pieces of cold hard chicken

b) swarms of watery canned cream soup

c) huge wads of coagulated tortilla pieces bonded together for dear

life against the heat and the cold of their 18 hour life-span

d) chilis still strong enough to burn my mouth

12. Pangs trying to decide whether to toss it into the garbage (pronounce the French way) or gobble it down as a Lenten penance, or mash it in the food mill into a tortilla potage.

Never again! I will wait for the next family reunion to eat Diana's confections.

February 27, 2008

Lisa Sullivan came over to do door to door with me. I suggested we visit Diane who lost 2 of 3 children and a husband. It was so moving. The three of us sat in my living room praying together and there were tears and closeness. I had been doubting this ministry and so after this encounter Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to tell me: "See the graces we will pour forth."

I got in an argument with a wonderful parishioner who claimed that he was a total pacifist and thought that it was right to dissent from Church teaching on this. I was not so upset that he was a pacifist as that it opened the door to the cafeteria Catholic approach which denies infallibility in morals. In fact, he is good on contraception, the usual first line of dissent. But also I was upset because I respect the police and soldiers and others when they

are defending the innocent against villains and don't want to think that other Catholics think they are doing the wrong thing if they ever kill anyone even if they are, say, terrorists. The argument was that Jesus would never want us to kill anyone. Of course it is true that Jesus hates war and hates the conditions that lead to defense but that doesn't mean that He doesn't think police and soldiers should kill people if there is no other recourse.

In prayer I asked Jesus to help me see how He views it. He seemed to say:

"I hate war and killing but if even good men could not defend against evil aggressors one on one or in just war, that would destroy the good protector side of their natures. So the Church teaching, allowing for defense against aggressors, is My will in that sense.

I asked Fr. Ken if I should drop out of RCIA since it causes so much tension for me and others. He, who rarely 'commands' said forcefully not to drop out but to stop assuming that each person there is but a statistic from my past experience of others in the Church. **"You don't know what they think."** They say one word and I leap. Of course, he added sagely, you could be right. I felt **"convicted."** I think it is because of all the unhealed memories of dissent in the Church and persecution of me because of my being magisterial. I want so much for the Church to be of one mind and one heart.

When I came to prayer again it seemed as if the message was to **"hang tough, sweetie LOL"** I thought about the need to heal those memories of being persecuted in the past for being loyal to the Church. And some kept me in jobs even if they disagreed. I recalled in prayer that after all most of the same men who persecuted me also showed me great love. As a matter of fact, the same pacifist did show me love in other Church contexts. The men of the past I am alluding to hated my ideas, but not me! Maybe because God gave me love for them in other ways. Because men want to be admired they are angry when I confront their ideas. And I thought of all those students who benefited and even became leaders.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to say: **So now thank us and don't be so afraid of conflict. John the Baptist seemed to tell me to accept that if I am prophetic I will be fought against, but also listened to. I do need to follow Fr. Ken's admonition to speak the truth with love more and not stereotype others so readily.**

I saw that what makes me want to flee is the combination of false ideas in the Church which seems like the gates of hell will prevail and I will be an orphan, and fear of rejection if I protest strongly.

February 28, 2008

Adoration: I am feeling anxious about tiny chores. I am wondering why.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seemed to say that when I was younger I had to squeeze these in; now that I am older and more tired I can do less things, especially not so quickly. Therefore I need to do less things. Each day do only what is necessary first, and don't seek to finish lists so fast. Nothing matters so much as being loving and peaceful.

March 1, 2008

A friend took me out for a day off to relax me. I have been feeling forgetful and strange since coming back from California. I thought of many reasons, but finally hit upon the shock of the crematory scene there with the body of my brother-in-law. We thought we were going to proceed to the crematory door and stand behind it praying but we went right from the prayer room into this horrible warehouse like room with a huge oven with danger signs all over it and then suddenly they thrust the shrouded body in. I ran back toward the prayer room but when my sister, Carla, was gasping seeing it, I rushed back in to hold her. I think I swallowed the shock to be helpful to Carla but that it was a sort of trauma, maybe also because of Charlie and his ashes. I buried some of them at the monastery in the desert but part of them were scattered in the ocean because Martin wanted to do it that way) – so maybe I actually have a mild PTS. I am now thinking I don't like cremation and especially don't want my bereaved ones to have to deal with my ashes that way.

Even though I brought it to prayer then, I think now in my own home and thinking of my own death I need to bring it more thoroughly to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph now.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Sometimes we wait until you, beloved children, bring something to prayer so we can console you. Sometimes you need to bury a shock for a while to function in the immediate situation and then it surfaces later. As your mentor, Von Hildebrand, understood, even if you have a strong belief in the immortality of the soul, the death of the body is a terrible shocking thing, and a special suffering if it is a beloved person. Know that we are there at that time. We are honoring the way we moved you back into the crematory room out of love for your sister to strengthen that relationship in spite of the reasons for turmoil in it. Feel our love for her and for Arthur and for you right at the heart of the memory of that moment. Now just gently acknowledge our love by breathing in our names slowly.

I have been pondering a peculiar incident with my friend. Somewhat playfully I was outlining a short story about cat ladies full of strange incidents where a spectator notices that the ladies (relatives) are now sharpening their nails to be like claws, eating off the dishes on the floor, wearing cat costumes, etc. After much laughter I suddenly got depressed. I started thinking, what in the world would such a story have to do with me as a writer? What Christian message would it have, etc.? My friend admitted that it sounded kind of creepy. Later when I figured out that it was some sort of regression in an attempt to flee from the cremation images of Arthur's death in Berkeley, I was so grateful for her

friendly, gentle admonition. I think God uses good friends so much to help us when we have some wild ideas with no substance.

Fr. Ken said that widows are looking for security not usually for something new to do such as our Widow community. They would need to tap into a free spirited part of themselves to do it. That explains a lot of hesitancy, for example, of widows who wouldn't want to move from houses even to apartments right near the Church because the house is security for them. I thought that I am free-spirited on the mystical and charismatic side, but full of emotional insecurities.

Monthly message as given to Anne, a lay apostle, of Direction for Our Times

March 1, 2008

Jesus

My dear friend, you will learn so much about love in heaven. You will look back at your time on earth and you will understand that many things that occurred to you were both exercises in love and opportunities to love. There is misunderstanding about love in the world but those who follow Me, My beloved apostles, seek to master love as I mastered love, in sacrifice. It is true that love creates joy. This is true. But when we take on love, it is also at times like taking on a burden which must then be carried. We should not decide for love and then, finding that love burdensome at times, set it down and walk away from it. This is not how it is done. On the contrary, if you love as I loved, you will find at times that the weight of love is heavy. I experienced this on Calvary when I carried My love for you to My death. Did I make the right decision, to pay the ultimate price for love? Of course I did. What else would I do, given the wonderful creation that is you? In the same way, I want each of My apostles to expect their love for Me to be a burden to them at times. This is normal. I want each of My apostles to expect their love for others to be a burden to them at times. This is also normal. In love, there are times when the decision to love feels light, of course, and there seems to be no burden to it at all. Rejoice in these times. In love, there are other times when the burden causes you to question your commitment. Do not be afraid of these times. This questioning is necessary for your growth. I experienced this, too. I was tempted toward an easier way. When love is tried this way and triumphs, that love becomes firmer and less likely to be disappointed later. Welcome the challenges to love, even while you decide for love. I will be with you in each situation, counseling you to humility and gentleness. View each challenge as a worthy exercise, allowed by heaven to teach you about eternity. See the opportunities to love all of those around you, particularly those whom you find it difficult to agree with at times. Please do not be alarmed when you are disappointed in love, when others fail you. This was also My experience and this will also benefit you because it will help you to learn forgiveness. I will bring you to greater holiness with each experience if you remember that I am with you and that I love you perfectly and

completely. From the secure place that is My heart, you will go forward with self-assurance, confident that you are cherished. This confidence will express itself in an increased ability to love those around you. Be at peace, dear apostles. My plan is such that you will learn to live like residents of heaven. All is well.

March 4, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: See, more and more are coming earlier to rosary for Adoration. See how slow this growth has been! Process! Trust. We use you start many things.

Francis de Sales writes in the Introduction to the Devout Life that meditation can be harmful if it doesn't issue forth in concrete resolutions about ways to improve on our defects, such as the right prayers to say when tempted, etc. I related this to my vow to be more silent during Lent. I often forget all about it.

During RCIA Fr. Ken said that we walk with Christ through our problems. We don't try to escape by fantasies of living in an ideal transcendent world.

March 8, 2008

Tonight I gave my anger talk in Spanish that I have been rehearsing with my tutor all these months. Right before I asked Fr. Ken to give me a blessing. Afterwards I laughing told him I loved him for encouraging rather than controlling me and he quipped "I never try to control the uncontrollable."

Before the big meeting of the 250 or so, there was a prayer session with the leaders and ushers. It felt so wonderful to be among them. I was so happy to be a bridge this way between the Anglos and Hispanos. Even though, in fact, people have been Catholic in their Guatamalan country way before I was a Catholic, I had a sense of how missionaries felt seeing their faith take fire among a different native Indian culture for they pray in such a fiery way and I am sure God loves it even though it is not high European type of praying as in Gregorian chant, etc. I thought also of Mother Angelica's motto: God cannot do the miraculous if we will not do the ridiculous. It could seem ridiculous for a 70 year old woman to try to learn a different language and speak publicly in it after 6 months of tutoring. I had High School Spanish and then a year with the students at the seminary, but I had forgotten most of it. Suddenly, looking at the young intercessors, I thought of Charlie, my son who died at 19 of suicide and I heard Jesus say to me: "Madre, see your sons."

Even though God gave me a special peace the whole day so I wouldn't get too nervous, I did feel apprehensive not knowing if I could pull it off. Well, very soon after I started the speech, mostly reading it but half looking up they started laughing at my humorous lines. They are a somber people and I had never heard them laugh that loud and spontaneously.

And then when I got to the part of my testimony about total forgiveness of my husband and his changing they clapped. They especially seemed to catch the insight that 20 years of non-forgiveness for a sin of a spouse was more evil than that sin of the spouse. And then when I asked them to come up and be prayed over for non-forgiveness and anger they had tears in their eyes. I felt especially close to the women who are less prominent and less often come forward.

I truly felt it was one of the best days of my whole life to be able to let Jesus use my failings, problems and even sins, to help others this way.

March 10, 2008

Oh, me of little faith. I felt so discouraged about Veronica not being able to do more 2/2, but I did leave a bulletin in a neighbor's door. This morning she knocked on the door locked out with a baby inside. She said her husband told her if she had any problems to go to the friendly lady downstairs. So I sat with her while she phoned him and it turns out she had read the bulletin and wanted to go in, etc. Her previous husband was a Catholic and she had been inside a Church a few times and thought Catholic churches were so beautiful.

This confirms Nancy McCall's advice that in evangelizing you need to become friends so people trust you.

March 13, 2008

From Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, Inc. (this fits me to a "t" about anxiety about tiny things now that I am doing so few "big" things)

"To (a perfectionist).every puny endeavor, each trivial enterprise is a challenge to prove and to maintain his exceptional stature. His life is a perennial test of his singularity and distinction. For him there are no trivialities, no routine performances. He is forever on trial, before his own inner seat of judgment, for his excellence and exceptional ability. He cannot achieve poise, relaxation, spontaneity. He cannot afford to have the COURAGE TO MAKE MISTAKES. A mistake might wipe out his pretense of being superior, important, exceptional. With no margin left for mistakes he is perpetually haunted by the fear of making them."

I am noticing in two private revelations that use the term "the Returning Jesus" that the meaning is not that there will be a huge external event, but that primarily Jesus is returning to our hearts!

March 15, 2008

I was so glad that the charismatic prayer group had The Passion instead of the joyful music. After Miguel gave a stirring preaching about it with Jesus telling us that He did all this and then so many don't respond, I gave a brief comment about how the film was an intervention of God so that millions all over the world could know of His love more and also a proof of the resurrection to the doubting because how would the disciples have followed him to such a death without having seen the Resurrection?

Fr. Ken was irritated by something. By now with the tiny corporal penances I am doing for him and others I feel even more bonded so that any time he is irritated or saddened I feel pain inside my own self. I think it is a sign of a deep spiritual friendship to participate in this way in the soul of the other.

March 17, 2008

Today I marched with a group doing a social justice protest. They were making their way from Asheville to Raleigh. One of our parishioners who runs an ecumenical ministry to immigrants was part of the leadership of this march. A few times many years ago I tried going to such demonstrations but was put off with the fierce rejection of some of them of the pro-life movement. Like Juli Loesch Wiley who started Pro Lifers for Survival, I think these issues should be joined especially by consistent life ethics Catholics. In fact, on this march today the Schunke family who is so pro-life, did come to this march also. I had many reasons to go this time.

I have a heart for the immigrants since getting to know the Guatamalan Mayan ones in our parish and prayer group. Also I wanted to try once more to dialogue with the other marchers about pro-life issues.

I prayed and prayed before and worked my Recovery, Inc. techniques to decide to only speak politely and not to argue. Blessed be God, the individuals I spoke with during the march were real peace people, not raging self-righteous ones that can sometimes be found in such movements. Also I got the grace to insert my pro-life activist viewpoints in a gentle way, not in a confrontative way. It was a great victory for me of grace plus Recovery, Inc. techniques.

At the RCIA meeting I did better also until the very end. Fr. Ken wanted to help the candidates to see that they didn't need to fuss over every detail of the upcoming Easter Vigil ceremony but instead begin to open themselves to new graces. He said that they could never love the liturgy of the Catholic Church if being safe was their priority. Somehow it touched a nerve and I blurted out that I disagreed more with Fr. Ken on this than anything

so far! I insisted that the Church was our only safety. Fr. Ken polled the group and no one but me had interpreted his statement as having any reference at all to Church doctrine but only to the attitude of the candidates to their reception into the Church. Still I fretted and fretted over it, realizing that for me to be Saved in the Church equals to Be Safe. Period! I grabbed Fr. Ken the next morning to try to clear up the misunderstanding. He seemed quite angry that I persisted in misunderstanding his intent. He did explain it more clearly, making a distinction between seasoned Catholics who should find the Church safe and those about to plunge into their initiation rites. Finally I did something so unlike me – instead of debating it forever I just said meekly “Please don’t be angry at me. I am trying so hard to understand.” He said he wasn’t angry at me, just at the circumstance of the candidates making such a fuss about exterior matters.

I thought it was a sign of healing that I could speak to him from the heart instead of trying to win the debate.

March 19, 2008

Arrangements have been finalized for me to do *Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace* with men across the street in a half-way house for alcoholics and drug addicts. I am thrilled.

I was planning to work on my Spanish talk on feminine and masculine but it being Wednesday of Holy Week I felt led instead to listen quietly to the St. Matthew Passion and finish reading a book by St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain. In the last chapters on delights of the spiritual life there are a few quotations that seem to fit very well with what some people in our times are experiencing in visions and locutions:

“The vision of the divine light and the divine beauty...is more sweet and more desirable than all the other attributes and perfections of God...The reason for this is the fact that as the physical light of the sun provides the brightness to the physical eyes and makes it possible for them to distinguish the visible creations in the physical world, so also is the spiritual light of the super-essential sun which grants illumination and clarity to the eyes of the soul the means by which they can discern through it all the blessed visions in the spiritual world and all the mysteries of the future age.”

“According to the holy Fathers (the Doctors of the early Church) the body by necessity participates according to its nature, together with the senses, in the divine and blessed passions, both in this present life and in the future as well....Therefore, even the physical eyes see the divine light and the spiritual beauty, and the physical hearing hears the spiritual sounds of heaven. ...St. Kallistos, too, has written at length to show that God out of love for mankind can be revealed and received through every intelligible and spiritual sense.

Triduum, March 21-23, 2008

When Father Ken was washing and kissing our feet so solemnly and crawling from person to person down the pews it seemed as if he became Jesus.

Good Friday all the Hispanos crawling up to venerate the Cross was so moving especially because this year I recognize so many more of them from the charismatic prayer group.

There came 2 very sharp rejections from friends these days.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: We said we would manage you. Through the hurt of different people rejecting you or falsely taking out on you their own problems, we want to bring you to spend less time with others and be more with us saying always the Jesus prayer. Don't fret, just flee to us each time.

At the airport going to Allentown, PA, to make my one year vows in the Consecrated Widows of the Good Shepherd, since it was Easter Sunday the airport was almost empty. There was a woebegone looking old black janitor sweeping up. I wished him a blessed Easter and got into a nice conversation with him. He said he wished he could quit but he can't. He wonders what God wants? I suggested he talk to people in the airport as he works about Jesus. He was pleased with this idea and said it was because I smiled at him that he talked to me. Alleluia.

Some highlights of March 23-29 in Pennsylvania: I didn't get angry or irritated even once in spite of some discomforts and some conflicts of ideas about the way of life. I loved being with the Sisters and enjoying their loving hospitality and also being with Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton, the foundress, as she goes about bring Jesus in the Eucharist to patients, homebound, and those in assisted living. It was wonderful to see the faces light up when she came. The ceremony was beautiful and I liked very much Fr. Joseph, the hospital chaplain and their chaplain.

Monthly message as given to Anne, a lay apostle.

April 1, 2008

Jesus

My dear apostles, I speak to you from My heart, the seat of love. I speak to you freely at this time to teach you about love. I desire that each of you accept My love, which includes the love of all of heaven. Those who are lukewarm and do not accept my love cannot help Me in My goal of renewal. Those who are concerned with establishing their kingdoms on earth will lose opportunities to seed the renewal each day. Those who postpone a full commitment to My goals will find that they are sadly disappointed later, when they realize

how important their service was to Me. I rely on My apostles to be passionate about service, seeking always to store up heavenly treasures in the souls of those around them. Truly, no kind word, no compassionate silence, no act of love is lost. Each of these is both used immediately and preserved eternally. I understand that you are tired at times. I understand that you become discouraged. I understand these things because in My humanity I experienced these things. I allow these feelings in My beloved apostles because their service to Me then becomes even more beneficial. Rest assured that you have been given all that you need in strength and courage for each day's service. There is no difficulty, from heaven's perspective, in an apostle serving in weariness. Most apostles served in weariness and the weariness that an apostle feels does not mean that the fire of the Spirit is at risk of being extinguished. Have no fear about this because I Myself tend to the presence of the Spirit in your soul. This fire has been expertly banked so that it will burn for as long as it needs to burn. Some day you will be finished with your service on earth. The tasks that I need from you will be completed. This will be a joyful day for you. You will see all that you have accomplished for Me. Yes, weariness comes and goes, but love creates stamina that keeps the servant and the service steady. In the time to come I intend to increase the capacity for love in each apostle. This is necessary for heaven's goals and will enable My beloved ones to serve with even greater dedication and humility. I will teach you more and instruct you closely in the use of this gift as time passes. This heavenly concession will greatly increase the effectiveness of My presence in your soul. I am so grateful that you seek to remain close to Me. Rejoice, dear apostles. I am with you.

April 2, 2008

Reading for the Hermit St. Francis of Paola April 2 in the Office of Readings. It is so relevant to us who struggle with anger:

"Put aside your hatred and animosity. Take pains to refrain from sharp words. If they escape your lips, do not be ashamed to let your lips produce the remedy, since they have caused the wounds. Pardon one another so that later on you will not remember the injury. The recollection of an injury is itself wrong. It adds to our anger, nurtures our sin and hates what is good. It is a rusty arrow and poison for the soul. It puts all virtue to flight. It is like a worm in the mind: it confuses our speech and tears to shreds our petitions to God. It is foreign to charity: it remains planted in the soul like a nail. It is wickedness that never sleeps, sin that never fails. It is indeed a daily death."

Notice that he doesn't add "but it is okay if you are in the right."

Feeling grief this morning over a friend who withdrew from me and also about the problems with the Sisters in Allentown that they are my "triplets" in some but not all their values. I begged Jesus, Mary and Joseph for a word about what I should do: They seemed to tell me this:

“You need to let us be your “quads.” If you stop wanting so desperately that others be your twins, even your real twin, you can be lighter and then you will see more clearly how to proceed day by day with the problems that come up. As long as you want others who come to be your twins it cannot work.”

Fr. Ken remarked humorously when I conveyed this idea to him that “if I met my twin I would kill him!”

I thought I should “chat” during the day with Mary about household things, food, and cats as well as about trying to be more gentle. St. Joseph I beg to help me when I need to understand men better. Doing the Stations it seemed as if St. Joseph told me that from heaven he had inspired the Roman soldiers to get Simon of Cyrene to help carry that cross!

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, seemed to tell me that every time I think of something that outrages me about someone who I wanted to be a twin soul I should offer that pain immediately for graces for them, and then let it go. Every time I see something I like I should praise the Lord.

During adoration Jesus seemed to tell me: “Sursum corda. Remember, we win in the end. Now, today you pray the glorious mysteries and just rejoice in them. That can be a way of visiting us.”

I was reading about St. John Vianney and the writer says it is reported that people saw him talking to Jesus and Mary and the angels and laughing aloud.

April 4, 2007

By means of a dear friend who has locutions and visions, Jesus seemed to want to give me this message about the Sisters in Allentown:

Peace be with you, Ronda. All that you labor for is warranted, but here is a situation that is likely to change. This will not be a long term thing for you, nor will you find long term satisfaction if you try to stay.

Then I asked Fr. Ken the next day what he thought about this. He thought that just by living widowhood in the dedicated form I am doing it, I am providing a way for widows to have a sense of what they could do in many, many, forms, not necessarily a specific one such as the Order or my Dedicated Widow rule. So, I am thinking in this connection that the EWTN show will be potentially reaching 50 million over and over again all over the world and that might be more important than starting a community myself or with Allentown Sisters even though personally it is painful for me not to have “twins” doing it with me.

(Rereading this in 2013, it is even clearer than it was then that I am not meant to be in any kind of community run by me or by another and that just being a Dedicated Widow in my own way is a good witness for others.)

April 11, 2008

Fr. Ken came for a visit to the house of Carla and Steve, mostly to see Diana, my California daughter who was visiting the family here. We all had a little wine and it seemed like a real in vino veritas visit. Because I am not drinking any kind of alcohol any more except at family visits, not out of some penance, but because I don't like to drink alone, one glass of Merlot tonight had me sharing riotously my fantasy that one day at the Saturday night charismatic prayer meeting I will levitate and they will call Fr. Ken and he will see and then he will have to listen to me even when he disagrees! I also humorously shared with the whole gang my longing to see my daughters back in the Church, and to ask God to send me some painful dread disease I could offer as a penance.

Well, only one day later I passed out at Adoration and the daughters got me to the emergency and I spent a terrible 2 days there feeling so alienated by the atmosphere, by the TV I succumbed to out of restlessness and wanting to be diverted totally. The good part was offering everything up for the daughters, and identifying pain of needles with Jesus from the Passion film. I think Jesus, Mary and Joseph did honor my prayer but I did very poorly on putting up with eating issues and the defects of hospital service for diabetics. I managed not to scream at anyone but to talk with tears in my voice about how anxious there lack of communication was about availability in between their horrible meals of snacks that would be good for diabetics. Apparently I could have gotten them if I had begged more clearly.

I am not going to work up the anger by itemizing the details. I just finally begged them to do it differently with the next diabetic. And it made me eager to try to do more Eucharistic ministry to the hospitalized and home-bound.

April 12, 2008

My Priest, My Friend

It's not in the job description –

well, friendly, yes,

**but not to offer hope,
he'd be a real friend.**

**The tone in the voice
that changes
so swiftly
from amiable availability
to compassion for my pain.**

**The gleam in the eye
that catches
so swiftly
the humorous nuance
beneath my speech.**

**The diverted attention
that darts
so swiftly
away from a display
of my lesser weaknesses.**

**The occasional hug
that extends
so swiftly
to prove I'm welcome**

in spite of all my faults.

The admonishing stare

that startles

so swiftly

when I cross him

and he's actually right.

The life-line

that plunges

so swiftly

down to the bottom

when I'm in a pit.

The open acceptance

that greets

so swiftly

my family on visits

we so cherish.

Our responding love

he absorbs

so swiftly

with joyful glee

but never dependence.

His greatest wish?

that we would

recognize his love

is but a mirror of

our mutual friend Divine!

from Ronda, with gratitude for Fr. Ken's upcoming birthday: April 16, 2008

April 13, 2008

Zacko's first holy communion was beautiful. Sadly, Carla had a terrible flu attack and couldn't come but Nicholas came and Zacko was so pleased and Carrie sat next to us.

April 17, 2008 Papal visit to the United States: Let me be like Benedict, speaking the truth in love to overcome divisions in the Church. I was so intrigued by the compassionate diplomatic way he spoke about situations where I would want to be so confrontative. His strategy seemed much more like the way Fr. Ken thinks about process, taking people where they are and trying to move them one inch closer.

April 18, 2008

After much inner turmoil, in conjunction with seemingly clear messages from Jesus, Mary and Joseph during the session with Mary Rose, I decided to think of my link to the Allentown Sisters as more like being in a federation and worked up this alternative Way of Life I think is the final idea of what I am called to:

DEDICATED WIDOWS OF THE HOLY FAMILY

A WAY OF LIFE FOR A COMMUNITY

led by Ronda Chervin, Morganton, N.C. 2008

Many devout Catholic widows are seeking commitment to a more structured way of life with greater community with other such widows. Some time ago I formed an association called Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family – see www.rondachervin.com click on Association of Dedicated Widows for the way of life of members of this association. This association does provide a way of life, but not much community since its members live so far apart. I feel called to provide the possibility for greater closeness near my present

residence for widows who would be interested in trying it out. Here is the way of life I have in mind.

Common practices with flexibility:

- a. **Daily Mass**
- b. **Frequent Confession (once a month)**
- c. **Rosary and Chaplet of Divine Mercy**
- d. **Liturgy of the Hours daily especially morning, evening and night prayer.**
- e. **Silent Prayer each day (at Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on parish days of Adoration whenever possible – at our parish we presently have Adoration M-Th 10:40-11:40 AM, Fr 6:30-7:30 PM)**
- f. **Spiritual Reading daily from Scripture, writings of the saints,**

Office of Readings, or other.

- g. **Yearly retreat**
- h. **Community Prayer: whenever possible the sisters should gather as a community for Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary, Chaplet or visit to the Blessed Sacrament**
- i. **Eucharistic Adoration Spiritual Motherhood prayers for priests, our bishop, seminarians, vocations as recommended by the Congregation for the Clergy at the Vatican 12/11/07**

Other Observances:

- a. **In the interests of simplicity of life we will wear any calf-length or longer blue denim jumper (available at second hand shops for \$5 a piece) with white or blue tops with a large crucifix. For family visits a dedicated widow may wear any simple, modest, garments of other colors.**
- b. **Observing a simple life-style without unnecessary possessions (but with allowance for needs of her extended family), detachment from things of the world such as cosmetics, perfume, jewelry and hair coloring, perms, with discretionary funds given to the poor. Dwellings will be furnished simply with many religious pictures and statues.**

- c. Each dedicated widow is self-supporting and lives in an apartment or house near the parish. Some may choose to live together and share expenses and resources but this is optional. We will try to help a widow with health problems and disabilities but financial help cannot be guaranteed.**
- d. Our pastor, Fr. Ken Whittington, will be our chaplain, but each widow may choose her own spiritual advisor. A widow in our community needs to be eager for help in dealing with any character disorders discerned by the coordinator, presently Ronda Chervin. Differences between the widows will be settled with counsel from the chaplain.**
- e. All widows need to believe and accept the Magisterial teachings of the Church on faith and morals.**
- f. Apostolates of the community include needs of the pastor and the parish, and other works the gifts of a sister suit her to perform.**

Requirements for Entrance into the Community:

There is no upper age requirement. All that is required is a widow's desire to serve God and the Church. Most of the members will be widows and the head of the branch will be a widow, but single women may also become members.

It is presumed that the applicant will be of good moral character and she will make a promise not to marry.

Applicants to the Community will visit Ronda Chervin to see whether our callings and personalities are compatible. A recommendation from a priest who knows each widow well is required.

After a year of residence in the vicinity of the community, the dedicated widow will make a private promise not to remarry and to consecrate herself to Jesus and the Church. During this year the dedicated widow will work with the coordinator and any other helpful groups on any character issues including any addictions such as to alcohol, drugs, nicotine, gambling, co-dependency, work, over-eating, over use of e-mail and the net, excess shopping. As well the dedicated widow will work on growth in prayer and Christian virtues and on her apostolate.

A dedicated widow may choose to leave at any time. Also she may be dismissed at the discretion of the coordinator of her branch for legitimate reasons.

April 19, 2008

Ruth Ballard did her wonderful icon workshop. Before this, Fr. Ken explained why Western eyes, used to 3 dimensional sculptures in Church don't immediately understand icons and how they are a gateway into heaven not a depiction of human life. I was especially moved by the idea Ruth conveyed that when you pray before an icon you move through it back through all the similar representations of the past and then into the living being of the person(s) depicted.

Uproarious hispano(a) birthday party for Fr. Ken. Right before in the Papal visit Benedict said we must love our priests even more and this event so depicted the way the closely knit Mayan community would express this. We, more individualistic, anglos, wouldn't think of having lines and lines of people coming up to kiss and hug him and some throwing money on his dinner plate. Fr. Ken detached the huge birthday balloon from the back of his chair and fastened it to his belt and then walked around with it, clown like, throwing candies to the ninos and even mounting the stage area in the hall where the band was playing loud electric guitar songs and tapping on the drum. I thought that the lay preachers would not have organized this fete unless they all know that Fr. Ken's giving us the Eucharist is even more important than the prayer meeting. Also that they were all so joyous because they felt that Fr. Ken, their spiritual father, loves them.

April 21, 2008

I put up on poster boards collages in the hall of my apartment of many old photos. It was healing – as if all these long dead family members, mentors, friends, and my children and grandchildren of so many beloved people were smiling at me with love. It made me feel less lonely. Thank you, dear God, for so many wonderful people.

One of the posters is just photos of me in different communities in my religious garb of different sorts. I experienced it as a breakthrough not to see all these attempts as failures but more as stepping stone to my new venture to form a community of Dedicated Widows.

April 25, 2008 Evening

It looks as if Juliana, a widow from far away, will come to visit June 11-18. I am very excited if wary. When I said I had not thought I could lead a community because I wasn't like Rosalind Moss – sweet, diplomatic, prudent Julianna remarked: "Well, Mother Angelica isn't like that." I replied: But she is much more sacrificial than I am. It looks as if Gen Lesko may come in first after all. My cup runneth over.

May 1, 2008 Gen came into Dedicated Widows for her 6 month trying it out. I was so happy to see her in the jumper and we went out to celebrate. What a dear person! I feel so graced. This is my 7th try of some kind of community life. May it be the best one that really works. Thank you Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Letter from Anne Direction for Our Times

May 1, 2008

Jesus

Dear apostles, My heart is bursting with love for each one of you. Indeed, I cannot contain the love that I possess for all of mankind. Many reject My love. They are not open to accepting love directly from My heart. You, My beloved apostles serving in this time, do accept the love of the Saviour. You rejoice in My love. You allow My love to transform you into carriers of heaven's healing plan for humanity. Because so many reject Me, I give in a ridiculously lavish way to those willing to accept Me. Many of God's children, living in the sadness of sin, will not admit that God could offer them anything of value. They are closed to My love for them and they are closed to My plan for them. But these people will, nevertheless, accept kindness from you, God's apostles. They will accept good example from you, God's apostles. Ultimately, if My plan is successful, they will accept love from you. The love they find in your heart will belong to Me because I placed it there. When the people around you are loved by you, they experience Me. This works because you are connected to Me each day through your apostolic pledge and through your apostolic service. I have told you in the past that you bring light to a dark world. I want you to know, dear loyal apostles, that the light you bring is changing the world. We, those of us in heaven, see the light growing. Some of you begin unsteadily. You are not certain that you are called. My beloved one, I am speaking to you now. Listen to Me. You are called. You belong in this family. I need your help. I do not ever want to be apart from you again. It hurts Me to be apart from you and it hurts you to be apart from Me. Only I love you perfectly. If you remain close to Me, I can continue to love you in such in a way that you will value yourself as heaven values you. You are not perfect. It is true. I accept this about you. If you believed you were perfect, My beloved friend, you would be no good to Me. Far better for every one of My goals that you believe you are flawed. Believe in My perfection and be willing, and together we will bring an unstoppable flow of love into the world. I rejoice in your love for Me, dear apostle. I want you to rejoice in My love for you. If you do this, you will show others an accurate example of the peace that comes from resting in the Saviour. Rejoice in your heart. I am there and I love you.

May 5, 2008

On my way to my Christian Writing Group in the parish I prayed to just BE LOVE instead of always living in expectations. It was a good day for that because a woman who comes from Rutherfordton had her wild puppy in the car and on her walk on the road the dog broke free from the leash and was run over. She put her corpse in the trunk and kept driving to us. I was able to overcome a certain squeamishness about corpses and we went out to see the dog in the trunk of her car and I prayed over our friend and the dog and even

patted the dog and then fed the friend soup and chicken before her long ride home. It felt very loving and without the Messages of this week I might have just given my friend a quick hug and on with the meeting!

We are being trained.

(Note: It was at this time that I got a whole series of words in my heart from the Holy Spirit that lasted for 4 months. They became a booklet called God Alone. Here it is. After these pages I will resume the usual journal excerpts.

GOD ALONE! SOLO DIOS BASTA!*

Words Received in the Heart

of

Ronda Chervin

May, 2008-August, 2008

***(St. Teresa of Avila had these verses written in her *breviary*:**

May nothing disturb you.

May nothing astonish you.

Everything passes.

God does not go away.

Patience can attain anything.

He who has God within,

does not lack anything.

God alone is enough.)

(You are welcome to use anything in this booklet for any purpose. For other queries write to chervinronda@gmail.com.)

May 12, 2008

Nine days before Pentecost I prayed a novena to the Holy Spirit each day. In the middle of the night after the Pentecost Liturgy I woke up suddenly at 1:30 AM.

It seemed as if the Holy Spirit was speaking to me in my heart.

In the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, there is no obligation to believe in the validity of any visions or words, audible or “in the heart.” Such phenomena come under the title “Private Revelation.” Approval of such by Vatican authorities means only that they contain no doctrinal errors or viewpoints dangerous to the faith, not that they are considered to be certainly from God. In any case, private revelation never has the status of

Biblical Revelation. For example, Catholics are not required to believe the messages given even in approved apparitions such as those at Lourdes or Fatima.

A distinction is also made between messages allegedly given to an individual for their own use and general messages designed to reach the public. Recipients of messages supposedly from God or others not on earth are always subject to the judgment of a spiritual director. Clearly, however, a message such as “God loves you dearly,” is less questionable than one such as “leave our family and go to Jerusalem tomorrow!” And both of these also differ greatly from ones such as “Tell, the world, the second coming will be in the year 2000!”

Another important note: there are at least two types of visions given to humans: 1) apparitions – these are experienced as outside of the viewer, just as we see natural objects and the people around us. 2) interior visions – these we see within the mind but they are strong, strong images, not like floating, fleeting images from memory or imagination.

My conversion to the Catholic faith more than fifty years ago, from an atheistic but Jewish cultural background, included what I would think of as miraculous visions. At different points in my life I have been graced with what seemed like many interior words in the heart inspiring and consoling me. For more information about these experiences go to www.rondachervin.com and click on books, then on e-books and go to my conversions story and the various books of journals.

Then, in May of 2008 I started, myself, to receive alleged words from the Holy Spirit. . For ease in transcription I will not repeat for each description or message the word “alleged”, but the reader should know that this is the way I view them. I will never claim that these messages are infallibly given or to be received as such by anyone. None of them are designed to be given to others as “action items” such as start preparing for the three dark days. They are more, really, like little essays written by the Holy Spirit to me and anyone I give them to; or, perhaps, part of a charismatic teaching gift from the Holy Spirit to me. My spiritual director at the time saw nothing in them contrary to the faith or dangerous to my soul or any other soul. The reason I want them available to others, and the main reason I think they are not from me but from the Holy Spirit is simple. These words in my heart are much better than anything I have ever written in all of my sixty-five or so books!

Note also that when the Holy Spirit says “Us” or “We.” I interpret this to mean a reference to the Trinity. Some early readers found that Us and We and Our disconcerting, seemingly more impersonal than I or Me. I wondered if I should substitute the word God for those words as in change a sentences such as “We want you to become more open to Us” to something like “God wants you to become more open.” I asked the Holy Spirit about this and seemed to get the reply: “No, we want you to become more accustomed to see each member of the Trinity as speaking with one voice for the three, therefore, as “We.”

Sometimes the locutions speaks of what Jesus said as written in Scripture. It is not clear whether the “we” in these cases includes Jesus or not. I don’t believe it is important to worry about this matter.

May 14, 2008

About the Moral Law

We need the moral law because humans are so greedy to try for heaven on earth in following their illusions that worldly goods will make them happy, such as stolen possessions or the pride of fame.

Just the same, it is not as if once someone sins we give up on them and totally reject them. No. We let them live in the consequences of their wrong choices.

The “righteous” want to see a clearer punishment, such as the immediate destruction of the body of the sinner. This is because the “righteous” are tempted and jealous of the seeming good the sinner got by breaking the code. The “righteous” then feel frightened that the other sinners “got away with it.”

In this way, concupiscence and pride make a vicious circle.

Both the concupiscent and the proud are motivated by fear: fear of not having enough leads to covetousness. The fear of being a wretched coveter instead of a proud Stoic leads to sins of anger and desire for vengeance, and trying to be victorious through denunciation.

Do you see how Jesus tried to unmask these double evils by condemning greed and lust but also condemning self-righteousness?

What is the way out of the circle? “Perfect love casts out fear.” By offering you the perfect love of the Trinity and, through the centuries, the comfort of the love of your spiritual mother, Mary, and the model of so many saints and Holy Communion we try to reach in to you to open the knots of fear.

As our love finds a place in you, we build a well in the depth of you in which to gradually pour in grace which over time overflows so you can love your neighbor as yourself.

You see? When your well of love is fuller you can love yourself and reach out to your neighbor with loving concern as you see them grabbing out of fear and judging out of fear.

This takes a long time to work out. The process is called “life.”

It is our “job” and our joy to see how to overcome the obstacles in you that come from original sin, childhood wounds, social formation, and your “fright-ful” choices.

“But, be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.”

May 15, 2008

The Family

Out of individualism, you think too much as if each individual has to have every virtue to be complete, whole and perfect. Your critical eye focuses on each one in a family and you think about each one’s defects and your mind works on how you would like each one to be. The same with your family in the Church.

You have not really understood the mystical body image we gave you in Scripture. (Jesus is the head, you are the body and the idea that a hand is not a leg.)

It would be better if you look at each one and be grateful for every virtue, talent and good personal way and see how it contributes to the family and others places this person is: school, work, Church. They need the help of the Spirit to perfect those qualities to bring them under the umbrella of love.

In their areas of defect, when some capacity is needed by the Spirit, they need to call for help on those who are better in this area and to seek Divine help.

But they don’t need to berate themselves constantly for not being everything. That comes from a proud, competitive, envious, spirit.

This teaching is part of the goal we have for greater appreciation for your own gifts and the gifts of others. It will take away tense striving and make “the burden light.” You will be without so much tension to be perfect in a worldly way.

The fierce desire to control others and yourself must give way to giving yourself and others to us in prayer and becoming encouragers and affirmers of the good.

May 16, 2008

(I woke suddenly with images of war. I have been reading about the Vietnam War and the Iraq war).

Wars are a shock treatment we have to use to break through the dreadful complacency of worldliness. What is important is not our analysis, but the cracking of the shell – the breaking through the illusion that you and others can make a paradise out of combined selfishness.

In the soul open to the need for God's love and for salvation, those instincts are transformed in solidarity with others as you see in magnified form in the saints who didn't choose evil as a desperate means for survival.

Shame

You are inclined to feel shame because you are vulnerable instead of shame because you sin. The healing is to accept your creatureliness with childlike simplicity: "O, my Father in heaven, your little child feels weak, uncertain, miserable. Lord have mercy," and then toddle along through your day as we strengthen you.

May 17, 2008

Healing

In healing try to see what the demon is of that problem. When I was on earth I often cast out demons. I didn't act as if the word demon was only a symbolic name for vague human forces.

So, in asking for healing for yourself and for others of sin, it is helpful to ask to be delivered from that demon say of drugs or anger. It keeps you from belittling the problem or from acting as if these problems are just natural and inevitable reactions to exterior events in your lives.

About Conversation

There is a roughness in your talk, not only as in talk among embattled soldiers full of vulgarity and cursing but also within your families.

Teasing can be a form of fondness, but I am advising you to avoid harshness or the indifference of not greeting each other with words or gestures or smiles of welcome.

It leads people to become shut up in cold defensiveness and then to seek relief sometimes in the comradeship of shared addictions or in solitary addictions where there is a note of tenderness toward the self: such as "poor me. This drink will make me feel better, or this masturbation, This over-indulgence in food makes me feel good.

(Note from Ronda: I did not interpret him to mean ordinary pleasures in life but addictions.)

Politeness is good when it is an expression of respect, but it is even better when it overflows from solidarity and goodness of heart towards others in daily life.

Watch the way genuinely loving people conduct themselves in these small aspects of life such as light humor, affection, affirmation. Don't write this off as convention but learn

from it and plunge yourself into the source: God the Father, ‘from whom comes all good gifts.’

May 18, 2008

Hospitality

Your homes, your doors, your arms, should be open wherever possible. How sad. So many locked houses and locked up personalities, as you say.

Yes, sometimes, locks are necessary. We know that. but it should be a sadness of you that this is so.

The house of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was always open. The heart of Mary was wide open to the incarnation in her constant prayer she let God stretch her – now you are rightly calling her the spiritual mother of the world.

Are some of you even self-protected against God your Father, your Creator? Like Adam and Eve after the Fall, do you hide from God rather than walk with him?

We miss you. A mother of a large family always knows when one does not come to the dinner table. We miss you when you don’t come to the Eucharistic table. Unless you respond to the call with an open heart, how can you receive the Eucharist?

You have a thousand reasons to be locked in on yourself. We understand. But we knock. This time, open the door.

(Sharing these locutions with the Christian writing group, a Methodist woman pastor who loves the Eucharist and tries to increase the frequency of her way of interpreting it in her church asked me to ask the Holy Spirit why Catholics don’t accept inter-communion. Here is the answer I got in prayer:

As a deep kiss should be a confirmation of self-donation not a gesture of friendship, so full-inter-communion will only come when you are pledged in unity. That is not the present reality. But you must honor the longing for the oneness by drawing always closer to one another, praying to overcome the barriers.

May 18, 2008

We have a perfect will, but then if our children are not able to do that, we permit changes. We honor weakness and free will. Think of St. Peter. You need to do that, too. It is good that you consult others to avoid rigidity.

May 19, 2008

Expectations

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(Regarding others reading words to the heart such as these) You think “if only one person, plant seeds, etc.” is a cliché bromide. This is because your culture is dominated by statistics and cynicism. This is not a PR campaign. It is a transition for hearts. Have you not been changed? Was it so easy for you to become more loving that you want to doubt that the Source is directly working on your transition? “Love is patient, love is kind...” you are all too inclined to impatient harshness.

Yesterday you had a day of grey fear of the void. You became anxious. We told you that it was okay and to move slowly into what would be sent to you to fill your time. You are in training.

(Concerning my sense that since I am obviously not a saint, these words could not possibly be real, I seemed to get a theory that grace abounds and comes into each of us through whatever door is open and each door has its own shape. Some word doors have distinct flavors in the style of the recipient. So, the only way a spiritual director who does not get direct words can guide one who thinks she does, is through prudence about the truth of the messages and the fruits. Of course, also if she seems crazed or seriously immoral that would count against the messages also.

May 22, 2008

Our Church

Those working to heal divisions in the Church sometimes want to minimize the splits so they can have hope. We want, through love, to open each side to the truths which will enable each of you to let go of attachments to errors and half-truths.

The truths that set you free are known to you already, but are veiled, not only by false philosophies, but also by lack of deep spirituality. Notice that in the midst of all the ecumenical and interfaith dialogues, John Paul II called leaders together in Assisi for a retreat.

May 23, 2008

The World Around You

... Begin to link your own heart to all the pain and joy in the world in a cosmic yet personal sense. We don't want our children to be insular or global but deep and at the core and in touch with the hearts of others suffering and joyful.

You tend either to groveling despair or grandiose pride. But Jesus is high and lifted up on the cross with the seed of resurrection real but hidden.

When you cleave to Jesus, Mary and Joseph in prayer, you are mystically in touch with everything at the core. You are not narrowly chained to the local or national, but this is not

for the sake of making theories about the past, present and future, but to be able to love everyone through loving each individual who appears in your life.

By talking to you in this way, we want to unite your head and heart and will, imagination, and spirit. We can simultaneously stretch and deepen you when you truly surrender in trust.

Fear constricts and pride of ambition gives a false transcendence. Trustingly walk slowly, taking in, responding and then, as Jesus proclaimed, all will be one as I and the Father are one.

May 24, 2008

Poverty of Spirit in Battle

When you are in a battle for the cause of truth, for Christendom; or to witness to your own personal values, you have an arsenal of words, your favorite weapons, that worked when others tried to convince you; that give you symbolic victory, words of ours to bolster your truth with authority, sometimes taken out of context.

I am the Spirit of Truth. When in conflict, I want you to come to me with the openness of the poor in spirit. This is not because there is no truth, or only what works in the present (that is Pilate's 'what is truth?')

There is personal truth as well as present day application. But, to let the truth shine through you, you have to be less defensive and really seek me to give you the words that pierce, not like a dagger of hate, but like a two edged sword of LIGHT.

May 27, 2008

Light and Darkness

When you become more silent you can see in yourself and in others the twisted rays of light and dark in ways of life and character. You feel frightened, as you would say, alienated, from others and from yourself.

When you feel alienated from others, you want to hide in yourself, but then when you feel alienated from yourself, where do you go?

You have to run past any limiting images of us, to the real God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Mary, to our real presences so that you can hide in us and become more like us to get light and love for others with less darkness and fear (defensiveness).

This process of transforming you, doesn't take place in a way that is clear to you. That is why trust is so important.

Often what you consider darkness is shadow and what you run to as light is glitter.

But we don't sit on high laughing at your struggles. We are cheering you on for each tiny victory when you see goodness where previously you were too defensive to notice or where someone you think is critical and unappreciative ratifies what you are doing.

The closer you come to us, the Light, the greater will be your yearning that others and you, yourself, can be only light. This is the Cross of those who are given more of a foretaste of heaven. Don't "kick against the goad." Trust. May 25, 2008

May 28, 2008

Together

Much of the time my children are knotted up in power struggles because of fear and pride. That makes it hard for you to benefit from all the ways you can help each other.

In your generation, where so many live very long, but in a weakened condition, you are forced into greater inter-dependence. This rankles, but gradually opens you to greater detachment from this earth and eagerness for total dependence on heaven.

The Church is a school of good inter-dependence because you need the self-donation of the priest for your daily heavenly bread in the Eucharist and he cannot fulfill his ministry without you coming to receive and all your works of love.

But, why is it so hard, you ask? For those of you who work in the parish, the more you want it to be heaven on earth the harder it goes. It can be the healing of your individual family wounds as you grow in love, but it can never satisfy you the way full union with us, the Trinity, the angels and saints will be in heaven.

We want you to cultivate gratitude for the tiniest gifts you receive each day from others in every part of your life. Yes, even for the charm and comfort of your pets. And, then, to let us in the sacraments and prayer fill you with our love. This way you can be healed of all that pride and fear that pushes you to over-react to every annoyance, frustration and setback.

To come into this good way of being together in preparation for heaven, doesn't require a plan. It is rather a yielding to impulses throughout the day and the leadings of your angel.

“The fruits of the Spirit are love, patience, joy...”

May 29, 2008

Breaking Down Barriers

In the Trinity and in Paradise there were no barriers. Satan created the first barrier in his revolt and then Adam and Eve set up a barrier by disobeying God. They exiled themselves from Us in this way. The physical exile was an outward barrier, the closed gates guarded by angels.

Jesus’ “all will be one” prophecy and vision removes the exile. “The veil of the Temple cracks” at the moment of his crucified death.

You, as humans experience in microcosm this pattern. You begin a friendship with joy, feeling kinship and openness. Then come the surprising negatives and you exile yourself from each other.

Instead you are to run to the heart of Jesus, dragging your image of your friend with you, and beg for healing love. Beg that the love of God in both your hearts can leap over the barriers or break them down.

Simply, you could pray: O God, I delighted so much in the light and goodness I saw in my friend. Now he or she seems like a knot of anger and fear with no room for me. I feel pushed out. I don’t know how to be with this person.

And, perhaps, you could hear us say something like: Keep lifting him or her into our light and trust that either now, soon, or in eternity, the love you had for one another will be purified and free of all barriers. Then forgive whatever part the other one has in that barrier and ask forgiveness if you are at fault, also.

Then ask simply: Today is there anything I can do to show love and understanding to my friend? A prayer, a word of empathy if nothing else?

And when you see your friend, ask us for a clue about what is still possible between you. For example, you might not be best friends, but occasionally you can be an oasis of understanding for each other.

Love is a gift from us, not a bargain the other failed to fulfill, where you got damaged goods for a high price! In a way it is like that, but you were also damaged goods. (As the poet Auden wrote) “Thou shalt love thy crooked neighbor with thy crooked heart.”

May 31, 2008

Retirement

You think of this with emotions that waver between relief and doubt. We think of it as a big time of preparing you for your eternity.

For many of you it is a time of increased physical pain and woes. These we use as purifications and ways to detach you from the earth and ready you for your voyage to your true home. It shortens the time of purgatory which is a purging of the vileness that narrowed your hearts. You need so much more space for graced love for your hearts to be ready for heaven.

It is a wonderful time for witnessing to those younger than you. By your joyful eagerness to be united to us in heaven, they get to see the deeper meaning of life, beyond survival and coping.

Of course, they cannot see this if they think of our faces as filled with judgment of them. When you cannot avoid seeing their sins and faults, let that look from you be more sad than angry. “Dominus flevit.” (The Lord wept.)

Think often of the older days in the lives of our saints.

(I thought of Teresa of Avila dying with her head on the lap of her favorite Sister-friend. I thought of old Cardinal Newman doggedly persisting, hearing confessions for hours in cold confessionals, of Mother Teresa on her death bed telling us to be grateful for the beautiful things in life such as being able to walk. I thought of JPII asked why he still showed himself to Audiences in such terrible condition saying: They must see how I suffer for them.)

June 1, 2008 (During the Octave of the Sacred Heart)

(On arising I felt a familiar slight pain in my feet and hands.)

We told you not to be surprised by changes in your bodies. I want you to have this invisible stigmata in your feet and hands because I want you to be one with me, Jesus, in feeling wounded by the sin of others vs. being fearful and angry.

What is in the heart overflows.

Let me do this working your heart. It seems impossible to you because your heart is so jittery, but all things are possible with me.

June 2, 2008

Family

You would like it to be all the good part: the long understandings of proximity through the generations; the physical closeness; the built up gratitude for all the helps.

We understand that, after all, we created the family.

But, then, there are the swift judgments born of long knowledge; the resistance to compromise as each digs in with prideful self-defense; the love dished out in spoonfuls that more be not demanded.

And from this you flee back to friendship love, lighter, less painful but less primordial, less of the gut.

We understand, we created friendship.

You hope your own marriage and children would have all the best of family and friendship; in the image and likeness of what was best in your past families, but free from all the tangled grief and disappointments.

We don't dash your hope. We wanted, by our grace, to transform everything natural, through supernatural virtues and gifts into its best form.

Each time anyone in the family opens to grace there is more love, more joy, more peace. Each time one in the family closes the heart to the others and to us, there is less love, joy and peace.

We urge you into the arms of forgiveness, to heal the rifts, and to make new beginnings. Even when on earth the bonds break, we aim for final restoration in our home, which is called heaven.

June 3, 2008

Closeness

You are ambivalent about closeness. Sometimes two of you can work together, your gifts complementing each other, but very often to try to do things together is to clash; each one slowed down by the resistance of the other, such as trying to put the collar on the cat's head while she is trying to keep it off.

You transfer this ambivalence to your relationship to us. You think if you get closer to the Father he will try to make you do what doesn't fit your personality, as your human fathers sometimes did. You think if you get closer to God the Son you will be crucified; you think if you let me guide you moment by moment my fire will burn up all your own precious goals.

Try to think of it more like a cello and a violin in a duet. Yes, there is a score, but the violin has a different part than the cello. It is not drowned out by the cello and there comes about a beautiful harmony when each one does its own part well; much more beautiful than if the violin player just plays his or her own melody unrelated in any way to the will of the composer.

To avoid frightening you, we don't tell you moment by moment what our part is in your thoughts, words and deeds. We want you to learn the main pieces we can play together "by ear." We want you to hear when you are playing off key: reacting instead of responding, lashing out rather than forgiving...

Yet we have no trouble with the harsh notes, we can gather them up into a high harmony if you let us.

To see if you are playing together with us, listen. When we are playing together the sound is called love.

"And the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

May 4, 2008

Means and Ends

You become insecure often because you make means into ends. These messages are a means, not an end. Think of St. Faustina, told that the new order would be founded before she died. (It wasn't physically founded but it was spiritually founded and then started after her death.)

We propose a means and if you accept, we move with that, but if there is too big an obstacle, then we try another means. Other possibilities are other means for furthering the end, which is union with us.

So, you must become closer to us right now and not cling to specific means. The messages are good means, but they might not go on the rest of your life. Jesus wasn't on earth until the end of time!

We understand that you cling to a means because you experience closeness to Us through it or you think you will get closer through it. That is fine, but we don't want you to be frightened if there is a change.

Ronda: But the sacraments and the Church aren't just changeable means, are they?

No, They are us. However we also work through other paths as John Paul II explained in Threshold of Hope, with the Catholic Church being the direct beam of light to the world but other rays of light off it participating in that light "That all may be one."

June 5, 2008

Spiritual Warfare

You cannot help wishing for rest from the combat and you are startled to have to go back to the battlefield when you thought that victory was won. Only in heaven will that battle be over.

On earth, how can you win at all if your guard is down? If you don't call for reinforcements?

That doesn't mean that you need to be tense. More that you must be aware.

The sign that the enemy is near is that sense of disequilibrium; unexpected hostile winds; change of moods in those usually friendly.

But your weapon is not the sword, or the shield; but sacraments and prayer; unexpected love piercing through another's defenses as we pierce through yours.

All these weapons we give you for free, for we are an army of liberation; liberation from your fear and theirs.

"Perfect love casts out fear." "You know not the day, nor the hour."

INSERT ON GOD SPEAKING TO INDIVIDUALS IN THEIR HEARTS FROM SCRIPTURE AND TRADITIONAL PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Before adding more messages, I want to put in an insert. I have been impressed by how often in Scripture and in the prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours there are references to being guided in life by God. Before receiving this steady stream of locutions I would have been inclined to think that these words about being guided meant the guidance already given in Revelation in scripture and tradition, but now I am thinking they could also be alerting us to the possibility of the kinds of "words in the heart" I have been receiving. Here are some of these passages for you to ponder if you have similar messages or if you want to pray something like: "Holy Spirit, I am reading these locutions I think are from you. If it would help to make me more holy, that is, more full of love of God and neighbor, to receive closer guidance through messages, please open me to receiving them."

from the Psalms:

Psalm 43: "O send forth your light and your truth; let these be my guide. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell."

Psalm Prayer, Tuesday, Morning Prayer, Week II: Almighty Father, source of everlasting light, send forth your truth into our hearts and pour over us the brightness of your light."

Psalm 49: “My lips will speak words of wisdom, my heart is full of insight. I will turn my mind to a parable...”

Psalm Prayer for Psalm 49 Tuesday Evening Prayer Week II: Make our mouths speak your wisdom, Lord Jesus...”

Psalm 86: Turn your ear, O Lord, and give answer for I am poor and needy...Show me, Lord, your way so that I may walk in your truth.”

Psalm Prayer for Psalm 130 Night Prayer Wednesday “

Psalm Prayer for Psalm 142 Sunday Evening Prayer II, Week 4 “Lord God, you are the eternal light which illumines the hearts of good people.”

Isaiah 2:2-5...”Come let us climb the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways and we may walk in his paths. For from Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

2 Peter 1:19-21 “Men impelled by the Holy Spirit have spoken under God’s influence.”

Hymn Tuesday Morning Week II, “This Day God Gives Me” includes the words “This day God sends me...wisdom as guide...Your lips are speaking, friend at my side.” Hymn Tuesday Week II Evening prayer: Day is Done includes the words “You are with us ever lending new strength to sight.”

Hymn Friday, Morning Prayer Week II “Speak to the soul of all the human race...Defeat out Babel with your Pentecost.”

Antiphon Saturday Morning Prayer, Week II “Let us listen to the voice of God...”

Saturday Morning Prayer Week II Cantic Antiphon: Lord, guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Hymn Friday Week III Morning Prayer: “As we worship grant us vision, till your love’s revealing light, till the height and depth and greatness, dawns upon our human sight...stirring us to faithful service, your abundant life to share.”

Common of Holy Men, Morning Prayer Responsory: In the depth of his heart, the law of God is his guide....”

Prayer Office of Readings, Saturday, Tenth Week in Ordinary Time: God of wisdom and love, source of all good, send your Spirit to teach us our truth and guide our actions...”

St. Augustine from Office of Readings June 26: “If I lack either the time or ability to study the implications of so profound a mystery, he who speaks within you even when I am not here will teach you better.”

Some other reflections on the nature of these locutions:

When we read in Scripture in Acts about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of which teaching is one, we may assume this means only teachings arrived at in the usual way by analysis of Scripture and Tradition, but the context could also suggest that these teachings could be more infused knowledge.

A Methodist Scripture scholar in my Christian Writing Group, Dr. Pat Looper, pointed out that her research shows that each of the prophets in the Old Testament is relating what God wants us to hear but in their own individual voice.

June 6, 2008

Receptivity

There is so much we wish to show you each moment. Right now you hear the birds chirping outside the window and each picture on your wall glows with the meanings they have conveyed to you – some for 45 years.

Don’t you see that these unexpected post-60th birthday years are expanding your tight little soul? (When I was a child most older people died in their sixties so I was surprised to have so much longer to live myself.)

We understand how hard it is to release into a more contemplative way of life for those who have been so active. So we offer you less and more busy times; we let you see the contrast, each mode with its pluses and minuses.

The goal is, always, that all may be received and given in peace and love.

Look forward each day with joy and hope to the Mass and your quiet prayer time, for this is where, in a focused way, you let us “melt and mold you, then fill you and use you, as your song goes. It is your receiving time.

Humbly offer to us those snarled up moments where you don’t see your way forward. Wool is still useful after it is unravelled of knots. Bring those knots to Us in trust.

“For those who love God all things work for the good.”

June 7, 2008

Surrender

Everything. Yes, surrender everything to Us, because we are your real future.

Do you see how your cats, even though they want to go out the door to a wider world, wait cautiously just outside the open door to check things out. Much more so do you look upward to heaven but then cringe backward shading your eyes from the sun.

Surrender seems supine, but is really a courageous leap into the better but less known. You could practice doing it each day and then many times in the day not just as a set prayer you could do making the motions, but, instead a real act of surrender.

Ask your angel to help you. Think of it as a dancer's leap. You stay in the air longer and longer and one day you don't come down. That is the end and the beginning.

June 8, 2008

Openness of Heart

You (humans) have certain skills for dealing with problems of daily life: how to farm, how to drive a car, how to use a computer.

So you want to think that all problems have solutions, even problems of the heart. Yes, there are truths about the heart: that anger can become hate, for instance. But the solution to the problem of anger is not a simple plan to shun hate.

"Come to Me, all you who are burdened and weary of heart," Jesus cried out.

The solutions to the problems of the heart are personal. Love dissolves hate. Forgiveness melts the hard heart.

Think of the witness of a saint, such as Paul, going from hardness of heart to burning love because of the forgiveness of St. Stephen as he was stoned and the forgiving love of Jesus coming in a vision to Paul. All of that is person to person, not a disembodied teaching.

Jesus does not only teach truths, He lets you see the love of God for you as He laid down His life on the cross.

Instead of fear and worry about your problems, open your hearts to the sacraments and prayer to let our love become the solution. Let the solution be our gift slowly resolving what you cannot change by your own powers.

"Every good and perfect gift comes from above." (James)

Later in the evening: I was feeling so sad because I cannot share these beautiful messages with the family since they reject this mode of communication.

I heard in my heart: if you cannot share the best of yourself with them, let them share the best of themselves with you.

June 9, 2008

Surviving

You are torn between the instinct of survival and the desire to leave this world. As Mary Magdalene clung to the feet of Jesus after the resurrection and he said “Do not touch me,” she would have wanted to be raised in the Ascension clinging to his feet. But Peter tried to flee from martyrdom and Jesus had to ask him “Quo vadis?”

When it is time for you to leave the earth we will do it in you. Until then, we let the survival instinct push you through the obstacles in life that otherwise might daunt you.

Each morning is a sort of resurrection from the nightly death of your powers. Part of surrender is accepting this rhythm in your body/soul humanness. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” That prayer of Mary is so perfect. See how she is clinging onto the Angel of the Annunciation, to me who will conceive in her, and by pledging the future clinging to Jesus who she will serve.

So must you in the morning self-offering bind heaven and earth by choosing to survive not for earthly goals only but by doing God’s will “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Are you seeing how the themes of each of these messages are joined? And, yes, as you suspect, they are linked to themes in each day’s liturgical readings.

Courage!

June 11, 2008

The Future

You think of the future as a road already laid out that you must walk on. Rather all the decisions of all persons pave the road. May the pavement not have the imprint of a brutal heavy boot. See how different paths look when they are planted with the flowers of goodness! The bare feet of a small child can walk on such a road without peril.

You cling to the news reports to be ready for the future. Do you ever see in these reports a picture of Jesus and hear His words, “follow me”?

But his feet lead right to Calvary, Rather than follow behind him, you would rather touch him lightly when your paths cross.

We want you to see the ultimate future as resurrected life so that you will run behind the Savior. Sing as you run!

“I have run the race, I have finished the course.” St. Paul

June 11, 2008

You observe around you graveyards of the dreams of others. You can choose between ridicule and grief. You can train a critical eye on defects to score points or you can weep for those whose plans have crashed under the weight of their defects.

Which path is right? The critic’s path is justified. Didn’t Jesus scathingly condemn the evils choking his country? This He did to make room for a new way that was harder but better.

He also wept for those trapped themselves and manipulating others in power strategies. He wanted to gather the great and the weak under His wings to rescue them.

The break through is both deeper and higher than the bleak alternatives you think you have to chose between (in your daily decisions). Do the beatitudes look like a plan for success in the world?

The breakthrough is in the heart. Ask us moment by moment to give you the love to see through all exterior evils into the disillusioned hearts of others. Is that not how we used our closest friends to win your heart?

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

June 12, 2008

Waiting to See

You want to pre-judge situations to flee from the pain of disappointment. But, in this way, you cut off what is not full grown, or, as Jesus said, ‘pull out the wheat with the chaff.

We would like you to be willing to wait more to see what we have planted in souls that might need something from you.

Every possibility is doomed if success is measured to a perfect score in reaching only one person's goals. Do children drop out of team sports unless they are the star players? Not if they love the game.

So, do what you love and bring along as many as respond for as long as they wish. Have gratitude for what comes that is good, but less measurement during the process. See how tense it makes you when you measure each activity every day?

Trust in us that we will draw you in and lead you out of the situations that come along. Loosen your grip. We have given you models such as St. Paul and St. Teresa of Avila who went many places and tried many things.

“Nada te turbe, nada te.....let nothing disturb you...”

June 14, 2008

The Promised Land

The promised land is a prophecy, a dream, a rest stop, a foretaste, and finally your eternal home.

Above all it is our gift and you open the gift and enjoy it when you are willing to dwell in the land. To dwell is to enjoy the milk and honey in company with other pilgrims.

How can you enjoy the promised land if you are more like a looter rushing through the land, dragging on your back more than you can carry?

In the Eucharist, Mother Church gives you the bread from heaven, a miniature form for the Eternal who entered time. In Confession, the priest, your travel agent, so to speak, rids you of the excess baggage you took on in fear and greed.

In each moment, through the lesser gifts of life on earth, we want to expand your hearts. Please notice.

“That your joy may be full.”

June 14, 2008

Islands of Peace

In war, unconditional surrender leads to a time of peace. In a similar way, when many of you have been struggling within yourselves you can give up all your ways of trying to win and then we can enter and bring a time of peace.

Remember how often Jesus says, “Be not afraid,” and “Peace be with you.”

It is not that we want to see you humiliated in your battles with yourselves and others. It is that there is no real winning on the human fields of battle you create, despite the beauty of your flags.

We want to bury the dead and something new and unexpected rises from the ashes.

The resurrection of Jesus: what is important is that it happened, not your analysis of how. So, too, in those little resurrections of hope after bitter tears. What is important is that you are there on a small island of peace. Take it in.

“Peace be with you.”

June 15, 2008

The Prize

What do you really want, my children? More? More life, more joy, more love, more success?

Your whole being is created to want more. You are not like rocks in the sun. You are always in motion toward some prized reward – short and long term wishes and goals.

It is a sort of race. It tires you out always running toward prizes but to sit still also tires you out. You can experience this as a rhythm of work and Sabbath, running to rest; resting to run again.

What do we really want for our children? More life, more joy, more love, more of the right kind of success. Jesus told you before He left this earth that He would send me to guide you. The guide book is the Bible and the teachings of our Church. Also, me speaking in each of your hearts. The light shines through.

We look for docile eager students who we can teach to run toward the good and also to rest in it. We have chosen you; do you want to pledge yourself to us?

“Only one man wins the prize.”

June 16, 2008

Pace and Openness

Imagine a sight-seeing procession. Ideally it is timed for the right amount of contact with what is to be viewed. The tourists are not jostled quickly past the most important sites.

Rural life was paced by nature: dawn, midday sun, twilight, nightfall, seasons. There was ample time to absorb the nature of trees, animals, weather in the midst of the work cycle. Think of cooking (as an example of absorbing the nature of each food). Think also of the pace of monastic hours of prayer.

In your era, you think instead of spirituality as leaping out of time, out of nature, into the eternal. You think of being saved from the realities you have made, into our eternal now.

More Catholic, universal, is a rhythm of the created with the Uncreated, in and out, out and in, like breath. When you release yourself into us in prayer, we fill you and then send you back into your world to be open to it and transform it. The pace is liturgical, not rushed.

“There will be a new heaven and a new earth.”

June 17, 2008

Acceptance?

Your sins nail others to the cross. Obvious are the victims when the sins are theft, scorn, babies torn from their mother’s wombs, terrorized innocents in wars. Less obvious are the victims when they are in complicity as when the victims of lust short-change each other willingly, or the exploited laborer wants the job.

The victims don’t always look like Christ on the cross but they feel the nails in their hearts.

How can you both fight sin, your own and those of others, and yet accept having to live in a world that is full of sin?

Picture a fleeing mob coming upon a launching pad. They see battered but viable helicopters descending to rescue them. Some, wounded in battle, slink away rejecting helping hands. Most let themselves be carried on board.

Once safely on board they spy their pursuers on the ground. Some throw things out of the planes to hit their enemies, but one calls out: “Surrender! If you surrender, after we land in safety we will send back rescue planes for you, too.”

“O happy fault, that led to such a Savior.”

Which choice will you make? Can you see your enemy as one as desperate as you? You are not called to accept sin, but “to love the sinner.”

June 17, 2008

(Note from Ronda: As a member of the board of directors at Flynn House (a group home for men addicted to alcohol and drugs) I thought I should know more about what the AA

meetings are actually like. I was astounded. Here were all these “tough guys” – quite a number on motorcycles, coming in and being so warm to each other and open and honest and needy of each other. I thought, my God, does it take reaching a bottom that low before men can relate in a heart-felt manner to each other?

I am now thinking that these locutions from the Holy Spirit are supposed to be related to my experiences during the day, partly to train me through deeper insights. So I am including the context of some of them where that context seems relevant.)

Pride of Life

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world.” 1 John 2)

You like to see energy in people: in sport, dance, building, climbing, bringing powerful music out of an organ. In nature you like to see the power of the ocean or in a tiger. Adam and Eve were full of such life.

Then you see the bad side of power: arrogance, dominance, cruelty: Cain killing Abel.

In every situation after the fall there are the two sides: the happy joy of life and the bad pride of life of feeling superior. That pride must be crushed before we can make the “new man in Christ.” When the bad pride of life is destroyed by ill-fortune or the grim consequences of sin, the weakness renders the dough soft enough to be molded into a person who can love and show the need for being loved.

To pray is to acknowledge that your life-force was not and is not enough to bring the happiness you crave. Through your surrender to us in prayers, we can transform the bad pride of life into energy for building the kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven.

June 18, 2008

Leaning

It takes defeat for most men to become humble and willing to accept the help of God and of other men.

For women it takes disillusionment to lean less on men and stand upright in the strength of the Spirit.

Hand in hand, walking with God, the redeemed men and women can go forward. Hand in hand is not one dominating and the other leaning.

That is the ideal. You see it in Mary and Joseph. Think of the journey to Egypt. Joseph had been broken in his pride by the people thinking the baby in Mary’s womb was not his.

Mary could not lean on Joseph during his time of uncertainty. Now, together, they go off to Egypt, a new land for them, hand in hand with the God-man, little Jesus.

Between the unredeemed and the redeemed is a long process of life together for you men and women with all the conflicts. You cannot go forward without the essential element of forgiveness.

Parents want to be as gods to their children. The children take all their strength, drink up all their love. All that time they need to be taught to find strength and love in the divine Father and, in a different way, in Mary, their spiritual mother.

They need to grow up; that is up-ward, toward their heavenly destiny. When they have outgrown their intense neediness, they don't lean, but join hand in hand with you.

The way is strewn with crosses, but leads to the promised land.

June 20, 2008

Give to the Poor

Do not be afraid. Cling to the Church and give to the poor.

Those who have us as their locus don't need to fear. We want you to be a "light" at the top of the mountain.

We have prepared you for a long time. Those who want to be poor are not desperate if a change in life-style becomes prevalent.

You can start now to do things in more basic ways. We will help you. Ask about each thing you buy or undertake: is this necessary? Savor what you have in each moment.

(The Holy Spirit seemed to direct my eyes to the Cimabue old portrait of St. Francis and said: See the wisdom in those eyes.)

"Behold, I make all things new." (Rev 21:5)

June 21, 2008

Lightness

The more insecure you feel, the more heavy-handed you become as you grab onto what you think you need, like a climber slipping down the mountain grabbing onto branches.

When it is people you are grabbing onto they will often resist to avoid becoming prey, entrapped, used.

This is why quiet prayer time is a necessity. For example, you may wish to talk to this one or that one after Adoration, but gradually you become willing to become lighter about whether that happens or doesn't happen. That is because when you let us fill you with our peace you become less insecure.

Can you see how much lighter is the approach to life of those who are more secure? The climber with a sure guide finds the right place to put the foot and from that secure place can reach out and up with a lighter hold.

There are many ways of explaining this: the Eastern concept of detachment or a phrase like "Let go, let God."

Now, don't become heavy-hearted thinking about how insecure you still are! When you feel insecure what you have to do is grip tightly onto us. Since we are usually invisible, you have to do this through prayer. For those with many tasks this can be done with little prayers throughout the day and then longer times as possible. For those of you with ample time the insecurity of so many possibilities could bring you often to us for longer times of restful peace. From us you can move more lightly into the next moments of your day.

"My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives."

June 22, 2008

Wisdom without patience leaves out love. What good is it to understand more and more about the global scene and the people around you and about yourself if you don't have the patient love to overcome the disgust that comes from bitter truths?

Honor those who doggedly work moment by moment to learn and apply and wait. Remember the images of patient farmers Jesus gave you.

To surrender your hearts to God and surrender to God those you love, which should include all humanity, is to recognize that only his love can bridge the gap between truth and realization.

In some past eras and in some countries now, the perception of injustice led and leads into immediate impulses to vengeance. In your times often impatience leads to the so-called quick fix for all frustrations by any method near at hand, from breaking the law to abortion.

Person by person and person to person you need to learn to come into divine wisdom and live that wisdom in patient love.

"In your patience you will save your souls."

June 23, 2008

Unity and Truth

You are concerned that the Transition will bring people from different religions into a false unity to the sacrifice of truth.

That is because you are looking for external unity. What we are bringing about is a more spiritual unity of all who have been open to letting us invade their hearts.

When people of many religions and nations visit the Pope he doesn't proclaim that there is only one true Church and they must enter. He tries to reach into their hearts by understanding and gifts so that they feel loved.

One day all the saved will know God to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit and will be one universal worshipping body, but the way we will bring this about and the way it will look will not be as you picture it now.

Think of the painting in your Church (a Catholic Church in Morganton, North Carolina) of Christ the Guru. It is not a picture of an Indian holy man worshipping a cross. It is Jesus showing Himself in the form an Indian would understand. Or, think of the many images of Mary in the apparitions of the different nations. She doesn't have to look like a Jewish woman of the Old Testament to be true. An Eastern Catholic Church united to Rome, looks more like an orthodox church than a Roman church. Mother Teresa looked more like an Indian woman than like a traditional Catholic nun.

Meanwhile, we want to give you the experiences and the gifts to be a light shining in the darkness until the day the light and the darkness will be permanently severed.

“Speak the truth with love,” and you will kindle the flame.

June 24, 2008

Fear

You often wake up fearful. It is part of your nature as one contingent, always in need. It is part of living among strangers with unknown motives.

How do we work to change fear into trust?

In the past we trained you in your morning offering to turn to our invisible presence. In giving your day to us you would be reminded of the purpose of your life and how your emotions could be brought under the control of our providence and will. Throughout the day in prayer you linked your quaking or tired or grateful hearts to us. Those who received daily the Body and Blood of Jesus were strengthened by his real presence coming right into their bodies. With daily contrition and the sacrament of penance you allowed us to take away the debilitating consequences of sin such as the fear that leads to and issues from hate.

Till the end of the world these will be our fundamental ways to be closer to you and overcome your fear.

Now more of you are coming into the ecstatic union. You will be able to see us and feel our presences as a constant, each in your own way. You will be less likely to fall into the abyss of your own weaknesses.

“That all may be one.”

June 25, 2008

Personal Spirituality

Christian doctrine is objective and unassailable. Though it is ultimately about the salvation of each person, it is not focused on the specific personality of each of you.

Scripture, by contrast, includes stories with specific words and actions of individuals. You will notice that it is full of risk. David has to trust that God wants to make use of his training in stoning wild beasts to help him defeat Goliath. He risks his life on his trust that it is God’s will that he step forward.

In your personal history you have times where the risks you took failed in your purpose. A small child tries to show love for a parent with a gift that is ridiculed; a man or woman reveals love for a person who rejects him or her.

As a result, you can become wary of self-revelation. Your way of being with us, instead of being child-like and free can become overly formal.

There is balance when you have in each day some perfectly formed liturgical prayer, but then, also, an ever flowing current of personal lifting of your hearts in trust to us and to our family of Mary, angels, and saints.

There is healing when you are elevated above random prayer into the universal rhythm of liturgy. There is healing, also, in believing that we who created you to be an individual person cherish your endearing ways of showing your love and receiving Our love. Think of Mary Magdalene plunging through the ridicule of the Pharisees to anoint the feet of Jesus with her hair.

Singing in worship is so important with each person's voice harmonizing with the others in praise. Also when those with the gift of tongues pray, each one's words are different, but they blend in song.

If you recall, I am called "the comforter." There is comfort in losing yourself in the throng in public formal prayer. There is also comfort in curling up into our embrace in littleness in personal prayer.

Pray to be free of every fear that keeps you from fullness.

"I will send the Holy Spirit, the comforter."

June 26, 2008

Light Shines in Darkness

Some days dark powers seem triumphant. You thought you had found a place of security and find instead dark and danger.

It makes you want to hide. The Apostles on Palm Sunday felt triumphant. By Good Friday most fled and hid.

Now it is your turn. Sometimes we tell you to flee, but more often we want you, whatever the price, to stay as a lamp stand for our light. You are to speak the truth, not with hate, but with love. If not you, who? Can you sense that your own words are stronger since you have been receiving these messages?

Often, when you feel you cannot win, that is the time when we can win, even if our victory is not visible. Was our victory visible when Jesus was crucified? Only a few saw the light

bursting through the darkness, but those few were enough for us to use to spread the light throughout the whole world.

“I come to bring not peace by the sword.”

June 27, 2008

“The Greatest of These is Love”

God has led each of you through different paths to different treasures. You can come to love a value or virtue in such a way that you become not only its champion but also its defender and then can set in almost a spirit of rivalry.

St. Paul wrote of the different gifts of the Spirit, culminating with the blazing proclamation that the greatest of these is love. Can you see that the quality of one small deed of love having its source in divine love is “the pearl of great price”?

It is not a matter of teeth gritting decisions to overcome your resistance to sacrifice. Rather by sincerity of response to our love for you, you let us overcome the resistance to sacrifice. Humble contrition for failure keeps your hearts from closing up in defensive rationalizations of selfishness.

Gradually your heart is enlarged. In the end there will be no stopping the flow of love.

June 28, 2008

“On the top of the mountain, “no-thing.” St. John of the Cross

The air is thinner

no smog

you are lighter

less attachments

Do you see

that being “we”

with us

you are better

more free

**not so shaky
not so angry
not so tired
less closed in with your wounds
more close into other's hearts?**

We call it "the Transition."

June 29, 2008

"Hope in Things not Seen"

There is pathos in hope. To wish for what is not immediately present seems to court failure. Disappointment is humiliating.

See how staunch was the hope of Mary and John and the few others standing under the Cross!

Coming to Church is an act not only of faith but of hope. You hope that responding to our promise will bring you and others one day to heaven. Each little prayer for each other is a banner of hope.

What about hope for yourselves and each other here on earth? Pessimism can be self-protective, judgmental. It can close you to grace. But naïve hope is a denial of obstacles to success within and without.

The Christian is to see the seeds of God amidst the brambles; to applaud the spring rains and the signs of growth that follow.

Can you hear us begging you to hope? How could we lead the saints into martyrdom if we didn't know that we could fulfill their hope?

"and even if it die..."

June 30 2008

Power

(I did not interpret the words that follow to mean that God doesn't want us to work for justice, but that he wants us to work with love and not for the sake of power and also to accept where we are powerless to effect exterior change.)

You love power and you fear power. It is the human condition. Jesus tries to teach you something to transcend human ways of understanding as in "behold the lilies of the field" or the temple veil is rent by an earthquake, but also by the drops of his blood or the child as the symbol of the kingdom.

The words of St. Paul speak of Christian virtue as the power to do good.

Your minds must be on the Gospel, the good news. Scanning the horizon for the bad news brings the illusion of the power to resist, but resolves nothing, for there are always powerful enemies without and within that threaten you.

The augmented power you feel in the joining of hands is a symbol of the different type of power. The images in Scripture of the end of the world Symbolize the defeat of purely natural power. Christ's resurrected body doesn't defeat the Romans, but defeats the laws of gravity as it ascends.

Grab His feet!

July 1, 2008

Being Drawn In

We, the source of your being, want to draw your being always further in.

Grace can be for the purpose of giving you extra energy to do our will on earth. Think of St. Paul and other missionaries. Think of a Christian's daily life of work for others. Grace is the energy for good action, but it is also the power to enter *in* to our realm. You rest in us and breathe in "fresh air" so you return to your life tasks with new energy.

Watch this in those you think are close to us. Can you see when their faces reveal more light? Can you feel more tenderness in their glance or touch?

The seed is hard, the fruit is soft.

"You shall go from grace to grace, from glory to glory."

July 2, 2008

Written Words and Persons

You read about Jesus naming Peter the Rock in the sacred book, but in the earliest days of the Church the people (who had not seen Jesus themselves when he was on earth) heard about Jesus from the mouths of people, the apostles, the disciples. The resurrected Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to Thomas personally. The written word is a means, not a substitute for persons.

People change and, also, wound; so you can come to prefer written words to people, thinking words hold still. We use the words of truth to reach your minds and hearts such as the words of the Creed. But the Word that became flesh was a person; the second Person of the Trinity and then a person on earth. When the body dies you will not see a book but a Person, your savior. Heaven will not be a library, but the communion of persons.

Because of what he saw and felt in a personal encounter, St. Thomas Aquinas thought the words in his books were but straw.

We are not asking you to throw away all books with written words. Are not these messages sent to become written words? But we do not want you to cling to them as if they were your salvation.

Each single moment of contact in loving presence with us or with any human person can be for you an opening of the doors of heaven; an opening toward the ecstatic union. After all, new human persons do not come from words but from the “ecstatic union” of two persons.

Is not the Trinity an ecstatic union of Persons?

“Be not afraid.”

July 3, 2008

Setting Forth on a Vaster Sea

You long for larger horizons. At the same time you rush back to the cozy safety of your homes. This is a natural in and out of human life on earth.

For your minds there is a joy in opening to wider views, but then you can become lost in speculation and need to come home to the fundamental truths.

In the Church we present to you the vista of an unknown but gleaming heaven and then gather you into your well-known parish settings with the one table of the sacrifice, finally giving you what is as safe as one Eucharistic host.

In this out and in rhythm you suddenly feel bewildered. You need to echo the words of Jesus on the Cross: “Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Children laugh more than adults because they have more trust, but the benign smile of an old one, tells of long tested trust and abiding hope. (The smile of Benedict XVI)

The sailors knew to trust Mary, Star of the Sea.

July 4, 2008

Intensity

We want you to be intense in a way that attracts rather than frightens. We want an intensity of love, not of pseudo-power.

People were not afraid of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They were drawn by the intensity of their love. So, also, with the saints.

It seems to you paradoxical that to become more intense in this loving way you have to become more relaxed in your prayer.

Prayer of presence is not tense but receptive. This is because supernatural love that comes into you and radiates from you is not tense. Tension comes from fear.

Our love is intense because it is person to person, but it is relaxed because it is a response to what is of unchangeable value; your created being and what we have created in the being of those you encounter.

Supernatural intensity is as rhythmic as music. Tension, by contrast, is jerky, as you try to coerce others into fitting into some plan you have created to allay fear; for example, fear of loneliness.

So do not begrudge us the time of receptive prayer. The ecstatic union depends upon your willingness to come out of your habitual state of defensive planning.

Refreshed by our intense tender love for you, you will be better able to direct rays of love into the hearts of others.

Try!

July 4, 2008

With what words can we teach you the limits of words?

We want to teach you not a dull silence but a rich silence; the silence that comes from going out of yourself into ecstatic union with us and our creation.

Tedious chatter comes from your enemy: fear. You try to ward off fear, ultimately fear of death, through wordy plans. Since corpses are silent, you prove to yourselves that you are alive by hearing your own voices.

Speech as response is better; more musical. You hear a request, pick up a concern, sense a need. Your voiced response signifies you are ready with helpful love.

Your tongue cries out against the threat of such seeming restriction. You ask if I would you condemn the joys of self-expression? Always you want to justify excess by reference to the evil of its opposite: poverty.

We treasure your spontaneous personal voices. What we wish to tame is the scattered noises of your anxiety.

Try for just awhile slowing down and questioning what you want to say. Favor words of communion what us; words of praise of beauties large as the sky, small as a flower; words of thanksgiving; words of humble need.

Reject words of anger; words of complaint; words of critique; words of prodding.

One day your song will blend into Our song.

(Beware) “The tongue is a fire...set on fire by hell.” (James 3:6)

July 6, 2008

Poured Out

It is safe inside the bottle, the libation slowly gaining flavor and strength. The interior life grows in darkness. Then comes the time to let us bring you out to be served, tested, tasted, relished or, perhaps, spit out!

We waste nothing. Think of the angels saving the blood pouring out of the side of your Savior on the crucifix.

Mary’s and your consent to our plan is at first without boundaries. The specifics of our plan unfold. At each unexpected turn we leave you free to take back your consent. Appalled, Peter cried out: “I know not that man!” Your weaknesses become part of our plan. How many find in Peter’s tears the impetus to their own repentance!

The risen Jesus came right through the locked doors of his hidden disciples. He was eager to reassure them. He will anoint them before leading them forth, themselves, to be poured out.

Take courage. Let us lead you into the unknown future.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness shall not overcome it.” (John 1...)

January 7, 2008

Results

You think of results as direct effects of causes. We think more of radiation of power as in light.

When you don't see results as you try to witness to our love, you are disappointed. We are not disappointed, because we are sending love to others through you. The light shines through even the darkness in you that makes you so ashamed.

The darkness in you does block those you witness to from accepting you or accepting your concrete plans for them. As it were, they throw away the package, you, and grab what is inside (our love). All you see is how they reject the package and you feel discouraged. You don't see them in the home in their hearts cherishing the gift.

If this were not true, how could 12 men, who were martyred, “cause” the conversion of peoples throughout the whole world?

I hear the sceptic in you shrugging this off. With the cause and effect mentality, you think this result came more from conquest than from grace. That is the dark side. But, because we are Love, Our rays come into the hearts of all who open to us no matter what the circumstances.

“I am the light of the world.”

July 8, 2008

Microcosm

We want you to learn how to see the All in the small. This is not pantheism (the theory that all creatures are God) or sentimentality (a fatuous cooing over the sweet) as you might fear.

It has to do with the imago Dei, with omnipresence, with symbols, with ecstatic union.

Think of

- all the notes in a symphony rushing toward the final triumphant chord;**
- the kiss of bride and groom at a wedding**
- the smile of a baby: the first to be seen by the parents**
- each Mass encapsulating every Mass**

In the end, when the barriers break down between the religions of the world, all will become one, not in some false blurring synthesis, but in a mighty ecstatic union where the partial will rush toward the full.

July 9, 2008

Convergence

The closer you get to heaven the more earthly division distresses you. You see no way to overcome it, whether it be in the realm of the political or the ecclesial. These divisions are long entrenched, coming as they do from real sins of the past.

Healing will come through grace. You can cooperate in making openings for grace by avoiding denunciation in favor of understanding the reasons for the dividing stances.

Imagination can help. Think of small children learning fear and hate as necessary for self-protection. Let yourself notice the unexpected that comes when someone leaps over the division in a gesture of solidarity. Don't you want to be one who, with our help, can make those kind of leaps?

Start by noticing in yourself the impulses to fear and hate and how they come up in the moment you are thwarted in the smallest goal. Can you see that quietly accepting the jolt to your will and working through the problem for the best solution feels peaceful? It prevents you from hasty, harsh, blame with the retaliation that cements division. Humble forgiveness put you and others on the same plane. And, then, with the same people or similar ones, at another time, there can be a convergence of needs and helps.

It is not a matter of "figuring out," but of releasing it into our hands and then responding to our prompts.

"In the world it is impossible, but nothing is impossible for God."

"Blessed be the peacemakers."

July 10, 2008

Comfort

The word has an ambiguous ring to you. The desire to be comforted can seem babyish, as if refusing the tough challenges of life in work or even sports. Yet the "giving of comfort" always sounds maternal in a positive way.

To prepare you for heaven, then, we simultaneously wean you from too human a need for earthly comforts, and attach you to spiritual comfort.

What is spiritual comfort? It can come from Divine grace pouring into your souls, but it can also come from the hope of our approval for your righteousness when you chose the good, often at some sacrifice. This comes from our paternal justice.

From deprivation of human comfort you can become closed or combative. Moderate human comforts are healing of this: good food, drink, the warmth of the sun. Surfeit of comforts makes you sluggish.

All this is part of the drama of life. Part of heaven will be to know how it all worked. Will you let the richness of all these elements of life give you hope?

“We now see through a glass darkly.”

July 11, 2008

Security

There is a good security. Think of “the house built on good foundations,” being with people you trust because they are honest and responsible; sound investments, hard earned savings.

This is good, but there is something better: the security of being saved by God’s all understanding love. In this sense mercy is safer than justice, for “who can ransom his own soul?” even with piles of merit?

St. Francis of Assisi called death “sister death.” He understood death as a sort of trampoline to help you leap from your temporal securities into the security of God the Father’s waiting arms. Judgment there will be, but no longer on your own fallible terms.

So much of the gospel is about letting go of earthly security, the stocking up of barns for a non-existent future.

Come! Let yourself be saved.

July 12, 2008

Beware of circling around stale self-justifying thoughts. Such repetition is very different from the wholesome cycle of nature or the rhythm of daily activities which brings peace.

Insight comes when you let the rays of Trinitarian light into the darkness of mind that comes with the Fall.

The Gospels are full of parables about such breakthroughs: the Prodigal son; and encounters with real people such as the woman at the well. The Good News According to _____ (your name) could be written about such moments of turning.

In periods when your life is not in crisis, We try to give you insight through watching nature or casual encounters. The sky tells you of the infinite. The pleasure of a supermarket worker helping you find what you are looking for could give you insight into the goodness of inter-dependence. Favorite music lifts you above the tragic: a sign that you are not stuck in frustration but can transcend it.

Simplicity of life should lead to less rush and pressure with more room to receive fresh insight. Even in physical pain, disappointment, or loss, open to the Spirit of Truth for unexpected light.

July 12, 2008

Cultures Blended and Transformed

(Of all the locutions in this series this one seems most like me writing rather than the Holy Spirit. On the other hand it corresponds in many ways to the reading at the Mass for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary time which followed the locution and, of course, some of the ideas which seem like summaries of my own previous reflections on life could themselves have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. You can just take whatever you think is true and ruminate on it.)

You can rightly bemoan the violence of the history of peoples; of conquest; the blood of battle; the enslavement of peoples.

How do we bring good out of all those sins that exploded out of the initial rupture of the peace of Eden?

You can see this good in the fact of the tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe (this is the miraculous and beautiful imprint of Mary's face on the robe of a Mexican during the time of the conquistadores which led to the conversion of millions of Mexicans) It is a noble, sorrowful, native face, yet she also appears as the transformation of Spanish culture. The craving for gold is transmuted into the prophesied gold of Revelation in the image of the woman clothed with the sun.

Can you see in the portrait of St. Paul in the Scripture the blending of the fierce Jewish obedience to God with the Roman vision of universality?

In United States culture out of the tragedy of slavery you see coming forth the Afro-American mode of love for Jesus which you hear in passionate gospel music. Now with the

waves of immigration you can see out of intense survival needs coming forth a fiery expression of desperation and gratitude for salvation penetrating the perennial universal (Catholic means universal) more serene rituals.

We don't will for you the miseries of evil in the tangled effects from the paths you took when you chose to listen to the Evil one rather than walk with your Father in the garden.

It is from all of that tragedy that you are to be redeemed, saved and a sign of redemption is the transfiguration of each people. Violence is a foretaste of hell; beauty a foretaste of heaven.

(Later, when I was "arguing" with the Holy Spirit that this all sounded too blunt, with not enough sense of the mystery of suffering that we cannot understand and can only accept because of the gift of faith, He seemed to add this example: the devil leads people to abortion, but the souls of the babies go into the lap of Mary.)

July 15, 2008

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Jesus warned you about hoarding; about a false sense of security for those who take no risks. Because He was the "Way, the Truth and the Life" he asked his children, his followers, to risk even death on a cross for a heaven they could not see.

In spite of the evidence of the miracles, many followers, even the closest, chose flight over the risk of crucifixion. Can you blame them?

At certain moments in each of your lives you come to a crossroads where the price of faith seems too great; everything to gain by being a spectator instead of a player...or so it can seem.

How often Jesus chided the people for their lack of faith. This would be cruel unless he, himself, had given them the evidence to make the leap.

Whose hands are dragging you back to the safety of skepticism? Whose hands are waving to you from a better place on high?

(I thought of St. Paul – first totally skeptical to the point of persecuting and arranging for the death of Christians, but then converted by a vision only he saw.)

July 16, 2008

1,2,3, Go!

At a race or a performance, you train and train and train and then it is upon you and you have to let go of everything else and rush into the act.

We want you now to be decisively focused, not on a physical feat but for loving response. That is what poverty of spirit is about. Only when you are empty of your self-protective calculations can we fill you with our energies of love.

But it is not as if you were a mere instrument or machine. It is precisely through your natural, freely responding personality that we want to work.

- **Think of a mother singing to her babe.**
- **Think of a carpenter smoothing a piece of wood.**
- **Think of St. Peter looking at the fish in the net and envisaging them as the men Jesus told him he would catch for the kingdom.**

Think of the people you call holy. Don't you feel in them this readiness to respond? Yet they are not tense, just truly present and in their eyes you see their love.

It is all right if these words make you feel inadequate. That should lead you the more to welcome us in prayer.

July 17, 2008

Watching and Waiting

In the light you see beautiful qualities in each other. These you want to embrace that you might have them always with you.

Shortly afterwards the shadows fall over the image and you see only what is dark, closed in, finally a mere outline. From this vision, dismayed, you recoil; reject.

How can human love be steadfast if that is the only cycle? Who can survive such scrutiny? It would seem that only inertia would keep any of you together.

Is our Christian call to love, then, no more than a pathetic fantasy?

That would be to think only the perfect is real. That is one way of transcendence; one form of "God Alone is Enough." The disciples wanted to stay on top of the mountain with the transfigured Jesus, never to return to the city.

Another way to understand God Alone is Enough, that we wish for you, is to cherish the sparks of the beautiful divine you see in each other and forgive the limitations and betrayals. Then, wait for your mercy for them and theirs for you to show you a redeemed goodness. That we call the coming of the kingdom, the transition. When God Alone is Enough you can love each other with tenderness instead of thirst.

July 18, 2008

Transparency

You humans develop a teasing and self-deprecating banter to cover your jockeying for power or your shy fear of rejection.

All the more, how beautiful it is when we succeed in overcoming all that to make openings between you where, unexpectedly, there it is: the voice, the eyes, simply revealing your deepest selves. That is what was meant when we taught you that you must be vulnerable to be able to heal.

Such transparency happens. It is grace. You cannot make it happen. It is a foretaste of heaven where there will be no concealment and there will be no reason to fear.

Can you imagine the power that was in the transparent contact when Jesus looked at a person directly in the eyes before performing a miracle, or when He said “It is ‘I’”?

Great artists know how to convey that focused transparency when they paint the holy face.

Look and learn!

July 19, 2008

In His Footsteps

(I have a grandson, Nicholas, who looks at lot like Jim Carvizez as Jesus in The Passion. It happened Nicholas was staggering under the weight of a large couch he was dragging from the back of his van. His body assumed the posture of Jesus carrying His cross.)

You make the Stations of the Cross as a devotion often with contemporary words to relate them to your own lives. Still you do not always see that you are treading in the footsteps of Jesus when it is your own suffering:

- the agony of impending physical or emotional pain;

- the being under the will of powerful strangers;
- the horror of submitting to unjust judgment;
- present inescapable pain;
- the falling from a status of popular acclaim to being an object of criticism or ridicule;
- the finality of loss by death, literal or figurative.

Of a sudden we help you identify with him on this bloody road. For a second you see that you are not alone.

If you stay with that identification, you can become a true Christian. Then you will feel also in your own bones many resurrections.

July 20, 2008

Comfort at the Core

In the body/soul unity of your personhood, you find both physical and emotional comfort through the assuagement of your needs, when you are warm and fed and also feel safe. We usually have you grow in the shelter of the family.

We lead some saints to toss aside such physical comfort to prove to the human race that there is something greater than “bread alone.” But most of you we lead slowly step by step, to enjoy a sense of well-being in the Spirit through music, art, being surrounded by the arms of the Church building. We bring you into the sacraments where mysteriously through the visible you can be saved and comforted by invisible presence.

We wean you from total immersion in physical comforts toward the separation of soul and body at death. Our plan is not for you to feel terrified, but rather by greater and greater union with the Holy Family to be comforted in your souls as you make the transition.

To show you that one day the body will be restored to you transfigured, we give you homey images of Jesus’ resurrected boy cooking fish for his followers and promising them that one day they will find themselves in mansions prepared for them by Him where there will be no more tears.

July 21, 2008

We give you enough of a view of the distant shore so that you will be willing to pull with your oars toward the goal. You are often so tired that all you want is to give up. We understand. Can you see that these messages are a glimpse of the shoreline?

Of course, tired sailors have to pace themselves. When you over-exert yourselves you are more likely to collapse. Pace ourselves means often resting your oars and gazing at the short. You do that when you stop to pray even for an instant. We value such prayer more than you do. We want you to receive our encouragement as a sportsman turns for a moment in the direction of the coach.

Do you really believe in the words of the great champion, St. Paul, that one day all will be changed in the twinkling of an eye? Would we give you “a stone instead of a fish?”

It will help you to sing as you row. If you listen up you will hear us singing with you.

July 22, 2008

Impasse

The natural way in battle is fight or flight. It is perilous to transport that pattern into spiritual warfare.

You are to “fight the good fight” (1 Timothy 6:12) and sometimes flee shaking the dust off your feet. But these responses to evils must be taken up first into your more basic goal of following the way of Jesus. That way has love at its center: not revenge or earthly survival.

On the night before the crucifixion Peter tried to draw his sword to defend Jesus. Jesus said no. Then Peter fled. John and Mary and Mary Magdalene and others chose neither fight nor flight but to stand under the cross.

Situations arise where you are brought to a standstill. You are at an impasse where the desire to fight or flee are in such conflict that you don’t know which to choose. Do not act out of rage or fear. Cry out to us so we can show you if there is another way that is better. Listen to the advice of holy friends. Then commend yourself to us and act with confidence that we will bring good out of your decision.

Later I had this image about the friend I was in conflict with: I saw him stretched on a cross with either side of the Church stretching his hands and nailing them to the cross. As it were, the worldliness on one side and the judgmental on the other. Also that he, in a sense, doesn’t want to let go of obedience to the law, so as not to be flung to the world, but he doesn’t want to be nailed to the judgmental side either.

July 23, 2008

Standing your Ground under the Cross

When in a conflict between two goods, you would like our guidance to be a simple affirmation of your own greatest leaning. (I think the Holy Spirit wanted me to relate what follows to choices in my mind of fight or flight in a particular conflict situation).

Often you see the choice as between two extremes such as fight or flight. You add up the fantasized satisfactions of either course. You might not even think of trying instead for the cross of love and trusting that we will bring good out of the pain for all concerned.

Jesus said “keep them in the word, but not of the world.” To be kept “in the world” is a counter to the desire to flee from conflict. To be kept from being “of the world” is a counter to fighting as in pitting your natural strength against that of others.

When you come to us for guidance, then, try not to be self-protective but to be wide open for the way of love. In conflict standing your ground under the cross might be avoiding hasty judgment in favor of deep listening.

July 24, 2008

“Everything Passes.”

(This locution makes constant reference to the poem of St. Teresa which is the frontispiece of this series: “May nothing disturb you. May nothing astonish you. Everything passes. God does not go away. Patience can attain anything. He who has God within, does not lack anything. God alone is enough.”)

You think you have let go of everything but “God alone” but at the threat of any change for the worst you become frantic “troubled and astonished,” You want to cling to what you know. When it eludes your grasp you have a choice: despair or trust.

We allow that pain of real or seeming loss to replace earthly possession with spiritual possession. “God is enough” because the source and depth of everything is in God.

Do you see how it is all in the Gospels? Mary Magdalene wants to hold onto the resurrection Christ but he tells her “do not cling to me, I have not yet ascended to the Father.” He tells the disciples they cannot cling to him but he will not leave them orphans. They must be open to the Jesus they will find through me, the Holy Spirit.

At the fear of loss you beg us for help. You may feel ashamed to be so needy; to want so desperately to possess. We tell you to look upward where your treasure is ascending. We promise that if you “seek first the kingdom of heaven, all things will be added unto you.”

At Adoration doing my inner listening Jesus, Mary and Joseph and my angel seemed to say “don’t talk it up even in your head. Pray the Jesus prayer for you and him over and over until it is resolved.”

July 25, 2008

“Thy Will be Done!”

Your underlying motive for doing what is good can sometimes be to please others. Their pleasure in you makes you feel secure, that you won’t lose them.

It doesn’t work. Why not? You are not a clone or a slave. There are limits on how well you can meet every need and desire of another human. On the positive side, your own personhood seeks freedom to develop independently. Another person can reject you whenever you act not as a clone or as a slave. Then you feel devastated, cast out of relationship into a void.

When you say the Lord’s prayer: “Thy will be done,” and mean it, you break-through the dismal cycle of dependence on human affirmation. You seek a higher motive for your acts.

Jesus certainly didn’t please the powers of his time! In His human nature, he had to be willing to accept the total rejection of most men to fulfill the will of his Father in heaven. It is because he knew him so intimately as his Father that he could accept being crucified by men.

Do you see how the phrase in the prayer “Thy will be done” comes as a result of the first line “Our Father.” It is not a formula. It’s a reality. Through sacraments and prayer you become truly one with the Father. Then you have the strength to act out of the knowledge of being totally loved. More and more you are doing the will of the Father. You don’t have to look around all the time to see if you are pleasing the people around you.

The first steps may be understanding this truth. That can happen in an instant. Only gradually, however, can we heal your hearts of the wounds of failed attempts at trying to find security in human love.

As this process continues, look at every choice you make and ask us to help you answer questions such as these:

- Is this act good in itself?**

- **Am I doing it primarily because of its goodness (thy will) or only to please a human? (How do you know? There are different ways but one way to see is whether if human approval is lessened or removed do you still want to do it.)**

Then ask us to give you wisdom and prudence and fortitude to carry out our will. Accept that when you throw yourself whole-heartedly into what you think is God's will you may be rejected or the work may be stopped by opponents or just circumstances.

July 26, 2008

Turbulence

It is hard for us to keep you on the right path when you let your emotions run riot. You may enjoy emotional excitement, even when there is a lot of pain. It can seem preferable to the seeming monotony of quiet routines.

The price of turbulence, though, is exhaustion, and often hurt feelings.

We want, instead, to bring you into a state of vibrant receptivity. Open to our presence. Let us into the turmoil of your racing stream of thoughts and passions to calm the storm. In this way we will be more and more a buffer zone between you and those around you.

Instead of waiting to let us in until you are desperate, let us abide in you in a more constant way. Then, instead of nervous explosions, your words and actions will have the focus of love.

July 27, 2008

“Out of the Depths I Cry....(Psalm 130:1)

A baby wails out of need for milk. There is a victory yell in sport. The lament for lost love is another kind of cry. There are cries of joy in song.

The words of prayers you may mumble usually become a cry when your need is deep.

Self-control is a virtue when it keeps you from trying to fulfill your passions through bad choices. But self-control becomes distorted when it covers weakness by a show of invulnerability.

The Devil wants you to suppress the cry from the depth as weakness. He also wants you to cast aside discipline in letting wild passions free. Or, in fear of debilitating weakness or wildness, he would have you become tight-lipped and emotionless.

Out of the depth I cry....to you I lift up my soul.” “Deep cries unto deep.”

The way *out* of the impasse is *up*.

We promise to assuage your deepest needs in ways you cannot foresee. In faith, cry out from the depth of your need.

July 28, 2008

Following Jesus

You become perturbed when your ideas of how to follow Jesus clash with the ideas of others. You seek justification for your ideas through Scripture and Tradition. In this way you try to make what is a way of life into something as absolute as dogma and doctrine.

There is strength in common rules and practice but what maybe more needed in your times now is a way of the heart in response to the reality of Jesus. Your Jesus wants to permeate the world with faith, hope and love. Different types of community can grow around this experience. You can learn from what you try.

Do you see the wisdom of the Church in looking not for rules and plans but rather for signs of good Christian living together in one form or another?

Don't be afraid to make mistakes. When you encounter those with inspired plans look not so much at the plan; that can be nothing but a fantasy. Look instead at the hearts of those involved and cherish the fruits of their works of love.

Let us show you what We want of you in relationship to the ways of life you encounter: sometimes affirmation; sometimes that you are there to make suggestions; sometimes joining in. You cannot know which is response is right in advance. Sense our guidance in the encounter."

July 29, 2008

Freshness

Bombardments of the consequences of sin can make you feel trapped and constrained. Even when there is nothing immediately dangerous to you in your environment, there can be a staleness from repeated unwholesome patterns.

Reach in and reach up to find cool freshness. "In" is the place within where we dwell, a pure stream of grace. "Up" is from your crouched position of fear to lift your arms and hands to greet the good, small and big that we are sending you each day as fresh air.

Can you interrupt the stale round of your worries and unhealed memories to let in the new? Are you so afraid that if life isn't heaven it is really hell that you are not savoring the foretastes of heaven, our gifts for you each day?

July 30, 2008

“Finishing School”

In your culture in the past awkward and sometimes wild girls used to be sent to a finishing school to be trained in proper deportment. They would graduate ready to come out in society as proper and elegant young ladies.

By analogy we try to train up immature and sometimes sinful followers to come out into the world as true soldiers of Christ. What we wish for, however, is not outward show but true conversion of heart from self-centered ways to the way of love.

As your “final examination” in your “God Alone” training we present you with this test:

For a whole week be so close to us through prayer and intention so that your words and gestures will reflect love.

Don't be afraid this would destroy your free personality and make you a mere puppet. That is not what we want at all. No. If you give yourself to us in this way we will use all your natural gifts and God created individuality in an even stronger way. Our grace will make a tentative melody into a symphony. Courage!

“Not I, but Christ lives in me.”

July 31, 2008

More Love

There can never be too much love in the way you handle every encounter. We are helping you to make being loving your highest goal in your thoughts, words and actions.

Can you now see more clearly how specific this challenge is? How an unexpected sharp tone in your voice or in that of one who is speaking to you can hurt? How, on the other hand, a sudden strong expression of esteem or concern will meet a hardened heart?

May this not be a passing phase but an earnest endeavor to which you are committed.

Have you also begun to sense the greater attention to your liturgical prayers to change them from a good dutiful chanting to a cry of love?

Of course it is hard for you to understand the paradox of our absolute Trinitarian transcendence and the need for love expressed, as has been discerned, in Jesus' cry: “I

thirst,” or in the commandment to love your God with your whole heart, mind and strength.

We help you with analogies: is it weakness if parents cherish the love their children show them? Is it not rather bonding?

Don't be discouraged if your progress is slow. Learn from each set back. Remember, you are not alone. We are working in you.

August 1, 2008

Higher and Deeper

When we try to bring you up the mountain to a greater height, a wider view, you can feel overwhelmed. In one way it is joy to be above the usual realm of earthly concerns. In another way, you can panic when you don't see the place for your feet to land. Suspension in the clouds is foreign to your bodily nature.

An antidote to dizziness can be to feel your way deep into your roots. Your ultimate root, of course, is not a blood line only, but your source in the creating mind of the Father.

As a sign I sometimes give the gift of tongues that you may speak an unknown language with primal sounds of roots deeper than our conscious mind.

In some hispanic paintings God the Father in the image of an old regal man is depicted hovering behind Jesus, sustaining Him in an embrace, as Jesus is elevated on the Cross.

Will you let the Father sustain you, also, from above and below?

“With groanings too deep for words.”

August 2, 2008

The Answer

You seek a single truth you could carry in to every circumstance of life. It would be like a pass key that opens every door. With this answer you would never again be perplexed and uncertain. It would end all doubt, shut the mouths of all scoffers. With this truth you could be strong instead of weak; luminous instead of murky – divine?

A single word can sometimes be a life-line, such as “light” or a battle cry such as justice.

We see this longing for such a truth as your attempt to leap into eternity where “all will be one.” You could also see this desire as a sign that you are coming closer to the kingdom of God where partial insights will merge into a unified vision.

Each “answer” you find can be a path to God. It can take you so far, but not through the gate back to Paradise guarded by angels with flaming swords. (Genesis 3:24)

Sometimes you can only find the next path for your journey by becoming not more powerful to be able to destroy barriers, but smaller so you can sneak under them.

Even as you are to avoid pride in your quest for the answer, it is better to push forward toward divine truth than to cling to inadequate formulas for coping in the world.

Close your eyes and beg for the answer you need to take the next step forward.

(When I tried this what I got was something like “Openness; await the dawn vs. locked in by fear or closed into your own plans.”)

August 3, 2008

Weakness

You honor weakness with your lips but not always with your heart. How is that?

You understand from years of reading the New Testament that Jesus came to overcome the worldly sense of strength as coming from power. Instead He exalted the lowly, the meek. He responded with compassion and mercy to the humble and poor.

On the other hand, in your own weakness you want to lean on those who seem stronger than yourself”; stronger, for example, in intelligence or health, in accomplishments or in virtue.

If you look at the saints, starting with Mary, what do you see? Not usually worldly strength but the power of love.

As Christians you are to excel in compassionate love expressed in helping others in their needs. It is right to admire others for the strength of their virtues, and you can look up to them, but you need to lean more on the strength of God than on the strength of any human persons. When you do this you will be able to draw close to the weak that we send you. Instead of being afraid of their neediness you will be able to prudently give as we show you what will help them.

“I was in need and you came to me.”

August 4, 2008

Leadership

(The context is that more widows are interested in my group Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family and I was having doubts I could lead them.)

You are afraid to lead because you think that followers will be as critical of you as you have been of past leaders you have followed.

We want leaders who are well acquainted with their own flaws. Remember St. Peter so publicly weak in denying his Master? Do you see how his knowledge of his own betrayals made it possible to listen to me in a dream about the food issues or to me through Paul about circumcision and the Gentile converts?

Beware of leaders who hate “suggestions boxes.” If you are called into any leadership role, make yourself so humble and so eager to improve that the others will not be afraid to help you with suggestions. Disarm them with your humility.

Always be eager to come to us to listen. If your enterprises are a response to our promptings, you will not need to think of yourself as defending your own ideas. Not that you should try to assume infallibility claiming your decisions are influenced by us. No! You can still make mistakes because the light of our will is filtered through your dirty windows.

We will use all your negative experiences of the past to help you avoid not only false moves but also false postures.

When you think of leaders you have known in the past with clay feet, think not just of the clay but also of all the good for you we brought out of their initiatives.

August 5, 2008

Wordless Presence of God

Sometimes you can figure things out; sometimes you can't. You like to figure things out because you imagine that if you understand you will be able to control things for the best. We like to see you exercise this God's given power of intellect. It is our gift.

How, then, can you accept it when you try to use the gift but no answer comes? That's when we want you to be like a child who can walk in the dark with a parent, hand in hand.

Sometimes, like Peter, you swear your allegiance to follow us even unto death, but when the test comes your survival instinct pushes you to flee. We understand. We forgive. That you might be surer that you are forgiven, we give our priests the power to say the words of absolution for us.

After your words and deeds of penance, we want you to feel a wordless peace, like a child who was lost but then knows safety in the embrace of the parent.

August 6, 2008

Gusts of Grace

Just when you think that what you have done is enough, perhaps even more than enough, We send you a new gust of grace to do something more:

- **to help a needy person**
- **to start a new venture**
- **to devise a new method of presentation**

At first you resist. Part of you wants not the new but rest from change. We understand. We don't prod you because your previous efforts are inadequate but because the world is so hungry.

Let us work with you on these efforts so that your feeling is not pressure so much as wind in your sails.

“When I am weak, I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

August 7, 2008

Leading

We want you to seek our help and the help of your Mother, Mary, the angels and saints in your planning. That is good. You need guidance from on high. The saints always sought the virtue of prudence, enriched by other special gifts of discernment.

Sometimes we make what we want very clear as when we told St. Joseph to flee from Herod with Mary and the child Jesus.

You want to feel that what you discern in prayer will give you certainty in the outcome of your decisions. This presents a problem. For instance, during the years that the holy family was in Egypt, Joseph had to trust without knowing how long it would be before our plan would unfold for their return.

When you feel insecure and anxious you would like us to reveal every detail of our plan for you. Often we choose, instead, to show you only a step you can take next. Future paths depend on free will responses of others. Some of these people you don't even know yet. Sometimes we want you to be part of a plan that fails on the surface because the failure will teach important lessons.

When you don't spend enough time in quiet prayer, your agitation prevents total reception of our leads. You don't see, for instance, that your involvement in a plan may be not a change in location but rather encouragement of others, because there are things to do in your present place that have not yet shown themselves. That is why in many circumstances watchful waiting is better than leaping into something new.

As we have been trying to teach you in many different ways it is not good to become too attached to expectations for often We work more through presences rather than visible direct outcomes.

Look at the growth of the Church. Do you think the deaths of the martyrs seemed like success?

“That the hearts of many will be revealed.”

August 8, 2008

The Light of Truth

Our gifts to you include absolute truths shining in the darkness for all and also words for the heart of each person.

Some of you dislike the reality of universal truth which stands so strongly against the desire for individual autonomy. For example, a rebel rejects the “shalt” of the ten commandments: “Why not steal when I want something I can't otherwise have?” “Why should God be three persons instead of four?”

Others suspect even more any personal truth given in prayer whether they are directives or signs. There is a correct wariness about being deceived by the devil or only ones own foolish wishes, such as wanting to sit at the right hand of God without first carrying the cross. But such wariness can close the doors to any heart to heart communication.

Is the choice then between hard cold absolutes and sentimental fantasies?

“Blessed be the pure of heart for they shall see God.” Jesus taught that deep truth comes to those with sincerity of purpose. The pure of heart treasure the light of truth revealed through writings or spoken teachings. They receive an individual word with “fear and trembling” and grateful humility: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word.”

To protect our children from the darkness of error, we provide the unchanging teachings of the Church and the guidance of the spiritually wise.

When doubt and fear assail your poor little souls, hold fast to your Savior; the light shining in the darkness, who proclaims “the truth shall set you free.”

August 9, 2008

Envy

A toxic form of pride is envy. It gnaws away at the fabric of family, the work place and Church.

Do you see how it dominates from the start? Satan envies God and influences Adam and Eve to wish to become godlike through rebellion. Cain envies Abel. Later the brothers of Joseph sell him into slavery because of envy. Saul betrays David out of envy all the way to most of the leaders in Jesus’ time envying His authority and miracles. How much violence is rooted in envy!

Watch closely for forms of envy in your dealings with others. The plain woman envies one more beautiful. The uneducated person envies the scholar. Others envy wealth and status. More subtle forms can be boasting in the desire to provoke envy in others. Rage can come from impotent envy of those in power who ignore ones wishes or claims.

Each of you in your hearts must come to grips with your differences. You are to glimpse interiorly in prayer the Providential love that is part of your circumstances. You have legitimate desires for bettering your life in small and big ways. If these desires spring from envy it shows you are basically angry with God about your life. Instead such desires for improving your lives should be a seeking for greater fullness which hopes not for the downfall of others but for the same fullness in their lives.

There can be no place for envy if your motto is truly God Alone is Enough! Will you let us show you that we are enough?

August 10, 2008

Shock Waves

Through advanced worldwide media coverage you can be shocked not only by the evils in your immediate area but those around the world. In a certain way you have in your times more of a God’s eye view of your world. In another way you are less aware. A family on a farm pre-media could watch things slowly grow. City people see these only as products in a supermarket.

Through myriad events, personal and global, we immerse you in the rhythm of being of other creatures. At the same time, through the shock of destruction, small and large scale, you are weaned from making earth your home.

The tension of life, death, and new life reaches a climax in the events of the conception, birth, life, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. You can participate in this cycle daily at the Mass, joining to it everything in your day of wonder, joy, shock and transcendence.

It all becomes too much for you. We let you sleep, and finally we lift you out and up. Meanwhile, soak it in!

August 11, 2008

Rising from the Ashes

The Church rose stronger from the era of the martyrs of pagan Roman massacres. Great grief overwhelms the faithful during the struggles throughout history. Think of the dark times of corruption within the Church in European history; of battles tearing apart countries and families.

So, too, the martyrs of the 20th and 21st centuries and the scandals in the Church and the tearing apart coming from dissent.

Do not succumb to violence of arms or rhetoric. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and let him be the Saviour not only of your souls for heaven but also of your hope within the ashes of seeming defeat.

Those of you show lives have been relatively peaceful can be the most devastated when the bad times come. Why? Why? Why? becomes your constant cry.

Can you accept the help from us not so much in outward change so much as in deep in your own hearts?

Look at our saints. Did they experience the triumph of their plans during their lives? Usually not. They had to plunge into the heart of God to get the strength to go on. Join with others not in rage but by clasping pierced hands.

“Be of good courage, for I have overcome the world.”

August 12, 2008

Saved

You would like your every enterprise to be successful with a minimum of labor and a maximum of profit. Sometimes that happens, but rarely.

You would like our spiritual life to be successful with a minimum of struggle and a maximum of applause. Sometimes that happens, but rarely.

More often the success of an enterprise requires enormous effort for even a minimum of profit.

More often holiness comes after terrible struggles with minutely achieved visible change.

What Jesus came to save was not your projects and products. Neither did he die on the cross to save you “faces.”

It is both simpler and more hidden. You are in anguish about your failures: less wealth instead of more; broken homes instead of family unity; war instead of peace; death instead of life. To be saved is not to be publicly crowned with success it is to be forgiven and then given new life.

New life is not for glory in human eyes but for mostly hidden gains such as more kindness, more helpfulness, more sacrifice.

And, hidden from public view is the permanent reward...”in the bosom of Abraham.”

August 13, 2008

Each era in Christian history has a different way of wrongly emphasizing more or less of the divinity or humanity of Christ.

In your lifetime (1937 ff.) Catholics first thought of the divine nature of Christ as so transcending the human that they could scarcely dare to imagine Jesus performing ordinary human acts. By now, 2008, however, his humanity is so emphasized that some think of him as being as weak as they are.

Phrases like “the God above” or “the God within” can usually seem neutral, but can take on the flavour of such divergences from the Truth. “God is above all thoughts” can become a way to keep him away, so that your eyes are on the stars but your hearts are rooted in the world. “The God within” can become a way to keep Him imprisoned in your own categories, stripped of the power to change you.

Through Scripture and Tradition we teach you balancing images. Jesus offers parables of the Father's close love, such as the parable of the Prodigal son, but also tells the disciples that "no one has seen the Father but me." God is shown both as the farmer, sower of seeds, but then as the Judge separating the weeds from the grain.

Let awe of the God above usher forth in praise while the heart opens to its all consoling guest: the God within.

August 14, 2008

Family Stances

Each child in a family develops defences against being taken over by the other children. The price of love can often be slavery to the other's wishes. Later, some become so defensive that they choose isolation rather than risk being used. Others attract companions, sometimes to replicate power positions of the past.

How tragic! How bleak!

We want you to exit such a cycle. We want to help you do this.

In the stories of the saints you see men and women who took in all the genuine love from their childhoods and the love that was there from others in their life as adults. They believed in the ideals of Christian love. Most of all they opened their hearts to our love: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and of Mother Mary, the angels and saints. They were liberated from patterns of power, defensiveness and withdrawal.

It is a never ending battle between many sided evils and victory through the power of love. Over and over in the Old Testament you see defeat if people trust in their own strength and victory when they let themselves be the instruments of God's will.

In the Gospels, overturning the seemingly invincible plots coming out of fear, pride, jealousy and power, you see the triumph of divine love.

You can try to analyze every aspect of psychological and spiritual warfare in life. That can only take you so far. Insight can lead to despair instead of breakthroughs.

Pray! Pray! Pray! Not to win others over to your side, but that fresh streams of divine love may bring change, forgiveness and change.

August 15, 2008

Holy Solitude

You crave company. Your often lonely hearts cry out for human understanding and intimacy. Yet when human love is given, you can feel as if the price is too high. The others

intrude into your inner space until you cannot even find yourself there. They can probe your motives until you cannot even find any pure reasons for doing anything.

Can you see that many in these times are choosing a more solitary life? Is this because they are failures in relationships? Sometimes. But also, for some, because we are drawing them out from the crowd. Sometimes the greater isolation is physical; sometimes it is mental. Sometimes it is pure spiritual – as in going within to us in the midst of people.

To feel it unbearable to be alone is to deny our presence with you. Our presence is mysterious: potentially burning, but often times almost cool. Our demands are sometimes for change in your decisions but often just that you be free enough to be present to Us.

The words of worship and other formal prayers will draw you out and up to us. Please don't resist.

“And we shall come make dwelling in them.”

August 16, 2008

Talents

Many times you have to do things in life with painful difficulty against the grain. We grace such efforts.

Other times, what you are called to do for love of us and for love of your brothers and sisters flows easily from the talents We have given you in abundance.

The Evil One, knowing the power of those talents, tries first to bend them to bad purposes: unusual intelligence can be bent to bad purposes; unusual intelligence can be bent toward conquest; unusual strength toward brutality; unusual physical beauty toward seduction.

When the talents are directed by love, the Evil One works more subtly. Into dedication he mixes pride. Into commitment he mixes neglect of other claims. Perseverance can be pushed to exhaustion.

Watch out for the self-doubt that surfaces when you sense the mixture of these negatives with your talents. The doubt leads to a desire to give up. Instead of giving up, you need to bring your talents back to us, their source, for purification and renewal. Then they will shine for whoever we have prepared them to reach.

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

August 17, 2008

“A prophet is not honored in His own country.” (Matthew 13:57))

In the sentimental religion of your fantasies, sincerity is always rewarded with applause.

In the sentimental scenario of your fantasies, to be right is always to be victorious.

In the sentimental world of your fantasies, your own family is the first to accept your prophetic charism.

Examine the life of your model Jesus, and the history of the Church.

What do you hear? Applause?

What do y

What do the records show? Families affirming the path of the counter-cultural path of the martyrs?

The history is full of paradox: “the prince of peace” carries a 2 edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) Some professed followers divide the Church. At some periods saints followed the claims of opposed leaders.

When you are nailed to the cross by rejection, some of you want to flee; others want to scream denunciations. While you await our next move, take up the words of your model:

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:24)

August 18, 2008

Tug of War

Each one pulls hard. To win is to overcome the resistance of the opponent. Once toppled and fallen, the “enemy” can be dragged to the side of the victor.

This game is played over and over again in daily power struggles. Sometimes the outcome is predictable. A parent has the strength to compel the disobedient child to comply. The more skilled competitor in a sport will outrace the ones less able.

What is it in humans that revels in such trials of strength? Is it a matter of natural delight in power or is it ugly and evil pride? Of course, it can be either. Looking at the negative type of tug of war, can some only enjoy superiority by forcing another into submission?

For believers, tugs of war become more complex trials. Love of power is to be conquered by the power of love.

In the process there is no lack of bloodshed. You cannot figure it all out beforehand. At any moment self-assertion can overtake the goal of love.

Consider the familiar display: three men on crosses. Each one has lost the tug of war with the Roman conquerors. In defeat, the bad thief tries for a last power play by taunting Jesus as a false Messiah. Your savior, takes a different path. He speaks out the despair of seeming defeat “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” (Matthew 27) Then he changes the nature of the trial in the words “Into your hands I commend my spirit.” Jesus lifts the battle from the physical realm. He shows you that what really counts is the battle to keep faith in the Father’s love in spite of all appearances. Out of the victory of hope over despair, He has an overflow of mercy to forgive His earthly enemies, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:24)

As if sensing the shift to the new battleground, the good thief begs Jesus for a secret supernatural victory even for himself, a man justly condemned to death.

When you find yourself losing the tug of war in your attempts to get what you want, which of the three on the cross will you imitate: the bad thief taunting God for not helping him win; Jesus, trusting the Father to bring a higher victory; or, like the good thief, putting all your hope on the Redeemer?

Sometimes it is good for men to cry and to cry out.

Do you see how the mercy chaplet shifts you from love of power to the power of love?)

August 19, 2008

Hardness

Our St. Augustine thought that “peace is the tranquility of order.” You can love order as a relief from chaos. Order is good.

Sometimes, though, the desire for order can make you tense and hard. You see that your goals are blocked by others because they are more relaxed or just indifferent, or busy with other goals. You seek their cooperation. You can try persuasion or you can try force.

In either attempt, persuasion or force, beware of becoming hard. Hardness manifests the fact that the goal of order is higher to you than the goal of love. Even though the goal of order is loving, you are letting the ends justify the means when your approach is hard.

As you go about your daily rounds, even when you are alone, check from time to time for tension and hardness. When you detect either of them, stop, even for a minute. Lift your heart to us for a fresh flow of lighter energy.

Avoid efficiency at any price.

“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his immortal soul?” (Luke 9:)

August 20, 2008

Persecution

In the academic world you think of positions taken on one side or another of a debate as if the view were the important thing, not the persons holding them. In seeking truth, this can be a good way to think.

In the world outside the school, however, differences soon become highly personal as the consequences of ideas mount up.

Those whose ideas are threatened by greater numbers on the other side will sometimes resort to violent retaliation. Think of the leaders who felt threatened by the growing popularity of Jesus and reacted by persecuting him unto death.

On the verbal level, when you feel you cannot win over the opposition, you may resort to the “violence” of sarcasm or name-calling. If the debate is between people who know each other well, the feeling of being persecuted is especially wounding.

How are you, a follower of Jesus, to conduct yourself under verbal attack? Jesus was not naïve about the motives of those who were against him. Neither should you be. Yet he accepted seeming defeat in the events leading to His passion and death. He who had the divine power to destroy his enemies, instead chose the way of silence and even of forgiveness.

Should you do less?

August 21, 2008

Judas and Mary

Judas saw no way out. He tried to find it by destroying himself. You read about him and you wish he had waited for the resurrection and then begged Jesus for forgiveness.

When Mary saw no way out, no way to protect her son from violence and death, she stood under the cross, her soul given over to anguish, but also to seemingly futile acts of heroic hope and trust.

Many times the children of God are nailed to the cross. They beg to be taken down from the cross, or, at least, to know why.

When you are nailed to the cross it is not wrong like Jesus to cry out "Why have you forsaken me?" but you need also over and over again in your trials to pray like Jesus "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

The Passion tells you that what counts is not to escape from suffering, but to endure it with trust in the Father's plan and then let him liberate you as He chooses, even if your enemies kill you, you will be saved in heaven.

Do you see that in some situations there is no solution in earthly terms and your only choice is between stark despair and stark hope in God Alone?

"Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

August 22, 2008

Unity of Purpose

Your strength is broken when there are major divisions in your efforts. In the Bible you see this beginning with Satan falling from heaven and Adam and Eve falling away from unity with God and Cain and Abel at enmity.

In reverse you see strength when there is unity of purpose: Joseph helping his brothers, David defending Saul, Peter and Paul coming to agreement.

Can you see how weakened is the Christian witness by divisions between groups and within groups?

Unity can be based on warding off enemies. The Zealots of Jesus' time on earth were united in purpose trying to overthrow the Roman dominance. In your present world there can be political strength when forces unite to repeal an enemy.

More important, however, is that you have a common positive purpose we call the building the kingdom of God. Think of the strength of beauty when voices join together in song, when members of families set aside individual goals for a common effort.

To be strong for the kingdom of God you need our gifts of faith, hope, and charity. These overcome the division that comes with doubt, despair, and rejection.

When you come to prayer, you open to these gifts and then by your unity of purpose with us you are strengthened to bring faith, hope and love to others. Do you see how doubt, despair and anger are quicksand for the kingdom of God? Never let them grow in your heart. Cast yourself into our unity so we can show you how to bring the most light, peace and love into each situation you encounter.

If you cannot win a victory over evil on earth let us help you win the battle within your own heart.

(Simultaneously with those locutions were other journal notes which are here below):

From Retreat for Dedicated Widows by Fr. Ken, weekend of July 15, 2008

HERE ARE THESE REFLECTIONS:

On the topic “walking more intimately with Jesus,” Fr. Ken referred us to the road to Emmaus and asked us to think about what prevented each of us from seeing Jesus. I thought “If I saw Him visually I could not do anything else and He wants me to do other things, at least so far. I liked how Fr. Ken emphasized that the greatest intimacy with Jesus is not through imagination but in the Eucharist as they found out at Emmaus.

On “letting go but staying bonded,” Fr. Ken emphasized the way the liturgy for the dead is so much deeper than making it into a celebration of life. The liturgy is about bonding with the spiritual reality of the person who died.

He talked about how embalming can help us see how the person who died looked before the ravages of old age and awful illnesses such as Alzheimers.

On Life-Style for Widows I was looking for advice on dealing with choices but Fr. Ken emphasized more simply being a Christian and how that involves contemplation and ministry. He was happy that our tiny group could be a mirror in our times of the early Church’s Order of Widows who sat together at the Liturgy. It was helpful to me that he thought that for most of us the old archetype of the old widow living in the bosom of the extended family just didn’t fit any more. Still not everything has to be a big crisis. He thought that we should realize that chaos in our families is not the same as perdition. We should be aware that our need for security can cause difficulties for our adult children in terms of wanting to control them. If they are doing well we think we have more security. He thought that some of our fears for them can come a bit from prideful ego.

Refreshing our Spiritual Life – the last topic included surprising challenges to be kinder to our bodies, to refresh the body through exercise, for example.

I was told to cultivate greater lightness. I went into the chapel and danced around just lifting my hands and walking. I thought I could do this physically but also do it as an image in my mind when I am feeling burdened.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph said: anything you think about or plan that makes you disturbed and fearful, let go of it and let it come to you if it will, but don't plan it, just because it is exciting in some way.

It felt very good to see the other widows sitting quietly in the retreat room doing lectio divina.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph said they wanted to be my best friends. Maybe they will give me a woman friend to match Fr. Ken as my best male friend here, but I don't need to worry about this. I am hoping Gen, my other dedicated widow, will be that friend, but this will be slow because she is essentially a loner and I am a twin.

About Mother Mary as my friend I realized that she was, when on earth, surrounded by uncontrolled passionate women. She tells me that she tried to bring them trust and peace as she is trying to give that to me.

I asked the Holy Spirit to give me greater insight into the pain of others so I can be closer to them. I think it is not just a matter of cultural difference that makes me not understand others very well but also being too self-absorbed or taken up with my projects.

The Holy Spirit told me that when I enter into a place where others are I could ask Him to show me their pain.

Mother Mary seemed to tell me: you are so funny, Ronda, with all your lists. How do you think I got by without them? I understand that it was because your birth home was so emotionally chaotic that you like order and lists so much, but that is really exterior. Your heart is still often turbulent and anxious in spite of the lists! Gradually we will free you from the compulsion of the lists, but for now we leave them for the relative security they give you. Laughing at is a step toward greater freedom of spirit.

Mother Mary also told me that I was created to be an idea person and that was good but that the shadow side, as Jungians would call it, is this feverish mental activity. It is okay to write down these ideas as they come but then let go of them and give yourself to the theme of the now.

St. Joseph said to avoid the burden of expectations. I thought "one day at a time" is very good for those like me who want to plan obsessively.

I realized during a glitch in the middle of the retreat where I thought my computer died that I don't really want to live without it. The connection with people all over, friends and readers, helps me stay in one place without traveling which is too hard on me at this age.

Mary said "I had to see so much that was tragically awry. When you see something that isn't working you can say something, but don't push. Failure to connect between people may lead them to come to us. You, too, are disappointing to others and we fill the gap. Offer your pain for the person you feel is not being treated right.

Mother Mary urged me to realize that as I age I will need more comforts such as daily baths vs. every other day or more relaxation.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph seemed to want to tell me that at my age I have no obligations and therefore should do everything cheerfully.

Worrying about certain differences between some widows and myself, Fr. Ken advised that I could try for the impossible – exact replicas of the best in me and then try to coerce them into doing it my way – or accept some amount of difference. Of course I want to do the latter.

I asked Mother Mary to help me see, for instance, how home-making women would feel differently about a house vs. an apartment than women like me raised in apartments and more interested in the work-site often than in making my own home a reflection of love.

Mother Mary seemed to suggest that they had given me the gift of simplicity and most other widows the gift of hospitality. "If all of your widows have hospitality of heart for each other you will not feel threatened by the differences. Nada te espante..."

More Insights from Fr. Ken in Retreat for Widows (July 14 – 17)

"Walking more Intimately with Jesus" He asked us what obstacles bad or good might stand in the way. Sometimes when I feel very physically tired I think that I would be better off dropping all ministries and becoming a total contemplative. But when I prayed about the obstacles it seemed to me that it was not the ministries but being preoccupied by them in an anxious way. I went through the whole list of them and seemed to hear in my heart Jesus, Mary, and Joseph telling me how to do them a bit differently:

- Writers' Group: don't push anyone to write more or send out queries. Make a suggestion once and then let go of it. Don't push for greater friendship than comes naturally. Accept what might make it hard for each of them to come closer.**

- **RCIA: Say as little as possible. Offer up, for the future Catholics and returning Catholics, having to wait now to see how my role will unfold.**
- **2x2 Pray and work out a plan with Ron when he returns.**
- **Philosophy Club – after metaphysics offer Person. Fall do talks on M/F and Conscience.**
- **Gen, my first dedicated widow: very gentle and Marian**
- **Charismatic: respond to their needs.**
- **Family: Lighten up. Have fun. Leave earlier during the visit if you start to feel depressed.**

August 24, 2008

My dream came true when my sister Carla, visiting us, danced spontaneously with me after my talk at the charismatic Hispanic prayer meeting. For a year I had been dreaming of her dancing for them.

That night in prayer with Carla sleeping in the bed with me instead of a locution I got a sense of the ocean's waves carrying us out to sea, and death would be letting the waves carry us out into the ocean of God. All night I had a sense of my soul leaving my body.

The Holy Spirit said: In thanks for loving My people I am giving you ecstatic union.

I thought of St. Teresa saying “death is ecstasy.”

August 25, 2008

Anne (the widow I did the series with on EWTN) is staying with me. We went to Carla's house. We had wine and then Kahlua drinks. It was very joyful but I felt I was a bit too garrulous and “outrageous.”

Holy Spirit: It is good that you were free and funny. What is not needed is for you to grab center stage. Try to stay in the background and serve. You felt good doing the dishes. You felt good all day helping your guests. In this period of building up Dedicated Widows the theme is to encourage them. Some will not be able to make any moves because they need their own space. So you need to be affirming but not attached. Avoid trying to offer them “sugar plums.”

August 26, 2008

Holy Spirit: Do you see the convergence of people writing to you on the e-mail? Do you see how we let circumstances force you to persevere with the computer so that you could coordinate mystical bonds? Yesterday you certainly detected that each time you tried to get a symbolic victory by talking about the faults of others with Anne you felt diminished. We are teaching you to avoid sour feelings. Notice that she is not an angry person and this helps you. When you are not angry, you feel weak and anxious. It is a sort of beatitude, part of “blessed be the poor in spirit.” Stay in the weakness until We can fill it with a positive emotion. When the feeling of weakness and anxiety comes over you, intensify your Jesus, Mary, Joseph prayer.

August 27, 2008

Holy Spirit: Did you see some instances yesterday where you were ready to give up but you stayed in long enough to see good instead? Roland, late for anger group? Fun of shrimp and blueberries and chocolate? Try just staying with each thing you started with trust. Giving up can be hurt pride that something didn’t succeed more gloriously. Let us surprise you with little successes. We want you to be such a ripe old woman. Peace be with you. Concerning other possible dedicated widows, let those who want to do Dedicated Widows a different way and in a different city do so, adapting the way of life and with a different name such as Dedicated Widows of Jesus of San Francisco. If they use the name Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family then they should visit and follow your way of life and you need to supervise them.

August 28, 2008

(Context: someone telling a returning Catholic he could go to communion or get a blessing or go to confession first. I thought he shouldn’t go to communion after 20 years away from the faith without going to confession first.)

Holy Spirit: You are not wrong about the need for private confession for returning Catholics, but in the Transition and the breakdown of barriers between religions there will be a lot of strategies used that can be seen as lax; but that doesn’t mean We will not pour out special graces as in the case of Br. Roger of Taize. Or consider the Hebrew-Catholic woman in England with a dispense to go to Mass on a weekday instead of Sunday.

Concerning working with other leaders in the parish, don’t let them tell you what to say and don’t tell them what to say. Part of the prophetic role is to speak out the truth in

season and out of season; in the midst of kindred souls and minds and in groups that are not like minded.

Ronda: Are you loosening me up for a change?

Holy Spirit: We don't want your mind to be on flight at this time. Things could develop where you are needed elsewhere. Think of St. Paul. It is good for you to be where you are now. How about a little trust! Offer up the pain of the areas of disagreement. A prophetic person will always experience this pain more greatly than one of another type. Anne is more of a helper. We use her differences.

August 29, 2008

Holy Spirit: You fight and fight against these evils of pain and death. That is good, but not as an end in itself.

You are feeling challenged by Anne's word that you have no heart. All the prophets were so categorized for speaking the truth. Still you can learn more about speaking the truth with love by not speaking so quickly and being sure it is Us that want you to speak the truth in any given instance and listening more.

Ask Mary to be very close to your heart always for she is full of compassion. You do have compassion when a situation is like something you have suffered. Through better listening you will be able to let Us expand your heart. You are doing better than usual with Anne in listening. Make that a special goal in this time. We want to help you. If you are more silent you can listen better.

Joy about Sarah Palin.

August 30, 2008 visit of Annette (Annette is a very literary friend who took up truck driving in middle-age to earn a living. She came with her semi while Anne was here.)

Holy Spirit: Mary is softening you for being more hospitable. They are interesting follower personalities. You see how good humor is for going with the flow. At the same time, yes, We are deepening you that out of compassion you could take in more of the sufferings of others. It is not so much a victim soul spirituality as simply empathy. Because you and your twin were brought up as children to be Nietzschean stoics you don't know how to relate directly to the tears of others.

Jesus said He would wipe away all your tears. That is heaven. But if you are to be a part of the kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven," then you need to start now with the wiping away of tears. Charismatic praying over others is a ritualized way to do this. When possible,

whenever someone shows his or her pain, you can ask to pray over him or her. Ask Mary to do this through you with her heart.

August 31, 2008

Holy Spirit:

Having other women in the apartment with you is a near occasion of sin for them and for you! LOL. With A. be very silent. Let her take all initiatives. Let them come to your house, but rent a car so some of the pressure is off of togetherness, and that will give them freedom to see the town. They must be attracted not so much to you as to the way of life of more prayer. They must be close enough to Us to accept the crosses that go with trying something new.

TOGETHER WITH THE HOLY FAMILY

(This shorter journal begins after God Alone with journal entries when I was trying to lead Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family.)

September 1, 2008

Message received seemingly from Mary, Mother of God, by Ronda Chervin for Dedicated Widows (The Association and the Community at that point Doreen, Diane and Marilyn (not in North Carolina and given to Gen, the Dedicated Widow in my parish):

Dear Dedicated Widows,

I embrace you with motherly love and affirmation as you begin a new way of walking together with the Holy Family.

At first it will be through locutions to Ronda that I will be conveying to you the wisdom of the Holy Family. As we continue, there will be messages from Jesus and Joseph as well.

I want to speak to each of you in your hearts in words or images or other signs and I want you to share these with each other.

For our new beginning let me use those favorite words of my Son: "Be not afraid!"

September 1, 2008

Message from Mary, Exalted Widow to Ronda personally:

You are used to a pattern of welcome, conflict, fight or flight. You feel trapped now because you have a new challenge: commitment to the widows who come to you and a way not of sad resignation but joyful hope in the midst of differences.

We know your severe limitations with this new phase of your life. We have chosen you to try for a way for widows not because you will be good at it at first but because we have made you humble enough to seek grace and wisdom from us to lead you.

You are afraid of the pain of it. You want to run away from the pain of the coming together of those with conflicting ways of escaping from change.

Let us, your Holy Family, give you hope for a new way.

Wonderfully, the reading for this September 1, 2008 was for the 22nd week, Monday from the Imitation of Christ: “Write my words in your heart and study them diligently, for they will be absolutely necessary in the time of temptation.”

September 2, 2008

I am reading again Kazantzakis’ St. Francis. It is enchanting. Jesus, Mary and Joseph purify me of the fear of suffering.

Great news that Marilyn and Diane live only 10 miles from each other in Idaho!

Message #2

Dear Dedicated Widows,

When you saw the Passion you readily believed that demons were about. You have each been walking with Jesus separately. Now I want you to walk together and together to ward off any demons you meet on the road.

Ward off demons of fear, despair, anger, envy, even as you would ward off demons of the occult or of deadly addictions.

To do this, every time you feel those emotions or find yourself in contact with people afflicted with such demons pray simple:

Jesus and your angels, deliver me and us from the demon of _____.

If you want to have the other dedicated widows pray for you in this way, you could have Ronda send an e-mail to the others asking that, say, “Marilyn asks that you pray that Jesus and the angels deliver her from the demon of _____.”

**Doreen asks that you pray that Jesus and the angels deliver her from the demon of
Start with praying these prayers just for yourselves rather than for others.**

As your group grows in number so will the number of prayers you could say for one another each day.

I will be interceding for you. As you ask often during the day Holy Mary, Mother of God pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, you can add 'that we be delivered from demons of _____ and add the one you need deliverance from most.

In this way you will identify the work of the demons instead of just letting them toy with your emotions.

I love you, Mother Mary, Exalted Widow

September 1, 2008

(From Anne of Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

Dear apostles, I want you to know joy. Eternal joy will be yours in heaven, of course, but I want you to know joy now, during your time of service. If you do as I say, as I am asking you, this heavenly joy will become more and more available to you and you will share this joy more and more freely. You will be a true representative of heaven in your joy and others will be attracted to the heaven that you represent. I want you to believe Me when I tell you that you can trust Me. If you could not trust Me, dear apostles, why would you continue to follow Me? The answer is that you can trust Me, of course, or you would fall away as others have fallen away. You do trust Me. You rely on Me and you are safe with Me. You have made a wise decision by putting yourself into My care. It is always the best decision to rely on the One who loves you perfectly and holds, in His heart, the perfect plan for your time on earth. Why would you let fear diminish your joy? Why would you let anxiety for yourself or others eradicate the joy that is available to you in the present moment? My dearest apostles, you live in the present, not the future. If the present is difficult, I am there. If the future becomes difficult, I will be there, too. You will not be abandoned and your loved ones will not be abandoned. Ultimately, the greater the trust in Me, the greater the joy in each moment. I want you to abandon fear. I want you to cast yourself into the providence that surrounds you. Fear is a snare for you or I would not treat it so seriously. Ask Me now for greater trust and I will give it to you. Ask Me now for greater joy and I will give that to you, also. It is important that others see in you an

accurate reflection of the graces heaven makes available to apostles. Do not hide these graces away. Let these graces flow out from you to those around you. Share what is good, dear apostles, not what is bad. Share what comes from Me and you will help to draw others back into our family. I am telling you that I have greater graces available to you so make your Jesus happy and ask for these graces. You will be blessed with all that you need and joy will be yours. Be at peace. I will never abandon you.

September 3, 2008

Dear ones, I think there must be a reason that Mary seemed to start sending me these messages just prior to the EWTN program when we are still so few.

About praying against each other's demons, I don't want to mention any with your name attached unless you explicitly say to share that it is you with the others since you may be just writing some of this to me privately. So, when you get this message, if you want your name attached to the prayer request for the group, write me that this is so.

I will just summarize by saying so far we need prayers against demons of impatience, despair and discouragement, pride and self-love, attacks by family members.

Here is the message I got early this morning, September 3

Dear Dedicated Widows,

I am glad when you share your real problems with each other so that you can be closer in prayer.

I see how your little hearts are crushed when you make a leap forward and then feel pushed back by the weight of your problems. Many of these problems have deep roots in your family histories.

Please keep bringing your feelings moment by moment to your Holy Family in prayer. We understand how hard it is for you. You want to tackle problems head on for quick solutions. We want to transplant you so that your roots are in the good earth of our love for you and yours. That way, new flowers can bloom.

For example, can you see in the midst of conflict based on old patterns that laughter can be a new flower?

Be of good cheer, feel chosen and cherished, Your Mother, Mary

I had a good door to door visit at Flynn House for addicts. I was joking with Eddie, the supervisor, calling Purgatory a half-way house transition.

September 4, 2008

Message from St. Joseph

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Ronda calls on me for help because she believes I helped Mary from heaven in her widowhood. Let me be the head of your “house ways and means committee.”

You are often flustered by practical decisions. In those Scripture passages you read concerning my role you can see that I had to face seemingly unsolvable problems. I was a just man looking for just solutions. God led the way.

In the small and large decisions you make, start with prudent common sense. Ask the advice of your directors. We will usually work through them to help you. If there are no clear answers, ask your Holy Family for a sign.

We want you to be known in your parishes and families as women to be admired. The means steering clear of two dangers:

worldly decisions coming out of fear of crosses;

or

crazy decisions coming out of escape from crosses.

Prayers of surrender to any sufferings God the Father permits in His providence can help you avoid such bad decisions.

Each of you also has certain personal calls, usually in line with spiritual attractions developing throughout your lives in the Church. Cherish these.

St. Joseph, your protector.

September 5, 2008

(Context – first EWTN widow show and Republican Convention)

Personal message from Jesus to me:

Yesterday was a complicated confusing day for you. Because of the EWTN show there was a contrast between the inner world and known world of your usual daily life and this being thrust into the world of TV alien to you in many ways and then the hours of watching the convention with all the good in it but also the part that upsets you so of the speakers (Note from Ronda: I object to the speakers acting as if this was simply a great country vs.

alluding to the killing of the 50 million aborted babies). It was not a prayer meeting and even something like World Youth Day with all the outer theatrics can make you feel uncomfortable.

In humans there is a basic tension between the interior of the soul vs. the exterior life of each person and then the interior of the home vs. the exterior of the neighborhood, school, village, city, country, world.

We (the Holy Family) are everywhere, but you find us in different ways. During the Convention you saw us in the photo of Cindy McCain mothering the baby in trouble and in the way we brought McCain through the POW torture chamber, stronger.

Through the TV we let the outer world enter into your life with God. Bring your feelings of hope and fear to us in prayer, that never-ending dialogue that in heaven will enter into the glory of total understanding.

September 6, 2008

Dear ones - this message seemed to me something I could meditate on fruitfully for a long, long time. Let me know if it speaks to your hearts also.

Dear Dedicated Widows:

You thirst for love and even more to give love. To a greater or lesser degree this thirst was quenched in your marriages and families.

Now as your heavenly bridegroom, I wish to show you My love in abundance and to spread that love through your heart to others who need it so desperately.

You may question: "If your love for me is so abundant, my Jesus, would I not feel it more? I see that those around me are desperate for love, but then why do they so often reject my love for them?"

The answer is that you have barriers to my love you are not aware of. I love your deepest heart and soul, but you sometimes want Me to love the plans of your minds and so you think I don't love you at all since I don't make your plans come true.

In a similar way you seek to show your love for others by planning for them. Then you feel rejected if they reject those plans. Even if you have better plans for them than the ones they have for themselves, what they need more is affirmation of their selves and qualities. Without such affirmation they flounder, seeking substitutes instead of higher spiritual goals.

I don't write you this to make you feel bad, or hopeless, but rather to open you to new possibilities.

In prayer, open to the pure love I have for you that transcends earthly plans. When you go out to others, leave your plans for their lives on earth aside. Ask Me to show you different ways to convey your love.

Never think you are too old for fresh experiences of grace.

"That they may have life and that abundantly."

With love from your Savior.

September 7, 2008

St. Francis to Ronda: I have delighted in all your little ways of trying to live out my love for Lady Poverty. I will help you continue in this new phase of your life. Don't be afraid. Of course the little cats are your friends in this, for they have so little and trust in your bounty.

Mary to Dedicated Widows on Simplicity of Life

Dear Dedicated Widows:

I understand that out of the love in your hearts you wanted to have many things in order to give to your husbands, children and all who crossed your door steps.

As you divest, let me give you criteria:

What does the Lord want me to keep as His gift to me?

What does He want me to give away as His gift to others through me?

(this might be giving photos to family out of love or giving of what you don't need as a widow to the poor through second hand shops.)

The more, like St. Francis of Assisi, you can pray "my God and my all," the less you will find you need excess of things.

For each of you, the divesting is personal, for only you know what you truly need and what will be a joy to give, even if it is a wrench.

It might help you to imagine how I lived. Of course I had what was needed in my times for family and guests, but no one ever felt that I loved things more than people! My things were never a burden or a distraction.

Will you let me help you clean house?

We, the Holy Family, love you, Mary

September 8, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows about Penance (I think this powerful message is also for other individuals.)

Dear Dedicated Widows:

To modern people choosing voluntary suffering for your own sins or those of others can seem crazy, useless or just not understandable.

What do you want to do, instead, when you have to confront your own sins, the sins of those you love, or the sins of strangers or enemies?

You can try to justify your sins. You can try to deny them. You can hide from them.

The sins of others, you can also try to excuse or blind yourself to them. You can blame, hate and punish when you are able.

If you look at your lives you will be able to find examples of many of those attitudes towards sin.

God, the creator of your freedom to choose, sees your bad choices. In the Old Testament you read passage after passage about how sin betrays and offends God. In the New Testament you see something different. You see Me, the Son of God, bleeding for your sins and the sins of those you love and the sins of all mankind, even your enemies.

Some saints followed Me in this, even to the voluntary shedding of their own blood in penitential acts. I do not say you are all called to that path. Some may be. To find what you are called to personally you can start with these promises:

- Instead of denying or excusing them, I will acknowledge each of my sins and bring them to confession for reconciliation.**
- Instead of denying or excusing the sins of those I love, I will pray for them the more often and the harder.**
- Instead of just blaming and castigating them in my mind, speech or acts, I will pray against the sins of strangers and enemies.**

- Throughout the day I will bring my own sinful soul and the sinful souls of others to you, Jesus, as I pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” and bring my own soul and the souls of others to my Mother as I beg over and over again, “pray for us sinners, now and as at the hour of our death.”
- In imitation of You on the cross and my Mother standing under the cross, I will offer the sufferings of each day in reparation for my own sins and those of the ones I love and all others I observe or hear about.

If you live in this way, I will be able to bring you out of denial, excuses, anger and blame into a purified suffering of compassion for yourself and others.

Your loving savior, Jesus

I witnessed the heroic virtue of my pastor dealing with a person who drives him crazy. I thought, a good part of the heroic virtue of a priest is having to be seen in every act by his parishioners.

September 9, 2008

Letter to Dedicated widows from Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Let us be present to you all the time.

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Sometimes you think of ourselves as alone, but very occasionally visited by us, your Holy Family.

It as if the innermost core of an onion thought that there was only light in the kitchen when all the layers of onion around it was peeled away.

In reality, we are always around our children, especially the baptized, but you are too busy with your many layered tasks and thoughts to notice us.

As dedicated widows of the Holy Family we want you to be immersed in our presence. In this way, very gradually, our love will shine through you to others, especially in silence. Think of the way a baby takes in the mother’s love by being in her arms or at her breast, or how a child follows a father around and becomes a small replica of his motions.

Talk to us and let us talk to you. Turn your thoughts to us and let us teach you from the stories of us in Scripture and in the images we will send each of you personally.

Most painfully, let us teach you through the criticisms of those around you. They don't see the innermost core of you, but they have to deal with the "rotten" layers they cannot avoid seeing and smelling. When their remarks 'cut you to the quick'" run to us always present. Let us show you what is true and what is false in those criticisms. If the criticisms come from another's fears and envy, your mild replies can open a door to the room where you live with us.

If you really believed that we were always present, wouldn't you run into our arms more often?

With love from your Holy Family.

During adoration it occurred to me that St. Joseph could have repeated the words of the Hail Mary to Mary each day. I think I read this once in a long book about St. Joseph but it came up to my mind and I think it is a lovely idea. As I gaze at the statues of Mary and Joseph and the infant at the altar I can think of this.

September 10, 2008

Jesus, Mary and Joseph to Ronda: Look closely at the incident where one of your dedicated widows seemed to be ready to give in to temptations to give up on the Church and widowhood but her spiritual director helped her. He could not change her circumstances, but with our grace, he helped her change her attitudes to be willing to suffer in very hard circumstances. Her director saw how the devil was trying to work on her. Your little sacrifice (crawling the stations) was used.

We are not telling you to choose that route of sacrifice yourself or recommend it to others in all cases, but you should not cringe from sacrifice as if it were only a path of the past.

September 10, 2008

Letter from St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows

Suffering Together

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Think about the time Mary and I could not find the young Jesus in Jerusalem. Do you not think our hearts beat as one as we searched for Him?

You may think that is impossible to be close to those Dedicated Widows you have not met except on the e-mail. "With God all things are possible." You will find that in your spiritual warfare prayers for one another that we are making this closeness possible because we want to redeem the web for our use as a linking of hearts.

When you feel unexpectedly burdened or lightened, consider that you are linked to each other and to your Holy Family who loves you.

September 11, 2008

Ronda to Mary: As I approach watching the second EWTN episode, I feel crushed, as if the end (of helping widows) does not justify this strange alien impersonal means of stilted TV conversations.

Mary to Ronda: A hard acorn does not look like the beautiful tree. The tree will come from the impulses in the hearts of many widows to entrust themselves to us, each in her own way. You don't have to know about all this. Offer the pain of everything hard for you in viewing the episodes for the weeping widows and also for those with areas of unresolved bitterness in their marriages who cannot weep.

If you think of it all must on a natural human level it will seem hopeless. Remember, instead, that I, with open arms, will be sitting with each widow who is watching, including you and Anne.

September 13, 2008

Letter from Jesus to Dedicated Widows: Visible Weakness

(the context is a gas stoppage here due to gas trucks being delayed in Hurricane Ike in Texas. I felt very anxious but Gen of the Community of Dedicated Widows here prayed over me and that plus adoration calmed me down.)

Dear Dedicated Widows,

You would like to show yourselves to be strong witnesses of trust in Me when you have moments that you view as crises.

Sometimes we give you special graces not only to survive but to do it with radiant trust. But often we let you show your human weakness. It is not bad to have to lean on friends at such times for prayer and counsel. Did I not form the Church upon Peter, a visibly weak man, but just for that reason once confirmed by the Holy Spirit, a rock of faith?

The way you turn to Me when you are really weak is different, deeper and more urgent than when your life is smoother. It is humbling to your pride to feel yourself to be weak, but that is worth the relief you feel when your confidence comes not from yourself but from my help.

“Nothing can snatch you out of My hands,” Jesus

September 14, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family: When you can't protect them.

Dear Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family,

You want to protect your children even when they are adults. Sometimes you can. I couldn't. Meditate on my fears when it seemed we lost our young Jesus in Jerusalem. Think about how I felt when I realized that this boy of perfect virtue chose to do something that would hurt us so.

With your children it is in many ways different. They are not perfect and the choices they make that hurt you don't always have a divine motive, to say the least.

What is the same, though, is the terrible fear you have for them; the desire to control them; and the realization that you cannot control them even if they temporarily agree to obey you.

The way of angry fear makes your children defensive and makes you "a nervous wreck" as you would put it.

Letting go out of spite makes your children feel rejected and leaves you with only bitterness.

What is the good way for the dedicated widow:

First: call by name and pray against the evil you fear either in them or in their paths. For instance "Lord, come against the demon of laziness and the outcome of failure in my child (name the child.)"

Second: offer the pain they cause you in reparation for their flaws or sins.

Third: ask your Holy Family to surround you and them with love. When you think of each child and when you are with them picture our arms around them as, indeed, they are.

Fourth: Ask us to show you if there are any openings for a gentle word of wisdom.

Try!

St. Joseph

I had a beautiful experience at the Hispanic prayer meeting. The talk was by a fatherly man, Miguel Jimenez and it was about education of one's children. He spent a lot of time on the problems when fathers neglect their sons and fail to discipline them with love. After his talk many of the young people came up for prayer and the older men prayed over them. One, the leader of one of the music groups who had been singing with such panache stepped down to where they were being prayed over and wept. It stung my heart thinking

of Charlie, my son. Of course his father didn't neglect him and spend endless amounts of time being close to him but he went on the wrong path anyhow.

September 15, 2008

(It is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Sorrows)

Ronda to Our Lady of Sorrows:

For how long have images of you with the 7 swords in your heart made us think you never smiled? Perhaps we need the knowledge that you are our mother of sorrows much more than we need to think you are rejoicing in our joys? Thank you for being with me in the worst sorrow of my life (death of my son) but also to bring me the joy of conversion (for that story go to my e-books and scroll down to Saved: the Story of My Conversion)

Our Lady of Sorrows to Dedicated Widows:

My feast days in the Church are times when I want to draw you close to my heart in its sorrows, joys and glory. As you become more and more contemplative in your prayer, I will bring you to see how my sorrows, joys and glories are closely linked as in the rosary. Then you will see that you, in my image, also live in such a way that your sorrows, joys, and glories are closely linked.

Would the glory of the Assumption be the same if I had never known the sorrow of the Cross? So it will be in your eternity. The glory of eternal life will transfigure your worst times.

How can you have hope unless you believe that this is true?

Your mother, Our Lady of Sorrows and Exalted Widow

September 16, 2008

I was amazed and pleased to see this strong confirmation of the basic image of the locution of yesterday about Mary's smile with what the Holy Father said at Lourdes the same day as reported on Zenit:

"He traveled to Lourdes in the afternoon to participate in the celebrations surrounding the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Bernadette Soubirous..."

The Pontiff celebrated two Masses in Lourdes. Some 190,000 pilgrims attended the Sunday Mass in the prairie that marked the 150th anniversary of the Marian apparitions, and some 70,000 people participated in today's Mass for the sick at Rosary Square...

Pontiff Contemplates Mary's Smile

Urges Afflicted to Turn Toward Our Lady

LOURDES, France, SEPT. 15, 2008 (Zenit.org).- For those who suffer and are struggling, the strength to carry on can be found within the smile of the Virgin Mary, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope said this today at the homily he gave today, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrow, during the Mass with the sick at Rosary Square at the Marian shrine in Lourdes. Some 70,000 people participated in the Mass.

The Holy Father offered a reflection on the smile of Mary, who he called the "teacher of love."

He noted that the tears Mary "shed at the foot of the cross have been transformed into a smile which nothing can wipe away."

"Christians have always sought the smile of Our Lady," Benedict XVI explained, "this smile which medieval artists were able to represent with such marvelous skill and to show to advantage."

"This smile of Mary is for all; but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein," he said. "To seek Mary's smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship which binds us to her whom Christ gave us as our Mother."

The Pope continued: "To wish to contemplate this smile of the Virgin, does not mean letting oneself be led by an uncontrolled imagination. Scripture itself discloses it to us through the lips of Mary when she sings the Magnificat: 'My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Savior.'

"When the Virgin Mary gives thanks to the Lord, she calls us to witness. Mary shares, as if by anticipation, with us, her future children, the joy that dwells in her heart, so that it can become ours. Every time we recite the Magnificat, we become witnesses of her smile."

Bernadette

The Holy Father said that St. Bernadette Soubirous "contemplated this smile of Mary in a most particular way" when Our Lady appeared to her.

"It was the first response that the Beautiful Lady gave to the young visionary who wanted to know who she was," he said. "Before introducing herself, some days later, as 'the

Immaculate Conception,' Mary first taught Bernadette to know her smile, this being the most appropriate point of entry into the revelation of her mystery."

"In the smile of the most eminent of all creatures, looking down on us, is reflected our dignity as children of God, that dignity which never abandons the sick person," the Pope said. " This smile, a true reflection of God's tenderness, is the source of an invincible hope.

Benedict XVI continued: "The endurance of suffering can upset life's most stable equilibrium, it can shake the firmest foundations of confidence, and sometimes even leads people to despair of the meaning and value of life.

"There are struggles that we cannot sustain alone, without the help of divine grace. When speech can no longer find the right words, the need arises for a loving presence: We seek then the closeness not only of those who share the same blood or are linked to us by friendship, but also the closeness of those who are intimately bound to us by faith."

Strength

"I would like to say, humbly," the Pope proposed, "to those who suffer and to those who struggle and are tempted to turn their backs on life: Turn toward Mary!

"Within the smile of the Virgin lies mysteriously hidden the strength to fight against sickness, in support of life. With her, equally, is found the grace to accept without fear or bitterness to leave this world at the hour chosen by God.

"In the very simple manifestation of tenderness that we call a smile, we grasp that our sole wealth is the love God bears us, which passes through the heart of her who became our Mother."

"To seek this smile," he said, "is first of all to have grasped the gratuitousness of love; it is also to be able to elicit this smile through our efforts to live according to the word of her Beloved Son, just as a child seeks to elicit its mother's smile by doing what pleases her."

September 16, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows "Under Fire"

Dear Dedicated Widows:

You can become numb with horror when too much that is frightening is happening in your own life or in what you read or see about the world around you. The reassurance you need goes deeper than any words or thoughts. Cling to whatever is good and bright at such times and let your Holy Family find a way to give you hope in the innermost depth of your being.

Your Savior, Jesus

September 17, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows – Spiritual Awareness

Dear Dedicated Widows,

As your contemplative life deepens you will become more sensitive to many kinds of spiritual realities. This is inevitable. That is why the Holy Spirit provides gifts of discernment. Since some of these realities are frightening you may not be able to judge them well. What is why spiritual direction is necessary.

Satanic powers want to create in you fears, usually in areas where you are powerless. We, your Holy Family, want you to fear where you can make a change. I was told to fear Herod and take Mary and the child into Egypt.

When you sense evil or get a word about the future that is frightening, you need to immediately take control by calling on St. Michael and your guardian angel to rebuke any evil spirits that could be involved. Then give your fear to us. If we are telling you that you are to take action, you will sense not so much fear as strength and peaceful resolve. Above all, do not let such words or images about the future distract you from what is called for in the present in the way of steady devotion to works of love.

We are near, Joseph

September 18, 2008

Jesus to Dedicated Widows:

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Do you hear the pain and fear under the rage when people shout in anger?

You cannot reason when people are engulfed in that kind of anger. What they need is love. Such love can take many forms including sometimes advocacy, sometimes punishment; sometimes silence, sometimes words of compassion.

Let not your pain and fear express itself in vengeful anger. When you do that you continue a cycle of hate.

Why are the words “I forgive you” and “forgive me” so powerful if not because they break out of the cycle of anger to heal the place of fear and pain?

Feel forgiven, your Jesus

September 18, 2008

At first I thought this was only for me because I am so like what Mary describes, but then it seemed I was to address it to the others in our tiny group as well.

Mary to Dedicated Widows

Dear Dedicated Widows:

You dream of some permanent grace that would lift all crosses from your weak shoulders but we are strengthening you for the battles ahead.

You are startled by some change in your perception of even small things. Someone acts or thinks differently than how you would think they would and you immediately become tense. This is because your trust is still too much in weak humans instead of in your Holy Family.

True when Jesus was born the angel sang to the shepherds “peace on earth to men of good will.” That was to show forth the peace the Messiah would bring but we don’t promise you any permanent peace on earth. We want you to work for it in the world around you, and to experience it deep in your hearts when you pray, but not to just have it always without any seeking of it by you. We want you to have one foot in heaven.

Take my hand and we will go forward one step at a time.

Your mother, Mary

During Adoration I had a sense that I was to use all my free time to be in Church, especially the beauty of the Mass came into my soul.

Sister Mary Neill to Ronda received September 26, 2008

DEAREST RONDA,

I was so glad to hear from you; I was about to check in. I thoroughly understand about the difficulty of living with someone in your space. It has been a good learning for you. Just wait and watch and hold the divine conflict between your need for space and solitude and the need to be connected, these polarities are a cross from your birth as a twin, sharing womb space to the long road to autonomy ==YOU GOT TO WALK THAT LONESOME ROAD ALONE.

The synthesis of these opposites comes in holding the truth at the core of opposites until the Holy Spirit creates the synthesis in you. These are false when made ABSOLUTES; your devotion to Christ who made two into one is the healer. Stop planning; be humble in your limitations and own the divinity of the garden of agony. The peace and serenity you are

seeking as a Type One cannot be worked or willed, but only your surrender again and again to God, and saying lots of gratitude prayers for how you are and who you are and where you are now ...Much love, Mattie

Gen Lesko said she thinks that I have a lot to give and that I decide too quickly to give without thinking things through. I immediately joked that I was just stupid. I think that's a way to ignore the comment and instead I should ponder it. It sounds accurate.

January 20, 2008

Mary to Dedicated Widows – the Liturgy

Dear Dedicated Widows:

I want you to imagine what I felt when the apostles began to pray in the words of my Son at the Last Supper (Passover Meal). Think of what it meant to me to hear His words in the mouths of His disciples and to see His gestures in their hands and to receive He who first came into me as a tiny baby now entering me in the Eucharist.

My dedicated widows should love every word of the Liturgy, every gesture, and honor their priests greatly for the sacraments. When they see any defects in the character of their priests pray for them ardently. Do you think the apostles had no defects of character? The Scripture records those defects.

Ask me to go with you to the Liturgy and to show you more of what I see each time. Become my true daughters in this.

Mother Mary, who loves you.

September 21, 2008

Mary to Dedicated Widows: Loneliness and Guests

Dear Dedicated Widows:

Because you are lonely you are elated to have guests...at first! At first all that you have in common with the guests is in the forefront, but then come the differences and you go into grief or anger or both.

It is hard for you to understand that no one is closer to you than us, your Holy Family and we are “easy” guests to take care of. Or so it seems. When we visit it is really you who are visiting us in the innermost room of your hearts. If you don't visit often enough it is because there are differences.

Some of these differences cannot be overcome until heaven when we will be totally one with our children. Other differences come because of your lingering defects: especially lack of trust which drives you to hide from us in your habits, or sometimes sins.

We are trying to wean you away from those. With the habits, some of these are wholesome. You don't need to drop them but rather to let us in even if they seem too trivial. Do mothers reject their children because they are at play?

What has to change is your way of doing each thing, for instance, with too much compulsion or competitiveness, or pride. A gentle prayer to us before each activity with gratitude can be a first step to not being controlled by activities, but rather using them for the kingdom.

With your sins, it is a matter of humble confession, but also of the graces from your Mass and prayer times gradually giving you enough peace not to cling so tightly to the futile escape from suffering each sin tries to be. For instance, detraction. (Note from Ronda: gossip can be any kind of relating of incidents in the lives of others – and is sometimes harmless, or even for the sake of getting good advice. Detraction is where you reveal faults of others that no one else needs to know because you enjoy gloating over their defects in order to feel superior or to express your unredeemed anger). Detraction is the flight from being serious enough about others' failings to pray for them and do penance for them.

Not all at once. Courage, we are with you.

September 22, 2008

(Context: A member of the Association of Dedicated Widows is craving some form of Carmelite Widowhood with a habit but living in her own home)

Jesus to Dedicated Widows – Ways of Living

Dear Dedicated Widows:

We are inspiring many, many, widows to different forms of dedication and consecration. Without concerning yourselves right now with trying to fit into previous modes of religious life, you should each try what you feel attracted to. Learn from your experiences. As you live in new ways, others will be drawn. Do not fear. Am I not your Bridegroom? Place yourself under the mantle of My mother. Let her be your mother and teacher.

You can inform your Bishop that you are trying a certain way of life for widows that others may wish to follow.

During adoration came this personal locution:

St. Joseph:

Notice how as you walk hand in hand with Mary you will be less angry and therefore you can do more.

September 23, 2008

(Context: I was trying to sponsor a woman for RCIA with multiple addictions and heavy medication for schizophrenia. She came to meeting so heavily overloaded with prescription drugs that she was practically passed out at the table.)

Mary to Dedicated Widows:

Dear Dedicated Widows:

In the time you are living there are many people around you with severe addictions. It can take you a while to recognize the patterns that are involved in the external behavior and others emotions.

Sometimes your hearts go out to them and you want to help but you don't know how. Give them to me in prayer.

Sometimes you are just angry at the futility of their harmful addictions. Give them to me in prayer.

Whenever it is in your power, get them to counseling and programs that can help them. Often that is not in your power. You don't want their pain, fear, and anger to flood your minds and hearts so that you have no peace.

Sometimes you have to stay away from addicted persons, but when that is not possible whenever you are in contact with others who are addicted you need to avoid reactions coming out of fear.

Come to us and ask us to reach out to them through your gentle love.

September 24, 2008

Ronda to God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Guardian Angel:

Help! I feel stuck on my 6 Steps to Holiness project. After I put in the insertion about people in mortal sin needing to take care of that first, which is confrontative, I got worried about the anger this could cause in the reader, including my family members. Then when

I put in my fearless inventory I felt anxious about the family being scandalized. I also have been feeling uncertain because of the thought that 12 step works because it is done with the face to face support of the group. Will just writings and a forum be enough?

The Holy Spirit:

A tool is not a fruit. The tool is only as good as the hands that wield it. Since you are yourself a sinner trying to be holy you must accept that you are writing it in “fear and trembling” not from a perch of triumph. Also, you will have to name the demons of each participant and then let us do spiritual warfare for each of them.

At this phase the “cost” of the program is making itself felt. We allow this to happen so that you can freely re-embrace the course or let it go if you are not willing to accept the crosses that will inevitably come with it. We speak to you many times in the locutions through Mary Rose about expectations. Was your expectation that 6 Steps would be simply a beautiful synthesis? It will have to be a work of grace of nothing!

Mary:

Do it first with our Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family and we will help each of them through the process.

September 25, 2008

St. Joseph to Dedicated Widows; Layers of Fear, Layers of Security

Dear Dedicated Widows,

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve walked in fearless companionship with God. After the Fall they hid from God. Then, out of fear of their enemies and unpredictable trials such as barrenness, the people clung to idols for protection and favors.

God drew leaders close to Him, right into His presence. Think of Abraham, Moses and the Prophets. In this way the people could be led beyond their fears.

In Baptism you are brought out of the world back to closeness with the Trinity. But you don't escape from the external causes of fear from natural enemies or material deprivations. And then there are the interior enemies; anxieties coming from your childhood family surroundings and evil (supernatural) enemies working on your thoughts and feelings.

Are you surprised that you would have many layers of fear? Our supernatural life in the Holy Family did not preclude fear of external enemies such as Herod or, ultimately, for

Jesus of the Jewish and Roman leaders who opposed Jesus. Still, within the family circle of our home, there was no fear, because we were totally bonded in faith and hope and love.

You will notice that when we could not find Jesus because He was teaching in the Temple, the external fear for His life was mingled with having to face the reality that Jesus belonged more now to His heavenly Father than to me or to Mary. He came back with us, but now we knew this was only for a time.

After the Assumption of Mary, our time of complete unity as a family was brought to a heavenly fullness.

Do you see how to different degrees your own lives have mirrored ours in the Holy Family? You found a partial security in marriage and family. There came a time when your children left your embrace. You were afraid. When your husbands died you became even more insecure.

You are dedicating yourselves to God in the embrace of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and myself, Joseph. You are not only plunging your frightened hearts into our reality as it was on earth, but foremost into our reality as it is now in heaven.

We are trying to wean you away from the idols you cling to in your insecurity: idols of money, status, approval. This we do by drawing you, when you are afraid, into our presence. As you open to our love for you more and more you will become conscious of the layers of fear. Sometimes these will be fears of exterior emergencies. Sometimes these will be fears of interior enemies such as sin or collapse. Finally these come together in your fear of death.

Even Jesus in the Garden experience terrible fear but then was able to surrender, and then on the Cross commend His spirit to the Father.

We allow each fear to surface so that you can bring it to us for understanding, compassion and finally such a sense of our love that you will be secure in the depth. We will bring you to the Father. "Perfect love casts out fear."

It is not something that you do, but that we do. Listen to the words of St. Paul: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ; Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword...no, all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'
(Romans 8; 35-39)

Holy Spirit to Ronda: When much of what people say seems trivial and meaningless it can be because We are weaning you from this world into the total mystery. Don't resist. Speak much less yourself and let us bring you into the ecstatic union.

After this locution I felt a heavy (in a good way) sense of quiet come over me and a great desire to talk only when addressed by others, unless there is a compelling motive of charity.

September 26, 2008

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to the Dedicated Widows

Dear Dedicated Widows;

You need time to absorb what we have been teaching you. Expect that each day you will have moments, incidents, where what we have taught you can be applied. At other times you will see your life being illumined by those truths.

It is not like finding a truth in geometry illustrated when you are cutting up a pie. It is deep and cumulative, like a growing awareness that you are not alone because we are with you.

Walk in trust, Your Holy Family

September 27, 2008

Ronda to Jesus, Mary and Joseph:

I am afraid you are stopping the locutions.

Dear Ronda and Dedicated Widows,

We are stopping the ones for others for now. We want all of you now to plunge into our presence so we can instruct you from within. Pray constantly by opening yourselves to us. We will speak in your hearts from time to time but mostly we want you to live in us more totally.

Do not fear, your Holy Family.

Note from Ronda to Dedicated Widows to whom I was sending these messages:

After getting this in the night I did feel a little frightened that maybe I did something wrong and they were leaving us. Later I recalled that in the segment of 6 Steps to Holiness I had written about how the sacraments are necessary because in love we need more than words of prayer but we need Jesus to come right into us. So, now I think when I read and reread this locution that they are telling us they want to come into us now much closer even

than words. All morning long I have been talking to them in my heart and feeling their gentle loving re-assuring presence. I think each of you should ask them for similarly graces of intimacy.

October 1, 2008f

From Anne, Direction for Our Times

October 1, 2008

Jesus

Dear apostles, how strongly you desire holiness. This desire pleases Me and I will bless this desire. I will increase your holiness. There are times when you despair of becoming as holy as you wish. At those times when you are tempted, I would like you to know that I can make you holy in an instant. If you require heroic holiness in a moment, I can give it to you. The Holy Spirit blows where it is both welcomed and needed so if you welcome the Spirit, the Spirit will sanctify you. I, Jesus, lived on earth and in My humanity I understand the struggles that plague you. I understand the frustration you feel when you examine yourself and find that you have work to do in virtue. Dear ones, consider life like a walk. If you are taking a walk on any given day, you walk. You do not sit down on the path and call that action walking. That would be sitting down and that is different from walking. Your spiritual life is meant to be active. If you look at yourself and find that you need to work on holiness, then you are looking at yourself in truth. You are on the path and you are walking and you see that ahead of you the path continues on into the unknown as far as the possibility for your holiness. I, Jesus, am comfortable with this for you. I am not pleased, however, when you move backwards on the path or leave the path altogether. You were meant to serve Me and you were meant to serve Me in this time. Please, do not be distracted. Do not believe that My plan can do without your service. My plan does not require your perfection, My dearest one, but it does require your presence. If you remain with Me during your time on earth, My treasures are transmitted to you. You can then open your heart to others and allow these treasures to be distributed to them. Ask Me for these treasures for others. I will send them to others through you. Have no fear that this prayer will go unanswered. It will not. It will be answered more generously than you can imagine. Draw closer to Me in holiness, dear apostle, so that I can sanctify you and move into the world through you. Do not be afraid of changes. Just as you must always be moving on your path, so the world must always be moving through time. As the world moves through time it changes and it is changing now. You, dearest apostle, are a part of that change.

October 2, 2008

Taking in the homeless.

From Maryknoll Golden Book:

A little Boy of heavenly birth,

But far from home today,

Come down to find His ball – the earth –

That sin has cast away.

O comrades, let us one and all

Join in to get Him back His ball. Fr. Tabb

SPIRITUAL MOTHER

(Due to a severe problem with my parish in North Carolina concerning Catholic options about the Presidential elections, I felt led to look into a parish in Connecticut with convictions more like my own. This part of my journal begins with a visit to Fr. Martin Jones and the emerging Bride of Christ Community. (see www.brideofchristcommunity.org). Fr. Martin saw me as a kind of Imma – Hebrew for Mother – of this community. I realized that in many aspects of my life I am now a spiritual mother, so I am using that title for this part of my journal with covers the end of my time in North Carolina through August of 2010 in Connecticut).

March 31, 2009

I gingerly check out Fr. Martin by saying many communities get into difficulties because of lack of financial transparency. He lumbered out of the dining room and returned with the checking account records showing the \$400 or so in the account that were mostly his input and said, “I can put you on the account if you like.” This was humorous and reassuring, indeed. While at Adoration prayer I felt lots of peace about coming back to try out the community. Also I was wonderfully welcomed to do part time teaching at Holy Apostles Seminary.

I am putting in here the theme song, so to speak, of the Prophetic Word given at the Bridal Retreat, 10/16/2004 to Father Marty Jones, the founder of the community I will be trying out:

Jesus to Fr. Martin:

“My beloved! You are My beloved. Your gaze overwhelms me. I am filled with your love. Remember the days of your youth, the days of My experience with you, the days that you were in love with Me and I with you.

My love has not changed. Let your love and change be like your first love for Me with all the newness of the flowers and the springtime. I call you back to that springtime in our relationship where everything was new.

Be bold with love of Me. Share that love with those whom I send you. Call them to that love. Prepare them for that bridal experience of Me who am the Bridegroom of the Church, the Bridegroom of each of your souls.

Awaken, arise, cast off the sleep this world engulfs you in but plunge rather deeply into My most Sacred Heart. My Heart is the symbol of My Divine and human love for each one of you, the love that overflows from the heart of the Blessed Trinity itself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the love which created the universe out of love.

Call others to Me. That is My task for you, My mission for you, for I thirst for their love. I will keep thirsting until the whole world is in love with Me and then I will come back to you when the Spirit and the bride say “Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus.”

There is much that needs to be done in preparation and the time is short so I need you to go out and call those into the depths of My love. My daughter, Margaret Mary Alacoque, was the herald of that love for you, the love that is flowing from My most Sacred Heart from the moment that it was created. From the moment that it was pierced with the lance and blood and water gushed forth from My Heart: torrents of love and mercy that enveloped the whole world.

I see this evil generation that you live in, a generation that is far away from God; a generation that calls itself atheists and has turned far from My commandments, from My law of love.

Know that there are things that will come upon you, things that you cannot imagine in preparation for the new world, the new springtime, the new church that I will bring forth from the death of many, from the death of many. Many will have to suffer. Many will have to undergo trials and tribulations. Know that I am with you always, that I bring you through this time; that you are held within My most Sacred Heart.

I give you the Mother, My Mother as Mother of the Church, as Mother of the bride, for it is in Her Immaculate Heart that I have called you to take refuge. She is like the ark of Noah, the ark of the New Covenant, the ark that I call you into so that I Myself will close

the doors of that heart that you will be safe and kept close to her most maternal heart that always beats in love of you.

That's what I heard when my ears were first forming within her womb – the beat of her Immaculate Heart, the heart that still beats in love for each one of you. When you are afraid to go close, go close and draw near to her heart. There were many times throughout my life I laid My head upon her heart and listened to that Immaculate Heart, the most pure heart that was ever created beating in love for Me and now beating in love for you. Go to her, rest with her, listen to her words as she call you back to My words, to obeying Me.

Know that the time is short. The evil one has done much in this world to confuse many, to draw even the elect away from me, to draw many away from even My church. I speak through our Holy Father that I have given to you as a gift for these times. Listen to his voice for I speak to you through him. Follow him as you would in a row of ships, for he is in the barque of Peter and he will lead you safely into the eternal shores where there is always rest and peace. For it is my Mother herself who guides him and speaks to him in his heart; who inspires him through her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, who guides and directs him at every moment.

Call forth My Spirit upon you also that you may be able to listen to My voice as the Spirit speaks deeply to you within your heart, for today I have given you my own heart in place of your stony hearts, hearths that cry out “let me do your will, oh God” for it is your hearts that know the will of My Father.

Each time you pray to My Father you pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That will is always done in heaven. Now I pray that it be done on earth by you following the will of My heavenly Father.

My will for you is love. Love one another as I have loved you and I will carry you back someday. I will carry you back to those heavenly mansions that I have prepared for you, that are almost ready, that are beckoning for you, so that we will have there a great honeymoon of love, a tryst of love that will know no end, a honeymoon within the depths of My heart overflowing with torrents of joy and peace that you cannot even imagine here below.

Then you will plunge all your petty sorrows into the immense joy of My heart, an abyss, an ocean, an ocean of joy gushing forth, gushing forth from My most Sacred Heart.

O My beloved one, My bride, My beautiful one. If you only knew how much I love you, all the other cares that you have would be melted in the furnace of My love, a furnace that grows hot and flames shoot forth so that I will purify everything in your life as I will purify everything in this world

So, be ready for Me, for Me, the Divine Bridegroom, who comes to claim you, My bride, and I will take you with Me so that you will return to the eternal joy of happiness, a happiness that will know no end.”

April 5, 2008

Dear friends,

I will be leaving NC for 6 months to discern being in a community called Servants of Bride of Christ as a consecrated widow. This ecclesial movement is Magisterial, Marian, Charismatic, Pro-Life, helping of the poor, into simplicity of life and has or will have

priests, brothers, sisters, lay people single and families - they are building in the Berkshires of Mass. a retreat center and retirement colony. Also they plan to do Jewish folk dance. If it sounds interesting to you write me for more information but first go to brideofchristcommunity.org. I will also be teaching part time at Holy Apostles Seminary. Please pray for me as I discern as I have tried numerous ways of life since becoming a widow and I am hoping here I will be able to use my gifts and benefit greatly from those of Fr. Martin Jones and the other members. They pray together the entire Liturgy of the Hours.

April 8, 2008

During the night I had a feeling of rapture and anointing. I had a sense of aptness of a new name as Imma = meaning Mother of the Bride of Christ as Fr. Martin calls the woman he envisages working on this by his side. I had a sense of all that Jesus, Mary and Joseph have given me that is being fulfilled in this new venture.

Letter to daughter Carla:

We had a saying in our home with Nonna (my mother) when about to talk about something important - "here are my thoughty-thoughts." Well, I think I can understand how frustrating it must be for you when you are sure I am making a wrong choice to keep talking about the pluses and then later the minuses. I will struggle not to do this.

Just the same I think I should communicate with you about the new venture anything that directly touches on you and the family here.

In religious orders, sisters give all their money to the superior who then doles out anything the sister might need. I told him that this would never work with widows - not that he suggested it, but it came to mind - that we, widows, always put emergencies of the family first and no widow could ever join if she had to give her pension, social security etc. to the priest and then ask for permission to get some for air tickets or to give to the family if they

were in need. I said I thought the best way is that the widow control all her money and if the community needs something the priest can ask if she wants to donate.

Just for the records. You didn't ask about this, but it could be a subliminal concern ...

Bless you, beloved, dear daughter mine, whose love I cherish with unending gratitude,
Mom

April 10, 2009

Dear Jesus, Mary and Joseph,

I feel so excited about Bride of Christ but so jumpy thinking about the white garment they wear. I guess because I feel old and ugly and white is bridal, I need you to tell me if this is right, this garment, or just a vain adrenalin rush.

Mary: In my apparitions I look bridal without ever looking flashy or vain.

Jesus, Mary, Joseph: We told you to become stronger and then love and do what you will. Here is an example.

April 12, 2009

Carla was much more loving but sure this won't work. She thinks I am repeating a pattern looking for a man to lean on.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph: You will always be looking for people to lean on. That's not wrong unless you overdo. We will help you wherever you are to be stronger. Now be at peace, one day at a time.

April 18, 2009 Augusta, Georgia talk.

It went so well. So many seemed helped. I was more open than ever about my sins. I had the sense that I must speak regardless of what the cost.

April 15, 2009

Total surprise, Archbishop Dolan of NYC at his installation. He is outside on the sidewalk cheering the people for coming. New type – tough but full of fun. My head is spinning – in the background Gregorian chant but the Bishop is laughing and cracking jokes in full regalia! And he's yelling to the seminarians and priests and the people, I need you, thanks for coming! So American! Openness overcoming all formalism.

April 28, 2009

My daughter Diana's poem for a widow friend who used to walk on 110th St. and Broadway and wanted her to go back with her to NYC to renew these memories:

**There are echoes in the pavement,
there's reluctance in my feet
I am walking hallowed ground -
bits of life that won't repeat.**

**There are owls in the windows,
(there are owls everywhere)
Dreams and themes that used to matter
become tangles in my hair.**

**Will I hold your hand in mine?
Will we step back to the past?
Having gone, will we discover
any lessons that can last?**

**Does it matter, does a bird
who can whistle, nothing more,
find a melody that matters
somewhere in the whistling's core?**

**There are lessons in the sidewalk,
there are bruises in the street -
the kind you turn your mind against
when your relentless feet**

**against your will, are marching still
despite the certain night -
bills unpaid; unsure and scared
toward some sacred light...**

**I can see you in the corners -
I can see you everywhere -
at 110th and Broadway,
in the sun and in the air,**

**in the rainbows that arrive
when I least expect their grace,
in the shadows on the sidewalk,**

in the lines that bless your face.

**There are owls in the window,
there's a dance we've yet to do,
a finger's touch that means much more
than what I say to you.**

**Will you meet me for a nightwalk,
(though our hair is growing thin),
will you own the road that ends,
and see that now, the road begins?**

**I am dancing down the sidewalk,
whistle-haunted on Broadway,
with the ghost of our tomorrows
whispering our life today.**

**I have got your hand in my hand,
there is no such thing as time,
there is love, and here! We've got it!
Hold on tight, babe. Let us climb.**

Love you, special one...

April 28, 2009 (I was on my way to Connecticut but gradually pulling away from North Carolina).

Dear Bride of Christ friends,

**As I move toward our little community I am thinking I would like to
share with you the graces pouring into me through your prayers and the abundant nuptial
love of Jesus:**

**My homeless guest who was here for 6 months (2 with her teen daughters) found a public
housing place to live. The Pastor of her very strong Pentecostal Church came over and
promised her the help of the Church assistant, (a large tough as nails type) to drive her to
the public housing and insist they take her. So now on her income of \$440 a month plus
food stamps she gets a 3 bedroom apartment for \$113 including gas and electric!**

**With this breakthrough I feel a huge weight off my shoulders and I was up a lot in the
night in prayer of quiet with little rapture moments. I also simultaneously finished most of**

my research on What the Saints said about Heaven.

Then the Holy Spirit seemed to tell me to spend this time until the 14th following as closely as possible the prayer schedule of Bride of Christ because even though quality matters as much as quantity, quantity is a sort of soaking. Especially we are planning that the retirement colony will be based on participation in the prayers of Bride of Christ so we should begin to model this as much as possible.

My daughter in LA told me she is very proud of me that at 72 I can jump into something new and she sees this as a model for her someday when she is older.

I don't see it so much as something new as going back to my Benedictine Oblate roots amid my charismatic roots and, so to speak, hiding in the Church in my old age.

The seminarians in LA and Texas used to call my Mother Ronda as a sort of joke, but if you like the idea, go ahead.

I am praying for you'all lots, too. Ronda

April 30, 2009

Dear Bride of Christ comrades,

What it comes down to is that if we have the rigid (total Myers-Briggs J) type prayer schedule, then everything else has to be very, very flexible (P) so that will be my little cross since I like everything super ordered and planned ahead in detail.

Combined with reading Fr. McCarthy's chapter on worry in the Healing Compendium I see that I need to start right now with this car trip with the cats, etc. to trust that with all the inevitable glitches, frustrations, etc., God will bless the journey and the finding the right place to live eventually and everything.

So now all I have to do is to rebuke the demon of petty anxiety and lay it at the foot of Jesus and mutter "Jesus, I trust in you" every few seconds! I long ago figured out that the basic anxiety about plan such as 'will people like me in spite of what I'm like even with constant prayer and confession, etc.," is covered over by anxiety about the details of some project.

May 1, 2009 From Anne, Direction for Our Times Monthly message:

Jesus

How often have I called you ‘My little apostles’? Have I ever called you ‘My big apostles’? Why do you think it is that I call you ‘little’? I will tell you. It is because each apostle, by his desire to serve, becomes little. He becomes little so that God can be glorified. If a person is serving Me, that person desires only My glory. If a person is serving Me, he desires to be seen as a servant of men, not as a master of men. In the case of leaders, this desire for humility must be even more pronounced lest the leader begin to believe that he himself is leading, as opposed to My great hope which is that I, Jesus, am leading through the man. I intend to send leaders during this time. You will know them by their spirit of service. You will know them by their humility. You will know them because they will help you to think of Me and what I need from you. No man is entitled to the glory reserved for God. No man is worthy of this glory. I only speak in this way today so that each man will consider his call to service as a call to holiness. I want each man to give credit to Me for the good that I allow to come through him into the world. Do you understand, little apostles? I am reminding you that all good comes from Me so that you will not be tempted to pride by the great fruits I send through your service and your commitment to Me. It is important that every apostle examine himself for signs and symptoms of pride. I ask this of you in a serious way today. We, together, are ushering in a time of grace, and graces will be apparent, not through your power but through Mine. Little apostles, do not believe that Jesus is scolding you. I am not. I am helping you to examine yourself to prevent difficulties, both for your holiness and for My plan. I will help you in this each day if you ask Me. Ask Me to send an outpouring of the Spirit to you whenever you are afraid that pride is troubling you. I will do this for you because I love you and because pride makes you so terribly sad. Pride is the great devourer of joy. You, My beautiful apostles, are entitled to joy and I send My joy to you today. All is well. We work together to perfect your soul.

May 3, 2009

Farewell letter to Nancy (the homeless woman I sheltered for 6 months)

FOR NANCY

You came to me,

desperate but charming!

You prayed with me,

anxious but trusting!

You shared with me,

trembling but believing!

You cried with me,

fearing but hoping!

You sang with me,

quaking but soaring!

Nancy, the woman who made my apartment into a home, even bringing two more delightful guests, whose favorite words will always be

“I love you”

and

“God bless you.”

Friends forever, Ronda

May 6, 2009

Joy, joy, joy about the apartment in Connecticut I arranged to rent over the phone so close to the Church.

Dear Fr. Martin,

Because of your lines in the big locution for Bride of Christ about following the Holy Father like ships following a barque, I am watching and listening more carefully to Pope Benedict’s words. I love his mild sweetness combined with such firmness. Surely one who speaks the truth with love, one of my many goals for myself. It happens his face and personality are very like my godfather Balduin Schwarz a disciple of Von Hildebrand.

I am praying mid-afternoon prayer and there is this wonderful verse for me:

**Psalm 45 "Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words;
forget your own people and your father's house.
So will the king desire your beauty:
he is your lord, pay homage to him."**

At the large Guatamalan charismatic prayer meeting I gave a tiny farewell speech. As it was Mother's Day tomorrow there was a preaching on mothers and they had all the

mothers come up to be thanked and prayed over. In this group I got to be among the tallest! Then we sang charismatic hymns to Mary as Mother. I asked her to be my special patron for discerning Servants of the Bride of Christ.

May 11, 2009

I plan to have a little time with Fr. Ken the last day I am here to try to see whether I have misunderstood anything he said or thinks about me so that the friendship with this priest, one of my favorite people in the world, could continue unmarred by my taking some of his words of the past wrongly.

As I was pondering this future talk I got an angle that would help, at least help me understand:

In God all the attributes are united rather than separable, but most of us have a greater love of one than another and this is how I would see this between Fr. Ken and myself:

I put first Truth/Justice, then Beauty, then Love, then Freedom (in the sense of freedom of spirit), then Mercy.

He might put first Beauty, then Freedom (in the sense of non-coercion), then Love, then Truth/Justice, then Mercy.

So we can meet very well in Beauty – musical, artistic, dance. And when it comes to love in the sense of compassion we will be at one. I can love his free-spiritedness.

Since Jesus, the Mass, and the Church are my highest values I can love and admire and be grateful for his incredible commitment to showing the Real Presence of Jesus in the Mass with the highest Beauty he can make happen with his many gifts. I can love him for his delight love of my family and of me, in certain respects. I can love him for his deep compassion for those truly weak and in need including me when I display that side of myself. I think where the painful conflict comes is where I think Catholic truth conflicts with his idea of freedom as non-coercion.

By the time each of us leaves this world, perhaps we will meet not so much in the realm of beauty, or truth or love, but of mercy.

Well, as I look over this statement it sounds a tad grandiose. Would it be so hard for me to say something simpler such as I love you and I hope you love me and I am sorry for any sins of mine that have separated us? And, of course, given the nature of this epistle, I have to make sure not to allude in the slightest way to any of his faults! Ahem, Amen.

IN CONNECTICUT:

May 20, 2009

Trip to beautiful beach at Old Lyme. Our little group, Fr. Martin, Bob and Evelyn Olson and myself felt so much of one mind and heart as we planned the prayer meeting. I thought, Fr. Martin wanted followers but God sent him leaders!

Surprisingly Fr. Martin showed the poetic-mystical side of himself by taking each of us down a path where there was a cleft in the rock where you could sit and see the ocean and then recited the Song of Songs passage!

May 24, 2009

Dear Nancy,

I miss you so much! I hope all is well with you in your new place.

Praise the Lord I am finally settling in. I had all these misery glitches.

It started with Conchita refusing to get into the cat carrier with Felix for the trip. She hissed and fussed and reared her dear little body. Happily Bonny came by to say a last goodbye and she insisted we buy another cat carrier. Since we couldn't get all the stuff in with the second cat carrier I had to leave some with my daughter.

Then we ran into fog and storms and got to the motel that takes pets for \$25 each only at 4 AM in the morning. Nicholas insisted on rising at 7 AM. We got to Connecticut at 2 PM. The apartment is in a house built in 1890! It is all old wooden things which I loved. Felix disappeared after a few days and I was sure he was dead since the landlord said he saw a dead grey cat on the highway. I mourned and prayed and he returned after 4 days of prowling about the neighborhood! Then the landlord refused to keep the cat door in the window saying burglars could push that in with a hammer in 2 minutes and get into his apartment also. So now they are mostly outside cats and come in at night primarily.

Lots of graces with the team here who are all into daily Mass and prayers and charismatic prayer. This is all going well.

May 31, 2009

We had a wonderful first Healing Celebration Sunday night prayer group. Fr. wanted to combine first Adoration, then praise and worship, then a talk, then praying over the people on kneelers. They seemed like brides as they held icons with us the prayer ministers standing behind them while they faced Jesus in the monstrance. Fr. Martin came with the monstrance to each of us and blessed us. I felt so maternal and soft praying over some women. Then Bob and Evelyn prayed over me and Bob said as from my father "I have been forgiven. Can you forgive me for hurting you?" It felt releasing. I had a sense of Bob and Evelyn being healing parents to me.

June 1, 2009 from Anne, Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, I ask that you remind yourselves each day that I am participating through you in the course of history. What comes from Me can only be good. When you see goodness and kindness, you must thank Me. When you see mercy and compassion, you must thank Me. These occurrences originate in heaven and are brought to earth through the participation of those who cooperate with grace. Always, there are those who claim to participate in grace, but who do not. There are also those who claim to reject Me and yet they participate in grace by allowing goodness to flow through them. How confusing this can be for My children. Dear children, ultimately, this will be clear, in that each man must answer yes or no in each moment. Be alert to the choices in your day. Be alert to the example you set for others in your decisions for good or evil. Be alert to the peace that I bring to you when you decide for what is good. My apostles, you crave Me, I know. You crave My return into your world through a wide acceptance of the Spirit of peace. How can you satisfy this craving? I will tell you. In order to relieve the pangs of your hunger for goodness, you must bring goodness to others. Speak of goodness. Celebrate goodness. Rejoice in goodness and then try your best to participate in goodness through your cooperation with My renewal. In this way you will know that you are never helpless against evil. You will understand that I have healing power, yes, and I can flow My healing power through each person who accepts their responsibility for bringing Me to others. I am so pleased with My beloved apostles because you have accepted your tasks. How gratefully I listen when you pledge your allegiance each day. How I count on you. Spend a moment considering what I have managed to do through your cooperation. Have you shown kindness? Have you tried to become holier? Have you spread my message of compassion? You are only one. Now consider how many I have called into service at this time. Consider all of those I am calling into service through your service. Consider the healing graces that flow through My mercy. My friends, all is well. The renewal continues.

June 2, 2009

I have been feeling confirmed that this Bride of Christ is going to work and that I am meant to be here in the role of Imma in spite of all my faults and the difficulties.

I prayed, thank you Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Guardian Angel, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit – I got what I wanted most: to be able to walk to Church, not to have to deal with dissenting Catholics, and to have the same people to see each day and talk to. Alleluia.

June 8, 2009

Dear friends,

Don't be insulted that I am sending this to you on a list! Of all the good things I am experiencing one is not so good - I am as busy as a bee and can't get to each of you separately.

Contrary to all dire predictions I am doing well here. It's a unique situation in many ways - Our small community prays all 7 Liturgy of the Hours aloud in the parish Church. This is part of the founder's vision to mingle a sort of Benedictine spirituality with parish apostolates. I am so used to doing liturgy of the hours silently by myself that this was quite a strain at first but now I see that it is kind of like a mantra, immersing the soul in truth and beauty throughout the day.

The priest, who is diocesan, loves community so he cooks for me and for anyone who would enjoy his crock pot cooking - which especially includes priests who have no cooks and otherwise just open cans or go to MacDonald's! Those of you who know me will realize that nothing could be more "me" than to eat lovely meals cooked by someone else in exchange for conversation and doing dishes.

I am setting up all my usual workshops, but the icing on the cake is that since Fr. Martin is charismatic he is having me and two other charismatic retired leaders start a healing prayer group which he combines with Adoration by bringing the monstrance right up to the face of the sufferer being prayed for! Also he lets us give 2 minute witnesses after the Mass. I have been wishing priests would do this forever.

I miss the family and my old friends greatly, sniff, sniff, but I am hoping this is my final place.

August 1, 2009 from Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dearest apostles, I thank you for your efforts for Me. Do you see the fruit of your labours? Perhaps not. Perhaps you continue serving, living out your commitments with no understanding of how I bless the world through your service. I hear your sighs. I am with you in your uncertainty. In humanity, there is always uncertainty. In humanity, there is always doubt. There also comes fear and each human will experience heaviness in his heart someday. None of these things should persuade you that you are serving in vain. None of these things should distract you from a zealous representation of the gospel message. You see, the message is so much bigger than each of you. And yet, each of you is necessary. The gospel truth pushes itself into a world that craves truth, even while it rejects truth. You, beloved apostle, are part of that push. You will feel the strain in your body and soul. You will feel the sacrifice. If you did not feel any such strain or sacrifice, there would be cause

for concern because living and spreading the gospel is work. When you feel tired, remember that I also felt tired. Never separate your sufferings from My sufferings and you will be at peace, even as you carry your share of the cross for this time. I am with you, loving and sustaining you. I am ever watchful. When you need Me in a special way, you shall have Me, with every grace required. Do not be afraid of anything. Your Jesus will never abandon you.

August 26, 2009

I am working on a manuscript by Pere Thomas Philippe being translated from French to English. He writes about how receiving God's love in wordless prayer is deeper than anything else. I hear Jesus, Mary and Joseph telling me:

"Yes, Ronda, you became too obsessed with locutions. We needed to stop and bring you by an indirect route of grounding in Bride of Christ praying of Liturgy of the Hours aloud, and back to contemplative reception of our presence. You can use Thursdays for this silent prayer. I am pondering Alice Von Hildebrand's remark after reading my autobiography that I should not let hatred for my sins blind me to God's love for me.

August 29, 2009

First class at Holy Apostles Seminary near the parish of Fr. Martin.

What an amazing class. Wonderful seminarians, wonderful, sweet Vietnamese, wonderful lay students with a virginal feeling to them vs. students burnt out from parties and booze. The standout was Br. Yousseff, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, who sat near me with eyes brimming over with grace and love. I thought I was in heaven. They seemed to accept my rollicking funny teaching style after a short period of looking at me as if "this woman can't be for real." But I kept reminding myself, they are mostly concerned with the requirements, what they have to do, not with my personality style.

I am walking on air, praising the Lord. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, are smiling and saying, "didn't we tell you we'd take care of you."

September 1, 2009 from Anne, Direction for Our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, I remind you to ask heaven for the graces you require. In order to work in My plan, united to My will, you must be in the habit of asking for all that you need. This

constant petitioning for help in your service creates in you an awareness of the unity within which you serve. In this way, you will begin to understand that nothing can be attributed to you except your willingness to serve. You will receive the graces you require, of course, and with these graces will come humility because you will acquire an understanding of the relationship between your requests and heaven's answers. If heaven is supplying you with all that you need to complete the tasks heaven has assigned to you, then you cannot take credit for what is being accomplished. You may say that you are already doing this. I respond that I want you to increase both your dependence on heaven and your awareness of your dependence on heaven. Each day, every day, ask heaven for help throughout the day. My beloved apostles, I am preparing you for a new time which will bring you joy because you will serve peacefully in complete trust. Why would a child fret when his Father sees to his every need? Truly, you are united to heaven. I seek only to instil in you a greater awareness of your unity. I, your Jesus, call on you for dedication and sacrifice, it is true, but not without cause and not without benefit. See to My interests in your day, please. In turn, I will protect your intentions. Spread joy and goodness. Spread unity and peace. Spread trust in God who will never abandon His children.

September 3, 2009

Joy of being at the seminary. Decision to teach there in the Spring.

From Pere Thomas:

Man and Woman

Let us take a different perspective. God created humans as man and woman. Adam was created first, Eve afterward. The prerogative of woman is not to be first but to be the last, while knowing that the last one is the most perfect. Perfection is not at the beginning but at the fulfillment. And the misfortune of woman is that she always wants to be first, instead of accepting to be last and to let herself be filled by God. This was the sin of Eve, who wanted to take the place of Adam. And it is always the same, now more than ever.¹ I believe this is what explains the role of Mary in the 'end times'² and the particularly new difficulties of these 'end times'."

September 13, 2009

Notes on a book by Angelyn Arden, a professor here, called *The Articulate Silence*:

¹ This recalls the existence and influence of radical feminism today. (Ed.)

² The expression 'end times' is here used not to predict when the world will end but to characterize as the 'end times' the latest times in which the Church lives, that for Christians will always bear some symbolical comparisons to the Book of Revelation. It is a symbolical rather than a literal interpretation of the term.

"Fearful, even terrified of the Hole, we attach to how we know each of our parents/caregivers defend from it:

(My mother by 24/7 analytic conversation; my father by work.)

"Our attraction has to do with what we think brings flavor, mystery, charge, miracle, and distinction into our life ...their pull is through coercion, intrigue, secrets, promise of security. ... fear of bland, insipid, common ... nothingness....whereas if one goes through the insipid and weak to the vulnerability one can sit in front of the cross and let Christ enter..."

(I have been acting out all of the above at a frantic pace since arriving here.)

September 18, 2009

A woman I wanted very much to get close to rejected me. Praying today Mary seemed to tell me that she is my Mother and my Sister and to pray to her incessantly. I had a good talk about the basics of it with Fr. Martin who thought that my being so communicative and self-revelatory is a virtue, but can be overwhelming, especially to those who like to be hidden. This sounded right. He thought I should hang in.

September 26, 2009 Answer to an e-letter from someone who watched me on Marcus Grodi's Journey Home.

Dear W.,

Okay, let me try. Since I am not a theologian or Scripture scholar some of this will just be "my take" and others I will refer you to sources:

Why did Christ have to die to save us? Why was a blood sacrifice required?

It helps me to think that life is more like a story than a syllogism! Did you ever read the Chronicles of Narnia of C. S. Lewis? Well, the sacrifice of Aslan the lion seems somehow "right" even though we would never have invented such a scenario ourselves. Of course it seems right because we have Christian imaginations. He could have saved us some other way. The question is why did he choose to save us this way? If you read St. Augustine's City of God he has a lot about the evolution of religion without using the word evolution of course. Primitive man seemed to have a huge archetype of sacrifice of beasts and even humans.

I remember when I was in the process of conversion asking the same question you are asking about why the sacrifice. Somewhere I read that in old Yiddish tradition, women twirled dead chickens around their heads chanting, "let the chicken die instead of me." Out of some archetypal memory this image from my Jewish background, even though we were atheists, helped me understand Jesus.

So the evolution was from primitive animal sacrifice, to the prophets insisting that God didn't want these sacrifices but instead wanted the sacrifice of the heart to Jesus being the unbloody sacrifice. He obviously has a sovereign right to be the author and the main actor in the drama of salvation, no?

What I can see clearly is if one of my kids did a big no-no, and his elder sister begged me not to punish him but that she instead would take the punishment I could hardly fail to forgive the original culprit.

The Catechism is a good reference for all questions such as this. It is beautifully written in a very spiritual way - I mean the big Vatican Catechism published in the 80's.

Okay, next question: What is the nature of our sacrifice at Mass each week? The Priest says sacrifice be acceptable to God. Why is a sacrifice required and I have never been sure what sacrifice he is referring to?

A little explanation of time and eternity in relationship to the Mass. Most of the peoples of the world have cyclical time - i.e. they think time goes around in a circle, and it doesn't have a start and an end.

Only monotheism of a creationist type has God starting time and ending historical time. Picture a line from Creation to the end of time. Now picture a dot above this line called eternity. Eternity means either endless time or timelessness. God is timeless, i.e. outside of time. Eternity enters time at certain key moments such as Creation, the Ten Commandments, the Annunciation, etc. This is called sacred time. In religious rituals we enter the sacred time. When the priest consecrates he actually enters into the sacred time of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. We live in that time in a virtual sort of way. Through the priest, Christ gives us His body and blood in Holy Communion. Since Christ died for our sins, we participate in His sacrifice at the Mass.

As G. K. Chesterton shows in a wonderful philosophical book you should get called The Everlasting Man, that pagan religions and fairy tales are pre-figurations of the Truth. John Paul II in The Threshold of Hope describes God as sending beams of light. The big

beam comes through Judaism to the Catholic Church, but other religions are seeing light from lesser beams.

Placement of holy days? Church History is not my forte. How do I see it? Just as early Church Fathers baptized Greek philosophy - as in taking Plato's sense of the immortality of the soul and showing how Catholic belief in the Resurrected Body completes Plato's dualism, etc. - so the Church baptized holidays in pagan cultures and making them into Catholic feasts. So winter solstice becomes Christmas day. Maybe Christ was actually born on the shortest day of winter...you'd have to look that up on some Catholic Answers web.

Debating the days between Easter and Western Churches - I interpret that to come from political feuds being projected onto Church policies. For example since Constantinople hated Rome for other reasons they would also feud about holiday dates. Like a couple who is on the rocks putting their anger into a debate into which restaurant should we go to on our anniversary - the one you like or the one I like.

How do you know it is God's presence you feel and not your imagination? The standard criteria is the fruits - if you feel peaceful and loving that is a good sign, presuming what you are doing or deciding on isn't contrary to Catholic faith or morals. Since I am a nervous wreck, I can't fake peacefulness under any circumstances and always attribute it to divine grace.

Women's roles? Did you read my leaflet on Women as Second Class Citizens in the Church? It is on www.rondachervin.com click on books and then e-books and leaflets. Read that first and then ask more. Also read John Paul II's On the Dignity and Vocation of Women. As to leaders of house Churches try Martimort on Deaconesses.

Slavery in the Bible. I read a few books on this for teaching ethics. The gist: there are many things in Old and New Testament that were tolerated not approved in the sense of saying they are intrinsically good. If you google something like slavery and Catholic Church teaching you can get lots of stuff on things like Popes denouncing slavery and not being followed by Catholic slave holders. I see it as analogous to how the Church teaches social justice but most parishioners tolerate many unjust aspects of our society. The Church teaches that you should live simply and austerely to give to the poor, but how often is that preached! A middle class lifestyle with stuffed closets and enough garbage to feed the whole world is tolerated not approved. It would be better, I think, if every priest raged against injustice at least once a month, but they fear losing all their flock. Or they themselves tolerate relatively luxurious living.

In NT times slavery was a substitute for just killing prisoners of war. St. Paul hopes that

the slave owner will liberate the slave but legally he couldn't change that.

Basically Jesus came to give us spiritual salvation, not liberation from earthly injustice. That doesn't mean he approved of injustice.

In answer to this statement of the woman who wrote to me for answers:

"At the end of the day the Priests, Bishops, etc. hold the power and ability to make decisions for the Church and we can't even be in the club."

It can seem that way, but if you study Church history from a Catholic feminist point of view you discover other balancing elements – such as saintly women mystics telling the Popes what to do or guiding male members of religious orders. Also Mary trumps all. There she is teaching the whole world at apparitions. As a strong woman, brought up to be an aggressive woman, of course, I love to order people around, but that is not what the real scenario is about to begin with. There is God Himself, Jesus, accepting to be judged by Pharisees and Pilate.

Isn't God genderless? God is pure Spirit, but God reveals Himself in the Father role as progenitor, initiator. If you read JPII Dignity and Vocation of Women he says that since Jesus is God and He calls God Father that has to be normative for us.

Mary Magdalene announces the Resurrection and in that way is an apostle, but Jesus chose men to be apostles even though His mother was holier. A seminarian I was teaching this subject to opined that if God did it this way it was because more would be saved - I think women have an easier time following male leaders than men have following women leaders.

Offering up sufferings? This is based on the famous passage of St. Paul that we are filling in what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. That doesn't mean that Christ's redemption wasn't good enough, but that He willed that we could become close to Him and help others by offering our sufferings to God in prayer. So all day long I mutter "I'm offering the pain of having to wait on line, etc. etc. for the conversion of my adult children, etc. etc." Heaven is going to be a communal banquet, not the soul alone with God. This praying for one another in this way bonds us as a foretaste of heaven.

God is everywhere in terms of everything partaking of His being in some way in order to exist. A more specific and special way of God being present is Jesus telling us that He will be with us in the Eucharist. If God is present everywhere why would He reveal Himself in His Son in the first place. I guess because we didn't get it. The idea that God loved us so much as to let His son die for us melts our hard hearts, so He desires to be most present when we take up His invitation. As in a husband is present to his wife over coffee or

taking out the garbage but much more thematically present in sexual union. See my free e-book summarized as Signs of Love: About the Sacraments in www.rondachervin.com.

Sept. 29, 2009 Feast of St. Michael

Father Martin brought holy water from a shrine in Mexico in Tlaxacala (?) called Milagro where a peasant saw St. Michael many times and was told to dig for a well of healing water. I drank some of it for the healing of shivering. I felt heat go through my body. Then after that I felt the cold but it didn't bother me. This lasted for about a month.

October 1, 2009

From Anne – Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My dear children, I am with you. I watch closely as you struggle for holiness. Often, you are uncertain of your spiritual condition. You strive to serve but feel conflicted by the times in which you are serving. There are some things that all humanity deals with regardless of where in history they are placed. First, there will always be a difference between the world's path and heaven's path. These two paths, while they can run alongside each other for increments, will always separate. Ultimately, each man will have to choose. Every man, to a greater or lesser degree, will have to contend with choosing first good over evil and then he will have to make another choice and that is the choice of choosing My plan for his life over his own plan for his life. After that, the choices become even more studied in that the man must choose My plan in each day, in each task and even in each moment. You may say, dear apostle, that this is a difficult call for a man, to study his actions in each day. You may say, this is asking a lot. You are right. I, Jesus, am asking a lot of you. I ask for your full commitment and I do so without apology. Dearest apostles, if you give me your full commitment, there is no limit to what I can do. Look at your life. You have said yes to me on many days. Examine what I have done with your yes answers. Consider what I am building with the commitments of so many children of God who are willing to be directed by the Savior, their King. I am building a structure of love. I am building a structure through which many are returning. Truly, your hearts, open and filled with My love, call out to others. You provide for Me a welcome to those who feel separated. If they can be taken into your heart for even a brief moment and experience Me, with My love, then they will have the courage to both approach Me directly and to accept Me directly. Please, do not count the sacrifices when you consider your service. Do not count the loss of worldly respect. Count only the souls who are comforted and consoled. Count the repentance and healing of so many who have been restored to unity with heaven. Count the humility that I have bestowed on you, dear apostle, since you began to learn about true

holiness. I am your King. I can give you anything. I choose to give you peace and holiness. I choose to make of you a resolute servant. Accept My will in your life and you will then be able to accept all of the graces heaven has stored up for you.

October 2, 2009

Fr. Martin will be transferred. I will move into the seminary.

October 5, 2009

In Sept. 1937! Sister Faustina started to get heavy pains and Jesus told her this was in reparation for abortion and to save some souls. We were born in 1937!

Because of Fr. Martin's transfer I moved into a little room at the Seminary. Great joy of having a room at the seminary. All in one place so near cafeteria, class, chapel and barter of room and board for classes taught! St. Francis of Assisi thank you, thank you, thank you. More money for the poor with no rent or food bill!

October 9, 2009

Jesus: It is not that you're a "dingbat" (that I go from place to place) but remember I told you that you were my pilgrim bride. So this is the 10th place you are going since Martin's death. I send you . Rejoice in all the good done to you and that you did in this 5 months at St. Francis Church. If you were not into Franciscan simplicity I could not do this with you.

October 16, 2009

The seminary got me a lovely big new bed! Felix the cat is back from the snow day. My cup runneth over – I am thinking my role besides teaching is to affirm these noble priests and seminarians, the hope of the Church.

October 30, 2009

We had a glorious visit of an Abbot of Cistercians from North Vietnam – luminous. I had a sense of how the Gates of Hell will not prevail and God bringing good out of that awful war. The Abbot said that the communists are letting up on them because the spies had to go to every Mass and began to see how good the faith was!

November 1st message from Anne:

Jesus:

My dearest apostle, how pleased I am with your efforts. Shall I tell you all that pleases Me? I am pleased that you accept My words and welcome them into your heart. I am pleased because as you welcome My words into your heart, you welcome My graces into

your life. Many come and go in My service. But you do not do this. You remain in My service. It will take eternity for Me to show you My gratitude. When I say service, you no doubt think practically. You think of work, of heaven's work, which includes the tasks that you complete for Me and for others in My name. This is good. I so badly need those who are willing to work for Me. But when I say service, I want you to also think of love. You see, we need bridges built that will transport God's children safely into My heart. But the invitation to cross the bridge from isolation to the love of God will be extended through your love, through My presence in your heart. My love will flow out from you to others and they will find out that the wounds they suffer are vulnerable to love. Wounds melt away when they are exposed to love. Love, rooted in Me, is always selfless. It is quiet rather than boisterous. It waits patiently, willing to accept suffering for the greater good of the soul in front of it. The greater good will always be reconciliation with Me but this reconciliation between the Creator and the created is deeply personal and takes place in the privacy of the soul. Dearest children of God, you have been chosen to accept My love and to use that love to draw others back to Me. I am watching closely as you struggle for greater holiness. I am watching closely as you advance. I am with you in your own suffering and I allow loneliness for every serving apostle because it is only through this loneliness that you understand how badly you need Me. Your loneliness then becomes a heavenly port in a storm of activity through which you draw graces down into the world. You see that you suffer. When you return to Me forever, you will see that your suffering, accepted in My name, advanced not only My intentions, but yours. Be at peace, little apostle. I am involved in all that occurs in your life. I am with you. I will not leave you.

November 4, 2009

Could purgatory be having to forgive!

November 7, 2009

Insight on “second childhood” and old age. We are trying to replicate what we loved in our childhood without the negatives. For me, a mother who wanted to talk all day and a sister to play with who wasn’t critical.

We can get some of these ideal situations some of the time but not in a lasting way because we are being weaned from this earth. In the meantime Mary is the mother/sister who will talk to us all day and be challenging rather than scolding. And, Jesus is the Man, God the Father, and Mary the mother/sister.

God gives us what we need emotionally on the human level to survive, but keeps drawing us toward eternity.

November 11, 2009

In the 60's there was this sentimental little "children's book" The Velveteen Rabbit. The theme was how the child loves the old worn out rabbit even more than the pristine new version of the gift as an analogy to loving others in their batteredness, etc.

I had such an experience the other day. I have a dear friend I was annoyed with for various reasons. It happened that he was injured. I hadn't seen him for a while. He was trying to get off a couch but his injury made this hard to do so he got red in the face trying to maneuver off the couch and looked like a huge awkward bear. Suddenly I felt great love for him at that moment. Instead of seeing what annoys me, I saw this dear struggling person – not just the physical part but the whole struggling person in all his dimensions.

Another version of one of my long term images that instead of seeing people as fallen idols we should see them as funny little creatures.

November 14, 2009

An Amazing letter:

Hi Ronda,

This is Jesse, Charlie's (my son who committed suicide) old friend from LA. Actually, I'm writing to you from Colorado Springs where I'm living now. Recently, I went onto your website and was very moved how you are able to turn such challenges in your life into an inspirational, and no doubt, transformational message. I'm sure you've helped many people. I am writing to you now about Charlie and what I've tried to learn from his terrible loss. I look back on the person I was when he left us, and I think how truly young and naive I was about the world when I thought I had all the answers. Charlie's death made me question everything I thought I believed in, but it's taken many years to realize that. Still faithful to the arts, I graduated Juilliard in 1995 and have been teaching and performing in my own series of solo shows ever since. I am now workshopping a theatrical performance that deals much with the nature of my friend's suicide. The show is called "Face the City," and one of its primary purposes is to address this subject with young adults particularly at an age where the lines between adolescence and adulthood are blurred. Rather than go on a length about the show, it's probably easier to give you the description as viewed in our press release:

The story of "Face the City" is set in the High School, College and the early professional lives of four friends (The Painter, The Composer, The Journalist, and The Performer) who begin with a shared dream of artistic invincibility. When one of them decides to take his own life, his

pathway to destruction is explored by The Performer who is forced to come to terms with loss, compromise, and finally escape from his own false dreams as he discovers himself walking down a similar road. Integrating Rock, Theater, and Audio Visual Live Action & Animation in an unparalleled theatrical presentation, "Face the City" is an honest, moving, true story about redemption and the recapturing of innocence in a society that so readily tries to define who you are.

Originally premiered last October, "Face the City" has undergone quite a few revisions structurally and narratively. One of the main areas I've been on the fence with for a while, though, is Charlie's suicide. In the show, I never mention his name, but I feel if I truly am to tell this story honestly I need to go into some of the reasons why he made his decision to end his life. Ultimately, I feel this show can help many people. I have been building a relationship for some time with a woman named Jane Benet who works closely with Suicide Prevention in Colorado Springs and whose own son tragically took his own life a number of years ago. She is helping me form an alliance with Suicide Prevention organizations, using "Face the City" as a vehicle to create awareness. This is a show that does not pull its punches by any means. And I feel I have a very unique perspective based on my own experience to share with people.

As I mentioned, however, so much of my own memories of Charlie when it came to his death are really foggy. I feel if I am to tell this story accurately-- and to actually begin a dialogue with people who may be suffering-- I need more help dealing with such a sensitive subject. I am remembering now his journals. I believe if I were to spend some time with them that might open some doors and enhance the heart of this story. I understand this is probably an extremely sensitive issue for you, and want to ask this as respectfully as I can when I ask if you would be willing to part with some of them for a short time. Obviously, I'm considering you may not even have them in your possession, but if you do, would that be a possibility? If that makes you uncomfortable, which I completely understand, would you at least be willing to talk to me a little about it sometime on the phone? I will await your response, and respect entirely whatever decision you choose. At the very least, it will be wonderful to hear your voice again!

Sincerely,

Jesse Wilson

(As you will see, he did write this wonderful play and many in my family, including myself, went to see it.)

November 23, 2009

I talked with Fr. Brad, my spiritual director at the seminary. He was all joyful and full of transcendent visions of why our sense of self-identity should rest on God's love vs. opinions of others and low self-esteem caused thereby such as childhood wounds.

When I went to pray I got this sense that Jesus, Mary and Joseph were telling me that I have reached all my goals in terms of wanting to be a creative person and a famous person and a woman of wisdom. Now all that is left is not impressing anyone or caring about what they think but only letting them, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, form me into a saint by one simple path: "Let go, let God." This means just slowly doing what is needed in every situation without tension or ups and downs based on approval or disapproval and basking in their love. That is all. This gave me lots of quiet and peace and joy.

(Reading this word in the heart from three years ago, I have made some progress with God's grace in that I do less and do it more slowly. As to "let go, let God" that is slower.

December 1, 2009 from Anne of Direction for Our Times

Jesus

My dear apostle, you must remember that we are not separated. Sometimes, in your weariness, you pray and seek understanding of the situations in your life. When you do this, please remember that I am with you. You are not separated from Me when your thoughts seek to provide you with answers. If you remind yourself that I am not separate from you, you will search for truth more calmly and with more confidence that there is an answer to your many dilemmas. Please do not concern yourself if you are distracted in prayer. Use these times of distraction to talk to Me. Tell me what is distracting you and we will talk about it together. We are together, after all, so I am there. If a certain pattern of sin is troubling you, ask Me how I feel about it. Ask for My observations. You, my beloved apostle, are a studier of Me and how I treated others. Because of your desire to know me, you have a familiarity with My heart that others lack. I will give you the answers you seek, both in terms of your spiritual condition and in terms of the holiest way to conduct yourself in each situation you confront. We are not separate. We are together. Worries of major proportion would only be problematic for you if you were being asked to assure a holy outcome alone or if you were being asked to travel through the period without Me. I promise you that I will be with you and that the outcomes occurring around you will be consistent with My will. I cannot promise you that in your humanity you will always rejoice in My will, especially when there is pain. But I can promise you that the greatest amount of mercy will be obtained through your commitment to remaining with Me, united in the life that is yours. All is well. I am with you. I will be generous to My beloved apostles in this holy time of Advent. Be acutely aware of My presence. When you look at all around you, look with My eyes. This will give you the understanding that will insure peace for you. All is well. The infant returns through your heart, as the King.

December 4, 2009

Holy Spirit:

For you, “leaving mother and father” means giving up the idea that you will find a twin soul. Cleave to the Trinity and to the Holy Family and love everyone you meet, but don’t depend on them. We are making you stronger. You have many good traits others here don’t have and you lack many they do have such as prudence, serenity, steadiness, long-suffering. That is why they provide for you a place where you can flourish and grow. Be more silent. Let us guide you, especially in your inner and outer conversations.

January 1, 2010 from Direction for Our Times

Jesus

There are many different ways to communicate love. One of the ways that I communicate love to My apostles is through My constant presence. I am in each moment, in each day, offering you My heavenly companionship. I offer you a constant stream of love which heals and reassures, which steadies and directs. When allowed, I can help an apostle to adjust his viewpoint to My viewpoint, which is very different from the viewpoint of one who has either forgotten about My presence or rejected My companionship. With this viewpoint comes calm purpose. The days flow past, one by one, and My will flows through each one of you who has accepted My presence. You do not see big changes at your hands. Perhaps you wonder if your cooperation is helpful at all. I assure you today that if you were to reject Me tomorrow, My kingdom would suffer. Without you, I would have one less home for My great love on earth. Each time I use you to love another, I feel gratitude. My gratitude is a force for change in the lives of those around you. You are gaining graces that only heaven can understand. Only heaven can see how an action of grace is stored in waiting. This grace surrounds each person you intercede for and at a moment when it is possible, meaning that heaven sees the opening, that grace is utilized to protect and advance the soul. Dear apostle, serving heaven so steadily, leave all of your difficulties to Me. Abandon yourself to My providence completely. Serve with discipline in this moment and I will care for your loved ones. I am using you for the purpose of love and I want to use you even more fully. When you become discouraged, please sit with Me and I will help you to grasp the limited nature of your vision. Concentrate on My will for your day. Concentrate on remaining in the present, connected to your service in each moment. Avoid being trapped by the past and avoid being drawn into a future on earth which may not include you. You do not know

when I will come for you. But I am with you now, as you read these words, and I have work for you today. Look, together with Me, at what I am asking of you and together we will be a successful force for love. I crave love from you. When you trust Me and reject fear, I am delighted. Calm, steady service is what I require from My beloved apostles who seek to serve Me. Be at peace. I am with you.

February 1, 2010 Anne – Direction for our Times

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am directing you. I am giving you guidance. I am prompting you, again and again. Do you hear Me? Are you learning to separate My voice from the voices of the world? Do you hear Me when I urge you to greater and greater abandonment? You are suffering, I know. I am listening to your prayers and I am with you in your pain. Please do not think that you are experiencing suffering simply because you are serving Me. Look at those who do not serve Me or even those who do not know Me. Are their lives free from suffering? I am helping you to reject the temptation to believe that if you were not walking this path with Me you would be freed from suffering. It is not true. It would be true to say that if you were not united to Me, you would be suffering without the benefit of My companionship. Such lonely suffering. Such hopeless pain. Instead, I offer you the widest variety of consolations. I offer you understanding of the relationship between sacrifice and holiness. I offer you soothing graces to assist you in preparing your soul for heaven and bringing others comfort and grace. Dearest apostles, you are surrounded by heaven. You are surrounded by grace which supports you, even when you feel you are unsupported. If you feel you cannot stand, allow yourself to fall back and rest in My arms. I will care for you and give you all that you need to continue. Your life is changing, it is true. This should not alarm you. You should expect your life to change as I draw you more and more fully into the plan that I have for your time of service to heaven. It is always the way that I bring you forward, never backward. There is always movement and change. If you were to reject service to Me, your life would still change. Change comes in life whether you are serving heaven or not serving heaven. You may wonder why I am telling you these things. I am helping you to resist the temptation to attach your commitment to Me to suffering. If you are suffering, it is because suffering is part of My plan for you. Each life will include suffering. Beloved apostles, you are trying so hard to serve heaven. Please believe that heaven is serving you, too. You are protected and loved. You need only remain on the course I have laid out for you and all will be well.

Notes from the Bride of Christ Retreat at My Father's House given by Fr. Martin:

Used to the glorious Latin Schola here at Holy Apostles, I was listening with dismay to my own voice and the other retreatants' voices and feeling bad about the contrast. Then I got

this great image. Fr. Martin, and all parish priests, are the priests of the “anawim.” And just as Jesus is touched by the love in the intention even if the art or music isn’t good so should I be. The analogy came to me: suppose my cat Felix were able to arrange a choir of cats to meow greetings to me, would I not be touched?

Suppose I am the Imma not so much of the Bride of Christ community but of many others such as the seminarians and Fr. Paul’s summer group?

Jesus seemed to tell me during the retreat to renew the sense of being a pilgrim bride, as in going to the seminary, Canada, LA this summer.

Without humility we can’t be open to the Holy Spirit. I thought, for me the block is constant striving for my own agenda.

Feb. 2, 2010

A strange conversation where a seminarian talked about one mechanism to “succeed” is to get someone smarter than you and manipulate them in their brokenness so that you can get them to be your slave. I thought, as in “If you were a saint you would want to do what I tell you to do.”

Charismatic Prayer Group at St. John’s Middletown: I loved seeing the hearts of all of them. I got a prophecy about us needing one another so much and we need to admit that. I saw that it was good that I witnessed openness and neediness to some people recently who rejected me for doing so. I felt humiliated, but at the prayer meeting I thought they need to see that with more love of God someone is not so afraid to be open and vulnerable.

April 1, 2010

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am with you. I am present in every challenge you experience. I see your struggle and I provide everything you need to serve Me in each day. If you have given Me your day, then the day belongs to Me. Your self-will has been offered to heaven and heaven exchanges it for My will. How do you experience this? On most days your experience of serving Me is a mystery to you. How could it be otherwise when you are seeing with eyes that have not yet been exposed to the divine vision? Day after day, you offer your will to Me and day after day, I use your offering to gently push Myself through you to others. Do you feel successful? Or do you feel, at times, that you are unsuccessful? Poor little apostles, I understand your questions and I understand your doubts. I assure you, in My human experience, I did not feel successful at every moment. My experience was often much to the contrary. I often experienced the temptation to believe that I was failing the Father. I sometimes, in moments of human temptation, wondered if, in fact, love was enough. Could love succeed in turning hearts to goodness? Could love succeed in persuading God’s

children to accept the Father's beautiful plan for humanity? Yes, please believe that I suffered temptation. And now, you suffer temptation. Together, our temptations suffered for the Father, bring soothing graces to others. You, My beautiful apostle, serve despite temptations to abandon Me. Where others leave, you endure. You endure for Me, as I endured for you. From My perspective, all is well, despite your suffering. My plan is perfect and if you are serving Me, listening to My voice, there are no problems. If you are not serving Me and you are not listening to My voice, then there are many problems for you and there will continue to be many problems for you. 'Ah', you say, 'Jesus, I am listening to you and still I have these problems'. We must differentiate small problems from big problems. Small problems are the sufferings you bear for the sake of the divine will. Big problems are the problems you face when you abandon My will and insert your own will. Are you praying? Are you in steady communication with Me? Do you ask Me what I want you to do in situations where you are unsure? Do you spend time in silence, considering heaven and heaven's plan for you in the day? Answer yes to these questions and I assure you, your problems will be manageable. Do not believe I ignore your sighs or turn away from your fears. I am with you. I will never abandon you. My plan will be realised through your perseverance and through the perseverance of many apostles like you. I am so pleased when you pray for each other because this is how you experience, in advance, My gratitude. You see My gratitude in the graces received by others through your intercession. Rejoice. I am responding to your pain and answering your prayers. Truly, I am with you.

April 9, 2010

I talked to Fr. Brad about talking too much. What I surfaced is that I try to get symbolic victory through detraction. He said that I must train my mind to experience all the pain of the weakness of not being able to change family, dissenters, etc. Go back to the father wound. Offer the pain as an act of love for their sins.

When people reject you for being yourself you should be glad because they would have driven you crazy?

Find a time for quiet prayer where the chapel is empty – pray in order to die to the ego part of my delight in what I am doing. Not the delight but the ego part.

April 22, 2010

from a letter from my sister:

Did I tell you I remembered a snippet of a dream I had about one or two weeks ago, in which I saw mother - and she was beautiful! An elongated, gentle body in some kind of coat, sort of half reclining, and her face young, sensitive, inwardly glowing, at repose. I

gasp as I woke up, for I don't think of her that way - I look at just with a few photos around when she was older ..

April 28, 2010

Steve puts Charlie's music on my web. I played it for my class. A seminarian said : I saw a vision of Charlie playing the cello. He lifted up his head and said tell my mother Happy Birthday and I love her. My daughter Carla and my youngest granddaughter, Martina, were praying for a sign.

(You will be reading next about a possibility. I will not give away the whole story but let you see it unfold.)

A writer friend suggested that I use his agent to get wider distribution of my books and more money for them. I got a big burst of energy from thinking about this.

May 1, 2010

Jesus

My dear apostles, how often you are challenged personally when you attempt to speak the Good News. This brings with it a temptation to connect the authenticity of the Good News to your personal holiness. Alas, you find that you fall short, of course, because you serve within the limitations of your flawed humanity. Does this decrease the force of the Good News you are called to share? Does this diminish the authenticity of the Good News? No. Your flawed humanity is rather testimony to the extent of the Good News. Yes, the scope of the Good News is such that each of My little apostles becomes a true herald, human flaws notwithstanding. You are each uniquely qualified to bring this Good News to a wounded world. You see, dearest apostle, it is through accepting your own pain and offering yourself for healing that you become My greatest example. You, in your willingness to accept healing and in your willingness to grow, show others what I am offering to the world in this time of Renewal. Beautiful humanity, how painful is My desire to heal you, to console you, to bring you to the Father where you will find eternal dignity and confidence. I ache with the desire that you accept My love. There are people who are waiting to experience Me, but it is through your acceptance of Me, with complete abandonment, that I will be brought to them. Do I burden you with My work? Do you find My friendship a heavy cross to carry? Let Me assure you, it is only in this cross that you will find your joy.

Letter to Cathy, my dear Jewish convert best friend:

I just wanted your Jewish take on something. But I got it resolved and you can laugh instead!

I don't know if I mentioned it to you but someone hooked me up with this Catholic NYC

literary agent. I've never had an agent because there are no Catholic agents. There's not a big enough market for an agent to get 15% on sales. This man is a Catholic who is the agent of all sorts of secular stuff but now wants to do more Catholic things. I was told he could take over my own line and actually make big bucks for him and me. Heady, eh? Having lost half my pension it didn't sound so bad. (After many years of getting a certain amount, it turned out I never noticed that this was for me and my husband and I should have informed the pension company that he had died. They said I could either pay them \$50,000 for the back money I received in error, or take a \$1,000 cut per month.) So I went to NYC to meet him and it turns out even though he is Catholic and brought up Catholic, his father was Jewish.

So here I am in the office of this Jewish totally type A super-salesman, pushy, funny, domineering, with two phones on his ears, writing on the computer and 2 secretaries taking dictation. I could see he never heard of me because he's not an EWTN type Catholic at all – more Sunday and new age type. But he trusts that I am terrific because he just started representing Fr. Frank Pavone, who knows me from EWTN.

Typical lines of gab:

Ronda: I never read contracts on my books because since I give all the money to Mother Teresa I don't care.

Possible Agent: Well you can give all you want to Mother Teresa but I'm in this for the money because I can't get out of bed unless I have \$10,000 to pray my daily expenses!

So, I figure Martin arranged this scenario. Remember he was a NYC book salesman before his asthma but I am full of scruples because this agent wants to mainstream me and I identify myself only with our Catholic ghetto.

So it was a 4 hour trip with train cars and subways into NYC and 4 hours back and on the train I'm thinking Cathy will help me to see if I should run like hell or Praise the Lord.

Well, since you couldn't get back I got hold of my priest and he thinks I should go for it and not feel scrupulous about this man and his motives since what I am writing is truth, and I am just going to follow the priest's advice.

Heh! Heh! Heh! LOL Praise the Lord. "It's not over 'til it's over."

June 24, 2010

Dear Abba Martin,

You must have felt it also. As I was going to sleep I reviewed the day of prayer we led together at St. Andrew's (Fr. Martin's new parish) for Pentecost and it seemed to me that once we started it was totally anointed with everything fitting together, not only your prophetic call concepts of what your mission was but my participating in a spiritually motherly and teaching role.

I think what it might be telling us is that my Imma role is teaching in a motherly way by the side of the Abba, rather than being a juridical formal mother of the Bride of Christ.??????

PAX, Imma Ronda

June 7, 2010

It is my Mommy's birthday and I am thinking maybe she is joking with me from Purgatory or Heaven in the form of reminding me that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph said not to worry about my old age because since I gave all to the Church, the Church will carry me.

(From June to August I lived at St. Catherine's Church in Reseda where Fr. Paul Griesgraber, a very old friend, has a house for discerners who live there while doing ministry in the parish. He wanted me to live as a guest at this house and give classes on the Catholic philosophy of love.)

I love Fr. Paul's Mass. Such a beautiful combination of deep reverence and charismatic additions. His hands when he prayed over me after Mass felt like the hands of Jesus.

Fr. Paul says that we cannot give up our addictions but if we give them to Jesus he can crucify them and then we will be free as in Isaiah 66:7 where the woman gives birth easily without labor pains. He gives us Resurrection first so we can bear crucifixion.

July 12, 2010

(Dear readers of this journal, I think you will like this article I wrote for a Catholic magazine. Now in 2013, I can't remember if they published it or not!)

PUTTING YOUR MOUTH WHERE YOUR MONEY ISN'T!

How to turn left-overs into delicious pseudo-French potage for your family or community.

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On one of those nights when you wake up and tune in K-Hell on the radio of your brain, I starting thinking about how when I have to add lower dentures to my uppers I just could be left with a diet of Ensure! My guardian angel raced to my aid with the memory of once reading that before dentures were popular old folks in Europe lived on those scrumptious potato soups such as I had enjoyed on trips in France.

I called an old friend, originally from Belgium, and asked her for a recipe for potage. She send me not only the recipe but a vintage 1890 Amish metal grinder. You boil potatoes and grind them up with sauted scallions and, voila, a lovely soft soup.

I soon noticed that scallions are a little pricey and it occurred to me that there was no reason I had to obey my friend's recipe since I am just as much a gourmand as a gourmet. Why not put in with the potatoes any left-overs hanging around, such as scraps of chicken left on the bone, rejected peas and carrots and then add herbs and spices. Each one would have a different flavor and... I won't be throwing away that famous garbage that social justice people say could feed the whole world!

Well, grinding up left-overs in that old-fashioned metal grinder takes a long time. Eventually I realized that if I first cooked the whole mess for a half hour and then blended it, I could make it still finer, without the type of lumps that would repel my diners, by a last go through the grinder.

I jokingly boasted to my guests about my garbage soup. That resulted in lots of soup left-over for me – a whole week's worth! So now I tell them about my French potage: the first course. About 50% of them actually like it. And of those, about 5% become pseudo-French chefs like me.

Putting my mouth where my money isn't enables me to have more left-over cash to donate to favorite causes such as the Missionaries of Charity and pro-life.

Let me know if you try it and like it....

July 26, 2010 I had group at St. Catherine's, Reseda pray for me for not trying to force God to fix my earthly future. After a day I started feeling more peaceful after many weeks of churning over a variety of possibilities.

August 3, 2010 – The agent I told you about earlier dropped me! I felt rejected but pretty quickly accepted it as probably God's will because maybe we could never get along.

I saw Fr. Gregory Elmer, O.S.B., a dear old monk from St. Andrew's Abbey, who is now in a convalescent home. I had a lovely 1/2 hour with him.

12 Catholics who live in a mobile home park, where my dear friend Evie from my time in Sedona, came to listen to my talk. They looked so stiff - I thought it would be hard to reach them, but they loved it and this new thing is happening...

people are throwing money at me because they think I am holy!!!!!!!!!!!! One saw an aura around my head. Later in the evening class at St. Catherine's here a young man saw light all around me!!!! And another person gave me a little check for thanks for my little course...And this group in the evenings want to do sequels with other books of mine and me on Skype - they actually used the word "disciples."

I am too numb to figure it out.

Hilarious! I woke up refreshed with the strong feeling that there are follower types out there who need to think they are dealing with "special" people and therefore blind themselves to the faults they see so that they can feel good.

September 22, 2010

I decided not to be a widow servant (i.e. a full time member of the Bride of Christ community but, instead, to just pray and help. I asked Jesus, Mary and Joseph: why did I have to go through this:

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: You had to find out yourself that it is not because some priests are dissenters that you cannot find a niche but that even when you find a magisterial priest. We have made you to be a prophetic voice and that the philosopher part of you makes it impossible for you to settle into compromises of any sort.

We want you to speak the truth with love, but that means speaking it, not just living as a victim soul of others' shortcomings. That is what Fr. Luke Zimmer meant when he said you couldn't be in community because of something in your personality that was contrary intrinsically.

So now take all that Fr. M. can give you but be detached and follow up Our word to you: moment by moment with us.

FROM JOURNAL WRITER TO BLOGGER! 2011

(After the Journal from 2009 ff. called *Spiritual Mother*, I decided to stop writing journals. However, a dear friend suggested that I write blogs. Blogs?!? I find the word blog much lacking in aesthetical qualities. I like writing long things, not paragraphs, or so I thought. Then other friends of mine suggested I write blogs for Watershed – a wonderful web-site mostly specializing in sacred music (see www.ccwatershed.org)

I decided to try. After just 2 attempts, I fell in love with this new media approach and decided that it was the perfect outlet for exhibitionist ego-maniacs such as myself. I wrote about 100 or so and then decided to extend the outreach of these blogs by making them into a sort of journal for 2011 to be a kind of sequel to my older journals on this free e-book part of my web.

Hope you like them. Feel free to respond anyway you wish by writing to me at chervinronda@gmail.com.)

Of course, those of you who have waded through all the pages so far of *One Foot in Eternity* will find repetitions sometimes in these blogs of ideas or experiences you already read about earlier. Some of these obvious ones I have weeded out, but others I have kept, especially about Catholic anger management, because we need to think about these concepts often and we are inclined to forget. However, just freely skip over any line of thought you have “interiorized” and don’t want more of!

Blogs that I wrote after *One Foot in Eternity* was compiled go to [HTTP://WWW.CCWATERSHED.ORG/BLOG/RONDAVIEW/](http://WWW.CCWATERSHED.ORG/BLOG/RONDAVIEW/)

17 February 2011

Topic: Contemplative Photography

(Note: This is an old concept you will find in several of my books, but pared down into a few paragraphs)

Compare a portrait photograph with a caricature. The portrait photographer looks at the customer and figures out what is the most attractive way to present that face. The caricaturist, by contrast, looks for the most unattractive feature and exaggerates it.

Now, here is the analogy. When you contemplate the people you know well do you think of their best features or do you exaggerate their worst features? If you are like me, when I am feeling kindly disposed to a friend or family members, I think of moments where this person(s) was displaying virtues or delightful quirks. But when I am angry at someone, I contemplate their worst deeds, sometimes going back for decades!

Don't you think that, in the words of Dietrich Von Hildebrand, God wants you to join the stream of His love for everyone by looking for the unique preciousness of his or her personality rather than catching the Devil's picture?

Realistically, with the exception of Our Lady, we all have positive and negative traits. We need not ignore the bad traits, especially if we need to deal with them, but we don't need to fixate on them either. When the caricature comes to mind, let us ask God to make us into portrait photographers.

18 February 2011

A Poem for the Saint John Cantius Society

Dear readers,

Here at Holy Apostles College and Seminary where I teach we have the wonderful John Cantius Society seminarians training a choir for daily Mass. Here is a little "poem" I wrote, as a tribute to them, about listening to their Latin Chant one early morning:

**Sheltered in the chamber of our Church
Your voices echoing centuries of faith, hope, and love,
I feel saved and safe.**

Thank you, dear brethren.

You might want to read more about the John Cantius Society on their web and about Holy Apostles – a late vocation seminary. We have men of all ages and former occupations and nationalities from Cuban to Vietnamese to Lebanese, and many other backgrounds. When I was a little girl the United Nations started to such joy and hope. Now I like to say that the Church is the true U.N.

19 February 2011

Beautiful Music is from Heaven

One of my favorite quotations from Newman is that "music is so beautiful, it cannot have come from us but has escaped from heaven."

My husband, an eventual convert to the Catholic Church, was brought up on the Lower East Side to orthodox Jewish parents. Uneducated and poor, they did not understand classical music. My husband fell in love with it as a child, but since the rest of the family "didn't get it" he could only listen to it by hiding in the clothing closet with a little radio on low volume. When he became a Catholic,



his favorite form of prayer at home was to lift his soul to God by listening to sacred music and other classics each evening, on huge speakers.

Another quotation about the beauty of music that I love is from the famous English novelist, Rebecca West. A concert pianist gives up her career to raise her children, but teaches them to play the piano, violin, and cello. When the first child becomes an adult and is leaving the home, she earnestly admonishes her:

“Never, never, never think that life is not as extraordinary as music says it is.”

Yes!

21 February 2011

No discounts on getting to heaven?

One of the greatest mentors I have ever had was a fascinating Jewish convert lay contemplative, Charles Rich. He lived in a Jesuit residence for most of the 20th century, praying all day and counseling priests and lay people.



Here is one of his delightful stories: A man notices a beautiful suit in a store window. But it is \$100. He saves his money and finally walks into the store to buy the suit. It is as wonderful as he thought. But then he thinks, if I buy a suit, I ought to also have a new shirt, and a new tie. But I can't afford them. So, he winds up getting a cheaper suit that isn't very good so that he can also get the shirt and the tie.

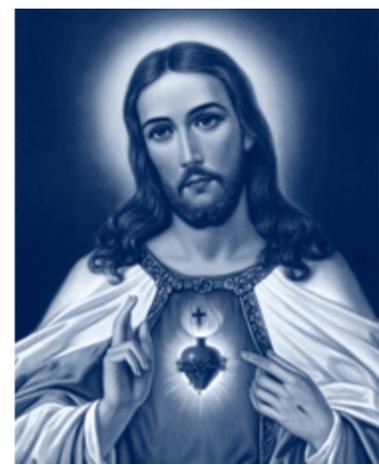
Here is the comparison. We realize that being a saint in the sense of only doing God's will and getting to heaven is the only thing that really counts. But, then, we think – I would also like to have the comforts of a good life, a little success, etc. etc. And so we don't go for heaven really but, instead, compromise. Why go to purgatory if we could get to heaven?

You can find a link to Charles Rich's biography by me and numerous of his pithy sayings on my web — go to rondachervin.com and look for the link to him.

21 February 2011

"You will find him in my Sacred Heart"

Today is the 20th anniversary of the death of my son, Charles. We had twin girls, then 3 miscarriages, then Charlie, and then 3 more miscarriages. Charlie was the son of my husband's old age. He was a delightful child, good, deep, and highly creative – a cellist and composer. He had



what Jungians call an eternal child syndrome. He had such a loving happy youth that he refused to become an adult. At 19 he looked for the most beautiful spot in the world to leap into the Pacific Ocean at Big Sur to his death.

It was the most horrifying moment in our lives. It still is a dagger in my heart even though I believe that God saved him. As you may know the catechism teaches that most suicides are out of their minds so we need not assume they are in hell, but pray for their progress toward a better place. A word I got in my heart was to look for him in the Sacred Heart.

Advice I have to give is never think those who threaten suicide are just faking to get attention – get them professional help immediately.

When I saw his dead body I grabbed the mercy chaplet and have never stopped praying it. I realized that we all need mercy, not merit badges.

You might want to hear his beautiful music to Tolkien's Lord of the Rings on rondachervin.com. Click on Music of Charles Chervin. He also wrote, just before he died, a plaintive piece called Requiem for a Lost Childhood, which you can also hear at the same place. There was a concert by the musicians from his music school a few months afterwards. I ran around saying, please steal his melodies so that he can live. Since this web is redolent with composers, please steal it if you like it!

23 February 2011

"Anything worth doing, is worth doing badly" G.K. Chesterton

It was the year 1965. I was desperately trying to make the adjustment from full time philosophy graduate student to full-time mother of twins. I asked my great intellectual mentor, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, how I could deal better with not concepts but diapers. "What's a diaper?" he asked. Of course he knew what a diaper was in German but had never heard the word in English.

Help came with happening upon the above line from G.K. Chesterton: "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." Bingo! Of course, raising babies is so important that it's good to do it even if I can't earn an A, a B, or even a C at it.

A related favorite a quotation is that the perfect is the enemy of the good. I looked all over to find the author of this adage. No, it was not in Scripture, or in Shakespeare, but from General



Sherman! In case you're sure exactly what it means since, after all, Jesus says "Be ye perfect," it is designed to help perfectionists do something good rather than nothing at all since you may reason that if you can't do something perfectly, why even do it?

An application in my case is that in my generation in Catholic schools most English teachers insisted on perfect grammar and spelling. This led some talented writers to produce nothing after they stopped writing compositions for school because, "if it wasn't perfect, why write it?" But, I, an atheist going to public schools as a child, before my conversion, was taught by progressive teachers who stressed self-expression. I have been expressing myself ever since. I leave the perfecting to the editors at the publishing houses. I presume that God helps me every time since people say they get a lot out of reading my stuff.

Now even though these adages don't work at all for creating music or performing it, for more ordinary activities it could work. Consider doing such ordinary worthwhile things badly and not letting the perfect get in the way of the good. Try it, you'll like it!

24 February 2011

I am teaching St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross at Holy Apostles College and Seminary this semester. They both endlessly admonished against chatter. Since I am a chatter-box – and this for 73 years – I was alarmed. What? I can never, never, be united to God unless I get rid of this habit!

I asked a wise mentor and he said this, "Don't try to talk less. Try, instead, to love silence more!" And what the Holy Spirit told me was to watch my outer and also interior conversations so as to be more silent.

Today is a beautiful day to start over again on this attempt to follow the Holy Spirit and beg for the grace to love silence more. It happens that yesterday was full of stress of all kinds and that stress is following me today. My tendency under stress is to vent it through chatter with one person after another. Typing this blog in silence instead of calling up one more audience for my woes is a step toward greater silence.

So, this morning my prayer is this: Our Lady of Solitude, help me to give all the problems that cause stress to you. Let me now rest my head on your lap and not lift my head until I feel more peaceful."

25 February 2011

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Hurling Denunciations from the Throne of Truth

I sometimes ask myself: “If I lived at the time of Jesus would I have been a zealot or a Christian?” Probably a zealot before the Resurrection and a Christian afterwards. After all, the zealots were haters of the real injustices of the Romans and, by contrast, Jesus must have seemed weakly passive in this respect.

Dietrich Von Hildebrand wrote a great analysis of the Pharisee in his classic *Transformation in Christ*. A key concept is that in pride we love to hurl denunciations

from the throne of truth. In our own personal lives this takes the form of “This person is unforgivable. Here are the 20 examples of his/her unforgivableness. Now, all of you need to hate him or her, also.” And then we add, “I could forgive him/her if that person begged for forgiveness and that, in a totally sincere manner.”

Whenever I see the Passion Christ when Jesus forgives his torturers I say to myself: “If He could forgive them, and they certainly weren’t begging for forgiveness, I can forgive everyone who hurt me.” Legend has it that not only the centurion but even Pilate got the grace to repent. Since forgiveness from the heart can take many years, it’s better to start soon.

Well, when we say every day many times “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” do we mean it or is it just lip-service?

26 February 2011

"Peace is the Tranquillity of Order." St. Augustine

In time of conflict and stress I sometimes wake up in the morning with a feeling of hopelessness. I mutter the



prayers of the rosary and a tiny little sense of peace begins to quietly trickle through the knots of the turmoil caused by outer and inner disorder.

Pope Paul VI proclaimed that there can be no peace without justice. Of course, everything disordered in the world, in the Church, and in our own souls causes peacelessness. John Paul II augmented his predecessor's words to proclaim that there is no justice without transparency. The vicious circle is cover-up of injustice, and the resulting peaceless fears.

How do we get out of the vicious circle? Our Savior – “the Prince of Peace” – tells us that the way out is up and then from the overflow of His love to begin the process of slowly unraveling the disordered knots.

Since we cannot control others, we have to start with our own disorders. Sometimes just removing dust that covers up the wood of my desk brings a little bit of peace. You might pray, after reading these large chunks of wisdom: “Our Lady of Knots”* what tiny thing can I do today that will bring greater transparency, greater justice...hence a little more tranquility to my soul.”

*You can find Our Lady of Knots on the web. The image shows her unravelling knotted yarn. There are prayers to go with the image.

27 February 2011

Fresh Beauty

My son-in-law, and English poet, put together a new website for me with beautiful graphics. I will tell you more about this web outreach to “seekers” when the web goes up. (You can find it on www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com) When I saw the nature photos on the draft of the web tears came into my mind. I was reminded of how I forgive everything about any of my family members if they create something beautiful in the realm of music or art or poetry.



I have a little teaching on types of work in the Church. I divide us into motherly/fatherly, prophetic works, creative works and contemplative contributions. Of course we have bits of all four, but generally there is one we are especially called to. Briefly, motherly/fatherly types will do anything to fill any need from ushering to ironing altar clothes to pro-life telephone ministry, and catechetics. Prophetic people are more interested in removing evils by working with such groups as operation rescue, writing letters to the editor, campaigns. In the parish church prophetic types like to make things better through the parish council

or bugging the priest. Contemplative types you will find before daily Mass praying the rosary, at adoration, just sitting in the church when it is empty, loving to just be with the Lord. I make it a point to try to affirm the gifts and help of all these types of builders of our mini-kingdoms of God.

Often least appreciated are the creative types such as composers, decorators, artists, writers. We love the result but have little idea of how much goes into these works, so we may gaily request the choir director who has volunteered umpteen hours a week if he or she wouldn't like to also bake cookies for the kiddies for after Mass, or spend Saturday morning sorting items from the rummage sale.

28 February 2011

Ridicule - a sin?

I just finished writing a book with the Ballards (Lutheran ministers turned Catholic) called **What the Saints Say About Heaven** (Since this blog it has been published by Tan/St. Benedict's and there is a series about it on Women of Grace on EWTN)...one of my co-authors included an old examination of conscience as an appendix. To my amazement it listed under sins ridicule of others, sarcasm, and even enjoying hearing others criticized!

This occasioned a general confession of 73 years of these sins! (In case you are a younger Catholic and don't know, a "general confession" doesn't mean you detail 73 years of instances of a sin. That might bore the confessor. You just say "I want to confess 73 years of doing "x". It sure lightens the load of guilt!

While waiting on line for confession I thought of how Kierkegaard wrote that instead of gossiping about the sins of others we should weep for them. Now, by gossip, we don't mean necessary conversations involving the faults of others for the purpose of helping them or dealing with them. What is meant is indulging in



the details of the flaws of others to make oneself feel superior and to almost gloat. At least that's the way I do it.

At the last minute I asked in the confession: “probably making sarcastic self-deprecatory remarks about myself is also not so good?” My confessor suggested that this comes under lack of love of self which is preliminary to love of neighbor as oneself.

This reminded me of one of my best thoughts about marriage – that we sometimes go from idolizing the spouse, to despising him or her as a fallen idol, whereas it is better to see the other not as an idol at all but as a funny little struggling creature, and ourselves that way also!

So ridicule and sarcasm are forms of pride. We proudly demean others. With ourselves we first proudly see ourselves as little idols and then feel horrified when we become fallen idols. If we were humble we would lower our heads in shame but say, as my holy godfather used to advise, “here I am, Lord, your poor little creature who fell again. Have mercy on me.”

They say we should not only pray the mercy chaplet but have a whole mercy spirituality. The ideas in this blog could be a start, eh? (Rereading this blog in 2013 the priests of the Mercy Shrine in Stockbridge, Mass. have been developing just such a spirituality. I especially benefit from the writings of Fr. Michael Gaitley of that community.)

Daring to be Vulnerable

1 March 2011

I have an adorable cat, Felix, who is a mouser. My sleep was interrupted by Felix bringing in a mouse, then losing the mouse, then trying to dislodge the mouse from an open bin with heavy pots blocking the cat's entry to the bin. Lots of fight and flight. I opened the door to the freezing wind and took out the pots, hoping the mouse would dash to safety. No

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The screenshot shows a website with a dark red background. At the top, the title "Spirituality - Running to God" is written in a white, cursive font. Below the title is a large, atmospheric photograph of a path lined with trees, covered in fallen autumn leaves, leading towards a body of water. On the left side, there is a vertical navigation menu with the heading "Main Menu" and several links: Home, What's New, Sign Out Guest, The Open Door, Amazing Stories, Free Spiritual Books, Biblical Counseling, Useful Links, and Music of Charles Chernie. Below the menu, there is a "Welcome" section with a sub-header "When we feel discouraged, sad, rejected, despairing or desperate, where can we run?" followed by a paragraph: "Spirituality - Running to God is a web-site devised by 3 spiritual leaders to help you on your pathway to eternity. Every week, through audios and writings, we will be adding to this treasury of spiritual insight." Below this, there are three biographical entries, each with a small portrait photo and a short bio. The first entry is for Rozeta Chernie, a widow, mother, and grandmother. The second entry is for Rozeta, who converted to the Catholic faith from a Jewish background and is a professor of Philosophy and Theology. The third entry is for Dr. Rozeta, who is currently teaching philosophy at Holy Apostles College and Seminary. The bottom of the page features a photo of Bob and Evelyn Oles and a bio for Bob, an avid runner and former pastor.

luck because the mouse had the piece of a ball of yarn wound around his neck like a lasso. The cat tore off the yarn but the mouse escaped into the top of the closet. Presently, the mouse is totally hidden and the cat won't go out because he smells the mouse.

Sleeplessly I was trying to create a parable about the only somewhat amusing incident. I thought of "fight and flight." I once wrote a piece about the crucifixion in a book now on my web (www.rondachervin.com) under free e-books called Mary, Teach us How to Live (rondachervin.com) The idea was that instead of fright or flight, Jesus chose total vulnerability.

Later, at Mass, I was bemoaning how I can't deal with computers. The present misery was my adobe flash getting lost when my computer crashed last week so I couldn't test the audios on my new web site. After the usual fantasy about fleeing to some beautiful desert monastery to be a hermitess, I just vulnerably begged God to help me. This led to an unexpected fix by a genial seminarian.

So, instead of fleeing to the desert, I will proudly announce to you my new web. This is a spirituality web designed to reach new-agers and weak Christians. It will have lots of Catholic spirituality in it, but not in the title. If you have people you want to reach of this description go to the new web I did with friends called www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com — Sorry I am not computer literate enough to get a capital on God in this context but the new-agers won't mind!

Visit Dr. Ronda's new website: spiritualityrunningtogo.com

2 March 2011

A New Way to Decide What to Give up for Lent

Many years ago I got an inspiration. Instead of deciding myself what to give up for Lent, why not ask the family. I was surprised. Since my main sins involve anger, I was sure they would pick that. Instead they all agreed: Mom, you are such a puddlelum – a character in C.S. Lewis who is always pessimistic. Whatever anyone suggests to do, you come up with the worst case prognosis! It's downright depressing!

I was surprised, especially that they all agreed. I noticed that they were right and tried to be more upbeat. So, when Lent came around I started suggesting to my students "Ask those close to you, your



daily victims, what they wish you would change as a Lenten sacrifice.” Of course, I don’t know how successful that was, since it would be prying to ask them whether their families and friends were happy with the improvement.

Here’s another more subtle one to prime your pump on this spiritual exercise. My marriage was kind of rocky. Once I suddenly asked my husband, “So, what do you hate about me most?” He thought for a while and came up with this ringer: “Well, you’re a teacher. So you are used to grading students. Whatever I do or we do together, you, so to speak, give it a grade afterward, as in ‘that was a great evening or, that evening was awful.’ It makes me feel like a little kid in school being judged for everything!”

So, do you dare ask your close ones what they wish you would change for Lent?

3 March 2011

"Beauty is Truth" —Keats

More than 50 years ago I, a militant atheist, stood in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, in awe of its beauty. The words of Keat’s famous poem came to me “Beauty is truth; truth beauty, that is all ye need to know on earth...” This was one of the highlights in my conversion to the Catholic faith. (If you are interested in a quick rendition of my whole conversion story go to www.rondachervin.com click on books and, then, free e-books and leaflets to the leaflet “Saved.”)



This morning the line came to mind in relation to the way beauty check-mates heavy sadness. This long, snowy, dark winter in Connecticut after years of living in Los Angeles, Texas, Arkansas, and North Carolina, really got to me. Now, with Spring almost here, the joy in just seeing the sun is almost ecstatic.

Of course listening to beautiful music is also a check-mate for depressed spirits.

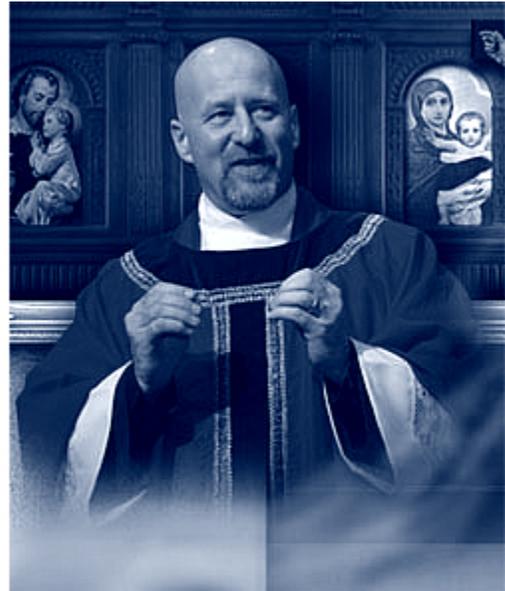
When you feel down, how about reaching out for a beauty-fix in the form of music, art, or seeking out something beautiful in nature?

5 March 2011

Security: The World's Way vs. God's Way

“Don’t try to fit in. Instead, shine forth!” The Holy Spirit seemed to tell me this once when I was feeling very insecure because I don’t fit in easily anywhere.

Once I figured out that my twin sister and I were probably the most “alienated” kids of all in our childhood in the upper West Side of New York. We were atheist anti-Communist Jews. Surrounding us were Catholic gang kids (West Side Story), Orthodox religious Jews in full old country regalia, Communist Jews, and Zionists. Of course, when I became a Catholic, I conformed as much as I could to the circle surrounding Von Hildebrand who brought me into the Church, but this same background made me still culturally quite different.



My dear friend, Francette Meaney, once remarked that I had an unusually great need to belong. However, like many creative types, I don’t fit in easily in any group. I plunge wildly ahead with my own personal agenda, and I am greatly appreciated, but that is earned, and not the same easy feeling people have when they are in a large group of same background people.

Lately, however, I have noticed that lots and lots of people feel they don’t fit in. One friend with a thick Southern accent feels awkward up here in Connecticut. My son-in-law from England doesn’t fit in too well in a small town in North Carolina. I would bet that each of you readers feels insecure because of not fitting in with respect to some aspect of your background or personality.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker, a maverick convert priest, speaker, and writer, now a pastor in Greenville, S.C., whose blog you might greatly enjoy, suggested a remedy for this feeling of insecurity in these words: if you are a free spirit, you can’t get security from other people. You have to become secure, instead, in God. What way do you pray when you need more security?

6 March 2011

Balance

I am fascinated by buzz-words. Of a sudden you keep hearing some new expression such as “don’t micro-manage me!” At first I find it repulsive. Then, gradually, I begin to see that the new buzz-word became popular because what it refers to has become endemic.

Such was the buzz-word “you have to have more balance” that became popular in the 1970’s. I was brought up by a father who adored music but was forced to study piano instead of the kettle drums he dreamed of playing instead. To compensate he favored recordings of Ravel’s Bolero or Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring over harmonious piano concertos. Since, as children, we had music in the background every evening of our lives, I think such rhythms got me into the idea that drama and intensity were the key to joy. I didn’t get much of the type of balance I might have picked up from listening to, say, Bach was stodgy.



When I was a raising children, I hated housework. I dreamed of the day when I could, without interruption, only pray, teach and write. I thought “the grass is greener” for single professors who could concentrate only on their work. I was astounded that when I became a widow with no children around I actually missed such mundane tasks as dishwashing or having TV in the background of my other tasks.

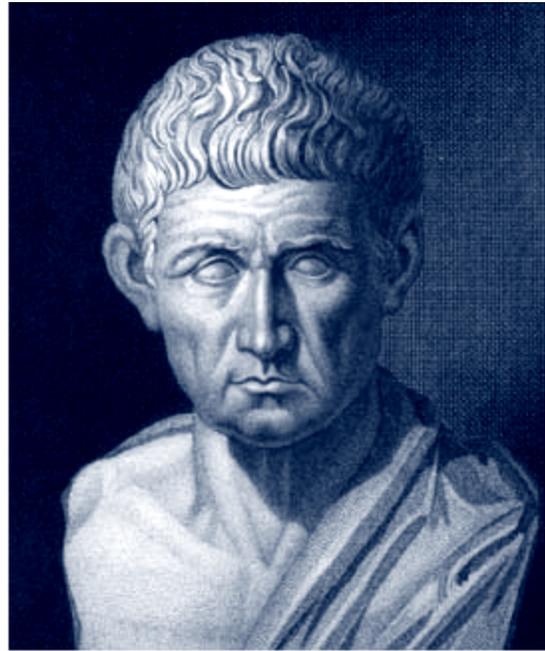
I recalled a psychological study of types I learned about in the 70’s. The idea was to relate the 4 elements: air, earth, fire and water to your own personality. Being airy (spacey and overly seeking transcendence) and fiery (too intense) I could get BALANCE by having some earthy or watery elements in my day. Not an outdoor sort, earthiness probably came with work in the house – down in the dirt; and more water from swimming or even rinsing dishes. I think there’s something in it.

Is your life well-balanced? If not, you could ask the Holy Spirit to nudge you toward what you need.

7 March 2011

Overcoming Disillusionment

Teaching at a seminary involves a specific poignancy when a hero priest is revealed as having fallen into big sins. Several of these have hit the non-Catholic and Catholic news of late. Heavy-hearted, I was pondering one of these news flashes at the same time as someone gave me pause to wonder about a priest I thought was a beloved hero and now am told could be someone with clay feet on grounds other than scandal.



It reminded me of a psycho-therapist years ago remarking to me about myself that “naivete is a pretty weak defense mechanism!” At the time I was 28 and she was about 50. Let me open up that cryptic statement a bit for you. If at one time you thought so, do you still think now, at whatever age you are over 14 that:

If a country is a democracy it can save the world even without virtue in the majority of the populace. (In spite of warnings that go back to Aristotle!)

If I go to daily Mass and believe in the teachings of the Church I can never commit a mortal sin. (In spite of St. Teresa of Avila writing that even after the spiritual marriage someone could fall into mortal sin!)

That people with beautiful natural gifts and great love of the beauty of the liturgy could never betray anyone, especially not me. (In spite of the fact that some composers of exquisite Church music were atheists or Masons!)

That those I love among family and friends could never reveal my secrets to others. (In spite of knowing this takes place in most other families and friendship circles!)

Everyone who reads this blog believes in forgiveness of such sins public or private. The thrust of this little piece is more to address a related issue: disillusionment. Since disillusionment breeds cynicism (the idea that everything that seems good is really evil underneath) it is important to come against letting the natural feeling of let down in the face of unexpected evils lead us not into cynicism, but into sadness, grief, and prayer for the perpetrators and for ourselves when we are the unexpectedly evil ones.

May having to see the fall of heroes lead us to work out our own salvation “with fear and trembling.”

8 March 2011

Taming the Lion Within

In my book, *Taming the Lion Within: 5 Steps from Anger to Peace*, I explain a concept of Dr. Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International — self-help groups for emotions out of control. The concept is Symbolic Victory.



Here is an example of the BAD strategy of symbolic victory. I was treated unjustly by a person or a group. I lack the power to win a victory over my opponents. This makes me feel impotent and raging. I hate feeling weak with no recourse. So, I try for a “symbolic” victory. How? When I talk to my allies over and over again about the hateful actions, policies, etc. of my opponents, I am in the superior position. I am the superior good guy. The unjust opponent is the slimy rat who is deserving of contempt, ostracism, etc. etc.

Did I achieve a real victory? No. I am still suffering from the effects of the “bad” guys actions. No compromises, reconciliations have taken place. Nothing has changed. Yet I feel momentarily compensated. I am right and he/she is wrong and I have shouted this from the roof tops.

Now, anger management does not mean that I passively, weakly, supinely, obsequiously, cringe before my opponent and beg him/her to take the foot off my neck. Not at all. What we learn in anger management is to become a tamed lion, carefully trying to see what I might be able to do now or in the future. If I am in Christian anger management I might look into free mediation even if there would be no hope of monetary recompense. If there is no mediation that would work in my circumstances, I might pray to God for wisdom as to what God wants me to learn from the experience, such as, help me God, never to treat anyone the way I was treated. Or, help me God to avoid people of a similar type to my victimizer even if there might seem to be other advantages to relating to such types. Or, “I offer all this pain for the final conversion of everyone I love and even my enemies.”

“Sounds good, but I’m too angry to do it,” you might say. If so try Recovery, International for groups near you or phone groups, or go to rondachervin.com and order my book.

9 March 2011

**Salvation in the Worst of Times: Ash
Wednesday**

Just before going to bed, I clicked on the headlines on my computer only to read about more bad in the Church in the United States. Heavy of heart, I prayed through the night. I thought, perhaps a dark blank page would be the only blog I could write.



I awoke instead with the old adage running through my mind “Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” I remembered that in the worst times in my life such as the death of my son, the death of my husband, my own worst sins, what helped most was exactly what we are given as the source of our hope: Jesus, The Word made Flesh, in the Mass, Mary, our Mother, Absolution in Confession.

A daily communicant for more than 50 years, still those phrases are so comforting: the words of the liturgy...Kyrie Eleison...I confess to Almighty God, and you, my brothers and sisters...Lord, I am not worthy...but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

My godfather, Balduin Schwarz, disciple of Von Hildebrand, and my teacher of philosophy of time, used to say – look how metaphysical the words of the rosary are! The past is gone, the future is not here. The moments we need prayer for are the “Now” and “the Hour of our Death.” Someone saint said that since we beg every day that Mary pray for us at the hour of our death, why wouldn’t we expect her to be with us at that hour!

When the darkness gets darker, let us run to our only sure salvation.

10 March 2011

The Spirit of Gentle Counsel

At a prayer meeting here in Connecticut, our leader did a beautiful meditation about opening to God for a new gift.



After kissing a big crucifix that went around the circle, we were to see if the Holy Spirit might be telling us about such a gift. Of course such exercises don't pretend to be infallibly the word from on-high, but when something comes up that fits I take it seriously.

I had been praying for more of the gift of counsel. Like many professors, I am long on teaching concepts and shorter on knowing what to say one on one to people in trouble. The word I seemed to get during this exercise was "I want to give you the gift of gentle counsel."

I filed it in the back of my mind but last night it came alive. I visited a mental help group to see what techniques I might learn from the touted holy priest director of the group. A small group of members sat around a table. Mostly we looked pretty woe-begone on arrival. The elderly priest leader, however, had a radiant smile as he greeted each of his old friends. He asked each one the simplest questions, such as, "what did you do yesterday?" His responses focused on what was good in what they had done with an encouraging nudge such as, "can you plan to do that more often this week?"

I realized that simply caring about the daily life of another enough to listen in a gentle spirit was a form of love. It is one I rarely indulge in as I plan my agenda of trying to force my insights down other people's throats!

Dear Holy Spirit, do give me the gift of gentle counsel!

12 March 2011

Depression, Anger and Anxiety - All Related

I got into dealing with anger this way: at 58 I was teaching at Steubenville. A grad student told me about this great group he wanted me to advertise: Recovery, Inc. (not 12 Step) for anger, anxiety and depression. I read the description and saw it as an answer to my prayers to do better with anger. I would say I had an average of 5 fits a day whenever frustrated in any wish to goal. Only after years of group work combined with prayer was my anger enough diminished that I could see the underlying anxiety and the depression (not clinical but more sad feelings) related to the other two.



How so? Well, anger can be a way to overcome anxiety in this way. I feel anxious that I won't succeed in some endeavor all the way from finding my way to a new place before GPS, to fear about my husband's asthma attacks. But anxiety is very painful. Finding someone or something to blame is less painful. So, blaming the complicated patterns of suburbs of cities feels better than just feeling stupid because I have no sense of direction. Or blaming my husband for smoking

with resultant late onset asthma would be less painful than accepting the possibility that he will die of an asthma attack.

So, where does depression come in? Psychotherapists claim that some non-clinical depression comes from suppressed anger. So, once I stopped venting all my anger 5 times a day, I would feel low and sad more often. Some therapists have described this as addiction to the adrenalin rush of anger! To avoid the unpleasantness of depressed feelings, we foment incidents of conflict and anger.

What a vicious cycle! What is the remedy? For those who know Him the only remedy is getting much, much, closer to Jesus so that He can make us feel peace when we are otherwise anxious and give us joyful hope instead of sad depression. Next time you feel angry, ask yourself, what the anxiety is beneath the anger. Next time you feel depressed ask yourself if you are suppressing anger. Instead of just running to a distraction, take the whole knot of emotions to Jesus, the Divine Physician, and beg Him to help you.

March, 2011

Humor is Your Best Friend

One of the “tools” in the Recovery, International group for anger, fear and depression I keep telling you about is “humor is your best friend.” Light recommended humor is very different from the type of sarcasm I am trying to get away from. As I work on getting away from the bad kind to the good kind I have a wonderful role model in a new friend of mine, also a widow, Marti Armstrong. She drives from Poughkeepsie, NY where she lives in the house she had as a wife and mother. When she comes she stays on an air mattress in the little cell I live in at the Seminary.



Although very serious about spirituality and tragedies of life, she is absolutely bouyantly resilient about the same daily frustrations I get hysterical over. As in, if we get lost following her GPS directions, I tense up and think we will never get there. She laughs merrily and admonishes her virtual electronic mentor on the GPS with words such as, “How can I trust you...silly voice?” Or, crossing a busy street, she will mutter ebulliently, “not a good day to get run over, Marti!”

When she leaves I usually sink back into my way of seeing every frustration as a symbol of how awful life is but, then, suddenly I start copying her better way and talking to myself coyly as in “well, silly little cat, can’t find what you need again...going senile...ha, ha, ha.”

An comic-actress friend of mine of the past, Mary Mitchell, used to give workshops called “When God laughed.” She insisted that Jesus must have roared with laughter when he drew the tax money out of the mouth of the fish. She challenged us with the advice that at the end of every day we should try to turn every “tragedy” into comedy. I thought this a little idiotic until I saw it with my own eyes in a case as tragic as death! This extremely humorous professor was dying slowly of a rare blood disease. Everyone wondered how his seemingly weak wife was going to take his final demise. But on the road to the cemetery, there she was joking with each of us because at the exact moment the hospital called her with the bad news, the toilet seat in their house cracked in half, a comic version of the temple veils were rent in two when Jesus died.

God, please keep me from taking every trivial frustration so seriously. Lighten me up, so I may be less heavy on those around me.

14 March 2011

"Addiction" and Pain

The word “addiction” has expanded from drug problems all the way to “shopaholism,” and computer game “addictions.” My own favorites are co-dependency and workaholism. At first these words seem artificial, but by now we have in the dictionary a generic description of addiction as being any kind of compulsive out of control behavior patterns.



A key factor in observing the “addictions” of others is the phenomenon of denial. How can a hugely overweight person, for instance, be exhorting others to be “detached” in order to be more holy? But it soon becomes a vicious circle since the one who sits in judgment of the obsessions of others is her/himself compulsively exercising contempt instead of hopeful, forgiving, love. (Now, reading this in 2013, I must tell you that the overweight person I had in mind came out of denial, went into an all-encompassing treatment plan, and lost 120 pounds in 6 months!)

What helps me in harsh judgments of others and myself is getting closer to the pain that underlies frantic attempts to escape into dead-end behavior. For instance, when I look for work in a frantic way at times where I should be relaxing in enjoyment of family and friends, am I trying to escape from the pain of the inevitable crosses of life? I need to think of the open arms of the crucified Jesus inviting others and myself to make even the smallest attempts to run to Him instead of to our favorite “addiction.” It is so moving to me when

someone I think of as “in denial” has a grace-breakthrough to begin the process of liberation from some addiction – one finger at a time releasing its grip on the desired “goody.”

I have been reading the contemporary novels of Brian J. Gail. In “Motherless” a key moment is where Jesus says to the priest-hero “If you show me your thirst for Me, I can show you My thirst for them.” If I turn my thirst for my “addictions” into groaning prayers for help, He can show me also the thirst for Him underlying the addictions of others.

14 March 2011

The Heart: A Spousal Legacy

Couples reasonably happily married often dread the thought that one might die and leave the other one alone. You can take comfort from the fact that it’s only because of all the natural good and grace in your marriage that you’re not, instead, having fantasies each day that the other one will leave this world and leave you much happier!

Two of my closest friends have a marriage that is 24/7 close and loving. They are in their late 50’s and have no children. When they have to be separated for work or separate errands they kiss each other goodbye and say over and over again “take care, honey.” It is moving to see. I can feel the fear in their hearts that God might allow one to go first.



Praying for them one day I got this word which sounds like it’s from the Holy Spirit: “when a spouse dies the heart of the departing one goes into the heart of the beloved still on earth.” It seemed to me like a corollary to “they shall be two in one flesh.”

Even in rockier marriages such as mine, I found that when my husband died 18 years ago, a funny thing happened. I started wanting to eat foods he loved and I didn’t, such as lobster. I wanted to remember that way how happy he was eating this delicacy. He had a tremendous Zorba the Greek type love of life, whereas I am always longing for heaven. After his death his heart came into mine in the form of enjoying the good things of daily life more. I could imagine him smiling seeing me have more fun.

Holy Spirit, over and over you tell me that even though we have to suffer terrible crosses in this life, we could be so much happier if we worried less about the future and enjoyed the gifts of the “now” much, much more.

15 March 2011

Custom-Made Temptations

We listened to the words of the liturgy of the First Sunday of Lent about the 40 Days and Satan's wiles in trying to tempt the God-man and we may think — "having power over the whole world doesn't even tempt me!"

Usually during Lent, however, we get an unexpected temptation custom-made to our personal fantasies. In my case, one of my daughters told me about her family possibly moving to a home even nearer to the Pacific Ocean than her present place. The ocean is my favorite for natural beauty. I love the way it's apparent infinity images God's infinity and lifts me out of my closed in petty worries. Since it is 80 degrees in California and about to snow once again in Connecticut where I am teaching at Holy Apostles Seminary, I started thinking, "Maybe I am meant to really retire. Suppose God wants to gift me at the end of my life with sublime joy instead or more crosses? Shouldn't I be open?"



In the midst of this reverie I thought I heard in my interior the voice of Mary laughing, "so you'd rather be a beach comber than the spiritual mother of future priests?"

What is your "custom-made temptation?" And how do the heavenly "voices" check mate it?

Shifting Paradigms

16 March 2011

I was giving a talk at a parish in a small city in Connecticut. The town is about 13 square miles and has 13 Catholic Churches in it! Though the talk was highly advertised in all those Churches only the people from the parish I was talking in actually came. The pastor remarked that typically parishioners only go to events in their own Church.

I was reminded of a funny joke about aging: First you don't want to leave your country; next you don't want to leave your state; then you don't want to leave our city; then you don't want to leave your block, then you don't want to leave your house, and finally you don't want to leave your bed.

How different this is from the jet set mentality where people go for weekends to Paris and some couples see each other only on holidays since each works in a state 1,000 miles distant from where the other one works!

In medieval times there was a phenomena called “circle cities.” The aging devout moved into huts surrounding the Churches or monasteries. This way they could go to daily Mass in their “celestial living room.” I love that paradigm. A priest I know has been planning a monastery/refuge for all vocations in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. I wrote a novel with him under a pseudonym describing what this dream would be like. If you are interested e-mail me at rondaview@ccwatershed.org and I will attach it. Of course it could also be built in a place near you? If you build it I might come!



17 March 2011

Healing of the humiliating vices of envy and competitiveness.

I do a lot of teaching on Masculine/Feminine Stereotypical Traits. I deal with positive and negative ones for each sex. Positive would be wonderful traits such as the nurturing of women and the drive of men, among others. Negative would include such awful traits as the envy of women of each other and the competitiveness of men with each other.



Example: check out how a roomful of averagely attractive women react if a flamboyantly sexy woman walks in the door. if we avoid such attire, we will likely still be envious and even full of hate for such a woman. Watch how many a short, heavy-set man reacts when a tall handsome muscular jock enters his milieu. It's sometimes called the Napoleon complex – that is how short men feeling envy of taller men have a need to be domineering to compensate.

A humiliating feature of envy and competitiveness is that you tacitly have to admit that you feel inferior in order to indulge in such traits.

There is a beautiful holy remedy encapsulated in the phrase of St. Thomas Aquinas: “you can only love yourself loving.” Say it slowly and you’ll get it. When we move out in love to anyone we feel love in our hearts and this makes us happy to be ourselves.

God help me to admire your handiwork in the bodies of those more gifted than me in these ways, but to truly believe that love is the best gift and one available equally to all of us.

19 March 2011

"I have Called you by Name." (Isaiah 43:1)

One of my all time favorite Scriptures is “I have called you by name, you are mine.” This passage got linked up in a surprising way with the much more enigmatic one in Revelations (2:17) about finding a new name on a white stone.

I was visiting the Sisters of the Cross in Mexico. This is an order founded by the great grandmother saint, Conchita, who will, one day, we hope, be a doctor of the Church. She wrote more than 100 books and founded more than 4 communities in the first half of the 20th century. If you don’t know her, check her out under her longer name Concepcion Cabrera de Armida.

Anyhow, I watched a relay of nuns coming into the chapel for Adoration. Once at the Adoration prie-dieu they never moved an inch so rapt were they in contemplative prayer. I went into envious grief. “Dear Jesus, I moaned, look at those saints. You must be so disgusted with me, this awful, fidgetty, loud-mouthed, swinish woman who



pretends to be spiritual and can't sit still for 10 minutes even." (Of course, all my directors have been after me, not for being jumpy, but for self-flagellation!)

Jesus spoke in my heart in this consoling manner. "In the Church your name is not silence and serenity but, in the image of your Jewish ancestors, your name is YEARNING!"

I was so consoled that decided that I was called by name into the Church as Ronda, but that my new name on the white stone was "yearning."

As a result, at spirituality workshops, I like to tell this anecdote to the participants, and then ask them to pray until they can "hear" what is their own new name on the white stone. When they think they know, they put it up on the blackboard for others to see.

Want to try?

March 20, 2011

Fool-Proof Charity

My husband was brought up on the Lower East Side of NYC. He recounts how he learned as a kid about fake charities. His brother got "a job" passing around a can with a slot in it for helping impoverished Jewish immigrants. The gimmick was that the teen soliciting donations got half the money in the can! As a result he was totally sceptical about giving donations to anything until he went to the first talk of



Mother Teresa of Calcutta in Los Angeles. After that he said, "Okay, Ronda, we can tithe Mother Teresa. I know she's the real thing. But if she dies, that's it." She outlived my husband which gave me the chance to live simply and austere to give more to the poor and to right to life causes.

After a while I started exhorting others with this image: "Suppose you were on your way into Wal-Mart. You saw a woman on the sidewalk who was starving with no milk in her

breasts for her baby. Would you buy 3 new T-shirts or would you buy 2 and use the money for the 3rd to buy food for the starving woman?"

Okay, you don't see this starving woman, but the Missionaries of Charity do, and can you believe that Missionaries of Charity in India who have to vow to live without even toilet paper would be using your donation for "administrative overhead"?

Go to Missionaries of Charity on the web and you can donate to their Bronx NY headquarters – I tell them to give it to the hungriest people in the world where they minister.

Okay, I know "the right hand shouldn't know what the left is doing" on charitable works, but considering that what Americans throw into the garbage could feed the whole world's starving, I think it's worth losing gold stars "boasting in the Lord" by telling people not to buy luxuries when others are starving.

20 March 2011

In the Image of our Creativity - God's Desire to Molding Us.

My family was and is overflowing with creativity. My father wrote many books, the cutest title being "Who's Who in the Zoo!" Check out Ralph De Sola sometime. He wrote the definitive Abbreviations dictionaries, but insisted, quixotic style, on including in each edition a section on euphemisms. Since he was an atheist until almost the last month of his life, he relied on me for Catholic euphemisms such as "I'm not comfortable with what you just said" being a euphemism for "I hate what you say." My mother was an editor who also wrote plays. My husband wrote plays and books (check out Children of the Breath, a novel about what Jesus and Satan talked about during the rest of the 40 Days in the Desert – Martin Chervin on the web). My son composed chamber music (see my web for Music of Charles Chervin). One daughter, Carla Conley, writes prize winning poetry and another Diana Jump writes uproarious stories of family trips. A grandson is publishing novels – check out Nicholas Conley, and another grandson is starting to compose piano music. All of the writers are better at this skill than I am, but they are less well known because they lacked or lack something I have in abundance – overweening ambition and constant prayer to the Holy Spirit.



Anyhow – once I was feeling bad about my orphan books – these are unpublished manuscripts, among my best. I finally put these all up free on rondachervin.com. In the midst of grieving these little read “children,” I heard this inner message from the Holy Trinity: “Ronda, you know how much you love to create your books and talks and classes? We have a longing to create a new saint: you! Won’t you give us a little more time “in your busy schedule” to open yourself to us in quiet prayer so that we can better “melt you, mold you, fill you, and use you?” (old charismatic song).

Since so many of you Watershed readers are also creative, you might want to ponder this analogy with your name in the message!

22 March 2011

Showing Emotions

“At Mass I get to see your souls; but tonight I got to see your hearts,” I said to some of the seminarians who came to a charismatic prayer meeting at Holy Apostles where I teach.



It sounds falsely dualistic, but from an experiential standpoint it’s not. At Holy Apostles we pride ourselves on the formal beauty of our Masses. Since the seminarians wear clerics, this adds to the feeling of reverence, as the soul soars to meet Christ descending, as it were, into the Eucharistic Host. I love this atmosphere, but with 95 seminarians it’s hard to get to know most of them heart to heart. At the small prayer meeting, they shared from the heart. I loved seeing an unusually analytic seminarian lift up his hands and, with face glowing with gratitude, tell us that the Lord wanted us to not only give Him our wills but also to give him our worst miseries.

I teach Von Hildebrand’s classic, *The Heart*, recently re-published. He explains how the anti-affectivity tendency in the Church can lead to what he calls atrophy of the heart. Out of fear of out-of-control, sometimes sinful emotions, we become dutiful robots almost unable to express such wonderful emotions as joy, grief, and even love.

In response, people will say that they feel inner joy and love at Mass, too deep to be expressed. I retort, what do you think of people who say that even though they are talking to each other during Mass they feel “inner” reverence?

It is reported that in Augustine’s time the windows of the Church sometimes cracked from the impact of the praise.

Perhaps, some of us need to hide our emotions more, and others have to express the good ones more?

22 March 2011

How God Brings Good Even Out of Our Faults

God could have created 500 immaculately conceived leaders for each generation to rule flawlessly like Plato's philosopher kings. We don't know why He didn't do that, but we do know that God used improbable people to lead his flock generation after generation in the Old and New Testament times. Why pick a stammerer, Moses, as the greatest leader of the Chosen People or as King David, an adulterer? Why Peter, the denier, as the first Pope?

Many sermons have been given emphasizing the humor in this strange strategy of God. How can we apply these lessons to ourselves? The question came to me in prayer this morning when I was noticing my manic tendency even at 73 years old to pile up project upon project (I call it project-itis). It seemed to me that the Holy Spirit was telling me that given His personnel shortage if He wants to launch a venture, He often has to use high energy slightly unbalanced types to do it. Your serene and laid-back fun-living type is harder to motivate. That doesn't mean that God doesn't want to help me pace myself better with more time for quiet prayer. He does. But, perhaps, since He knows I will resist, He bring good out of this bad but using my projects amply.





25 March 2011

Don't Box Mary In

I became a Catholic when I was 21 under the mentorship of the Von Hildebrand circle of friends. They were much more devoted to the Liturgy of the Hours than to devotional prayer. So, even though they loved Mary, I didn't learn the rosary through them.

Here's how it happened. A friend of mine witnessed that when she made a pledge to pray the rosary every day of her life for the soul of her husband, he suddenly announced he wanted to be a Catholic. Thinking how much I wanted my husband to become a Catholic, I made the same pledge. I regretted the decision the next moment thinking how the rosary was "boring," but I rattled it off before going to sleep loyally just the same. Although it took him more than a decade to convert because he loved the old Latin Mass and hated Vatican II, he did become a Catholic. By then I was much fonder of the rosary, but still didn't really know Mary as a person that well.

One day a lady from the Blue Army of Fatima asked me if I wanted the pilgrim statue for Christmas. This was before my husband's conversion. I said, we probably couldn't do her justice. The woman sighed and said that nobody wanted Mary for Christmas! "Oh, in that case, of course, I'll take her." It was a busy day the women brought what looked like a tiny coffin to my house. I wanted to get back to my work immediately, but they insisted we pray the consecration together. Just a small booklet of seemingly a half-hours worth of prayers! So, you see, I was absolutely not in a mood to hallucinate the real presence of Mary.

When we got to the part about asking her to replace my heart with hers, I mumbled the prayer dutifully. Immediately, I was flooded with contemplative graces I had only read

about in books. A mantle of peace draped my frenetic little soul. It lasted for 2 years, this with 3 kids and a full-time teaching job.

How could I never have thought that Mary was not just a refuge of sinners and repository of graces for petition prayers, but also the prime contemplative since the start of creation, so that inviting her heart into mine would be a revolution!

On this feast of the Annunciation, remind yourself of the graces of Mary to you and don't box her in – ask for even more.



27 March 2011

Loneliness vs. Too Close for Comfort

I live on the grounds of the seminary where I teach, occupying a little cell-like dorm room. I barter room and board for teaching. It is a great life for a devout widow – closeness to so many wonderful



seminarians and no house work or cooking! But between classes and Masses and Liturgy of the Hours and meals, I feel lonely. Especially lonely for my adult children and grandchildren who are far away. I consider that these feelings of loneliness put me in solidarity with seminarians and priests who have plenty of people around them and many friends, too, but still lead a solitary life compared to living with family. Yes, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and all the saints are our spiritual family, but still....

But then, when I am with my family for long visits, and when I remember when we were all together before my son and husband died, I identify with the title of that sit-com “too close for comfort.” Yes, such cozy, familiarity, but still also such tangled webs of conflict.

How I long for heaven...can you imagine what it will be like with the greatest closeness to everyone we love and none of the quarrels! In his wonderful short book “Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven,” Dietrich Von Hildebrand explains that fear of the unknown keeps us from simply longing for heaven night and day. Still, I think it would give us much more joy throughout the day if we cast our souls up to God and prayed more often to come to our heavenly home whenever God so wills.

28 March 2011

How God's Providence Can Test Friendships

I am a super-friendly person. It seems to me that God gave me the grace to readily see the intrinsic preciousness of others, unless they happen to fit into a stereotype I am allergic to such as normal and conventional! Smile!

The problem is that most people don't “live” in the depth of their souls where this unique preciousness dwells. Most of us combine beautiful traits and defects ranging from annoying to unbearable.

So, it is imprudent, to say the least, to decide that someone is going to be one's best friend after a short acquaintance. But how long is long? In God's providence, we usually see hints of problems to come, but out of loneliness or generosity, we choose to ignore them. A hilarious example from our engagement period is when we were on a trip to Paris and my husband to be wanted to spend 7 hours a day window-shopping and I wanted



to hole up in my hotel room reading Thomas Aquinas! Does it require a rocket scientist to guess that this divergence of interests would follow us into the marriage?

I developed this strategy. I don't count on a friendship to last until we have been through a major conflict successfully. We need to have seen each other's worst (according to our own hierarchy of values) and still think that his or her virtues outweigh that worst.

Still, I sometimes make mistakes. But often, the mistake is in a positive direction. Often I think a friendship has proven itself to be impossible, and just as I am about to write that person off, he or she does something so unexpected and lovely, I have to bury the hatchet.

Thank God for our tried and true friendships of many years, and thank God for those that resurrect even in the death throes!

29 March 2011

The Four Temperaments

Going all the way back to the ancient Greeks is the theory that we are divided into predominant and opposing temperaments. The Greeks thought these were physically caused, but contemporary psychologists, if interested in this, think of them more as simply emotional tendencies.

You might be choleric (angry, energetic) or more phlegmatic (laid-back)

You might be sanguine (hopeful) or more melancholic (pessimistic)

Each one has pluses and minuses. Choleric people are full of energy so we usually accomplish a lot. On the negative side, though, we are easily frustrated, angry, and driven. Spiritual psychologists recommend quiet peaceful prayer time for good planning and less anger.

Phlegmatic people are usually fairly peaceful but not always willing to go that extra mile to get things done. You can thank God for not being rushed but also pray that the Holy Spirit would fill you with energy for doing what is right and good, moment by moment.

Sanguine people are hopeful and this helps them not to give up easily. Thank God for giving you hope. On the other hand, you can pray for realism so that you don't chase really impossible dreams.



Melancholics are known for being serious and foreseeing problems. On the other hand, we need to pray for hope lest we sink the ship.

Of course some people hate all typologies in favor of seeing what is individual in self and others. But if the shoe fits.....!

30 March 2011

Life is more like a Story than a Syllogism.

A dear friend of mine, long deceased, Robert Hupka, used to say: "I hate to wait!" Kierkegaard wrote, with greater eloquence, that all sins are forms of impatience. How so? Well, we might tell lies to get what we want quicker; of substitute the immediate satisfactions of lust rather than wait for true love.

Another angle to impatience involves a subtle form of pride. If life were a syllogism you could go immediately from the truth that, say, it is good to eat only healthy foods, to I will cease to eat unhealthy foods today and never indulge in unhealthy foods ever again! It would be that quick from maxim to practice.



But, no, life is more like a story. In the story we get an insight and then we try to infuse it into daily life, but it's a slow, uphill, wearisome battle to actually become full of an admired virtue. Our pride revolts. "If I can't overcome my flaw immediately, why even bother?" Humility, by contrast, tries, and fails, repents and tries again.

Is it because the goal is not to succeed in some abstract self-redemptive project of improvement, but to bond with Jesus as He bears our crosses with us chapter by chapter of our lives. Since the goal is union with God in heaven, what good to succeed by one's own powers? To be god-like without God was the goal of, guess who? Satan.

Surrender?

31 March 2011

Diverse Ways of Bringing up Kids

Here are 2 opposite ways I saw other mothers bring up kids. Both worked.

One friend, Debbie Grumbine, founder of Shield of Roses pro-life apostolate had 12 kids. She had her home totally organized with duties, rewards and punishments outlined on pages taped to the walls of the family room. She could bring all these kids to a pro-life pot-luck and not watch them because they were so well trained!

Another friend with 11 kids. She sat in a tiny room near the kitchen all day with kids swarming in and out. With a big spoon they ladled out whatever was on the stove whenever they were hungry. The latest baby lived in the draw of a bureau except at night when he or she was taken to the family bed.

Both sets of kids turned out great. I like to say that being militaristic or totally laid back both work and, probably, in the long run, they work better than my way which was to let them be free but then yell and scream because things were chaotic. My kids quickly picked up that even though I love order, I wasn't willing to discipline them. I was a softy underneath the scowls. The tough love movement came when the youngest was already a teen. Too late. However, they turned out to be total love-bugs and also creative geniuses, and more so than their parents. Praise the Lord!



1 April 2011

"Put out into the Deep Waters and
Lower your Nets for the Catch."
(Luke 5:4)

I have been teaching philosophy and
spirituality for some 40 years. A lot of

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what I say I have said many times over. In some ways this is good because it represents years of experience in how to convey a particular concept, but sometimes it doesn't feel good. This is usually because I need to go deeper.

At a prayer meeting the leader was teaching us a method of lectio divina using the Scripture "put out into deep waters and lower your nets for the catch." While pondering the application of this famous passage to my teaching in the present that I should let the Holy Spirit tap deeper areas of me, directed to deeper areas of my students or audiences (at talks).

Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid of the deep waters. For me, the fear is of the femininely vulnerable in me and in others, male or female; that as they reject the feminine in themselves they will have to reject me also.

But when I take the risk of letting the Holy Spirit lead me into the deeper waters, my students and audiences are moved. The truth can get in better because they have become more emotionally open. (Male teachers and speakers do this when they go further than conveying truths by adding witness stories of how they got there. In this way the heart joins the head.)

Try it. The fish could be more tasty!

3 April 2011

Hilarious "Franciscan" Story

I moved to Connecticut 2 years ago to work at a parish named after St. Francis, with a priest who seemed to combine everything I love: magisterial, charismatic, Marion, heart for the poor, and simplicity of life. I lived a block from the Church and spent the day at the rectory work.

A contradiction began to bother me. There was lots of talk of the small parish being in debt, but we ate off gold rimmed plates and fancy gold cutlery. On the Feast of St. Francis, I thought I got a great "prophetic word," for the priest.



“Father, St. Francis has given me the answer to the parish debt! He “says” we should sell all the gold in the pantry to pay off the debt. Each fork could bring in hundreds of dollars!”

I thought the priest would be mad, but instead he laughed til the tears came into his eyes. “Ronda, I bought that junk for \$25 at Wal-Mart. It’s all fake!”

What a lesson in distrusting “fantastic” messages straight from heaven!

An Extraordinary Concert

3 April 2011 At our Late Vocation Seminary where I teach, we have concerts to celebrate the first year of our lovely new chapel. Imagine at this time of shortage of priests, over seminary overflowed to such an extend we had to build a new chapel for them!

The soloist was a world class violinist, Charles Rex. Maybe some of you know him. He played a concerto of Beethoven I didn’t know but most of you Watershedders probably know — #7 in C Minor. He did it with such perfection that we all felt as if we had entered heaven. I, who always spout that maxim that “the perfect is the enemy of the good” to excuse my lack of willingness to edit my work, had to realize that the really perfect is much, much, much better than the merely good!’



While I am on music I am remembering how my late son, Charlie, when asked why he wanted to study cello, hard for him because he had poor eye hand coordination, when he could have majored in English which was a snap, he replied “because music is more beautiful!”

And, I thought of my sister, the dancer, who has a finer ear for music than I do, once amazed me. We were rushing somewhere and I yelled, “turn off the phonograph, we gotta get out of here.” She replied, “well, we still have 5 minutes, why not five minutes more of beauty!”

Oh, dear God, thank you for the gift of sublime music, such a foretaste of heaven!”

4 April 2011

Poetry of John Paul II

Even though I am not very good at understanding any poetry more complex than, say, Tagore's, when a book came out of John Paul II's poetry shortly after his ascent to the Papacy, I grabbed it. Well, truth to tell, he was a rather avant garde poet, not the kind easily understood by anyone, however, one line reached me permanently.



As you probably know, he did many different things from playwright, actor, rock quarry work, philosopher, and finally Bishop and then Pope.

This poem comes from balancing rocks during that quarry time:

**“When I have borne an equal weight of horror and hope,
no one will accuse me of simplicity.”**

I take it that he means by simplicity here, naivete. And probably a young man of his consummate purity of soul and body would have been considered to be a naive simpleton.

In my own experience as a philosophy professor and a speaker, I did find that when the horrible tragedies of life came upon me, as well as horror at things I was capable of, that my words took on a different tone – no longer beautiful sayings of Catholic truth, but hard won survival witnesses of hope coming only from grace.

As we come closer to John Paul II's canonization, let us never forget the price he paid for his truths.

5 April 2011

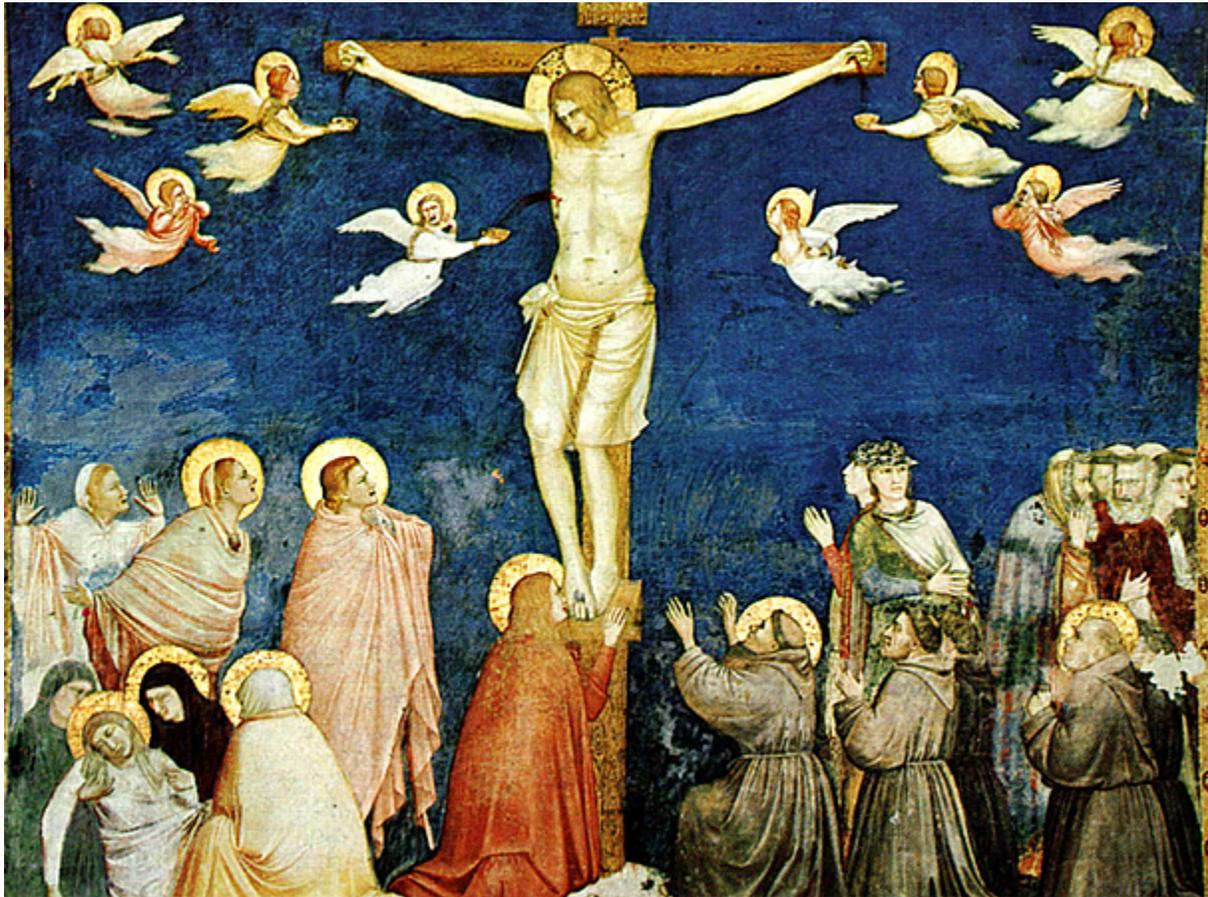
How Jesus is present when we Suffer

Tonight I did my radio blog with Bob and Evelyn Olson, lay evangelists. We are talking together about themes in my upcoming book: *The Way of Love*. You can hear these conversations posted on spiritualityrunningtogo.com under the title *The Open Door*.

Our topic was meeting Jesus in extreme sufferings. Both of the Olson's told about healing prayers during which Jesus told them in their hearts how He was there when they suffered childhood sexual abuse. I told about a woman I knew who had been raped at knife point on a kitchen table by her father when still a toddler. This was confirmed by an older sister. Decades afterwards on a retreat she got comfort from meditating long hours on the moment when Jesus was stripped of His clothing.

Horrible memories are not to be filling us with dread and bitterness. Instead we must run to Jesus and let Him find us analogies in His life. For example, He was not rejected by a

wife, but He certainly knew rejection, including the rejection we sometimes give Him by fleeing into addictions vs. running to Him.



7 April 2011

A Yes to Prayer after a Long, Long Time

When something very good happens and one of my daughters sees that I am already worrying about something else, she calls out “Take the Joy!”

After my husband died 18 years ago, I have tried 16 different communal ventures. Now I am on to a new one that looks like the best. I found a wonderful widow, a pastoral

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counselor, who wants to co-found with me a specific kind of Dedicated Widow Community. The apostolate will be to intercede for seminarians, be spiritual “mothers” to them, and volunteer at the seminary.

Lots of people pray for vocations and for priests, but not so many for seminarians. Most of them have to go through a 6 year process before ordination. Many of them leave pleasant homes and/or good jobs, to live in a room about 15×15 and enter into a routine, glorious in some ways, but very hard in others. They miss being around families, women and children. It is good for them to have some friendly women professors, staff, Sisters, around them. I think of us as cheerleaders.

Pray for them and pray for our tiny group of widows trying to become consecrated at a late age!

7 April 2011

Seminarians

I am working on the way of life for the Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist that I am in the process of co-founding. We have to write a section on the Eucharist.

My take, as a daily communicant, is that Jesus, the Bridegroom, is leaping down from heaven, to come right inside me. And, perhaps, even more dramatically – if the seminarians don’t persevere, we will starve.

Already some parishes in the US have a priest once a month and Communion Services the rest of the month. Some parishes no longer have daily Mass. Fr. Tony Anderson, SOLT, is pastor of 90,000 Mexicans.



Priests are an endangered species. Pray for vocations. Within the next month you will be hearing from me about a book I edited of Late Vocation stories. It will be called: “Last Call: 12 Men who Dared Answer.” These stories range from former night club managers to international bankers, to a Peruvian considered late vocation at 21 because in his time they took in boys of 7!

The hound of heaven isn’t dead yet!

8 April 2011

Disappointment in Friendships doesn't need to be Total Loss

Sometimes we think that a particular admired person will be a great friend forever. Then something happens that hurts or disillusion us. I am not writing about severe tragic betrayals, but more about personality conflict. We have to give up that dream of life-long closeness. When we think of him or her it is with sadness and even distaste.



But then a new situation arises where we find ourselves collaborating with that lost friend. Suddenly, we see again the other at his/her best, and the original bond is strengthened, not necessary forever, but for this God-given common task or ministry.

This happened to me today with several people who had disappointed me and whom I disappointed. Out of love for a new very hurting person we all gathered around and grace flowed toward the one we were praying with who had no idea of all the past problems between us. Besides the grace to our new mutual friend, there was a flow of appreciative love in the whole circle.

What will it be like in heaven when all is really forgiven?

9 April 2011

Of Gods and Men - about the French Martyr Cisterian monks in Algeria

Go see this remarkable French movie that won such prizes. There's an old phrase that France is the eldest daughter of the Church – and the remnants of the old French spirituality are amply manifested in this film about these monks who decided to stay with their Algerian villagers when threatened by terrorists.

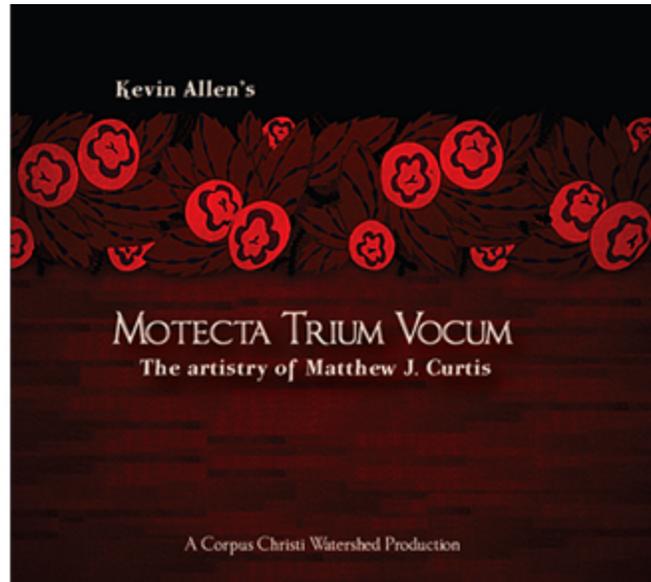


In a wonderful way it shows the contrast between the fear of the monks that is redeemed in Christ and the fear in the terrorists, so unredeemed and the consummate forgiveness of the monks for their enemies.

11 April 2011

Kevin Allen's Motets

A busy Sunday. It turned out to be one with deadlines on 2 writing projects coming at once. Actually not true. A long time ago I recognized that workaholic types like me tend to create artificial deadlines. In other words, in our own heads we decide that such and such project must be done by this date even though there is no such necessity. Then we work a mile a minute to succeed in reaching the deadline, meanwhile, of course, also cudgeling co-workers to keep up with the pace! Forgive me any co-workers who are reading this.



In any case, after this hectic day with 2 artificial deadlines I decided to squeeze in a prayer time and to waft me out of projectitis I pulled out [Kevin Allen's *Motecta Trium Vocum*](#). AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH! Blissful escape from my frenzied brain into the rhythms of the angels. (You can find these on www.ccwatershed.org – the host of these blogs)

I had another motive. I have not seen my friends at Watershed for many, many years. Now we are arranging a get together of Watershed people in early July. And I hope also to see Watershedders I have not yet met, such as Kevin Allen.

May God bless us all, and moderate our creative talents so that we may not be workaholics but....grace-aholics?

11 April 2011

Abby Johnson's Unplanned

When everyone on your side starts praising a book, do you ever kind of resist and think, maybe if everyone loves it, I won't love it? Most of the time, when I get around to reading the book I love it. This is certainly the case with Unplanned. As most of you know, it is the story of a woman who ran an abortion mill and turned around and



joined our side. I understand she has recently even become a Catholic.

I have been teaching an ethics book on abortion called **Understanding Abortion: From Mixed Feelings to Rational Thought**. The idea was to write a pro-life book that really explained why pro-choicers think the way they do. It is a book you can give to family and friends who are sitting on the fence. Look for it to come out in the Fall. It is terrific.

Nothing could better illustrate the points in **Mixed Feelings** than this book by Abby Johnson. Even though she was a Christian attending pro-life Churches she was still convinced that the services of Planned Parenthood in the area of contraception would make abortion rare! She managed to hide from herself her guilt about her own two abortions.

Working in the office counseling woman, It was only after 8 years that she saw an actual abortion and realized that this innocent baby was real and had the right to life.

The most hopeful and touching thing about Abby's story is how the love shown by the Coalition for Life members praying outside her clinic contributed to her decision to come over to the right side.

Read it, you'll be as moved to hope as I was.

13 April 2011

C.S. Lewis and his "Revision" of the Problem of Pain

C.S. Lewis' book the **Problem of Pain** is probably the best philosophical and theological answer of the 20th century to the question of how a God of love can allow terrible pain. Just the same, when he went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in **A Grief Observed**, he was honest enough to admit that his answers in the **Problem of Pain** didn't help him at all! He still started thinking, "Maybe there is no God? or God is a sadist!" What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reassure him on an experiential level.

Just now I have 3 close friends going through unbearable agony for different reasons – one is circumstances where he cannot protect a child from an



abusive father. The other is watching a beloved wife suffering physical and emotional pain no amount of medicine can remove.

All my feeble efforts to give fix-it advice failed. What I am saying to them instead now is my last ditch remedy: I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, “I’m not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon.”

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn’t change, but I feel God’s personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all.

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book *The Idea of the Holy* points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is that is the experience of God’s Holy Presence.

Signs of the New Springtime in the Church

15 April 2011

Sometimes Church news is so grim we think we are in the Dark Ages. But soon to be Blessed John Paul the Great predicted a new springtime for the Church.

I thought of this tonight hearing good news from Michael Cumbie. Michael is a late vocation seminarian at Holy Apostles where I teach. He has a fascinating background. He was a Southern Baptist, then a Pentecostal preacher, then an Episcopalian priest. He converted to the Catholic faith and hopes to become a Roman Catholic priest.

Michael is helping support his family and his seminary studies by doing Missions. Here is how he described a recent mission. It was to a small Catholic Church that had left behind lots of doctrine and practice. Now under a magisterial priest, Cumbie was invited to stir the people up to renewed fervor. The congregation was so delighted with Cumbie’s conversion that they became wide open to



what he said on subsequent nights about the glory of the perennial Church with its traditions and art and music. After 4 nights of this they were ready to renew their Church.

The new springtime of the Church!!!! Check out Cumbie's web-site where you can order terrific videos and audios of his spectacular conversion.

Sincerity Check-mates Cynicism

16 April 2011

Someone said that if you look around you it makes you depressed. If you look inward you get distracted. To be hopeful you have to look up. Of course we realize God is everywhere and not a sky deity, but the analogy of "up" meaning transcendence works.

I experienced this today in a beautiful fashion. I am a co-host on a little TV access show with interviews of Catholic leaders. Today, Fr. Martin Jones, newly appointed minister for hispanic evangelization in the Norwich, Connecticut diocese, and I interviewed an elderly hispanic woman who is a parish leader. Aurora was telling stories of the piety of her parents. She spoke of how on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe her family would ride from their ranch in New Mexico in a carriage drawn by horses 18 miles to the Church. She said the priest never started the Mass until they arrived. As she spoke, first in Spanish, and then in English, her eyes were cast upward with an expression of luminous sincerity.

The sincerity of her faith seemed like such a check-mate to a kind of mildly cynical sophistication we can fall into out of a kind of intellectualization of the faith.

On the verge of falling asleep tonight it was Aurora's upward glance that remained in my mind as the most significant reality to share with you.

Pride in Children and Grandchildren

16 April 2011 Most of us should and do love our children and grandchildren whether we are proud of them or not, but then sometimes come those delicious moments of happy and not to be blamed pride. In Yiddish such parents and grandparents are said to "kvell" which is a word just for that kind of joy.



My oldest grandson (21 years old) passed through Connecticut and visited me over night. Probably because of half Jewish ancestry from my side, he happens to look almost exactly like Jim Carveziel in the Passion! So much is this the case that in High School everyone called him “Jesus” as a nickname. It is not just the features, it is a look of eager compassion in his face that I love.

Now, he likes to wear grundgies, and I was afraid that at our formal seminary they might not be able to see the man for the clothes, but they did! And I kvelled thinking “Heh, without me, he wouldn’t exist.” I remember the first time I heard about the biological fact that because of the body/soul togetherness we believe to be God’s plan, it is not like he creates first a soul and then dumps it anywhere, but the soul and body are created simultaneously in such a way that the baby that my husband and I would procreate a month after would not be the same unique self as the one we procreated exactly on that date. Awesome, eh?

Best of all was a deeply Christian thing my non-practicing grandson told me about. He is a fiction writer who works as a cashier to support himself. I kvell a lot about his writings. Recently he decided to take a crash course to become a nursing aid. After months of practice, mostly on Alzheimer patients, he said this: “It’s probably the worst job in the world in terms of the awful pace and the sometimes disgusting jobs, but I love it because the patients need my help so much.”

Pray for dear ones fallen away from the Faith: that they come back to the sacraments. And try practicing kvelling openly with your kids, grandkiddies, or relatives and younger friends.

How much can we Expect from Others?

17 April 2011 A favorite line from a novel whose name and author slips my mind was enunciated by a bachelor to answer the question of why he had never married: “With women, everything is either not enough or too much!” I laughed and laughed when I read this. It explained a lot to me about my general state of dissatisfaction fluctuating with feeling overwhelmed.

In heaven nothing will be not enough or too much. On earth, maybe that is a universal plight. Because we are made for God who is infinite perfection, we can’t help wishing for paradise now. That is good in that it keeps us trying to improve things, relationships, creative work, the Church. On the other hand, the restlessness of our hearts has to be balanced by gratitude for everything wonderful, especially gratitude for what others are trying to do for us. How wretched it is to see, for instance, a spouse, trying and trying to

please the beloved and meeting only with captious criticism! But then, also, how wretched it is when someone can easily meet the need of another but is simply too selfish to even try!

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”



Unusually Terrific Sermon I Heard Today

18 April 2011

A deacon almost priest seminarian today gave such a great sermon I have to share it with you. He started with saying how if you were in Jerusalem this week and didn't know this story had a glorious ending, wouldn't you think that the life of Jesus was totally out of control? His disciple is stealing the money; the Jewish leaders are plotting to kill Him...doesn't He seem helpless and hopeless? But he really was in control.

And how about our lives? Some of us at the seminary, he went on to say, feel out of control. Finals, papers, even maybe a crisis about your vocation? Do we really believe that Jesus is in control?

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The sermon reminded me of a chapter in a book of mine that is out of print but now a free e-book called *Mary, Teach us how to Live*. This book goes through the 15 Mysteries of the Rosary relating themes to every day life. For the Sorrowful Mysteries the theme I chose was “Fight, Flight, or....stand under the Cross and suffer.” Many times when we are overwhelmed by conflicts or just exhausted from the basic struggle of daily life, we can feel tempted to fight in vengeful ways or to flee. Sometimes those choices are good. But sometimes we can’t win and we can’t flee because of our commitments. Then we have to imitate Our Lady and just stand under our own crosses and suffer until God chooses to bring us something better.

Going into Holy Week what is the cross you need to stand under?

You can find my *Mary* book at rondachervin.com — click on free e-books for *Mary, Teach us how to Live!*

Sacred Time and Space

20 April 2011

Brought up as a total atheist, I had no sense whatsoever of tradition, ritual or ceremony. When I became a Catholic at 21, ushered in through such lovers of traditional liturgy as the Von Hildebrand’s, I lived with daily Mass and liturgy of the hours more out of blind faith than understanding.

The key to understanding came with a course given by my godfather, Balduin Schwarz, on philosophy of religion. We read a book by Mircea Eliade on the nature of the sacred as expressed in all religions. The concept was that it is part of the experience of the divine to set aside sacred spaces and sacred times. In terms of Catholic worship I learned that in the incarnation, Christ, the God-man, enters our “conveyor belt” of human time. Because He was divine as well as human, when, through the priest, His death on the cross is re-presented we truly enter into the eternal where all time is unified. That sacred time participates in eternity and when we enter it we are caught up into His Real Presence in a way different from the way He is present to us when we pray at any time of day or year in any space other than the sacred space of the Church.

Presently, graced to live at a seminary where high liturgy is valued above all, I am caught up even more in the solemnity of that sacred time and space each day, but to the maximum as we come to the Triduum.

If I get sufficiently caught up you won’t hear from me on this blog until Easter Monday.



The Passion Revisited



21 April 2011

It was very different seeing the Passion for the 4th time at the seminary on a huge screen instead of in a home with many distractions. The context of these reflections is a previous conversation where I was insisting that I didn't have to adopt the kind of spirituality where you "pretend" not to want consolations in order to be in union with God. My holier friends insisted, instead, that if you want consolations then you don't really want only God's will. I wound up just saying that if Jesus wanted me to be more like them in this respect, I would pray for Him to show me.

Watching The Passion led to these new graces:

As I watched the violent scenes of the scourging, I felt a deep desire to suffer for Him more. I wanted to suffer more for my sins and those of others, and at the same time to rejoice even more with Him because He is in heaven and He will bring me there one day.

That is the paradox for me, not so much to want only God's "will," in some abstract sense but to want only Jesus, both the Jesus on the Cross and the Jesus who is in heaven.

I thought I want to say the Jesus prayer and the Hail Mary all day long – in my heart as I go through my day.

It is not so much that I want only His will, but just that I want Him, His heart in my heart making it into love.

I felt I wanted to count up the sufferings of each day, small and large and rejoice that I am worthy to suffer for Him, my Bridegroom. To offer these sufferings for my family, seminarians, and all those friends and others who ask for my prayers.

Some think The Passion is too gratuitously violent. I think only such realism can break through the defenses of people like me.

I said to a seminarian sitting next to me during the Eucharist scenes “If you are willing to suffer ANYTHING WHATSOEVER for Him, you can be a priest.” (Many seminarians start thinking the sacrifice of 6 or so years of seminary is unbearable.)

As usual, the horrible scenes reminded me of how we say a proof of the Resurrection is that if these men who knew what a crucifixion was really like, were willing to risk death by following Jesus as Christians, they must have seen the Resurrection.

Of course, this exalted mood will pass, but please pray that it leaves an impress on my frantic little soul.

A Christian Way to Respond to Annoyance

22 April 2011 I don't know if you have the same thing, but when I am upset about something and, therefore, in a bad mood to begin with, every single sin or defect I observe became a reason for a highly critical interior analysis of same.

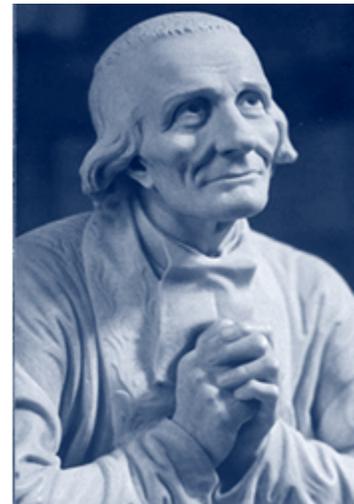
Today, Good Friday, the Lord seemed to tell me: “whenever you see something virtuous or beautiful rejoice in this way My kingdom is here, but when you see something sinful or defective first endure it, and then IMMEDIATELY do penance in reparation for it.”

I thought that by penance he didn't mean flagellation or any other dramatic thing, though there is a long tradition of that among the saints, but, for weakling me, something tiny such as instead of waiting to do some chore until manana, to do it immediately. Or clear off the dishes on the table instead of waiting for someone else to do it.

Try it! You won't like it, but it will distract you from useless fulmination.

Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist

25 April 2011



After my husband died in 1993 I thought I would become an instant saint. But, as he feared, I became, instead a dingbat floating around on the ceiling without the ballast of his heavy domineering hand! Recently I counted up 16 different ways of life I tried. A wonderful charismatic Catholic therapist told me not to look upon these as failures but to make a list and next to each one think of how I helped others at that time and how others helped me. So now I try to think of them as stepping stones instead of failures.



Anyhow many of these rotated around trying to find a way of life for ardent Catholic widows who don't want to get stuck some day in a Catholic retirement home where after daily Mass the main activity is watching big screen game shows. I will not make you laugh by describing reasons why seemingly perfect solutions didn't work both because of my defects and theirs, but instead tell you about my latest venture which fits with one mentor's advice "dream not the impossible dream, but the possible dream."

Dedicated Widows of the Holy Family will be a group of widows who promise not to re-marry with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, to dedicate ourselves to Christ and the Church but in the specific form of living close to seminaries and volunteering in service for whatever needs we can help with, as well as participating in the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours with them as more or less "spiritual mothers." In effect, bartering 3 delicious meals a day for fostering vocations! Yum! Yum! I am already doing this, but now I have 3 more interested who may come all the way from Colorado and Maryland. No money is involved. We live simply but keep our own funds for visits to family, etc.

If anyone reads this who is either a widow or a potential widow, or a single who could live with a widow paradigm rule, check out the Statutes on rondachervin.com click on Widow Options.

If you fit into none of these categories, say a prayer for us to Mary, Exalted Widow (that is her name in a Spanish novena).

Memories

26 April 2011

When I was 60 I wrote a book called Meeting Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging. I thought it would be hard to find joys but asking around I came up with lots. Senior discounts rated high. One of them I never thought of was that because we are less busy, even though busier than we thought we'd be, we have more time for musing. Something in the present, triggers some delicious memory of the past, and now we have time to savor it.



Reading Jeff Ostrowski's blog about piano vs. organ triggered this fantastic memory. I was around 12 years old strolling along Riverside Drive in NYC when, even though I was brought up atheist, I suddenly got this impulse to walk into Riverside Church. I had never been inside a Church. It was during the week. No one was inside this grand edifice but cascading down from the choir loft was Bach's Toccata and Fugue! I was transfixed not only by the beauty but by the power of it. I think it was the very first time God reached out to me through beauty, and perhaps paved the way for another graced moment when a college boyfriend, a non-practicing Episcopalian, played Bach's Wachtel Auf on a tiny tape recorder. Mind you, I didn't have the faintest idea who Jesus even was, but the music carried Him to me.

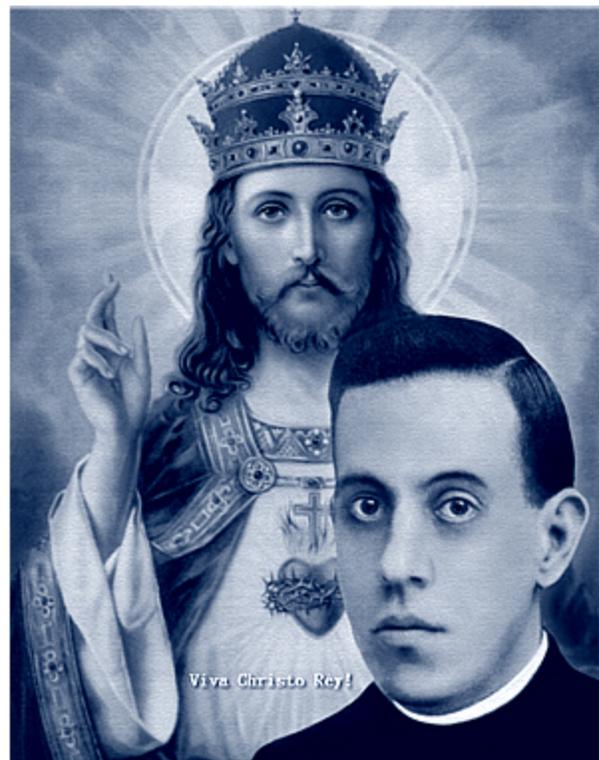
After you read this, take a little trip "down memory lane" to when the BEAUTY of Christ came into you for the first time.

You can find my book by going to rondachervin.com and clicking on books for sale and scrolling down to the above title.

Hispanic Masses

28 April 2011 On Tuesday evenings we have a special table for learning to speak Spanish by chatting. It is attended by the Spanish teacher, anglos learning Spanish, and sometimes a few native speakers. I go because I plan to do door to door evangelization soon. It would be good to brush up on my weak Spanish skills first.

Tonight, maybe because it was Easter and also the last week of classes, many hispanic



seminarians came to the table. They hail from Columbia, Peru, Mexico, Puerto Rico, etc. They began singing hispanic songs most of them knew but few of us anglos knew.

These men, who usually look serious, and some even morose, were filled with joy to be singing in their own language, not as part of some program at the school, but spontaneously! I thought, that is why I think it is so important that we have hispanic Masses in this country. Of course, every immigrant should learn English. The next generation usually only wants to speak English. But for those brought up to pray in Spanish, out of love, we should want them to have this joy.

I usually put this point in a “nastier” way: since we anglos are contracepting and aborting ourselves out of existence, we better learn Spanish! Adios, amigos!

Healing the Emotions

April, 2011

A very popular book in the 70's was entitled **The Wounded Healer**. It was written by Henri Nouwen, a priest psychotherapist. The book was about how most of us suffer different emotional wounds in childhood but, then, through prayer and counseling or spiritual direction, we need to become not Wounded Wounders but Wounded Healers.



Let me give you a simple example. A little boy of five is jumping around the house playing noisily with his brother. Whenever they make noise, if his alcoholic father is around, he runs into the room where they are playing and whacks them yelling “I deserve a little peace and quiet in my own home.”

In effect the father is being what we used to call “a kill-joy.” He could have calmly insisted the boys to go out in the yard or down to the basement to play, but instead he lashes out in anger. This could give the little boy the feeling that his father only wants him around if he is quiet, “seen and not heard.”

The father thinks that he is a very loving father because he works hard to “bring home the bacon,” but when the son grows up he may truthfully say that he can’t remember his father ever smiling at him or saying “I love you.”

Now let’s take our example a little further. Because he hated being yelled at and hit by his father, the boy, when he becomes a father, may never hit or yell at his kids, but he becomes a wounded wounder just the same.

How so? He may respond to annoyance and frustration by means of sarcasm as in “heh, kids, you think everyone’s deaf so you have to yell when you play.” Let’s say that he is sarcastic not only to his kids but also to his wife and to his employees.

Let’s step back now. As Christians we are taught that the highest value is love. We are all called to holiness, which I define as having nothing but love in our hearts. Clearly, being chronically angry in the form of yelling, hitting others, or sarcasm, is not loving.

Besides not being loving to others, it is also harmful to ourselves, because anger is the opposite of peace.

In the course of this presentation and the optional workshop after this on healing of masculine and feminine, I am going to offer opportunities for healing of toxic emotions that are obstacles to experiencing love and peace in our hearts.

Some of us think of being emotional as in itself negative. We think of sometimes out-of-control negative emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. We wish we had less of them and we wish we didn’t have to be the victims of those emotions when others experience them in an out of control manner.

Others of us think of emotions are largely positive. We think of emotional persons as free, not repressed, and “real.” We compare them to others we think of as “locked up,” cold, Stoical, distant and distancing.

The great Catholic philosopher, Dietrich Von Hildebrand in his book *The Heart*, distinguishes between different types of emotions. Emotions such as feeling miserable because too hot or cold due to the weather, or tired because of a sleepless night, are not within our control .

Other emotions such as anxiety attacks, rage, and melancholy can involve over-reactions. In themselves, it is not irrational to feel fear if there is an serial killer in your neighborhood, to feel angry about grave injustices, or to feel grief if a beloved person dies. But it is irrational to be so frightened of the serial killer that you hide you your house for years or to be so angry about the actions of a spouse that you kill him or her, or to be so grieved that you never get close to anyone again after the death of a loved one.

A lot of these negative emotions come from childhood. Anxiety can come from being neglected as a kid as in often left home alone when too young to cope. Anger can come from deprivation of basic needs in childhood such as being passed over because a parent preferred a sibling, or, worst case, being abused sexually or being battered, or being verbally demeaned. Melancholy can result from many deaths in the family. Counsellors know how to bring a person back to these painful experiences, offering healing insight and love, to break patterns coming from such wounds. Your own parish may have such counselors available without cost. My experience is that small daily frustrations trigger the over-reaction. For example, if a meal is delayed, I can feel irrational anxiety. A therapist taught me that this was probably due to being bottle-fed by a nurse as a child rather than with mother's milk or mother's close embrace.

Some emotions, however, are always rational and good. Von Hildebrand gives such examples as love, peace, and joy when these are responses to such realities as returning God's love, having peace because of faith in the proved virtues of others, being joyful to see a member of the family after a long absence.

To return to the Wounded Healer image – when we speak of healing of the emotions what we hope for is that we may move from being dominated by negative out of control emotions into the positive rational emotions of love, peace and joy. When we are feeling such emotions our relationships to others become healing to them. We become soothing, comforting, delightful to others instead of being Wounded Wounders of them. A poster says, “no one heals himself by wounding another.”

Two main remedies for out of control emotions are psychological insight and deep prayer.

The insights that helped me the most had to do with chronic anger starting in childhood. Until I studied and participated in the system of Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, International (not 12 Step), I used to have 5 public fits a day. This is a free self-help group started in the 1940's and now all over the world.

Here is the way Abraham Low would describe the angry father's sarcasm. This man is a perfectionist. He thinks that life could be beautiful if only everyone else fell in line with his directives. But, according to Low, only realists are happy. Realists “expect frustrations every five minutes” and peacefully work around them. They expect the average instead of the perfect. Instead of wishing his kids were obedience robots, this father, knowing that kids are noisy, fixes up a room or a basement just for the kids to play in.

Here's how I describe my own chronic anger, greatly diminished because of going to Recovery, International for many years. I think of myself as the heroine of a drama called life. I want everyone else to be either secondary characters or walk-ons who do and say what will enhance my ideal day. Since they refuse to accept these roles, I try to coerce them into doing so by yelling at them. That rarely works. So I feel weak, impotent, and

miserable. To overcome those awful feelings, I try to get a “symbolic victory” by talking with my friends about how awful my family is. “Symbolic victory” is a term Low devised to explain why people like to be angry even though it makes them miserable and doesn’t work. We hate to feel weak. When we can’t get a real victory, we try to feel strong and victorious by putting others down, lower than us, through anger or sarcasm.

To express this idea, I entitled my Catholic book on anger: *Taming the Lion Within: Five Steps from Anger to Peace*. Now, often, if not always, when I feel angry, I ask myself whether it is because I want to be the heroine of my day and feel frustrated, and why I feel weak. I try to accept that others won’t go along with my plan and that it’s okay to be weak because that is REAL. I am weak in many respects.

Then, bolstered by my weekly Recovery, International meetings, I combine these insights with my spirituality centered in daily Mass, and prayer.

How does prayer help? Let’s look at the father’s sarcasm in terms of healing prayer. On the way home from work, the father says a rosary in thanksgiving for his family and asking Mother Mary to intercede for him about what he can realistically expect to find when he walks through the door of his house: that is, the average behavior of his kids and wife. Once a week he goes to an Adoration chapel at his parish. He lays on God everything in his life that bothers him. He sits quietly and begins to bask in God’s love. He hears in His heart Jesus telling him how grateful He, God, is for the many sacrifices made out of love for spouse and kids. When his sarcastic anger gets the best of him, instead of justifying his anger on the basis that “I’m angry because everyone else is obnoxious, so they are the problem, not me, he brings that out of control anger to Confession. When the problems become major crosses, the father identifies himself with Jesus on the Crucifix. He begs Jesus to bear those crosses with him, lest he fall into anger, anxiety, of despair.

The worst pain I ever experienced was when my son committed suicide 19 years ago. Over time healing came with a combination of insight and the healing love of Jesus.

When I asked how could a God of Love let my son do this, I thought of C.S. Lewis’ book the *Problem of Pain*. Basically his answer is that if God wanted free human beings vs. robots or dolls, he had to allow us to do things that cause others unbearable agony. If I could have stopped by son by coercing him, he would not have been free. Just the same, when C.S. Lewis went through his worst agony over the death of his wife, Joy, described in *A Grief Observed*, he was honest enough to admit that his answers in the *Problem of Pain* didn’t help him at all! He still started thinking, “Maybe there is no God or God is a sadist!” What finally brought him through was giving up trying to figure it out and just letting God reassure him on an experiential level.

So, when these philosophical answers don't suffice, I lie on the floor in a cruciform position and tell God, "I'm not getting up until you reassure me that it is going to be all right somehow in some way soon."

When I do that, usually the situation that I find unbearable doesn't change, but I feel God's personal love for me enough to make it bearable after all. After my son's death, when I was feeling such agony, these words from Jesus came into my heart and reassured me: "Your son had his foretastes of heaven in the joys he had. You will find him in my Sacred Heart."

Rudolf Otto, a Protestant theologian of the 20th century in his famous book *The Idea of the Holy* points out in his commentary on the Book of Job that the answers God gives Job are not that different from what the false friends said! What brings Job around is the experience of God's Holy Presence.

In conclusion, to become Wounded Healers instead of Wounded Wounders, we need to seek insight into our negative emotions, through reading, spiritual director, and/or professional counseling, and we also need to pray in a deep way to give God a chance to heal us.

Between sessions I will be happy to pray over you for healing of your negative emotions or for your worst sufferings. Now I would like to read from a healing service. It is mostly from Fr. De Grandis, but slightly modified by me. You can more of this on his web.

Read from *Taming the Lion*

Blessed John Paul II the Great's Letter to Artists

15 May 2011

During the beatification, everyone here at the seminary was exchanging stories of what they loved best about our new saint. For me, one of the most exciting things about John Paul II was that he had such different works: rock quarry during the war, actor, playwright, philosopher, theologian, bishop, Pope, and even skier! One of our seminarians who was born in Poland said that when JPII was still only Archbishop, he was in shorts taking a group of young people on a hike and on the mostly empty train, his car was full of people who had rushed from their cars on the train, to greet this so popular bishop!



I teach his wonderful Letter to Artists. Here is the opening in case some Watershed readers never read this letter.

“None can sense more deeply than you artists, ingenious creators of beauty that you are, something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands. A glimmer of that feeling has shone so often in your eyes when—like the artists of every age—captivated by the hidden power of sounds and words, colours and shapes, you have admired the work of your inspiration, sensing in it some echo of the mystery of creation which God, the sole creator of all things, has wished in some way to associate you.”

Read the whole thing by google search.

Healing of Rejection

15 May 2011

I am working on a talk for a series in Los Angeles this summer on Meeting Jesus in the Crises of Life. One is on rejection. The focus is on a particular but common type of rejection that comes with over-estimating what others can do and be for us. This is different than the rejection that Jesus experienced with the Jewish leaders where he in no way over-estimated them.

I use two little scenarios. One is about a divorced woman who falls in love with her boss, a married man. The other involves a father who wants his son to be the baseball star he couldn't be. I take these characters through stages of fantasy, anxiety, rejection, surrender, forgiveness, to the right kind of love.



One of my chief insights, from lots of sorrowful experiences, is that when we approach others with thirst rather than tenderness they almost have to reject us. In our thirst for whatever their virtues and talents seem to promise, we demand of them more than they can possibly deliver. We make them into little gods and goddesses. Then, they fail us and we feel rejected.

When we bring our pain to Jesus, He can gradually bring His love into our wounds. Then, after forgiveness, we can reach out to others more tenderly instead of with a desperate thirst which usually leads to rejection.

If you are interested in more about this, ask Watershed to pass along your contact information and I can e-mail you the whole book.

Home and Homelessness

15 May 2011

A marvellous quotation from a saint whose name I have, alas, senior moment, forgotten goes like this:

“Happy are they who have a home. Happier they for whom every place is home. Happiest they whose only home is heaven.”

I think of this spiritual adage whenever I have to leave a beloved place to go on, and even when my stay in one place is interrupted, for the summer for example.

You might lift up a prayer of gratitude for your present home, if you have one. And then a prayer of gratitude for each place that has temporarily been a home for you.

And, then...how glorious to anticipate our final home in heaven – really there’s for the asking provided we repent of all the sins that have made those in our “homes” on earth less than heavenly!

Lebensraum

16 May 2011

Lebensraum is an intriguing reality crystallized in this word which literally translates as Living Room, but not

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in the sense of a living room. Rather it means the “room” a person takes in social situations. It is a derogatory expression referring to those who walk into a room and take over. The vehemence of such a one’s personality crowds others into the margins of the “room.” I “strut my stuff” oblivious to the need others might have to express themselves.

Mea culpa! Excuse? Well, if I don’t talk, we have to sit around in silence. I forget that I might break the silence by asking questions of others so that they can share and shine!

If you know me, or plan to see me in the future, be sure to kick me under the table if I start to do this. Whisper “lebensraum,” and you will shut me up fast.

Letter to be read at a funeral

17 May 2011

One of my daughters, a poet, wrote this letter to her mother-in-law for the funeral of her father-in-law, Richard, who was a military caterer in England. This daughter of mine is slowly inching her way back to the Church. I thought you aesthetes would love some of these lines:

I saw a picture of Richard when he was young: a gloomy Heathcliff sitting on a beach, handsome as the devil. When I met him, illness had worn him down to a charming elf instead of a lonely devil: well, time and illness can do that and sometimes it is a kindness and sometimes it isn’t. No one can know at what cost another person has earned their face...

I knew he knew he was dying when we last met. I do not think either of us knew how long or how painful it would be. I tried to pray but I don’t know how to pray. There was a channel of pain traveling all the way from England to North Carolina and I sent what little I possess of faith and hope along it, feeling it was useless.

The day before he died, Richard visited me, stood behind my shoulder in the kitchen and commented on a meal I was making, wanted to try some. It was a whimsical moment full of warmth and it felt real. I have no right to speak of faith, but maybe this IS what it is made of: a few sunny moments strung up like rosary beads, a leap of faith, a skip of hope and finally a giant hop off the crucifixes that are prepared for us at the end of our lives. Believe in these moments because what else can you do?

Dr. Ronda Chervin has many free e-books and audios on her website [rond](#)

Ridicule of Therapists

18 May 2011 Over dinner here at the seminary someone used the word “shrinks” to describe psychotherapists. I cringed and then remarked provocatively, “I happen to have benefited greatly from psychotherapy throughout my long life, so I don’t like to hear that ridiculing word: shrink.”

The group at the table were startled. None of them had ever thought of the matter this way. As our conversation developed I developed the theory that because of the stigma of needing therapy or even the less stigmatized “counseling” some who go or have gone express their sometimes unconscious feelings of shame by making fun of their benefactors.

Presumably the ridiculing word, shrink, came out of the theory that the problem of many clients comes from being “swell-headed” and, therefore, needing their heads to be shrunk. An example would be someone who thinks everyone is watching and judging them in neutral situations. It could take a lot of pride to think that most people are even noticing oneself so much that they would be making judgments.

To end these reflections on a more serious note, I realize that some Catholics have been misled by counselors and therapists who were either half-baked or anti-religious. But, for all of these sad outcomes, I have known many more troubled people who have been brought from dark misery to greater tranquility through good professionals. I have gotten much help from Catholic therapists, but also from an atheist and, even, a Jewish New Ager.

The last one, coming from a similar New York Jewish background to mine, had this explanation of an anxiety I could not understand by myself. I was telling him about how nervous I feel in Catholic work situations because I never know what the bosses really think. Here was his insightful and somewhat funny answer. “Ronda, because Jews lived in Europe mostly in ghettos close in together in apartments, they talked about everything all the time. Irish Catholics, however, came from a country where everything had to be hidden from the English. They talked behind the bushes. If your administrators are mostly Irish Catholics, that is in their bones. So, you’re right to fear that you have no idea what they are really thinking. Maybe you have to trust in God instead of in them?????”

Priestly Ordination at Hartford, Connecticut



18 May 2011

I have mentioned before that I have trouble with ceremonies, especially longer ones, but Ordinations are different. The first one I saw was in 1960. I was on a tour in Switzerland and going to daily Mass as usual came upon an ordination. Being a convert made it even more stunning.



After teaching at the seminary in Los Angeles, it was different. I actually knew these men. Some of these heroes I had helped pray through their worst moments of doubt about their vocations. The first time it was my late vocation seminarians being ordained I stood in the parking lot tears in my eyes pledging that because these wonderful holy men had gotten through the gauntlet of seminary I would never complain again in my whole life. Well, of course, I didn't live up to my pledge but, to my joy, coming back to Los Angeles years later, I found those heroes were now the priestly pillars of the archdiocese. They kept their pledge.

Now, when I go to an ordination of seminarians from Holy Apostles, where I teach, I always murmur the same words as I see the throngs of lay people taking their seats and the long procession of bishops, priests, about to be ordained, and seminarians coming up the aisle to the loud organ music and choir. The words I murmur as, 'AND THE GATES OF HELL SHALL NOT PREVAIL.'

The seminarian who invited me was a medical researcher born in South Africa, a huge black man, who migrated to the US and then to our seminary, primarily, for late vocations. The choir learned a song in African for part of the ceremony. There were also 2 songs in Spanish for the hispanic ordinand. Most of the music, however, was traditional chant, some in Latin.

The traditional ceremonial of such extraordinary supernatural meaning, reminded me, however, of something else I love: surprise. I recalled a Mass in Corpus Christi, Texas, for the ordination of Society of Our Lady of the Trinity priests. The vocations director, Fr. Tony Anderson, a thin man in his 40's, was in the customary line up of all the priests who greet each newly ordained with a hug of peace. One of those just ordained was a large, large, man about 6'4" weighing no one could imagine how much. When Fr. Tony was in High School he was a wrestling champ. But, of course, this was the last thing on anyone's mind until suddenly at the hug of peace we saw the huge newly ordained priest lifted up into the air into a horizontal position by our thin priest. It was too quick for

anyone to clap, but I clapped in my heart because reverential tradition is magnificent but the freedom of the Spirit in surprise is also...delightful!

A Visit to a Convalescent Home

19 May 2011

Today I gave a talk based on my forthcoming co-authored book: **What the Saints Say About Heaven**. The talk was to the elderly in a Catholic convalescent home here in Connecticut. I did it with Fr. Martin Jones who celebrates Mass at this place once a week. The Home is in a lovely woodsy area with beautiful views and lovely decor.



Before lunch I noticed that in the rec room the elderly were watching what seemed like a sappy old musical. It turned out to be a old Lawrence Welk re-run.

I was muttering in my mind that if I were running the place I would have EWTN on instead. Since the old folks watching the show were neatly attired, most of the women with perms, I felt the usual alienation since, as a Dedicated Widow, I dress in denim jumpers with hair I cut from long to shoulder length with an old scissor. I remembered an old cartoon I saw in the 60's. It showed a party full of far-out looking hippies with one conventional couple dressed in suit and tie and pretty party dress. One bedraggled hippie is asking "where did they come from?" The other responds, "Oh, we got them from Rent a Square."

Later, however, watching the elderly being wheeled into the Mass by the kindly volunteer attendants, the Lord chided me. "Do you see that in old age, these Catholics get to become like lambs, whereas you, also very old, are still either a lion or a viper?"

"Well this lovely place is very expensive," I thought. "People, like me, who love simplicity of life and give their money to the poor, of course, could never come here." I asked the pastoral counselor who invited me what it cost to live there. "Oh," she said, "well it costs a lot, but we're Catholic. Anyone who can't afford more than Medicare or Medicaid, we take in anyhow."

So much for sarcastic judgments from the Rondaview! Thank God for confession!

Redeemed Schmoozing

19 May 2011

“I’m schmoozing you, silly,” said a friend to me. It sounded like a Yiddish expression, but I didn’t really know the meaning. I was told that it is like manipulating another through flattery to get you to agree to something you might not otherwise agree to.



Let me put this word together with an intriguing statement on forgiveness by a famous Asian guru, Hanh. He said if you are trying to make peace with someone who is offended by you for any reason, trying giving a little gift.

Generally, I am loathe to try such ploys, but recently I was in a situation where there was lots of misunderstanding and some bitterness. Eager to come to peace, I prayed and prayed to say the right things at a meeting. These were all true, but not what I would usually have said, because I would have preferred to nurture my side of the grievance.

I got the grace to say these good things and more and it resulted in renewed good feelings. I was stunned. It reminded me of a phrase a friend liked to trot out when asked for advice: “how about trying a new move?”

I am asking myself, how in the world can we be begging God to make us more loving if we dig our heels into our usual patterns that haven’t worked, instead of trying, to use another Yiddish-English expression, to “make nice.”

21 May 2011

Many thoughts

I am going to be away for a week with possible cold turkey from my computer so I want to put up a whole bunch of stuff tonight. Could be the last one for a few days if I really can’t get on the e-mail somehow.

Did everyone else in the world but me know about Alpaca – a warm but light fabric from Ecuador and Peru for ponchos, shawls and cloaks? One of my



daughters gave me a certificate for Amazon clothing. After 6 weeks because of customs arrived this glorious navy blue poncho. It is the solution to a 15 year problem of being cold in Church but hating to wear huge heavy garments which weigh me down. Alpaca looks heavy but is light. If you don't know it, and you have similar problems, find out.

Great quote from Pope Benedict: "A constant temptation of Christian and of the Church is to seek victory without the Cross." Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa. Apply that to yourself as you can!

A word that came to me from, hopefully, the Holy Spirit, when you feel anxious, pray and watch to see how God gets you through."

These two I can't remember if I quoted before but they are so powerful you can certainly benefit from reading them again:

"If you talk more about the bad than the good it shows you prefer Satan's work to God's!" St. Ignatius Loyola

"If you are looking for justice you will find it in Hell; mercy is in heaven, and on earth is the Cross." Gertrud Von Le Fort

Look at Everyone with Mary's Merciful Eyes!

24 May 2011

Back in the 50's there was a TV ad for floor cleaner that showed a cowed housewife accosted by the judging eyes of a woman guest. The voice over was a man's voice saying: "Eyes are on your floors."

Not much for house-cleaning myself, when I occasionally have guests who are better housewives than myself, I remember that judgmental line and scurry around cleaning the floors.

Just to amuse you some old book about making life as a housewife easier suggested that if you clean only your kitchen counter and offer the guests a drink immediately no one will notice the rest of the mess!

Here is the spiritual analogy. When I went to confession about my harsh judgments about conventional retirement homes (you may remember this from a blog last week) – Fr. Martin Jones, my friend-priest, suggested



as a penance that I try looking at everyone with Mary's merciful eyes. It's a great image. Can you imagine Mary looking at anyone with harsh judgment about small things of daily life?

A related concept I heard a few days ago was this: the sins of others require our forgiveness, but the faults and defects should be overlooked. Not, of course, if you are in authority as a parent or boss, but in other situations.

If asked, do you think that those you encounter would vote you in as having the most merciful eyes they ever saw?

Do Leaders get along well with other Leaders?

25 May 2011

Recently someone said "You can't have two leaders, it's like two heads on one body." I have been thinking about this because sometimes I don't get along with someone I think I will do great with. I have all kinds of theories. But now I think in many cases it is because leaders both attract and repel each other.

We all know that, typically, in religious communities the founder is a flamboyant obvious leader, but then is, eventually, and often painfully, deposed to be replaced by a leader who is more quiet and prudent. A professor asked his class if they thought if two people were both saints that they would get along. They all said "yes." But he said "no!" Why not?

Because you can be full of heroic virtue but still have personality conflicts. If both are leader types, then neither one wants to give up his/her vision to simply bow before the vision of the other.

Sometimes we think we are not leaders because we don't fit the stereotype of leaders we admire. At a workshop on leadership by a psychologist, she asked us to offer definitions of what a leader was. Socratic style, she finally led us to her definition which was surprising: "A leader is anyone who others will follow." Duh!

So what Christian remedy to I see for leaders who clash? Look at Scripture! Eventually



Saul and David had to split even though David thought he just wanted to be Saul's soldier. After making up on major issues, it still seemed good that Paul went off from Peter's domain to "do his own thing." By the time they were both being crucified they probably had more in common than different.

You might check this out in your own situations. Without one or the other being a formal leader, if both are leaders by individual call, chances are they may have friction in spite of lots of admiration. When I first came the seminary, finding myself surrounded by genius professors in related fields, I thought it would be nifty to persuade them to cooperate in my dream of panel style inter-disciplinary courses. No takers. I was disappointed until I noticed that in our large dining room, typically professors fan out rather than compete for "head" of the table of seminarians and lay students.

My prayer should be "Jesus, not my way, your way. Thank you for wonderful people to admire. Let me let go, however, of dreams of team work that can't work because of friction of leaders. Let me put loving forbearance above grandiose schemes."

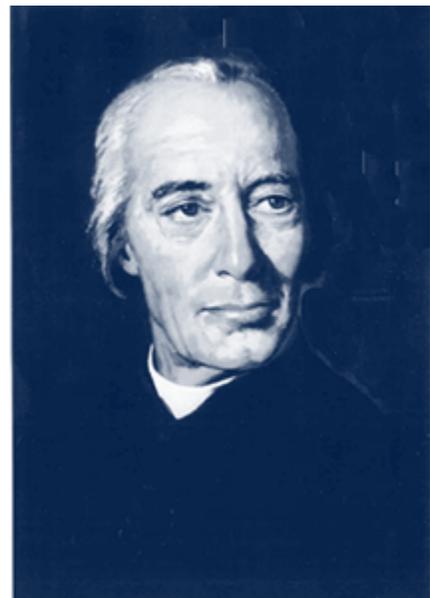
Fr. Gallitzin - missionary to the Alleghenies

25 May 2011

Well, my dear blog friends, I have now reached the point where I can't remember what I wrote in former blogs. I am hoping that when Jeff Ostrowski puts them up he will notice and send them back if I am becoming an old repetitious bore...sigh!

What I don't remember is if I told you that after my husband died in 1993 I tried 16 different ventures. As a result, when I come upon a new Catholic library, I start reading the lives of the saints I am not familiar with A-Z.

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But sometimes I glance at the nearby shelf that contains the lives of those others thought should be canonized but have not yet made it. These biographies detail everything the Congregation for Canonization would have to know in case the miracles piled up so that they would have to take notice. They are usually written by authors who knew the saint personally and if said writer was a good narrator they can be almost as wonderful as reading the lives of canonized saints, sometimes written by less gifted authors.

In this way I came upon one Fr. Gallitzin. The name always intrigued me. How did a Russian prince wind up as a key figure in American Catholic Church history? Oh, my, what an amazing figure, not only in terms of his holiness but of a psychological feature rather rare. Prince Gallitzin was the 18th century son of a German noblewoman married to a Russian prince who was a representative of the Czar living in Germany. The mother was a beautiful, adored society woman who became more and more devout to the point that when her children were old enough to be handed over to fancy tutors she decided instead to, in effect, home-school them making use of progressive ideas of educational experts. This worked well with the daughter, but the little prince turned out to be less than scholarly of temperament. The holy mother wept and scolded, wept and scolded, and even wrote the little prince letters of admonition about why he was so lazy and absolutely without any drive to learn anything.

This went on until he was 19. Because of the French Revolution they couldn't send prince charming on the usual Wanderjahre to Parish. Instead they packed him off to visit an uncle-missionary-priest in the United States. To the total surprise of the parents and the prince, early on he had a miraculous conversion through the Jesuits and risked losing his entire inheritance to become a missionary to the poor in the wilds of Pennsylvania. At the seminary he became so studious when it was theology he had to learn instead of the other liberal arts, that he had to be ordered to go to sleep. He became a holy missionary beloved for giving everything to the poor. Eventually the Russians, who never let anyone inherit their legacy who was Catholic no less a priest, gave all his money to other family members and Prince Father Gallitzin lived in real poverty with heroic virtue. It particularly wrung my heart hearing of him riding days and nights on horseback through snow and rain to far-off mission stations, and then having to eat hard meats and several day old biscuits with his dentures!

The bio I read was by a wonderful writer, an Austrian missionary priest, Fr. Lemcke. If you can't find that, look for another.

Why isn't insight and grace enough to overcome denial?

27 May 2011

The Rector of my seminary is making long term plans for the curriculum. After jotting down everything I said I liked to teach, he smiled and asked, and what is your real passion presently?

“Hmmm! I know! It’s denial. I hate denial in myself and others. As a philosopher I tend to think that denial comes from lack of insight. Plato thought that knowledge led to virtue, but we know that we need grace. But some of us have insight into our worst traits and grace, and we still aren’t much better at virtue. Why?”

“Okay, why not work up a course called 'Denial: Insight and Grace,' my genial rector asked. So, now I am picking everyone’s brain on what are the elements besides insight and grace that have to enter the picture to produce virtue?

Here are some candidates:

Unless we are willing to suffer in whatever way would be necessary when we want to choose our vice, fault, defect, or flaw, we won’t change. Example: I talk too much. Unless I am willing to accept the suffering of biting my tongue when what I want to say is neither edifying or charitable but just frisky anecdotal one-up-manship (one-upwomanship?) then I will not be able to talk less.

Another suggested candidate is to recognize that the devil wants us to do the evil, wrong, or inappropriate thing. So we need spiritual warfare prayers to move from denial to insight, to actually receiving the grace God is offering us and the devil is trying to deflect. Example: When I am dying to say this sarcastic, juicy, uncharitable thing, I could pray this way instead – “Guardian angel, protect me against the devil’s wiles right now.”

Your challenge! Can you flood my comments section with good ideas from your own experience of victory over denial? This could make my course someday be an interdisciplinary Watershed virtual offering! Hurrah!

Evils admitted to be real have to be fought

28 May 2011

On my summer travels I trust that my family and friends will always have plenty of books for me to select from. At the home of one of the our group of Dedicated Widows of the Holy Eucharist, I came upon a novel written in the 80’s

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THE NILE RIVER



by a writer named Giggon. It was about a former English teacher, a good man, a liberal, and a bit naive, whose wife and child are murdered by a serial killer. This is so devastating that he leaves his university, and the Church, and roams about, and winds up working as a security guard. The plot thickens when the janitor engages our hero in long conversations during the night hours claiming that he, the janitor, is also a serial killer.

Since the English teacher hates violence, since the police have no proof that this guy really is a killer vs. maybe just a man with a sadistic imagination, his problem is to decide whether he should himself kill the serial killer before he strikes again.

He winds up almost killing the killer and then, risking his own life, as a human shield, for the child victim of the killer.

The line that impressed me the most was where the serial killer, admittedly under the possession of Satan, tells the hero that all his life he has been trying to deny that the worst evils are real and happening all over, because "If you would admit that so much evil is real, you would have to come against it, instead of being a spectator."

The killer relates this to the whole media syndrome where people watch on TV all these horrors with no sense that they have to do anything.

Of course, even if we were the most militant of pro-lifers, which many of us are, we couldn't get rid of all evil through action, but let us at least pray every time we see or read about evil, and be truly willing, to die to save the innocent, if the opportunity arises, should we know it is God's will for us, in this moment.

The Good Things about People with Opposite Traits

29 May 2011

I am visiting the house of one of my dear Dedicated Widows. She is divesting the house to become more like me, all of whose possessions fit in one little cell at the seminary. What is hitting me between the eyes is how people like her and like everyone else in my family, who love to have wonderful colorful things of all types around them, actually enjoy life a lot more than I do. The absence of the annoyance of clutter is good, but absence of annoyance is not joy!



How do we get balance on this? Is the only choice between clutter and sterile order? Here is what I think. To have the simplicity of life recommended by our Church we need to

periodically go through our whole households and give away everything that doesn't actually give us joy. What gives us joy can be a gift of God. But, I never met anyone who actually got joy out of looking at stacks of old newspapers or bills paid ten years ago! Why would anyone save this stuff? My theory is that it is because it is more enjoyable to pursue other activities than to sort through old stuff! I recommend always thinking of the joy of the person walking into the thrift shop and finding a whole set of dishes (your 3rd set) for \$5. Ask family and friends when they visit to look over your whole house and take anything they want – telling them beforehand that if it is something that still gives you joy you will be an Indian giver. Of course having a yearly thorough garage sale will also produce perhaps needed income. Even in a recession \$100 for old stuff that we don't need is \$100 more than we had before.

From the other side, even though I adore simplicity of life, I don't need to beat myself up over \$1 more on an item in a restaurant that I prefer to the one that is \$1 cheaper. This is just Scroogeville! I need to totally relax my old bones in my widow friend's swimming pool without once thinking of the starving in India. God wants me to relax. There will still be starving in India even if I gave even more of my large percentage of pension and s.s. to them. But also, God wants me to swim, because being a crabby witch because I never relax is NOT His will!

Are you having fun yet reading this???

Finding The Right People To Talk To

31 May 2011

I am fascinated by buzz words. "To Vent" is an oldie, indeed. As usual, at first I found the expression distasteful compared to "talk" or "communicate." But it has it's utility because it indirectly admonishes us not to live in the stuffy world of our own ideas, which sometimes, become a vicious circle.

What is the difference between venting and gossip?
Sometimes they are synonymous, but not always.

Gossip has several meanings, of course. Some people consider any relating of stories about others to be bad gossip. Others think that talking about people is simply a necessary form of communication. One psychologist said that in business it is the only way to find out what is happening. The bad kind of gossip, that the devil loves, should really better be called detraction – that is where what you say is true but it is divulging what others have a right to have private about themselves. Such gossip is designed to put others down and gloat over their shortcomings. The devil loves to encourage that kind of gossip.



Since I tend toward bad and good gossip, I am usually thinking I would do much better to be silent most of the time. During the summer the kitchen closes at the seminary. I have much more time to be silent if I wish. But then I come upon the not- enough – “venting”- problem. I talk to myself all day and my thoughts are repetitive and often anxious and even dismal. Exactly what venting is supposed to overcome!

So, how can we talk about ourselves and others in a Christian way? Of course, talking to Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the saints, in prayers is always good. Besides, we need to surround ourselves with friends who use conversation as means of either humor or good counsel. Then, even if we start venting out of chagrin, the tables are turned on us, and we wind up with good ideas about how to love ourselves and others better.

Jesus of Nazareth by Pope Benedict

1 June 2011

I bet there are more people out there than admit it who when someone suggests you read a book by the Pope, whether past or present, you think “Well, of course, it will be beautiful, but probably it’s the same thing all over again.”

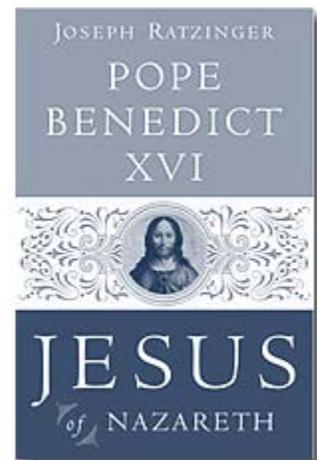
They always fool me! I picked up **Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week, the Scripture study by Pope Benedict for Lenten reading**. It is “lite” in the sense that it’s not like reading Von Balthasar’s heavier tomes. But it’s deep, like reading the thoughts of the saints.

What I found is that we have unconscious uncertainties about certain passages we have heard over and over again. We have gotten clues through the years, but still not a definitive answer. For example, “my God, my God, why have You forsaken me.” I recall years ago reading that it was Jesus’ way of alerting the crowds that he was going to fulfill Psalm 22 with his sufferings and death. Benedict’s style is so warm as well as deep that I had the feeling I was inside his heart as it beat with love for the heart of Jesus.

Here is a sample of such writing:

“Christ, at the Father’s right hand, is not far away from us. At most we are far from him, but the path that joins us to one another is open. And this path is a not a matter of space travel of a cosmic-geographical nature: it is the “space travel” of the heart, from the dimension of self-enclosed isolation to the new dimension of world-embracing divine love.”
—Pope Benedict, XVI.

Want to read the longer explanation of this? Buy or borrow the book.



Arrogance - Remedies

2 June 2011

The dictionary described arrogance as “offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride.”

Of course, if you accuse yourself of arrogance in conversation or in confession, you probably are not arrogant! It goes along with the denial I have been writing about, for sure.

Psychologists would agree that those who display arrogance are almost always covering insecurity. Typical examples would be a man who feels insecure about his masculine image because he doesn't fit the preferred height and muscles, may, unconsciously, deflect attention from his “defects” by a barrage of many syllable words. A woman who feels insecure about her intellectual abilities might enter a room full of savants dressed sexy for similar reasons.



Does that mean that it is arrogant to speak with pungent vocabulary or haughty to dress attractively? How might these traits be displayed in a way that isn't arrogant? On the word question, a person with a genius for great words and phrases, would only need to define each of these while speaking to avoid seeming pompous and over-bearing. A lovely woman could dress well but modestly and glide into the kitchen to help with the eats instead of taking a chair in the middle of the living room and swinging her legs.

Jesus tells us to be like Him: “meek and humble of heart.” People who aren't arrogant may seem superior but they compensate for it so well by affirming others and by laughing off praise of themselves, or attributing all their gifts to God, that anyone who bristles with envy in their presence is displaying their own fault of inferiority feelings.

Overcoming Denial with Insight, Grace and ?????

2 June 2011

Some of you may have read a previous blog about this topic. I am now at a new stage. What I feel called to do is to test out a method on myself, one friend, and any of you who want to try at any level. Here is the plan:

New Way

1. Pick out one negative trait you would like to improve on such as talking less, being less upset about trivial annoyances, smiling more at family, friends and people at work and Church. If you think you are perfect, ask those closest to you what little thing they wish you would do differently.

2. Collect general and personal insights about the negative and positive of this trait such as

- a. talking too much vs. listening better;
- b. upset about trivia vs. overlooking it or working around it;
- c. grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling and friendly.

3. Consider what is the pain from past and present that you compensate for through your negative trait. For example,

a. About talking too much the pain from the past could be feeling inferior when others dominated conversations in the past, so I want to be the speaker even when it is inappropriate. The present pain would be feeling that if I don't make the conversation interesting to me I will be slightly bored or feel that everything is meaningless unless discussions of important things take place.

b. On upset about trivial annoyances – a past pain would be feeling out of control as a child when parents or siblings did annoying and hurtful things to me. A present pain would be not being able to coerce others to act better concerning daily trivial matters.

c. On grouchy or withdrawn vs. smiling, friendly – the past pain would be parental role models of these negative traits. The present pain would be wanting to withdraw after a



hard day or before the day gets harder – being grouchy or withdrawn usually keeps others away.

4. Make a promise such as this: God, I truly want to change, not just to please others, but to get closer to you by becoming a more loving person. I realize that Your grace cannot penetrate my denial mechanisms if I justify every negative trait by excuses. (In my, Ronda’s case, well, if I don’t dominate the conversation no one will learn my God-given wisdom!) I accept the sufferings, small and large, that I will have endure in order let your grace operate more in my life with respect to this trait.

5. Write a personal prayer to Jesus to say whenever you are tempted to exercise the specific negative trait you are working on now such as:

a. Jesus, please pour your love into my heart so that feeling happy about myself I can listen to others instead of trying to dominate all conversations.

b. Father God, thank you for all the blessings of this day. Help me laugh at this trivial annoyance and get on with the rest of my day without over-reacting .

c. Holy Spirit, spouse of the Virgin Mary, show me how to be friendly so that everyone I meet today feel better because they met me, just as I believe people must have felt who met Mary in Nazareth.

6. (Optional but best) Choose a person who sees you often or whom you can call at a set time each day or evening to share victories of grace. One victory a day is a lot if you multiply by 365 days a year! This call should not be analytic, but rather prayerful as in:

“Heh, pal, guess what? Today I had lunch with friends and I let someone else dominate the conversation, by asking friendly questions instead of delivering long speeches myself. “

“Gee, Ronda, praise the Lord. Today I smiled at the kids as they went out the door to school instead of muttering – stay out of trouble kids.”

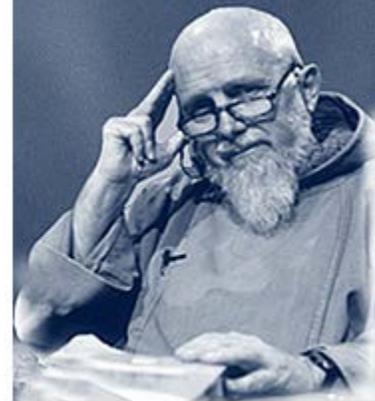
“Have a blessed day tomorrow being not Grouchy Dad but Friendly Dad. I’ll be praying for you.”

It may seem tiny but could it be worse than being stuck with traits everyone finds difficult but puts up with because they have given up hope we will ever change, grace or not????? If you decide to do and feel like posting comments about your progress go ahead, or e-mail me at rondaview@ccwatershed.org

Judging with the Church but still maybe Harshly?

3 June 2011

I came upon one of the latest books by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, one of my all time favorite priests. I met him a few times at conferences where we were both speakers. My favorite memory is one at Franciscan University of Steubenville where he came to speak at a Defending the Faith Conference after recovering from his huge nearly fatal accident. When the audience saw him walking up the path in the speaker's line up to the podium they rose to their feet and applauded. Arriving at podium he remarked wryly "It's kind of funny. An old man walks in front of a bus and he is treated like a martyr!"



His new book is called "Travelers Along the Way" and is an account of his personal encounters with some saints and others he met only once or twice but who changed his life. One of the chapters is about a transgender person. The key point he makes is that even though we are obliged to think with the Church about such wrong acts, including also those in unblessed marriages or active homosexual relationships, we must never forget that Jesus looked at such sinners with love. We should always hope for their conversion.

Reading this, I challenged myself – when I hear or see someone committing sins is my primary emotion love or is it anger? Righteous anger is correct but when there is no love in it? A priest once said to me, "Ronda, I am glad it is not you, but Jesus, who will be judging me when I die."

Someone once said we are supposed to image all of God's attributes but one. Final judgments on the souls of others we must leave to Him alone. Jesus, cleanse my heart of all such judgments to look on others with the merciful love our hero, Fr. Benedict, recommends.

Dietrich Von Hildebrand's book, The Nature of Love

4 June 2011

Many of the readers of CCWatershed know Alice Von Hildebrand through her articles, books, and appearances on EWTN. I was the student of her husband, Dietrich, one of the foremost Catholic philosophers of all times. I am teaching his book, The Heart, this summer in Los Angeles. I am thinking



you'all might like occasional blogs of his most significant ideas as I go along.

Many people think that to want the love of others is selfish and that real love is only the kind where you "give without expecting anything in return" as in working at the soup kitchen.

Here is the fascinating and inspiring way Von Hildebrand thinks about wanting love. Not to want the love of a spouse, a child, or of God, is actually less love rather than more love. Why? Because if we are truly moved with love for the unique preciousness of another person, human or divine, we must want to be united to him or her. We want to be united, not for the satisfaction of benefits for ourselves, but precisely because the goodness in the other draws us. When we love we want the goodness we see in the beloved to flow into us because we see and experience that goodness. This is why admiration is fine, but it is not the same as love. When we admire someone we can be happy to be far from them, but when we love them we precisely want their love to come into us either in romantic love, family love, or love for God.

Was it selfish of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to yearn for the love of Jesus she experienced in the first half of her life as a Sister but lacked the joy of in the latter part of her life?

That doesn't mean that we can demand that the love of another be expressed with a particular flavor, as in, "if you really loved me you couldn't possibly forget our wedding anniversary!" (In the rare times I ever give marital advice, I suggest that women who feel this way should certainly remind their husbands of the date in big bold writing on the bathroom mirror.)

So, with regard to prayer, we cannot tell God that He must show His love for us by granting a particular request, no matter how important. But it is cold and unloving to approach God with a stance like this: "I go to Sunday Mass and I say my morning offering and night prayer of contrition, so You should be pleased with me. I don't need to pray from the heart the way those "sentimental" other Catholics do." Why? Because if we truly love the real God we have to want to be close to Him, not just to do His will better, but also as a foretaste of heaven where there will be no tasks to perform, as such, only to bask in such forms of love as seeing ourselves and others loved by Him to the point of satiety!

You might want to check the web to order Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The Heart*, from St. Augustine's Press or used from Barnes and Noble.

When a Blogger Can't Blog

17 June 2011

Between a 2 day retreat and a day at the airport and jet lag I missed a week of blogging. I began to think I had ceased existing! I blog, therefore I am???

This coincides with my trial of A New Way – see previous blogs on this. The idea is to see if between insight and grace I could cease talking too much in situations where it is not a matter of “teaching” but really using every social situation as a teaching platform. From praying to see what childhood experiences, etc. might be behind that tendency and then praying for healing of those, and then, the big step, trying to be willing to endure the suffering, small and large, it would entail to avoid the sinful or unhealthy pattern – I had quite a week.

The good part is that if you try NOT to go with your usual pattern, you have a different experience of life. Specifically, in my case, I could enjoy more of the beauty of nature at the retreat (this is the Edmundite Retreat Center off Mystic Connecticut on Ender’s Island – a sublime site surrounded by the Long Island Sound). A high point was forcing ourselves to arise at 4:45 AM to pray morning prayer actually seeing the sun rise over the ocean. This beautiful half hour would have been quite different had I been busy formulating words to talk about it at the time. Describing it days later is different.

I also tracked how often I use conversation as a means to “work on” everyone, interjecting subtly and unsubtly into small talk about how they ought to change according to my lights! By the end of a week of observing this pattern I wondered why anyone has ever wanted to be my friend or even an acquaintance! I guess God has graced me with other qualities since I am very loved in spite of this syndrome.

I have one person pledged to work on one of her faults and check things out with me at 10 PM every evening for 5-10 minutes max. If you go back to the blog about A New Way, you can also enjoy this chance at an identity crisis!

Lord have mercy on us all.

Peace as a Fruit of Talking Less

17 June 2011 I have been working on talking less as a part of a self-help program I devised called New Way. Now, I have been a chatter-box for 70 years, so that is no mean trick or grace to improve. And I have also been praying for peace since my conversion 50 years ago with little success – i.e. I only feel peaceful if I get an infused grace for this. What I never thought of was that peace is incompatible with the type of talking too much I engage in usually.

How so? Well, since my conversation is often based on rehearsed lines I plan to use to try to control everyone around me – which, by the way, I am singularly unsuccessful at, this leads to peaceless tension as I plot, execute, and then become angry or sad when I fail. It sounds hilarious but I am betting that some reader of Watershed has a similar syndrome and will benefit from this analysis. Or, you can forward it to some friend or family member who drives you crazy with chatter!!!

So, now one week into talking less I am experiencing a delicious peace – a graced reward for my efforts, I believe.

Try it, you'll like it.

Senora Magdalena

17 June 2011

When I lived in Morganton, N.C., I used to see a tiny woman about 4'8" dressed in Guatamalan attire sitting for hours in the Church in prayer or asleep. Over time I learned her story.

She came to the US with her husband many decades ago and is now the grandmother of a clan numbering in the 70's. She speaks almost no English and little Spanish, but a dialect that few any more understand even in her family. Now a widow, she lives sometimes with one part of the family, other times another – usually with the one with the youngest baby to help. The house she lived in when I moved here is about 5 miles from the Church. There are various cars in the drive way but because the inhabitants are illegal, they only drive these at night to their 24 hour factory jobs.

A frequent communicant, cold winter, or hot blazing summer, Senora Magdalena spends 3 hours of the morning walking to the noon Mass. We daily Mass people with cars can't call her to pick her up because we don't know which of the many houses she is in and, in any case, she doesn't answer the phone. So, whenever we spy her along the streets we pick her up, and we drive her back after Mass to whichever house she wants to go to. To those places she brings food from our parish pantry. In sign language she directs us to these houses.

We have become very fond of her. I was doing a TV series for EWTN on widows and I thought it would be good to take a photo of her to be shone on the show, viewed by 50 million people potentially and the same amount ever time the show is repeated. These were my words when the photo was shown:

As dedicated widows, with Jesus as our Second Bridegroom, we go to daily Mass whenever it is not impossible. I wonder about retired people with cars who find it too difficult to go to daily Mass, when this woman in her 80's walks 3 miles in cold or torrid heat for the privilege of receiving the Body and Blood of her Savior?

Funny and Inspired sayings of my Grandchildren

17 June 2011

The budding musician: When the priest was preaching at Pentecost that the laity should transform the world, I whispered to Max, pianist and composer of 15 years – “later I'll ask

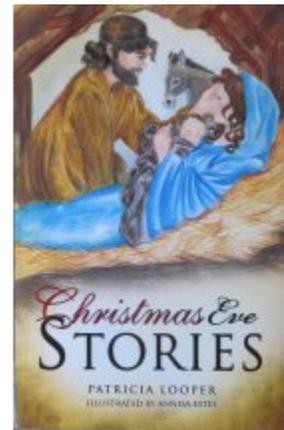
you how music fits with transforming the world.” He replied on the way to the car “That’s simple. Music comes from the Holy Spirit.” Asked whether cacophony came from the Holy Spirit, he replied – “that’s not really music.”

The five year old: I casually mentioned something planned for the next day and asked what her father thought about doing that. “I don’t think Papa likes to think about the future at all.”

Want to put some of your own favorites as comments to this blog?

A delightful Christmas Book for the Whole Family.

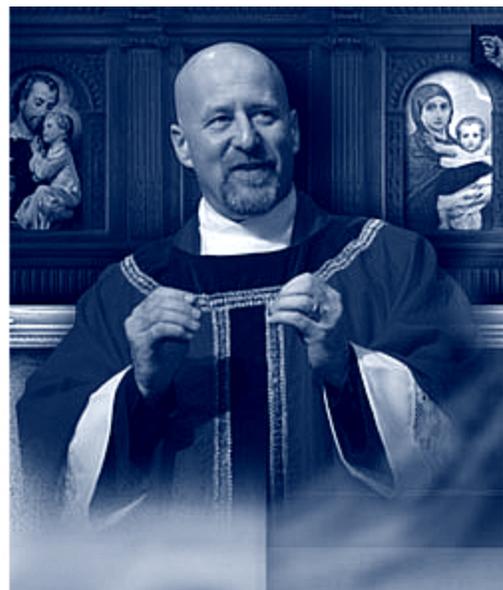
17 June 2011 Pat Looper, a friend of mine and member of a Christian Writing Group I ran in North Carolina a few years back, has published a book of Christmas stories she worked on with us. It is both for adults and children with themes circling around secondary characters in the Biblical account and how the Nativity inspired their lives. Pat has many degrees in theology, so it is not a sentimental book you wouldn’t like. The illustrations are done by an excellent artist.



Check out the description on Amazon. You can order it from them or cheaper through Pat Looper at her e-mail. Here is the information: Pat Looper: Christmas Eve Stories. Her e-mail is 4PBLPAT@bellsouth.net

Inner Healing Retreat at Our Lady of the Rosary in Greenville, SC

21 June 2011 Many days without writing blogs because I was the guest speaker at a wonderful parish. You may the Pastor, Fr. Dwight Longenecker. If not, check out his blog which was the inspiration for mine at gkupsidedown.blogspot.com/. At this parish there is a combination of absolute doctrinal orthodoxy and



beautiful high liturgy with interest in psychological insights. The deacon and his wife are my dear friends and co-authors, Ruth and Richard Ballard. You will be hearing about our forthcoming book from Tan/St. Benedict's What the Saints Say about Heaven:101 Holy Meditations.

It was a wonderful weekend and I will be sharing with you different insights that came out of it. Since one of my talks was based on my NEW WAY method, I went to confession after the talk for harsh judgments of people in denial. Fr. Longenecker referred to the concept of Scott Peck of the People of the Lie. The idea is that many people in denial were brought up to care more about appearance than truth. This means covering up any defects of character with denial or excuses. Anything would be better than, say, admitting I am angry because I am envious of you, etc. etc. Fr. Longenecker suggested that people brought up like me to be honest and open even about negatives in my own character, need to be merciful to those for whom being open and honest could be extremely painful.

More in next blog.

Dependency and Virtue

27 June 2011 Of course all creatures are dependent on God and on others in a multitude of ways. Inter-dependency on other human persons is inevitable, necessary, and something to be extremely grateful for.

Recently I have been thinking of aspects of dependency for widows. I realize that reliance on friends for sporadic helps as in help on visits or on projects is a totally different thing than living-together situations as in long, long, visits, or in community, or in live-in work situations. This is much more like family with all the pluses and minuses where our virtues and our faults impact one another in a daily, wonderful, and usually also chronically negative way.

I was remembering a long visit, as a widow, with a close friend in an emergency situation. Qualities that only mildly bothered me for tiny visits, I would then want to try to help the person change. The seeming motive would be fraternal correction, but also, of course, it would be that they should change to suit my needs. Mea culpa for the last part!

This is one of the main reasons many widows and widowers don't want to live with their adult children. Qualities of the adult children and the in-law spouses that are merely amusing or mildly annoying on short visits, become much more taxing in a committed long term situation.

The big question for all the widows I know is the great desire to live in family because of love and that kind of closeness, measured against the desire, instead, to be free of those kind of conflicts, but with the huge minus of loneliness. After 20 years of widowhood, I

don't think this question has any easy answers or final answers until we are so disabled in older, old age that we are happy to be anywhere that is not just awful and, I am told, in consolation, that at a certain age I might not notice anything at all – from semi-coma to the gates of heaven!

See my web rondachervin.com under Widows: Options for Widows for my latest solution.

Freedom of Spirit

published 28 June 2011 by [Dr. Ronda Chervin](#)

I was waiting in front of a gate at the airport when I heard a violin. There was a shabby character playing country western music. I thought he was soliciting but his case was closed and there was no tin cup. After awhile a few people began to sway and clap. Most paid no attention since they were glued to their iPhones.



Even though country western is not my favorite kind of music I loved this guys freedom of spirit. Between tunes he said he was bored and figured why not do his thing. I praised him greatly and dropped on him some adages about God and music such as “I bet your guardian angel is thrilled when you do this for us. Since 9/11 the airports are so tense.”

It reminded me a little about these You-tubes about opera singers at the Mall performing for free. So wonderful.

We need money to survive, of course, but anything we can do for free is such a sign of the kingdom.

Fear in our Church - the Sadness of It

29 June 2011

A thing that makes me so sad is to see parishioners walk into the Mass and not sure where to sit when they are a group of 3 and there are only two empty places showing this look of fear of sitting, say, up in front where there are more seats because they might make a mistake in their participation in the liturgy, etc.



The good side is reverence leading to not wanting to distract others from prayer by fussily stepping over their legs. We don't want the other extreme of people slouched in the pew chatting away. But I wish, wish, wish that we felt so loved in our parish Church that we couldn't imagine feeling fear just getting into empty seat!

The True Meaning of Leadership

29 June 2011

The Saturday night before Pentecost this year I was at a parish with a large Guatamalan charismatic prayer group. The leaders were trained as lay preachers in Guatamala. They are magisterial and always tell the 250 strong group including many teens, that Mass and Confession are absolutely necessary and the prayer meeting is not a substitute. One of the leaders has a son of 19 in a wheel chair most of his life, totally disabled with a face that register only joy or numbness. He sometimes brings him to the prayer group. When this leader speaks passionately about trust in God he is so credible because of the way fathers this young man.

It is a terrific witness to me. I have found that any words of wisdom I try to offer in talks is always more credible because of surviving my son's suicide without losing faith or becoming bitter.

What is the cross you bear that gives you credibility?

I soon realized that this fits in with my “New Way” work on talking less. Instead of a fifteen minute diatribe about why I was upset, I was able to write an e-mail simply asking my victimizer what he thought about the conflictual scene.

For those of you who read [A New Way](#) which debuted on June 2nd as a blog, I will tell you it is going very well. In Seattle where I talked about it, the pastoral staff had to keep leaving the hall to make extra copies. Tracking my speech patterns and speaking less exteriorly and interiorly had yielded many insights. For example, in general, not in the above instance, when I plan to talk less I am less angry. How do? Because I am not rehearsing in my head vitriolic come-backs.

June, 2013

1 July 2011

Laughing vs. Crying about Senior Moments (The graphic is not a photo of me!)

For the longest time after I turned 60 I felt humiliated and frightened every time I had a senior moment. By 74 I feel a twinge of humiliation and fear but then resort to the Recovery, Intl. (not 12 Step but for anger, anxiety and depression) slogan: “humor is your best friend.”

We seniors like to exchange our senior moments each day and laugh at each other and at ourselves. I am visiting my daughter, Diana, in suburban Redondo Beach, California. Today’s ones of my senior moments, started with driving an unfamiliar car to Mass and shopping. LA, considered to be a hundred suburbs linked by freeways, is challenging for a senior. It amuses me to drive a classy, if old, Mustang convertible. Not at all my style as a pseudo-St. Clare. But I rack up senior moments by the dozens just going 20 minutes away to a delightful Spanish style Church with a hispanic super-magisterial priest. I would not have dropped driving, except for Mass, if the GPS was around 4 years ago. But this Mustang doesn’t have a GPS, so I clutch tightly Mapquest directions on my lap.



Where my daughter lives there are stop signs on every block. Sounds easy. Well not if your head is buzzing with projects. Which of these 3 cars on each corner arrived before I did? Duh! Meanwhile, since it is really my turn, I try to avoid noticing the faces of the drivers in the 3 other cars bewildered and angry that I am not moving. Next comes passing the right

turn onto a big boulevard because 182 street comes right after 179th street, not like in NYC where I grew up where every street number follows the one before or ahead. Now I turn on 181st which turns out to be a dead end. I glance at the clock on the radio panel! Will I be late for Mass? What about that train that comes 2 times a day through a main thoroughfare and keep you waiting 20 whole minutes unless you happen to know how to veer off on side streets?

Big sigh! I made it to Church on time after all. Beautiful Mass, beautiful sermon. Lovely sight of all the ethnic varieties present. LA has 42 Catholic language groups. There is a huge Samoan looking man who stands rigidly in the first row in a trance-like state praying with eyes glued to the tabernacle. By my side is a beautiful hispanic woman decked with about 10 rings and a large gold crucifix. At my other side is an anglo woman of about my age dressed in a blue linen jumper with a Franciscan Tau cross. She, like many others, nods quickly at the peace gesture, hands folded, with a smile to show she is being traditional vs. unfriendly.

But then come more senior moments. Having heard my cell phone vibrate I crouch on the steps of the Church to talk to a friend about arrangements. A tiny woman rushes out of the adoration chapel to chide me that I am bothering the adorers with my loud voice. Why didn't I think of that? Then comes the ride home where I miss another left turn. I wind up where trying to make a left turn across a 4 lane road means trying to beat out traffic from both directions. After ten minutes I resign myself to making a right turn instead and after 2 blocks getting into a turn lane.

The entrance to my daughter's drive way involves scooting across with a left turn. The opposing right lane people have no visibility whatsoever as they are climbing a hill that ends one yard from her driveway. Good young drivers tell me not to worry because they will be driving slowly. "Maybe?" I think as I clutch the wheel and rev up to 50mph across the right lane and screech to a halt in front of my daughter's garage door worrying about how much room by son-in-laws big Dodge needs. He is gone now but when he comes back will he hate me if I have parked too close to his sacred space?

It is only 9 AM and I am strung out with adrenal coursing through my body half dead!

Without my 20 years of Recovery International for anger, anxiety and depression, I would have had to go to confession for vulgar words emitted loudly early in the morning.

Puullleeze, when you spy senior drivers like me, don't curse us, pray for us to give up driving asap. But, would you want us to give up Mass just to make your day less stressful driving behind us?

First Blog from Visit to Corpus Christi at a Watershed Home

1 July 2011 It is many, many years since I was in the living room of the Ridley family, part of the founding team of Watershed. They are among my closest friends. I met them when teaching at Our Lady of Corpus Christi in the early 21st century. They illustrate my favorite Watershed combination: magisterial, deeply spiritual, free-spirited and creative. One of the children is my god-child, John Ridley.



After welcome hugs and a prayer of gratitude in their driveway came ebullient sharings followed by a long bedtime praying together of the luminous mysteries with the youngest, Philip, tucked under Claire’s armpit and Anne and Margaret with colorful books of the mysteries. John, my godchild, was alternately serious and then with droll eyes examined this godmother he has heard of for years but not met since his baptism. Claire prays, even amongst the children, like a contemplative nun – absorbed and focused. This has always impressed me because I can’t sit still for 5 minutes. Jim, the father starts on his knees.

The scene so delighted me that I got distracted and made mistakes when it was my turn to lead a decade.

Whereas any children I have ever seen praying the rosary can’t wait for it to be over, these add favorite Latin hymns ending with some kiddie ones as “dessert.”

I blurted out one of my favorite sentences of Dietrich Von Hildebrand: “The children are the love of the parents made visible.”

10 July 2011

Meeting Watershed People Face to Face Live

It was years of watching Mother Angelica on EWTN before I met her in person. On the screen she seemed funny, smart, and deep. When I had the joy of



being interviewed by her, first about my conversion, I couldn't believe how warm she was with her large compassionate eyes seeming to want to pour love into my frenetic little heart.

"TV is a cold medium" I was told. This means that somehow it doesn't pick up on warmth of character.

I am having the same experience this weekend meeting with Watershed people I only saw on the web, such as some of the composers and singers, including Jeff Ostrowski (I met him once briefly years ago but not so as to remember him well). On the web, several of these musicians seemed to me like a formidable, very formal, imposing characters, perhaps a little austere. One in particular. I doubted he would like me since I am very informal. Meeting him now face to face, Kevin, he is a vibrant warm person, overflowing with joy. No way on the web does Jeff's warm enfolding demeanor come out either.

An analogy – we read about Jesus in the Bible. We picture him through art and films, but what will it really be like when all that totally supernatural love of Jesus will be known face to face in heaven? "Eye has not seen...what God has prepared for those to love Him."

10 July 2011

An Evening Among Friends

Saturday evening I met in person Watershedders Cynthia and the now world famous darling baby (because her parents put photos and videos of her on Watershed all the time). Carmen. As well, at the gathering were my dear old friends Francette and Michael Meaney. For those of you who have seen Cynthia Ostrowski only on the Watershed web and think, as I did, that no one could possibly be that beautiful in real life, she is! But in a wonderful way that beautiful face in repose rather than posing, has a depth and pathos you can't see in the web pictures. I especially liked the way she looked with Carmen in her arms just listening to the others like an icon of motherhood.

Our gathering was at the convent of Sister Anne Sophie who many of you know from her incredible apostolate, the Society of the Body of Christ, with hundreds of lay people helping Sister reach out to the neediest cases in Corpus Christi. I provided editorial assistance for her first book *On the Front Line*. Check the web to get this extraordinary account of Sister Anne Sophie's out-reach to the sick and dying.

Claire Ridley worked for hours and hours on the spread. Michael Meaney, a philosophy professor, filled us all in on some of his most pungent ideas about spirituality. Francette, who founded a terrific pro-life center and boarding house for girls and women, to save their babies, always inspires me greatly by the type of total helping hands and hearts she and her people give to this segment of the world's neediest.

Since the last blog I watched the Fr. Pacwa interview with Kevin Allen, and learned even more of the significance of the Sacred Arts Music apostolate in our times.

11 July 2011

The Nagasaki Christian A-bomb Victims

Someone gave me a book called *A Song for Nagasaki* about Takashi Nagai and scientist, radiologist, convert and survivor of the Atomic Bomb. I was reading it kind of just for more historical understanding of the Japanese experience of WWII, but it is an incredible story of a truly holy Catholic husband, father, and hero.



Nagai was an atheistic playboy scientist whose conversion came through reading Pascal and the prayers of his future wife, a descendant of the families of Nagasaki who were martyred for their Catholic faith. His description of his life before his conversion is illuminating because I always had the stereotype of Japanese men as ridiculously Stoic. It was good to read about his passion for truth and his deep longing for the love of his saintly future wife. Also, I didn't realize that there were Japanese even in the army in the war with China before WWII who were questioning unjust wars.

If you get this book (Ignatius) you will see how he became a fervent Catholic and incredibly sacrificial doctor before and after the A-bomb. Here is a sample of his beautiful ideas as described by Fr. Lynn, author of his biography: "The navel is the reminder that our body and our life are gifts from another. Nature has placed this sign in the very center of our bodies, where we cannot fail to see it. It is a symbol of the love, goodness and heroic sacrifices of our mothers. Nagai saw mothers as images of God and grace."

In a most extraordinary way he led the remnant who survived the A-bombing of Nagasaki to think of this as a holocaust where they were sacrificed to bring about the totally unexpected unconditional surrender of the Emperor. The people wanted to die instead fighting to the point of total annihilation for their Emperor, but the Emperor conceded to save his country. Nagai thought that graces from Mary saved the remnant to, hopefully, bring about through the reality of the horror of war the abandonment the characteristic Japanese military pride in favor of peace.

11 July 2011

Later Life Meetings with Siblings

Mostly I see my sister at family reunions. There we act out our admiration and love for each other as well as our tensions before an audience. This year we thought we would both go to a place we love just together and see if we could do better.

I am thinking that some of my observations could fit the case with any visits of adult siblings.

One of the best parts is being with someone who intimately knew our parents who have, as the Irish sometimes say, “gotten away from us” to eternity. We think we both admired and loved the same things and disliked and even hated the same things, but usually it is different. This gives us a chance to re-evaluate. Oh, maybe old Mom or Dad did this and that for a reason my sibling knew about and I never knew about. This can be healing.

We could be alike in certain characteristics but exercise these in quite different ways. For example, one might be obedient to genuine authorities when it comes to large vistas and plans and ideas and the other generally rebellious about those. But the other might be very obedient about liturgical practices or refinements of manners where the other is sloppy and sometimes offensive! Without directly confronting one another could we observe and learn where we need to?

After 4 days it reminded me of marriage where even if each one gives 100% there are still inevitable annoyances and conflicts. But, also, like in a good marriage, it is worth it because of those great virtues of the other, known over so many decades!

How wonderful it will be to be “family” in heaven, by repentance and God’s grace, to only experience the good! Lord, have mercy on us all!

12 July 2011

Redeemed Ecology a la Pope Benedict

There is a pattern revealed in Church history in the past few centuries if not



further back. The culture comes up with something crazy seeming like women's lib and most Catholics totally reject it. But, then, a few decades afterwards the Church comes up with a redeemed Christian version such as Christian Feminism. When I first saw this term, in the writings of JP II, I thought some translator smuggled it in. No! It was genuine and now is an accepted Catholic philosophy of the feminine.

In a similar way, I just learned, the Church is redeeming ecology, often mocked as a label for tree-huggers who don't care about babies only about the whales, etc. etc. Read this from Benedict XVI:

“What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of new life-styles ‘in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings, and investments.’” It is within this quest which is a desire for truth, goodness and beauty that ultimately leads to the foundational principle of an integral human development in relation to God.

Integral human development is closely linked to the obligations which flow from man's relationship with the natural environment. The environment must be seen as God's gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations.

An example he gives is that the forests that are stripped of trees for profit will not be there for future generations. I, for one, never thought of that.

14 July 2011

Pessimism - Not a Virtue

If you have been following these blogs you know I am on a new adventure with grace called A New Way (see blog of June 2nd). I am doing very well with a partner for accountability. She is doing clutter and I am doing talking too much. Another friend wants to work with me on pessimism. Here are segments of my first e-mail with her just in case you have problems with pessimism or others have problems with your pessimism!

“Dear X, Here is my plan for my pessimism. Each day when I wake up I will think of one thing that is likely to go wrong this day. Then I will consider that there is at least a 50/50 chance it



will go better than I think. I will report to you how it went when I didn't go in glumly pessimistic to that situation as well as any other observations the Holy Spirit sends me. You can try whatever way you think would help you.

Also let's identify the basic root of my pessimism that needs healing by Jesus. In my case I remember being a cheerful optimist as a child even after my father left us because I was closer to my mother and sister in any case. I started getting pessimistic in High School. I was skipped 2 years so I was younger and gauche among the other girls who were older and more attractive. I began to feel inferior. They were 170 IQ kids at that school. I was 137. I gradually raised my grades up from 85 to 94 % but until that 94% I was treated, I thought, by the other kids as a marginal dunce.

The relationships I had with boys and men in college before my conversion were mostly sinful. My first real rejection by a young man I adored was because even though he loved me, he wanted to marry a rich doctor's daughter who could advance his career one day as a doctor. He was pre-med. This shattered my romantic ideas about relationships with men.

I guess that's plenty to explain why I became pessimistic, eh?

Now, what would be my prayer for healing: Dear Jesus, You, not the world, should be our reason for hope. You brought me hope in you and in eternal life. Help me also to have hope that even if people and things are often disappointing that everything will be good in terms of your Providence because you bring good out of every evil.

So, going into this day. I am at an Institute teaching in LA that has mostly priest teachers and priest students. I am the new girl on the block. So my pessimistic thought, in spite of being such an extrovert super-friendly person myself, is that they will all reject me and I will have a miserable 7 weeks living here, except when I escape on the weekend to my loving daughter's place an hour away. Instead I am going to think: more than 50% of the time I do make friends in new places – not everyone becomes a friend, but some. Jesus, let me wait hopefully for one of these new people to like me. Okay, for starters the head of the program loves my work, which is why he hired me, and he is super-friendly!

So, I sent this off early this morning and already at breakfast there were two very friendly priests who I talked to and who seemed to like having me among them. A proof that my original pessimism was wrong. But, perhaps, if I had walked into the dining room emanating anxiety, they wouldn't have been so friendly. I think when we are willing to try to change, the Holy Spirit loads us up with examples of how bad it can be the way we are, and how good when we open to change.

15 July 2011

Attitudes toward those of other Religions

At the institute I am teaching at this summer in LA there are many shelves of books collected over decades. When I come to a new place I pray to the Holy Spirit to find me something to read that is not part of my teaching. This time I took one called “The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, A Jew – Three Women Search for Understanding.” I figured with such a title it was probably written by women who had in common a less than traditional relationship to their religions, but that I might learn something from reading it anyhow, especially about Islam, about which I know very little.



The book relates the gist of conversations 3 women in the New York City area conducted in the course of trying to write a children’s book about their three faiths rooted in the one God.

I am learning. For example, I never considered what it might feel like to be a truly moderate modern Muslim woman living in the US with a strong love of God and neighbor, and having to be identified the moment she mentions her faith as part of what most of us now think of as a terrorist religion! Besides feeling herself to be the brunt of that stereotype, she is having trouble finding a mosque to attend since the mosques are full of what she considers to be extremist fanatics. Could she, and others like her, be feeling the way we, pro-lifers, do when someone casually assumes that all those in front of abortion clinics are only interested in yelling that abortion is murder rather than in saving babies and helping the mothers?

Reading the words of the Jewish woman, very culturally Jewish, but like many modern Jews not even sure there is a personal God, pierced my heart. So many Catholics think we don’t have to evangelize Jews because, from years of hearing passages from the O.T., they think Jews are like Isaiah or Esther. A rabbi teaching Jewish roots at the LA seminary told me that surveys show that only about 10 % of Jews in the US believe in a personal God! Others hope there is such a God, especially when they are facing the death of others or themselves, but really most of them live in great confusion about God even if they still attend services 2x a year – like Catholics nowadays who go only at Christmas and Easter to Church but still pray?

The ex-Catholic Episcopal woman, who I thought would be a totally watered down Christian comes out rather well because she really does believe that Jesus was God and that He is our redeemer and manages to have a good influence on the other two women.

Waking up after reading a few chapters of the book made me want to pray much more earnestly for all those represented by these three. Since I assume that most of those who frequent the Watershed web to are Catholics, I want to ask you how much you pray for those of other faiths except when those people are in your own family?

Here is what I am praying this morning: Dear Jesus, you prayed that all would be one. May our witness as members of the one, true, Church truly be a light for those who are seeking God, our Father, by different means, or in Christian churches who see much of the light but are still not united with us.

16 July 2011

Wearing a Crucifix

When I was a little girl in NYC in the early 1950's every Catholic wore a gold or silver crucifix about 1 to 1 1/2 inches and many Catholic teen-agers had rosaries dripping out of their pockets. So, when I became a Catholic this was a sign of my new identity.



Right after Vatican II there was a big change. Within a few years Catholics started wearing silver or gold chains around their necks with no crucifix. Symbolic?

Those Catholics who were in the new charismatic groups, however, started wearing big wooden crosses without the corpus. Symbolic?

After a few years of the big wooden cross, I went back to the crucifix. As these got lost, I'd keep getting larger ones. My husband used to quip – "at this rate, someday, you'll be walking down the street with a life-sized cross!"

At the same time many Sisters went out of habits, and many priests stopped wearing clerics in public. Symbolic?

Now, as a dedicated widow, I wear a big crucifix and a blue jumper. Some people assume I am a Sister. The ones who admire Sisters are very friendly to me and treat me better than they otherwise might, for instance at check-out counters. In the Bible belt where I used to live, non-Catholic Christians look at the corpus and say "that's a pretty necklace." I take it to mean that even though they don't wear crucifixes they want me to know they love Jesus.

I respond with something like, “Oh, isn’t Jesus wonderful?” Strangers with bad memories of Sisters scowl at me.

I don’t know why so many magisterial lay Catholics, men and women, don’t wear a crucifix again since it is one of the easiest ways of witnessing without even talking. What do you think?

17 July 2011I

Evangelization and New Age

have followed some of the controversy about Harry Potter books and movies but not actually read any of the books or seen any of the movies. Some friends took me to the last one yesterday. It was 3 D and shown in a fantastic Hollywood Mall area.

Of course the tech part and the nature scenes were fabulous. I kept wondering what The Passion, or Lord of the Rings would have been like with this 3 D, much advanced since 3D first came out in my youth. During the long movie I kept thinking – this is a form of gnosticism (Gnosticism was a name for a variety of heresies in the early Church times that combined all kinds of pagan elements with Christianity) for surely this included many Christian symbols and plot elements with magic and other bad elements in the hands of the good guys. Then I compared it with Narnia and Lord of the Rings and thought it was a kind of version of those without the same kind of depth of Lewis and Tolkien, but then the movies of these Christian favorites have little of the depth of the actual books. At least I think so.

When I left the movie I asked one of the priests in the group “does it seem to you like bridge to Truth for young people, or a substitute? He said he thought most young people took it as a substitute. I am going to send this blog to some of my grandsons, who saw or will see the movie, and see what they think.

Decades ago when E.T. first came out there were Jews for Jesus standing outside the movie theaters handing out leaflets proclaiming that E.T. was really Jesus because of E.T.'s “resurrection.” I thought these Jewish believers in Jesus are pretty smart. Why don’t Catholics do things like that? Any ideas how?

A comment from Ronda’s college age grandson:

“I have yet to see the most recent (Harry Potter) movie but I have seen the other ones. But to answer the question I don’t think it is necessarily either (a bridge to Christianity or a New Age substitute). I think for most kids it’s just completely separate. I think they take it and enjoy it for the effects and maybe the plot and characters etc, but I don’t think they necessarily even relate it to their real life in any way.”

from the same grandson of Ronda's:

“After being intrigued enough to read up on the matter a bit, there’s a number of interviews where the author of the books, JK Rowling, describes the series as an allegory of how she came to understand her own religious beliefs when she was younger. As she’s now a devout Christian, it would make sense that the series would contain various signs of Christian symbolism.

Like I said, I haven’t seen past Part 3, but the interviews do imply that Harry’s coming of age is symbolic of her own struggles with coming to terms with her religion when she was younger.

18 July 2011

Types of Pride I Never Thought Of

At the International Institute of Tribunal and Theological Studies, Msgr. Chaffman summarized ideas he found about types of pride. I thought they would interest you.



1. **Pride of Timidity** – this is where from fear of not being perfect we can’t stand being prominent. It can come from being criticized too much as a child, but basically it is pride to think we could be perfect and to feel terrible that we may be shown not to be perfect. Ronda’s comment: my godfather used to say that we should see ourselves as weak little creatures and humbly confess to God during the day “Well, that’s what I’m like. I make mistakes. I have faults. Help me.” The opposite is self-hatred because I am not perfect.

2. **Pride of Sensuality** – A romantic urge for self-gratification; too much need for affection. Ronda: Maybe what “pride of life” means in Scripture? The pride comes in because we think we merit lots of lots of pleasure and affection vs. having our minds on how to serve others?

3. **Pride of Sensitivity** – seeing oneself as a victim. Ronda: used to be called ‘touchiness.’ Again, it is as if others have to suffer due to original sin, etc., but I should have a charmed life?

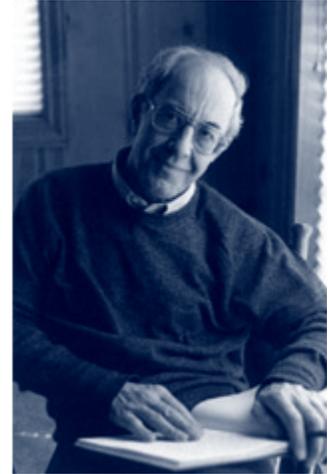
4. Pride of Dictatorship – this is obvious and the one we mostly identify as pride. A form of this common nowadays is what is called micro-managing.

Well, that will be enough to provide you and I with matter for Confession!

19 July 2011

A beloved daughter or son of God?

The same priest I mentioned yesterday in my blog is teaching a course on the thought of Henri Nouwen. For any of you who do not know him, Henri was a Dutch psychiatrist-priest who came to the US and taught at Yale but then left teaching and joined the L'Arche movement where those with so-called mental disabilities live in the same houses with others who Jean Vanier and Fr. Thomas Philippe (founders of L'Arche) considered to be way ahead of most of us in their ability to love God and neighbor.



Msgr. Chaffman, the professor who will teach Nouwen, quoted him with this formulation:

Ask yourself,

“Who am I?”

What other people say I am?

What I do?

What I possess?

or

the beloved of God?

This sounds self-evident that we think we are the beloved of God more than the first 3 choices. But, consider! How miserable do we get when insulted by others? How eager are we to introduce ourselves by our professions and accomplishments? How much do we envy others their possessions?

Sometimes when I give talks where I am announced with all my degrees and books, a woman will approach me after the talk to make a comment proceeding it with this phrase, “Of course, I am only a housewife, but....” I stop her immediately and ask how many children she has? Then, I say, “which one of those children would you like to trade in for a book with your name as author? A book that will eventually be relegated to the dumpster vs. a child who will live for all eternity?”

800

A friend challenged me today about this? Do you think people only love you because of your teaching and books? Not just because you are you? I am going to stop writing this minute and run to the chapel and just sit and ponder blissfully that my real name is not Dr. Ronda but beloved daughter of God.

21 July 2011

Turning Greetings into Witness Moments

A repetitive situation I dislike is when people return to a learning institution after a vacation and everyone asks “how was your summer?” They want to hear, “terrific,” but really my summer might have been difficult, but if I say so it seems inappropriately personal, and just saying “glad to be back” seems kind of evasive!

I have a wonderful friend, Dorothy, in North Carolina. Whenever I visit my family there, I am shocked anew because whenever you ask this woman, who is in chronic sometimes acute pain most of the time, “how are you, Dorothy?” she responds, “I’m good with God!”

I realize that she is turning a conventional neutral moment into a graced witness moment, since her answer forces us to stop complaining about our lesser aches and pains and to think of God.

You might want to think of an answer to “how are you?” that fits your personality and would be as refreshing. For now, when people ask me about my summer I’m going to copy Dorothy and say, “it was good with God.”

22 July 2011

Let's not be pessimistic about our Church

I am giving talks at a Church in Hollywood. By 8 AM there are countless homeless people on line waiting to get vouchers for a Mac Donald’s breakfast. They also come in during the Mass to the vestibule to use the restrooms to clean up. It felt so wonderful that while the Mass was being celebrated I could see these woe-begone people finding help from our Church as they stood in line for the bathroom!

Another inspiring sight was the consecration performed by an elderly priest whose arms are limp from some disease – so he has to grasp the Eucharist with both hands as best he can! He so obviously is praying that he won’t be retired because of this. Here he is pastor and he can do lots of things that are very important that he couldn’t do if he became only a helper priest at another parish. For example, he hosts young people in an old building who are discerning vocations. They volunteer at the parish while thinking about the future. It is wonderful to see some 5 young men praying their hearts out in deep silence before the

Mass. Oh, these are hi-tech young men who do liturgy of the hours off nooks or kindles, or iPhones!



25 July 2011

Listening vs. Arguing

I have a relative who doesn't go to the Sacraments but does pray a lot and is very loving. This relative was asking me if I thought God loved her in spite of not going to Church.

I said yes and I was about to go into a long argument about how not going to Church is rejecting the love Jesus has for one and not letting Him come into one with His Body and Blood.

802



Instead I just kept listening to this person’s reasons for not liking to go to Church.

The relative then said, “You know, usually whenever I talk about religion you jump down my throat angrily. This time you just listened. That meant so much to me.”

I think this is related to my big push to talk less (see A New Way, June 2 Blog). What a dividend!

I must watch for this. No matter what splendid retorts I have on different Church matters, it might not always be the right thing to enunciate them. Sometimes we need to just listen, especially with family members.

The next thing my relative said was how running to Mary helps so much because she understands!

Thank you, Mary.

26 July 2011

Creativity and Security

My daughters, Diana and Carla, were terrific artists when they were children. They were so good that, since we owned the house, we let them “fresco” the walls of their bedroom with delightful funny pictures. I still recall the parent of one of their little friends marveling that any parents would let kids do such a thing!

Carla went on to be a poet primarily. Diana writes wonderful comic narratives about family events, but also is now going back to art. She is doing great

Chagall/Van Gogh like paintings. I love them. She refuses to take art lessons to “perfect” them because that would ruin the fun. Her house looks a lot like the Ridley’s house – Watershed leaders in Corpus Christi – in case you have been there.

I am visiting her off and on this summer in LA while teaching elsewhere. She recently bought a huge wooden low bureau for \$10 at a yard sale to paint up. Here is a photo of what she has done. I love the sheer spontaneity of them, the freedom, the love of color and love of God’s creation they display. But some people think it is just crazy: “you should paint on canvasses, not bureaus!” (Now in 2013 I find that this is a new genre called furniture art.)



It brought to mind long reflections I have made about conformity and non-conformity. I am convinced that hatred of non-conformity comes from a very understandable and even correct intuition that without a certain degree of conformity there would be no safety at all. If you didn't expect that most people will not kill you when they got angry... you couldn't budge out the door. Along these lines is the fact that the custom of shaking hands was started centuries ago, supposedly, to prove you didn't have a knife in your hand!

Parents, in the hippie era, associated long hair and full beards with drugs and draft-dodging. Thus non-conformity was associated with something much more dangerous than hair. This explains why, still, I can't get any mileage out of telling my seminarians that since they will be alter-Christus' as priests, they should try to look like him with long hair and beards.

Anyhow, if you catch the fire, think about painting old bureaus. If you have kids, they will love it!

28 July 2011

Security or Jesus?

I was running through fantasies about secure futures for myself in my older, old age. I wanted a priest mentor to help me think this through. After a while it just became apparent that the problem wasn't which one would be better but that the desperate search for security in the future is a symptom of lack of trust in God. Not, of course, that we shouldn't plan and look into things, but the enterprise of dangling 5 possible options with A-Z on each one has to be foolish if not also an offense to God.

I heard the Holy Spirit ask me: "So if you had a choice between security or Jesus, what would you pick?" Of course, Jesus. The priest remarked: "there is a simpler word for this: faith!"



Later, in Confession, another priest gave me Ven. Charles de Foucauld's Prayer of Abandonment which includes these wonderful lines: "Father...do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you."

31 July 2011

Changing language; changing thoughts

Years ago I tried writing a book called *Screwtape Comes to the Seminary* based on Lewis' famous Screwtape Letters. In one of the chapters I explained how each of the polarized groups in the Church has its own language so that you can tell very quickly where a person is coming from based on phrases he or she uses often. For example, contrast Mother Mary with the Holy Immaculate Virgin.

Recently the one I am noticing is how in some circles "sin" went from being called "problem" to now being called "issue." As in she or he has an issue where previously it was expressed as he or she is lazy or rude.

The intent is often to be charitable. To say someone is lazy or rude sounds so blunt and judgmental! God forbid we would use the word "fat." It is certainly true that some of us, mea culpa, who tend toward harsh judgment will use the worst word possible to describe others we disapprove of, and we need to realize this is not charitable!

So? I suggest that when talking about our own sins we break the euphemism habit by using the real word. It will be a step out of denial as in "I am a chatter-box," "I am a gloomy party-pooper," "I am a smotherer micro-manager."

Then we can enjoy the response which is usually, "Aw, come on Ronda, after all, you also have lots of virtues, otherwise we wouldn't love you so much."



4 August 2011

The Glories of Parenting Babies

Jeff Ostrowski, President of Watershed, asked me to contribute a blog on babies. This takes me back many decades but is still relevant.



I was a twin and we were the only children in our family. I knew almost nothing about babies when my twins were born in 1962. It was before breast-feeding was revived in our country. It would have so much more convenient to feed them simultaneously, one at each breast, instead of one after the other as in 1:30 AM feed little Carla; 2:45 AM feed little Diana. That is, Mama never sleeps more than a half hour at a time! Happily when my son was born La Leche League was alive and well. I loved it. I developed the analogy (limping to be sure) that my body was like Jesus' Eucharist body. My milk was so good it could nourish a baby, just as the Eucharist is so good it can nourish our souls.

The birth of our twins was a revelation to my husband who was 46 at the time. He had always wanted to be a father. As he carried the babies in his arms for the first time he got a realization of how God the Father must love us, His children.

By the twins' six month of life, however, we became acquainted with a sign that innocence is not forever. One twin pulled out most of the hair of the other. This took place in their playpen when one was jealous because the other learned how to stand up first! We were flabbergasted. We have a of the bald twin which neither of them enjoy seeing!

Thank you, Lord of heaven and earth, and have mercy on us in our fallen natures.

7 August 2011

The Spiritual Classics

I am presently working on a course for Holy Apostles, for seminarians and other students, on the Spiritual Classics. So I am off and running assembling excerpts from the spiritual classics. Here is the draft of the table of contents:

**St. Augustine's Confessions
St. Benedict's Rule
St. Bernard – from Song of Songs
St. Francis – Little Flowers
from St. Bonaventure
St. Gertrude
Blessed Julian(a)
St. Catherine of Siena
Thomas A Kempis
The Cloud of Unknowing
St. Ignatius**



St. Teresa of Avila
St. John of the Cross
St. Francis De Sales
Brother Lawrence
St. Therese of Lisieux
Sts. Kolbe, De Montfort, Liguori on Mary
Ven. Conchita
St. Faustina

Also excerpts from
Von Hildebrand
Merton
The Way of the Pilgrim
Nouwen
Escriva
Gabrielle Bossis

8 August 2011

Themes in the Spiritual Classics

I thought I would convey to readers of this Watershed blog what is coming through to me as I work on my anthology of excerpts from the spiritual classics.

I start with Augustine’s Confessions. The aspect that always hits me first when I teach this great book is how personal it is. It is the first autobiography in the history of Western Civilization. It fits well with my favorite Old Testament Scripture passage: “You are called by name.”

This conviction is the opposite of some sort of vague image of being some sort of employee of God, one of many coming off a kind of cookie-cutter to do a certain work in the history of the universe, judged only by merits, not cherished as an individual daughter or son of God.

The second aspect of the Confessions I love the most is how when this great philosopher gets stuck he just calls upon the God of truth and begs Him to resolve the problem. Since Augustine didn’t report audible answers, we must presume that what he writes next after asking the question, he attributed to the Holy Spirit. Although one cannot judge such answers to be infallible due to the



ambiguity about messages from on high, it is certainly possible that Augustine's wisdom was mostly from on high since he is a Doctor of the Church.

When we are stuck on a theological or philosophical problem, why wouldn't we run to the God of truth?

11 August 2011

Gratitude

My godfather, Balduin Schwarz, spent the last decades of his life working on an analysis of the meaning of gratitude. He was a philosophy professor who fled Germany because of the Nazi regime, taught for years at Fordham University in New York City, and then became the Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Salzburg.



When I met him in 1959 while I was studying at Fordham it was a given that young people like me would complain bitterly about the shallow values of people in the USA in contrast to the depth of European thought, music, art. He would respond by expressing his undying gratitude for this country of freedom where he had found asylum during the time of the evil regimes of Nazism and Communism, results of a culture that had largely lost the foundations of perennial truth and Christian faith.

As he worked on his book on gratitude, Balduin Schwarz was greatly impressed by the fact that a foundation in Dallas, Texas had constructed in a big mall something called Thanksgiving Square where busy shoppers could stop and express gratitude to God in a chapel.

Schwarz's main theme was that the gifts of God and from others are not really opened until we are grateful because it adds immeasurably to our joy to know that the good things are gifts of love for us from God and others. Here are some quotations from the manuscript of his book that I use when I teach gratitude in my courses in Philosophy of the Human Person:

From Balduin Schwarz on Gratitude:

“Wonder... opens up our dialogue with reality; or rather, takes it up and continues it, since reality has already spoken the first word in addressing us as persons... There comes then into being a dialogue between that which ‘speaks to us’ and our soul which receives it. For

this to take place, we must open ourselves inwardly to what is given to us, cooperate with it, 'go along with it,' bring it to completion in ourselves, work together with it.'

'Humility is truth. It is metaphysical truth. I affirm myself as a created self.'

"Atheism doesn't only intellectually deny the existence of God but lives as if God didn't exist. At the root of atheism is despair: an antithesis to gratitude'

'Through gratitude, I hold onto the gifts I have received. I remain awake to them. Gratitude is a form of remembering. Gratitude is the way the heart remembers'.

14 August 2011

Miscellaneous

A wonderful sermon today for the Assumption of Our Lady. The priest described Armstrong landing on the moon and saying "one small step for me and one giant leap for mankind." (I didn't get it exactly, but I am sure you know it.) He compared it to Our Lady's leap into heaven to be the first purely human with a resurrected body in heaven.

A totally banal but intriguing little incident. I was in a car on the freeway. We went down an unfamiliar off-ramp for me to use the restroom. The driver filled up his tank. The door to the restroom had a big sign: Only for customers. Get the key. So, I went up to the cashier and brusquely said, "We are not buying anything in the store, but my drivers are filling up with gas. The cashier said "No!"

I was absolutely startled. Then he laughed and said, "All you have to do is say 'Please!'" I laughed and apologized for not having said "please."

Back in the car we talked about whether this fell under light fun or maybe was a trifle sadistic given the bathroom needs of elderly travelers.

14 August 2011

Priorities

I had a beautiful day. In Duarte, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, there is a wonderful order of Carmelites – nuns and friars. Among other apostolates, the nuns run a retirement home called Avila Gardens. Unlike some such homes where there seems to be much emphasis on distraction rather than becoming more holy, this place is redolent of piety and love of God and neighbor.



That is their priority! If you are an older person looking for such a place, check it out on the web.

I came to give a talk based on my book *Seeking Christ in the Joys and Sufferings of Aging*. (you can find it on my web: rondachervin.com). At the end of the talk I told the group that I would be around for more questions. A woman in a wheel-chair with a breathing tube in her nostrils seemed to want to talk to me. I walked over to her table. With a look in her face very unlike affirmation or questioning she exclaimed: “You are blocking my plug!” I leaped out of the way and then smiled. I guess if you can’t breath without a tube you would be more concerned with that than with whether it is relaxing, in old age, not to have to go to PTA meetings anymore!

18 August 2011

Short Spiritual Images

Two images given my spiritual directors many years ago came to mind. I still find them insightful and compelling.

The first is that we would like to think of our spiritual journey as running straight up a road to the top of the mountain. More realistic is that we run a few steps, get caught in the brambles of our sins and defects. Jesus comes down the mountain and extricates us from the thorns and we start again and move up until we fall into another bramble-bush.

The second is again that we want to run straight up a road to the top of the mountain but, instead the road spirals around to the top. When we come to the same vista we think we have made no progress but really we are seeing the same thing from a higher part of the mountain. That is, we come to the same conflict scenario and we feel discouraged but we are approaching that problem from a place of higher insight.

The last insight I recalled yesterday in conversation was not an image. At times in our lives when we have seemingly endless interruptions we think that we are being thwarted in our true vocation, but eventually, sometimes, we realize the Holy Spirit is telling us: “Your interruptions are your vocation!” That is, helping people in small ways could be more important in our growth in love than finishing our projects.



19 August 2011

Whose Church is the Church?

At St. Victor's Church in Hollywood there is a huge replica of the Cross that spoke to St. Francis of Assisi, except it is even more Byzantine looking. I was looking at it just before the morning Mass. Several of the street people who come to a place in the back of the Church for vouchers for MacDonald's breakfasts wandered into the Church and spent several minutes gazing at the beautiful cross and at the other statues. Some stayed for Mass and others drifted off.

It reminded me of Churches in Catholic countries where all day long people come into Church to pray. When non-believers talk as if our beautiful churches come from the priestly caste exploiting the poor, I say, "You've got it wrong. The Church doesn't belong to the priest. The poor see the Church as their celestial living room."



It seems touching to me that nowadays here in our non-Catholic country it is the poor of the streets that now gaze with awe and interest at the pictures, statues, and crucifixes in our Church and, of course, we poor in spirit love to be in our celestial living room other days as well as Sundays.

23 August 2011

Overcoming Polarity

I am working on an article about attitudes toward polarities in the Church. Here is a draft of the start of it.

Polarization in the Church: Despair or Hope?

The on-line dictionary defines polarization as “a sharp division, as of a population or group, into opposing factions.”

Here are some of the most obvious opposing factions in the Catholic Church today:

Magisterial Catholics vs. Dissenting Catholics (and those who never dissent in public but create loopholes for disobedience to doctrinal or moral teachings)

Liturgical classicists vs. Liturgical innovators

Charismatics vs. Anti-Charismatics

Group joiner Catholics vs. Sunday Mass only Catholics

Activist Catholics vs. Quiet Catholics

Peace and Justice Emphasis Catholics vs. Pro-Life Emphasis Catholics

Mystical Catholics vs. Faith only Catholics

Others?

I realize that just the way I have phrased these divisions is controversial, but try to read on even if you dislike even the wording since you probably know the basic issue that is being addressed.

Catholics also disagree about what to do about this polarization. Here are a few options. You may not fit into any of these options, or you might have variations on attitude 1 about some of the polarities but take attitude 2 options on one or more of other polarities.

1. Increase the Polarization

“What we need is not interminable phony dialogue, but a schism. There is no common ground between “us” and “them.” We should form our own separate Churches, on either side calling it “the real Catholic Church.”

or, for the less revolutionary:

“We just have to wait until ‘they’ die out.”

Or, in addition:

“we can do everything we can to push the other side out such as pressing, when applicable, for ex-communication, persecution through firing anyone on the other side from positions where their views could be influential, or that failing, shunning or sarcasm or humor that others find derisive.”

2. Try to Overcome Polarization wherever we can:

“we should love everybody including “enemies” within the Church. To do this we need to avoid stereotyping in thoughts and words. For example, we don’t need to think or talk about charismatics as “Holy Rollers.” As an exercise, go through the list of polarities given

above and think of the stereotypes that each side uses in describing the other side. As peace-makers we need to avoid those thought patterns.”

“not assume automatically that someone who thinks “A” also thinks B,C....all the way to Z. Instead listen carefully to see what those on the “other side” really think about many topics and practices.”

“accept the pain of disagreement and offer it as a penance toward reconciliation.”

31 August 2011

After the Storm

I have not written a blog in more than a week. First I was leaving Los Angeles to go back to Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Connecticut where I teach. Then, I had no sooner unpacked and finished my errands when Hurricane Irene hit.

Fr. Dennis Kolinski, one of our priests from the John Cantius Society whose seminarians study here, remarked just before the storm “It’s good. It shows us that we are not in control.” I didn’t like hearing that at all! The fear of the storm reminded me of news photos of people being lifted off their roofs into helicopters during Katrina in New Orleans. That was a moving image of loving compassion, but I certainly didn’t want to be the protagonist victim of such a scenario.



It was also going to be different than earthquakes of the past where I was protected by family. Yes, there are more than a hundred strong men here at the seminary, but none of them would be in my room when the predicted 80 mile an hour winds would keep me trapped inside! I happen to live in a “cell” within a large house, but my room is the only one facing out with no halls connecting me to the others whose masculine quarters constitute a semi-cloister. It felt awful being the only quaking female amongst all these stalwart men who pride themselves on fearlessness! The other women living on campus are 12 Vietnamese nuns all together in a separate house.

Whether by grace or nature, the hurricane dwindled to a tropical storm by the time it hit at 6 AM Sunday morning. No one was hurt, power outages mostly took out the net connections but not the lights. I kept reminding myself of my own teaching that the proof that for anyone “God alone is enough” is that we are not disturbed by earthly occurrences! Humbling, therefore, to have to see how fearful I could be!

The rector had all able-bodied seminarians of all ages and nationalities drag off the branches from the fallen trees, which, apparently saved us \$10,000 it would have cost to hire professionals!

Today, after 3 1/2 days, the net is up and I can write blogs again. A good result is that I will never be surprised when I hear of good Catholics being fearful or angry when threatened by or in natural disasters!

4 September 2011

In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no North or South

At the seminary for late vocation men where I teach we have many seminarians from countries where the US was once in enmity. Even though the communist government allows the Churches in such countries to be open it is almost impossible for the seminarians to get ordained because of “regulations.” They say, however, that some of the spies, who attend Mass every Sunday to make sure the priest doesn’t say anything political, eventually convert.

So, among these foreign seminarians are Cistercian monks. I am putting together an anthology of spiritual writings from the classics and working on St. Bernard, twelfth century famous Cistercian. And I am thinking that paragraphs like this sound so overly emotional to 21st century minds. This comes from St. Bernard’s commentary on the Song of Songs and is a reflection on the ointments mentioned in this lush love poem of the Old Testament:

“The spices of this second ointment, on the contrary, are not produced on our earth at all, we seek to gain them for ourselves from afar. I mean that all that is good, everything that is perfect, is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light. For this ointment is made from the gifts of God bestowed on the human race. Happy the man who makes it his business to gather these carefully for himself and keep them in mind with due thanksgiving. When they shall have been pounded and refined in the heart’s receptacle with the pestle of frequent meditation, all of them fused together in the fire of holy desire, and finally enriched with the oil of gladness, you will have an ointment more excellent than the former, and far more precious.”



Just as I was excerpting this, a friend, who is helping tutor one of these monks ,comes to tell me how a bishop will come from his country will come to ordain him here and he, the seminarian monk, is simply overflowing with joy from so many years of yearning finally to be a priest and say his first Mass – true son of St. Bernard, true lover of Jesus the Bridegroom.

Ah, Jesus, melt our hearts hardened by cynicism from years of sufferings in the Church!

5 September 2011

Wordless Prayer

This
I am
well,

I am

pray

know
after
times
just
But,



blog will be a little paradoxical because, of course, using words to tell you about not using words... at least sometimes.

recalling that when I was a young new Catholic convert I simply assumed that the best way to was always the liturgical prayers of the Church, period! Of course, they are sublime and always should be prayed when possible. What I didn't for decades was that the mystical saints teach that years of word prayers said during quiet prayer alone, we get tired of words. We can imagine it is because we are distracted miserable creatures. really, this is because God wants to move us into prayer of the heart – wordless groans, sighs, and eventually peace.

This isn't just one stage but can reoccur at different times in our lives. Even if we think we are doing nothing, that is okay, because we are making space for God to fill our hearts wordlessly.

7 September 2011

The Devil: Father of Lies

I am watching videos about a prayer ministry called Theophostic. Even though I don't agree with everything on the video the big point I think is right on and very helpful, so I will convey that insight.

Many times compulsive sins or anxieties and anger come from some lie we accepted, especially in childhood. For example, an active homosexual may have believed his childhood friends who told him he was homosexual in order to seduce him. Or, from abandonment by a parent I might think that any time I am not in control things will go badly.

In this ministry they pray people back to those memories and help them listen to "the voice" of Jesus telling them the truth such as "you don't have to be homosexual" or "look at all the good things that happened to you that were totally out of your control such as your conception, the good things in your parents and siblings, graces of the sacraments or your conversion, etc. etc. etc."

I tried praying this way for a few days about little and big anxieties. It worked. Just as they said on the video I got instant relief, hopefully permanent, from letting Jesus into these areas of past hurt.

Since the movement is ecumenical there might be things on the web you would disagree with, but you might want to visit their web just the same to take out whatever is true and helpful.

10 September 2011

St. Francis of Assisi still can Help Us!

I am working on the Spiritual Classics Anthology. I have read that story about St. Francis and Perfect Joy many times, but this time it hit me freshly.

I have a terrible time with being cold – it comes with old age and my time in Corpus Christi thinning my blood, they



say. Anyhow I was dreading the cold weather coming. At the seminary they usually don't turn on the heat until November 15th which is 2 months after I am already cold. I have a heater in my little room, but there is nothing to do about the cold in the chapel where I like to spend a few hours a day. (By the way, today was a day of recollection for the seminarians. They spend 24 hours in silence and serial adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I can't remember any Church except here ever being in a chapel with 100 people not speaking or even whispering! Balm to the soul. You know a little more silence in all our lives has to be good. I knew a mother with 8 home-school kids who insisted on an hour a day of silence for herself reading the Bible in her bedroom. The older kids had to answer the needs of the littler ones. It worked. She was peaceful.)

So I am reading where St. Francis is cold and miserable the rain walking toward his monastery and proclaims to Fr. Leo: "What is perfect joy? If our brothers healed the sick, made the deaf hear, even raised people from the dead that would not be perfect joy. Perfect joy would be if we arrive at the monastery and they won't let us in thinking we are thieves, and instead of muttering and grumbling we would forgive them and try to enter with only kind words three times."

Generally when I read the story it just persuades me that "I am not 'cut out' to be saint. Forget it, etc. etc" This time, however, probably because of working on my New Way and also the Theophostic prayer I mentioned a few days ago I thought instead, "what would happen if I made up my mind, after doing everything I can to stay warm, not to even mention the cold for the next 3 months???? I grabbed my dedicated widow companion and told her that any time I mention the cold she can smile and hint "perfect joy?"

Can I challenge you to think of something you tend to complain about outwardly or just in your head? Think, what would it be like if after trying to change the situation, I would just stop complaining for a day, a week, a month??????

14 September 2011

Liturgical Mysticism

St. Gertrude the Great is one of the most famous Benedictine mystics of the Church. Here is a little about her as I look for excerpts for my new course:

Gertrude the Great (c.1256-1302)

Gertrude was given to a Benedictine monastery at Helfta, Germany when she was 5 years old, as was a custom among some devout Catholic families



in those days. It was a monastery influenced by Cistercian spirituality. She was there first as a student and ward but, then, Gertrude joined the order as a young woman, still spending most of her time in studies of Latin and rhetoric. In 1281, as a young woman she had a spiritual experience which convinced her to spend the rest of her life on religious studies. She became a renowned and loved counselor of other nuns. She became highly influential because of her autobiographical writings, especially because of the way her spirituality is permeated by the liturgy of the hours, and also because of her experience of the Sacred Heart.)

Here is an excerpt from Chapter 22 which illustrates how mystical the liturgy can be! For many years I read such mystical writings and they encouraged me to yearn for more than I had in my somewhat faith is enough way of being a Catholic. When, later on, God graced me with mystical gifts, the knowledge of experiences such as those of St. Gertrude helped me not to think I was just “losing it.”

Chapter 22 Revelations of Divine Love

I should be unjust in recalling the gratuitous gifts which I have received from Thy charitable clemency, if I ungratefully passed over what was granted to my unworthiness, by Thy most loving clemency, during a certain Lent. For on the second Sunday, as they sang at Mass before the procession, the response which commences *Vidi Dominum facie ad faciem*, a marvelous and inestimable coruscation illuminated my soul with the light of Divine revelation, and it appeared to me that my face was pressed to another face, as St. Bernard says “Not a form, but forming; not attracting the bodily eye, but rejoicing the heart; giving freely gifts of love, not merely in appearance but in reality.”

In this most enchanting vision, Thine eyes, bright as the solar rays, appeared opposite to mine, and Thou alone knowest how Thou, my dearest Lord, affected not only my soul, but even my body and all my strength. Grant, therefore that as long as I live I may prove myself Thy humble and devoted servant....

When Thou didst display Thy most adorable Face – the source of all blessedness, as I have said, embracing me, unworthy – a light of inestimable sweetness passed through Thy ... eyes into mine, passing through my inmost being, operating in all my members with admirable power and sweetness: first it appeared as if the marrow were taken from my bones; then, my flesh and bones appeared annihilated, so much so, that it seemed as if my substance no longer had any consciousness save that Divine Splendor, which shone in so inexplicable and delightful a manner that it was the source of the most inestimable pleasure and joy to my soul.

Oh, what shall I say further of this most sweet vision, if I may so term it? For all the eloquence in the world, if employed daily to persuade me, could never convince me that I should behold Thee more clearly even in glory, O my God, the only salvation of my soul, if

Thou hadst not taught me by experience. I will dare say that if anything human or Divine, can exceed the blessedness of Thy embrace in this vision, as I consider, I may truly say that, unless Thy Divine virtue possessed that person, the soul would never remain in the body after a momentary taste of this blessedness.

I render thanks to Thee through the union of mutual love which reigns in the adorable Trinity, for what I have so often experienced, and that Thou hast deigned to favor me with Thy caresses; so that while I sat meditating, or reading the Canonical Hours, or saying the Office of the Dead, Thou hast often, during a single Psalm, embraced my soul many times with a kiss, which far surpasses the most fragrant perfume or the sweetest honey; and I have often observed Thou didst look on me favorably in the condescending caresses Thou didst give to my soul. But though all these things were filled with an extreme sweetness, I declare, nevertheless, that nothing touched me so much as this majestic look of which I have spoken. For this, and for all other favors, whose value Thou alone knowest, mayest Thou rejoice forever in that ineffable sweetness surpassing all comprehension, which the Divine Persons communicate mutually to each other in the bosom of the Divinity! ...

20 September 2011

Making Mistakes

I was at a meeting where we work on trying not to think we can control everything by doing things perfectly. I realized that senioritis is a GOOD challenge for that tendency. Why? Because when we get older we can't even dream of doing everything perfectly!



Where do such follies come from? I think that if you had any kind of emotional chaos in your childhood home, that you think you can control the results if you do small things well. For example, in school we get gold stars or A grades if we do things well.

So, whenever we make a mistake, it reminds us of the feeling of chaos that afflicted us as children and calls up anxiety.

Remedy? We can immediately when we make a mistake laugh humbly and say – “well, I’m human – I make mistakes.” Then, where applicable, we can apologize, modeling for others that one doesn’t have to get defensive about mistakes.

Basically, since we are called to pray constantly, these are good moments to pray something like “God, you are perfect, I am weak. Help me.”

26 September 2011

Stamina of Previous Generations

Here at Holy Apostles College and Seminary we have an alumni day for priests who were ordained out of this seminary. The oldest one, Fr. Francis from Canada, gave this witness story:

“I was one of 16 children in Canada. Over time my family also took care of 140 foster children! I was a baker. One day I told the manager: I want to be a priest instead of a baker. I met Fr. Eusebe Menard, the founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Apostles.



At the seminary I kept flunking out, but I persevered. I have been a priest for 47 years!

I guess people from families like his would have a lot of graces to persevere!

Not that God wills that every family have 16 kids and 140 foster children, of course. Each couple has its own vocation. I wanted to have 13 children, in spite of having great difficulty raising my three living ones because of being a spacey intellectual instead of a practical mother. I would have loved all babies who came just because of the beauty of each one’s soul; but I had many miscarried instead. I will see the faces of the other ones in heaven.

After this talk by the Canadian priest, the Rector read a letter to us about the gift from a priest in Florida of relics of the 12 Apostles. What a boon to seminarians some of whom have 6-8 years of study to go!

Tears of joy. The “gates of hell will not prevail.”

28 September 2011

Excuse vs. Accuse

In the group, Recovery, International, that I have led for some 18 years we have “tools” like the 12 Step slogans. One is “excuse vs. accuse.” I had a miserable example of this, mea culpa, this week. I wanted to try to save money on my expensive unlimited A T and T cell phone by switching to Verizon. But it seems that these cheap Verizon plans are very user-unfriendly and that, in general, Verizon is famous for poor customer service.



A dear friend went with me to the Verizon emporium and it took us 20 hours over 3 days to get the whole matter straightened out. Some of you got messages from me about changes of phone number during the course of this. I seethed through the process full of sarcasm and bile plus recurring fantasies of leaving the world in the form of throwing out all tech stuff and spending the rest of my life walking through the country evangelizing people, Franciscan style.

After two days of listening to my rants, my older techy friend, suggested that, after all, most of the Verizon personnel are young techy people who are not used to helping older clients. They just assume you will catch on quickly with a minimum of help.

At this point I thought of our tool “excuse vs. accuse” and realized that in Christian form this meant that I was indulging in harsh judgment and actually sinning against charity. Somehow, when I do this with people I know, I readily see that I am sinning as I go along and quickly repent and ask forgiveness. But when it comes to strangers in business settings, it takes me forever to see that I am sinning – at least venially.

If this example resonates with you, it might be good to think where might the Holy Spirit be wanting me to “excuse vs. accuse.”

3 October 2011

Fresh Thoughts on the Deadly Sin of Pride

A wonderful priest gave a sermon the other day on pride. I found it so good I had to go to confession that very day. I am excerpting key images I thought you'all might find challenging:

“Don't be misled by appearances. The kind of loud and blustering person, drawing attention to himself might not be the prideful person. (Ronda: mea culpa on that description). And the sort of quiet and self-effacing person might not be the humble one. Pride is self-regard... it is simply looking at oneself...a terrible spiritual poison ... We are attentive in a terribly painful way to what others are thinking of us, what impression we are making? How am I doing? Am I up or down? Which of us is the greatest?”



He contrasted this with being caught up in a good conversation where our attention is on truth and insight or the way a child plays, totally caught up in the activity. He quotes an image of another thinker of people on a bus riding through beautiful country with the blinds down and their minds on who got the best seat.

The priest thinks that these are part of the reasons why Jesus says we must become more like little children.

4 October 2011

Leave Taking

I was telling a beloved friend that I was departing for a time. He looked at me with love and said, “our hearts go with you, and they will be ready for you when you return.”



I thought, “what a loving reaction. How different from the possible look for shock, resentment, and distancing that sometimes comes with such announcements.”

It reminded me of how my godfather, Dr. Balduin Schwarz, used to say, “The only remedy for leave-taking is gratitude.” Of course, the pain of separation is directly related to the love between.

So, my prayer is this: I thank you, Lord, for all the people who disappointed me when they left me for reasons having nothing to do with our friendship. Heal me of any bitterness. Let gratitude and the knowledge that all human love is a foretaste of heaven help me to remember them with hope.

5 October 2011

Feast of St. Francis

The Scripture for today’s feast day included those words of Jesus: “My yoke is easy.” Usually I gag, as in “who are you kidding?” But today I got a different take on it. This is because I am going to Al-Anon meetings and taking in 12 Step wisdom. The “one day at a time” idea is particularly repugnant to this frenetic schemer.

But today I put the two together. Of course! If I am only doing one day at a time the yoke is not as heavy as if I am trying to carry the crosses connected to every future possibility!

The Scripture that matches one day at a time is the Lilies of the Field – and surely St. Francis didn’t carry the burden of the future around on his back every day.



8 October 2011

Negativity on E-Mails

Recently I wrote a family member an e-mail that included a little joke making a comparison of rules in one part of the family vs. those that pertain in another.

She shot back a furious response excoriating me for

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insensitivity! I was flabbergasted.

After much loving reconciling phone conversation, she said that really she was pontificating about a tendency often found in our e-mail culture. She suggested that before putting anything even mildly negative in any e-mail we read it over and over and show it to another person to see if it could be hurtful.

I think she is right. Pondering it, I added this observation: when we see people face to face, the virtues we love in them shine through in a way they can't through e-mail. The love in their faces counterbalances words that can be taken in many senses.

A challenge from the Holy Spirit?

11 October 2011

A New Way to
Explain the 3rd
Commandment

I am reading a book on natural law ethics called *What We Can't Not Know* by Budziszewski (a name only Poles could easily pronounce). It is the best fresh approach to natural law I have read.

Here is the sample that "convicted" me!

"The third commandment declares that complete engrossment in mundane affairs is not merely tiring but debasing... (So, Ronda



immediately thinks that scholarly work is not mundane but dedication to God's truth – or so I have always thought) Thus someone who says “My work is my worship” is deceiving himself – or else worshipping his work. Yes, we should do all our labors as though for God; but for God, we should intermit our labors.”

I do believe that it is rather a grey area what kind of work is forbidden on the Sabbath, and there are certainly exceptions made for those who cannot earn a living unless they work on Sundays (did you know that the Saturday vigil Mass was instituted to accommodate longshoremen in Genoa, Italy who had to work all mornings unloading ships, but were free in the late afternoon and evening?)

Just the same, if you happen to be a workaholic, I think Budzieszewski's formulation is a ringer.

18 October 2011

Roots of Rage

I had an incident of out of control rage on my part which yielded such good insights that it is worth it to tell this awful story on myself for the sake of making vivid points.

At breakfast at Holy Apostles Seminary we were discussing whether Catholics who are not sisters or priests can wear rosaries around their necks.

A Seminarian (who is leaving shortly): “No, because it's making a sacred object into jewelry.”

Ronda: (Looking at the jewelry on the hand of the seminarian, a friend by the way, I grabbed his hand the pointed to this jeweled ring and yelled, banging my other hand on the table: “If you had a rosary with wooden beads, it wouldn't look like jewelry.”



Seminarian: (grinning) “I don't like when people bang on the table when they are talking to me. I usually bang on the table back.” (After this sally he walked out of the cafeteria)

Ronda (to the others at the table) “Oh, my God. I gotta get him and ask him to forgive me for making such a public scene and yelling at him. (I caught him outside the building). I'm so, so sorry! How awful of me. Do you forgive me? I think I picked a fight with you because you are leaving and I'll miss you. If I think of what I don't like about you, it's easier to see you leave!”

Seminarian: “Of course, I forgave you immediately.” (Big hug from him).

Thinking it over I realized that the whole thing springs from something way back and what we call in Recovery, Intl. for anger, fear and depression – trying to get a symbolic victory. I was a relatively poor kid surrounded by upper-middle class kids who wore jewelry and cashmere sweaters. I envied them. I get a symbolic victory now as a simplicity-of-life-Catholic by mocking those with luxuries such as jewelry.

Symbolic victory means that by means of anger and sarcasm we get a phony victory over people whose ways we cannot change by quiet reasoning or inspiration. I can’t convince Catholics who wear jewelry that it is better to give the money to the poor, but by sarcasm I can think I have won a victory. It is not a real victory since they don’t change their customs. It is only a “symbolic” victory!

The example I always use to get this across is people giving bad drivers the finger. It doesn’t stop the bad driver from speeding but it makes the one delivering the insult feel superior – phony strong because fierceness feels better than worrying about bad drivers causing accidents where we are the victims.

See why I put in the heading “convoluted conflicts” on this blog, and, heh, guys, aren’t you glad I live far away from all of you!!!!!!

26 October 2011

Questionable Motives for Breaking Up Relationships

As I mentioned a few times I have been going to Al-Anon. I was reading this 12 Step literature and came upon a witness story of a young woman who said that because she always thought she could change the nearly perfect men she dated but couldn’t change them she would run from one to another. Now that she realizes she can only change herself she is more stable.

The Holy Spirit nudged me to consider whether that could be why I have tried 17 different groups in the 18 years since my husband died! The typical pattern would be that I hear of some wonderful existing place or plan for a group. For a little while I think it is perfect. Then I see flaws. Then I try to convince everyone to change so that the group could be in my own “image and likeness.” Then they resist. Then...I leave!!!!!!



Oy veh! I have gradually extended the time frame from every 2 months to every 2 years, but still it's pretty upsetting. Of course the only way I can do this is by living simply so that moving is relatively easy – everything I own fits into one truck load. (Now in 2013 everything I have fits into 6 boxes!)

Now the next step would be that in the next living situation I am in I will not try to change anyone but myself.

Wanna pray for me?

29 October 2011

No one is Perfect

As a corollary to a previous blog about being upset when things aren't perfect I got another insight into one of my forms of this problem. Typically, in my experience, the teddy bear men are wonderfully warm but not inspiring in terms of ascetical heroism – as in some of them eat too much (duh! That's why they look like teddy bears!); some of them are not very neat; some of them ... you fill in the blanks. So I love them dearly but don't find them as inspiring as...



The thin, gaunt, heroic ascetical types who are amazingly sacrificial and whose eyes are luminous with the graces of their “God alone” spirituality. But they are usually not as warm as I would like them to be.

So, after all, who do I know who is warm and also heroically virtuous and luminous? Guess who? Jesus, my Lord, Savior, and 2nd Bridegroom. As a dedicated widow for whom Jesus is my Second Bridegroom, He ought to be enough.

Of course, some man friend is looking at me and thinking well she's very warm but not very sacrificial or luminous and my other friend “X” is luminous and angelic but not so warm... And who is warm and luminous? Mother Mary. Isn't she enough?

Well, let's be thankful for all the warm people in our lives and all the luminous people in our lives and if you know any other than Jesus and Mary who are both warm and luminous, praise the Lord!

29 October 2011

The Four Elements

A long time ago a spiritual writer, Betsy Caprio, developed an update of the old Greek(?) ideas about the 4 elements being Air, Fire, Earth and Water. She transposed this division into a personality typology. In my opinion such typologies, if they are not elevated into panaceas for all the world's troubles, are intriguing and helpful.



Here is the gist of the theory. Each of us is primarily air, fire, earth or water. Then we have a second best of them, a third and a fourth. They come in opposite sets such that if you are an

airy person – highly intellectual – or a space cadet in your worst times, you need the balance of earthy people or earthy activities such as gardening.

fiery person – on fire with ideas, goals – or a rage-aholic in your worst times, you need the balance of watery people or activities such as laid-back people who “go with the flow” and swimming or taking lots of showers and baths.

earthy person – practical, loving of the sensory in life – or cloddish in your worst times, you need the balance of transcendent, very spiritual people and things like mountain climbing, flying, or retreats.

watery person – free-flowing one who delights in surprises – or irresponsible drifters in your worst times, you need the balance of highly motivated fiery people or activities where discipline is mandatory.

Why did I think there was some truth in this? Well, I am primarily airy, next, fiery, next earthy, and least watery and I find I just crave being with earthy people and feel a hundred times better whenever I swim, look at rivers and oceans, or even take a shower.

How about you?

7 November 2011

Contingency and Powerlessness

This was the week of the big power outage in Connecticut where I live and teach. I have not yet reaped all the insights from this awful experience. The morning after the lights and heat went out one of the priests said “This is good it will get us out of taking everything for granted.”

It was a horrible feeling alone in my room that night expecting that any minute the power would be gone = no land-line, a cell phone whose battery would soon run out that couldn't be re-charged, no heat, no light but a flash light and a prognosis that it could be from 4-10 days before power would be restored.

I had been in the big LA earthquake area, but in that case power was quickly restored and phones and emergency TV channels were on; it was not cold outside, and most of all I was huddled with family.

Since it was about 40 degrees in the classrooms almost all classes were cancelled.

Happily the chapel is heated by some radiant ecological system unrelated to electricity and the kitchen stoves are gas – the cooks in heavy warm clothing were cooking with flash-lights to see by trying to make best use of all the food in the huge refrigerators whose electric power was out.

Soon there were gas lines at the stations from all the people fleeing to their cars for warmth.

A good moment was finding someone with a battery for charging the cell phone that fit with my little Verizon phone. The second night I chose huddling under my comforter with a flash light over sleeping on a hard pew, bag-lady style, in the warmer chapel. The best moment was finding that one of my dedicated widows who comes back and forth from NY State had a house with power back on. So we quickly packed up the car of another freezing widow, waited on the gas line and sped 2 hours away to our friend's house. We passed many trucks of men fixing power lines or dragging away fallen trees on the way.

Many muttered prayers and joy to go to Masses in the light, still working, of Churches out of the outage zone, but basically a deep feeling of contingency; that is, anxiety that comes



when what we depend upon isn't there. "God alone is enough" was not my first thought or feeling. Instead I felt alarm that because of tech few of us have fireplaces.

Today I will hear about the local shelter one religious brother went to. The dinner conversation was all about different sizes and relative hazards of generators we might use if this happens again.

Anyhow, after only one long night in New York, the phone call came from the Rector of the Seminary – the power is back! Power! Yes! More power to power and prayers for all those still afflicted and the woman who died from carbon monoxide poisoning trying to work a generator without knowing how.

(THIS IS THE END OF THE BLOGS FOR 2011 BECAUSE I STARTED PUTTING UP INSTEAD ON THE WATERSHED WEB A SERIES CALLED "The Way of Love: 100 Steps: A Spiritual Marathon." You can find this on www.ccwatershed.org under RondaView and it is also now part of the published book called The Way of Love. If you google Way of Love and Chervin with it, you can buy 4 of my booklets on love for \$10).

GRACES 2011-2012

(Note: There was a hiatus in my journal between leaving formal membership in the Bride of Christ Community and these entries. Overlapping this part called Graces 2011-2012 was the beginning of putting most of my thoughts and experiences into a Blog. I am putting these here to be followed by the blog which started in 2012 simultaneously and which will follow.)

November 1, 2011 (from Anne of Direction for Our Times)

Jesus

My dear apostles, I am with you. I am with you when you are working, and I am with you when you are resting. I am with you when you are at peace, and I am with you when you are unsettled. You are unsettled less and less, though. As I watch you, struggling for holiness and struggling for My will, I can see that you are advancing. You are becoming stronger and more sure of Me. Even allowing for your human doubts, I can see that you are accepting My comfort daily, which makes it easier for you to come through your trials with less suffering. The greatest suffering is, after all, abandonment. The greatest cross is that of being left alone while craving the comfort and love of someone who is dear to you. My friends, often there is confusion in human relationships which causes terrible suffering. This part of the cross is heavy, indeed, and I, Myself, suffered this. It is during these times that I comfort you with the greatest and most tender graces because I understand the confusion which accompanies abandonment. For Me, it was important to remind myself that My Father would not abandon Me. For you, this is also important. I will never leave you. If you feel that you have been abandoned by someone you love, either through death or rejection, then you must come to Me for comfort. I will remind you that in heaven there will be no tears, no grieving, no heartbreak. In heaven you will be reunited in love with those who also love Me. Never worry about those who have gone before you. Pray for them and trust Me. The family of God is vast and includes people you know and people you do not know. You will rejoice in heaven and, even now, heaven rejoices in you. Dear apostles, heaven rejoices in you at this moment, as you read these words and acknowledge Me as your King. In the world, the cross was My throne and you, too, are celebrated by heaven in your suffering. You will not be forsaken and you will not be forgotten. I will be with you and we will move forward with heaven's goals for your life. Have courage, apostles. All of heaven assists you and protects you.

November 5, 2011

Fr. Kolinski, a priest of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius who is the chaplain of the men of that order studying at our seminary, said a Tridentine Requiem Mass for all our dead today. I loved the Requiem Mass when I first became a Catholic even more than the Novus Ordo Requiem so this was especially meaningful to me.

This evening I was transferring old VHS videos to a portable flash drive. Watching Charlie play a portion of the Saint Saen's cello concerto I started sobbing and begging Jesus to tell me in a different way why He let him commit suicide. The answer I am getting is that he was already sinning before he committed suicide but that there was still enough innocence in him that Jesus could save at that point. He is playing his own songs on his cello in heaven now. And, perhaps, Maxi (my pianist grandson) is hearing them?

Of course such locutions and images are not infallible but it sounds like something I wouldn't have thought of myself and, if true, not something the devil would like either. So it is all perhaps a grace of from Fr. Kolinski's Mass.

I was lecturing about spiritual friendship in a class on Feminine and Masculine in a Christian Perspective. While talking about the good kind of spiritual friendship I had a new insight. Some such friendships do not fit exactly with mutuality because for whatever deep reasons one is able to share in a totally personal open way and the other is not, either by God's will, or other reasons, especially when one is a priest/mentor as well as a friend. And so there ought to be such a category - and the one who is open and vulnerable needs to make sure that the one who shares only fleetingly and at a much slower tempo knows that he or she is accepted for providing hospitality of heart and spirit to the more open one, and that she/he is not even wanting to ask for a mutuality at her/his own pace.

I had a beautiful experience today. I passed a seminarian just recently ordained deacon and remarked "You know I love watching you being a deacon. It brings out the best in you; your responsibility and seriousness." He replied, "Thank you, I don't always get much affirmation here."

This goes along with a priest here saying how my smile is so good around here and another one saying he would miss not just my classes but my smile.

It makes me see that my role here is not just teaching my insights and those of Von Hildebrand, et. al., and praying for everyone, but truly the spiritual motherhood of affirming seminarians, lay students, priests, faculty.

When the devil tells me that I need to leave for good, not just for the Spring semester, because it is too cold here even in the Fall, and I am too old, and I am almost senile, etc. etc., these experiences will be the key reasons I will return.

(I decided to spend the winter semester in California with my daughter for the reasons about the cold and other ones).

November 9, 2011

Tita (a dear friend and a widow exploring being part of a group of dedicated widows with me) said that if I have too much in the pipeline it gets clogged, blocked up and this makes it stink like a sewer. I have control of the valve. I have helped many, many people. It is a lie to think that asking others to help me is exploitation. If I ask for help and someone says yes but then begrudges it. that is the problem of the helper, not mine. But trying to coerce people to help me immediately out of my need for closure is not right. (This is a propos of this sweet woman trying to help me for what became 30 hours setting up a new cell phone).

I sent this e-mail to Carla and Steve and Diana for comments. Steve wrote back:

“Well, I agree with the last two sentences. I think it can get murky if the person saying yes to the request for help isn’t clear on the parameters of the help available/possible and if the person asking for help has unreasonable expectations on what ‘help’ can be construed to mean, even in an emergency, i.e. ‘help’ doesn’t mean ‘resolution of EVERYTHING’ and ‘help’ doesn’t mean ‘I can’t actually do ANYTHING to help you but thought I should say I can which I now realize will only exacerbate the problem and waste another 4 hours, but, I’m trying to be helpful and that’s Good.

Example: John is hiking in the wilds of South Dakota and has been run over by a large pregnant/angry wildebeest and his left foot is hanging off by a wee thread. He screams, “Help! Help! My foot!” Vera, a fellow but unrelated hiker comes across John’s terrible scene and out of the voluminous good will thrumming through her veins she cries out, “Oh! You poor man. I will help you!”

Now, John would be engaging the murk noted above and behaving unreasonably if he took this to mean reasonable expectation of swift and miraculous foot replacement by surgically limited Vera, who never went to veterinary school OR medical school (she’s just a clerk!) and certainly isn’t able to chase down a now not-so-hungry wildebeest. John *could* reasonably expect some company, solace, not dying alone, perhaps even the intelligence to construct a tourniquet from a stick and some clothing, a working cell phone and South Dakota or at least neighboring Minnesota to have helicopters.

By the same token, Vera would be out of line by getting angry with John for the excessive/extreme foul language and/or pressure applied to her hand/arm during extreme pain, as the hikers await the arrival of South Dakota’s air ambulance and wonder if Vera really did know tourniquet techniques. Vera should expect that in his current state, John could be agitated and less able to measure/gauge his own physical strength and should be prepared to accept some discomfort herself. A reasonable evaluation of the situation and her own abilities from the outset should enable Vera to set reasonable parameters for what help she’s able to provide in the given scenario.

Of course, this becomes a far more complex and nuanced situation when dealing with Verizon in New England.

November 20, 2011

I asked Marti (another widow discerning commitment to the rule of the Dedicated Widow I divided who visits me often at the seminary) what I should change since I am testing out Way of Love: Step by Step: a Hundred Day Marathon on myself. She said to stop beating myself up. I have been wounded. I need healing to accept the love God is giving me and everyone in my immediate family to help me be a joyful bride. I thought of Theophostic (not related to theosophy at all but a deliverance technique I think if valid) What is the lie? The lie is that I am not lovable enough to be loved, so I will soon be rejected.

From Anne, Direction for our Times

Jesus

Dear apostles, it is with hope that I come to you today, speaking these words to your heart. I am hoping that the plans I have for your life will come to fruition. Do I require that you be powerful? Important? Do I need you to be people of great wealth or great influence in the eyes of the world? Will My plan be threatened by your imperfection or your difficulty maintaining holiness in every moment? Do I need only angels? Or do I need apostles of good will serving exactly where I have placed them? You were created to persevere and even flourish with limited understanding of all that is happening around you and through you. Yes, dear apostles, I am filled with hope. I am hoping that you accept My love. I am hoping that you allow Me to bring you healing, daily. I am hoping that through you I can love and heal others whom you will encounter in your daily experience. I bring you so many gifts of knowing Me, both directly and indirectly. Sometimes, I bring these gifts directly into your soul. Sometimes I send these gifts to you through the soul of another. I am saying that sometimes you will be the recipient of My gifts and sometimes you will be the one delivering My gifts. We are so united, you and I. We are together now and when you are finished on earth you will understand how closely I worked with you. You will be so happy when you understand the extent to which I blessed others through you. Dear friends, I come at Christmas as an infant in a manger and you rejoice. Truly, understand, that each time you cooperate with Me in your day, you are bringing Me into the world. When you see how others were blessed through your fidelity, you will understand the fullness of rejoicing. Yes, today, your Infant King comes to you with heavenly hope. Beloved apostles, I instruct you to bring this hope to others, regardless of the circumstances around you.

Dec. 7, 2011

In a conflict with someone I realized I need to try to meet people on the common ground, vs. trying to drag them to my separate ground.

Dec. 8, 2011

At our annual Christmas No Talent Show Fr. Dominic said “Ronda is going for awhile – she combined intellectualism and spirituality, witness and transparency.

December 11, 2011

If I defined myself as a servant instead of a leader, I could live anywhere????!!!!

December 19, 2011

I thought that renting a room at my daughter’s house in California I am kinda renting the Pacific Ocean for \$1,000 a month!

December 25, 2011

I read Pope Benedict’s sermon for Christmas Eve (see the sermon on my web www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com, scrolling to end of Dec. Amazing Stories) to get away from the commercial Christmas around me. I begged my daughter, Carla, to let me read parts of it at the lavish dinner. She said “Oh, yes, I loved it. I just read it on front page of Google News.”

The Pope mentions how St. Francis of Assisi arranged for Mass to be celebrated on the manger that stood between the ox and the ass for the first time. Later, an altar was built over this manger, so that where animals had once fed on hay, men could now receive the flesh of the spotless lamb Jesus Christ, for the salvation of soul and body, as Thomas of Francis himself, as a deacon, had sung the Christmas Gospel on the holy night in Greccio with resounding voice. Through the friars’ radiant Christmas singing, the whole celebration seemed to be a great outburst of joy. It was the encounter with God’s humility that caused this joy – his goodness creates the true feast.

Fr. Ken regarding an elephant in the living room in my family: Don’t expect one thing to follow logically from another. Don’t try to make sense of a senseless situation as to why? It will work but not the way I think it will – Did Abraham understand why he was supposed to move and the barrenness of Sarah and Isaac?

January 1, 2012

Jesus

May the peace of heaven continually surround each of my beloved apostles. My friends, there are times when the peace of heaven must pursue you, because, despite its best efforts,

you elude peace. My peace then follows you, waiting for you to pause long enough to accept it. When you bring yourself into My presence, then My peace can absorb you and saturate you so that where you go, it can follow. If you are alert to Me, you will see that others are blessed by Me through you. Dear apostles, please accept that this is happening and be reverent about what I am seeking to do. Are you with Me in this effort of renewal? Do you seriously consider that I am determined to bring light to others through you? If you will accept this more fully, I can work more freely. If you move too quickly through your days, convinced that you are not achieving as many actions and tasks as you would like, then you may be missing what is obvious to heaven, that is, that you are surrounded by grace and protected by light. When you rest into this reality, you will see how effectively I am serving the world through you. Truly, I am loving people and comforting them through your soul because each day, Heaven moves into the world through the souls of those who are willing to serve. Allow Me please, to continue, and allow Me please, to sustain you personally. It is not My plan that you become dispirited and hopeless. It is My plan that if you suffer, you suffer peacefully, confident about My presence in your cross. I want you to work calmly, confident of My effectiveness in your work. You must be brave enough to love completely, confident of the benefit the world feels because of your decision to serve Me in whatever place you have found yourself on each day. Rejoice, dear apostles. Look forward with Me to greater holiness. I will protect My plan for you, but you must make a decision to accept heaven's peace.

January 2, 2012

Dear Tita and Marti,

I had a great grace related to what each of you said in good-bye counsel to me. I thought you would be happy about it.

Yesterday I had a miserable time dealing with my group list for the book Last Call that had disappeared in cyber-space, and I needed to send 12 files from the manuscript to the group but had to keep typing out the e-mails of each and then getting stuck mid-e-mail. I asked for help. It was New Year's Day. As you suggested, Tita, I humbly asked for help but didn't demand a deadline on it. My daughter came 2 hours later. My daughter came and I got hysterical in the way you have seen me. I didn't throw the computer out the window or scream but I was mucho upset. After she straightened me out, I went into prayer and I decided, based on 12 step ideas to apply the Serenity prayer. I realized I can't change that I am poor at tech. I could give up or I could decide that instead of trying "hard" things and working up a rage, I will just wait until someone loving and proficient can help me.

Marti, you said that I need to drink in more of the family's healing love. Well, when I got upset my daughter didn't get angry with me, but just grit her teeth and walked me

through. Then she remarked (she is in the field of educational tech) that almost all teachers over 60 hate tech and act a lot like me about it. I found this very healing.

Then, this morning the head of Distance Learning tech at Holy Apostles wrote he wants to team teach a course with me in the summer and have me on the committees for making DL more interactive, etc. etc. I realized, this is the ticket. If I am doing this with him, **HE WILL DO THE TECH PART.** And, since he is a young scholar, he can probably help me all the way until dementia or death comes.

I got tears in my throat thanking Jesus for finding a way for me. But He said in my heart “Ronda, not for everyone, but for you, having struggled to do computer rather than give up your apostolic teaching work has been heroic virtue.” I would usually brush this off with the self-deprecatory idea that I just do this out of workaholism, but obviously I could have spent the last 25 years just reading good books for pleasure instead of battling tech. And He used my horror of sins of rage over tech to get me into Recovery, International, many good confessions, etc.

So, my dears, having given me such good counsel and borne with my fits over computers, I thought this story would give you cause to thank God.

January 28, 2012

From Tita regarding my Way of Love Steps: “For many people - including myself - it is good advice to get out of self and get a life. Your journey to the root of self is so sincere and so inspiring that stopping promoting this booklet would be a tragedy. It is much too fascinating to watch how the Lord uses your dedication to Him to expose things you need to change. What you share will probably put egotists off, but true seekers will come to appreciate your transparency and benefit from your successes and failures.”

I replied: “What you wrote about my self-examination in Step by Step was so consoling. It made me think - “Well, God brought me up in a family where no thought went unsaid and with a mother who worked for an early psychoanalyst as a secretary, a Jew who became a Catholic, by the way, and this gave me the confidence and psychological savvy to think I could be transparent as a Catholic. Jesus then redeemed this trait by making it work for my spiritual progress instead of simply for egotistic self-dramatization (not that this is not there also, of course). Praise the Lord.”

February 23, 2012

I had a sense of Martin(my deceased husband) having this big, deep heart and that’s why I married him and that he loved me in the children as I love him in the children –Carla’s poetry, Diana’s love of life and warm heart. And Jesus seemed to say You are all One. I felt great blessedness.

March 9, 2012

I always want to be admired more than loved because I can earn admiration, I imagine, but love is vulnerable and I don't really trust it. So it is so healing for the daughters to be showing me so much love. I imagined because they don't like my writing and speaking particularly that they despise me, but really they are showing now that they just love me, not my ideas. With Diana this is now daily shown, but with Carla making the sacrifice to come to visit for the 75th birthday (of myself and my twin sister to be celebrated here in California) in spite of all her pain and travel being so hard....!!!! Thank you, dear Jesus, Mary, Joseph for these surprising graces. And, of course, you don't love me primarily for my works even though you are grateful, but for the innermost person of myself.

March 16, 2012

Barbara, my Al-Anon sponsor said that being soft and kind does not = being a victim. That is my perception.

April 3, 2012

Jesus to me: You have given me your heart, mind and soul, but you have not given me your life – the rest of it on earth. That is what 12 Step can teach you.

April 15, 2012

Fr. Leo says that I need to stand under the cross of a beloved relative crucifying herself with addictions and bear the sufferings as Mary did. Then wait, like the father of the Prodigal Son with open arms. He thinks I absolutely would be wasting all that God has given me of talents and wisdom not to stay at the seminary Fall semesters unless my health really can't take it. Just to dress more warmly.

May 1, 2012

From Carla's poem for me for 75th birthday:

A Song Sung By a Fish

There are those things that can't be said simply.

I think it's possible that nobody is born. We wheel around inside our mothers and only vaguely find one another, all of us twisting like a swarm of Jonahs, turning this way and that in the skin of what either swallows us whole or becomes an ark. But a Noah is also terrified, anxiously watching the waters recede a little more every day, white-knuckled patriarch perched on the precipice of a vanishing oblivion.

Whatever I write here is wholly a preamble, a song sung by a fish.

If she were to die, this might write itself as finished, but it can't be done now: nothing that breathes will allow itself to be summed up while still puffing: every exhalation is a new letter in the alphabet of a life.

For some period of time, I lived inside my mother wearing the face of a wish.

I remember the hushed sanctuary of a thousand churches, the round braille of rosary beads passing one by ten through your fingers as Mysteries, back and forth soft Latin waves of devotion: the Lord be with you, and also with you: a thousand times a thousand times forever.

In certain dreams, my mother wears a casual cloak of rainbows and has made a covenant. Her world will never be destroyed by water: by proxy, I am safe.

I am not safe.

My realm is forged from water.

I see her in fragments stitched loosely at the surface. I do not notice that those who walk on water keep their arms flung out wide; that they move in the shape of a cross.

In other dreams, we face each other, so in those dreams, I have risen. I am a raven then, tight and black with eyes on fire. I am getting ready to fly to and fro, to and fro, hunting for branches.

I think I am a bird but I am still a fish.

My mother is a frightened dove. A thousand loaves later, my flesh will part and route into pieces and pathways, some of whom will face me and I will remember.

I am a crucifix swinging below my mother's breasts. It has been her hope to save me.

In some now, I am myself again. I think it's possible that everyone is born and born and born exactly into each moment. Everything else is a dream. Everything else is a wish. Everything else writes a sharp black cross on the sky with a raven's wide wings and empty claws. We are looking for a nest we left behind but it is all around us. We look up towards a tunnel: the light scatters and we are once again fish: small and silver, fleet with opportunity.

This is a preamble: the sound things make before they break, a rumbled warning before the earth quakes toward another eternal effort to swallow itself.

We are born in the water, borne by the water, slight boats on the crest of a flood.

We carry our mothers inside us when they die, whole in the way of what has finished singing and can finally be named.

There are those things that can be simply said.

Carla De Sola Eaton – a Tribute (Carla is my twin-sister, the sacred dancer).

“I pray that everyone, sitting cramped inside a pew, body lifeless, spine sagging and suffering, weary with weight and deadness, will be given space in which to breathe and move, will be wooed to worship with beauty and stillness, song and dance--dance charged with life, dance that lifts up both body and spirit, as we will be a holy, dancing, loving, praying, and praising people.”

—Carla De Sola— from The Spirit Moves: A Handbook of Dance & Prayer

**All the pictures I could find are gray.
A slender woman flies, her every bone
a twig. A knit-together flock of swords
contest rigidity. A bird in flight
does not know it's a symbol, doesn't fight
its own calligraphy: it writes a shape
made out of who it is. It cries its name.**

**Every gesture is a path to prayer:
it states we aren't statues, are not stones
with quiet voices stammering the words
we have no right to say. However slight,
there is a mystic quality in light
and how it gives that leg stabbed into space
the means to break a law. It calls a Name.**

**Weight and deadness. Motion is the way
to charge with life, to make us not alone**

but tethered by the countless swaying chords
that glorify each atom in its bright
chaotic dance – there is no black and white.
The woman in the picture summons grace
and bids the dust to join her. El Shaddai*.

What have I got to hold the dark at bay?
I flew, but then abruptly, I had flown.
I dared not try again. A form that soars
may tremble downward, shaken by the night;
but an eye remembers if bereft of sight,
recalls this image's exultant face:
the way it says I Am and not am I.

***God Almighty, God of the Mountains**

June 22, 2012

Barbara – Al-Anon: “to avoid making someone feel judged just say ‘I’ not you, we or they. As in, instead of saying when you are angry I shut down, say when I feel anger toward me I shut down.

She added, perceptively: A people pleaser likes to do everything very fast for everyone, but we should be thinking fun and free.

July 1, 2012

Jesus

My dear apostles, it is time for Me to announce Myself as King. I am truly the King of heaven and I am the King of all God's children on earth. I am the King of all that is good and I am the King of love. Most of all, and most importantly for you, I am your King. Yes, it is to Me that you owe allegiance as a follower and servant. I ask that you speak of Me in relation to your contribution to the good of humanity and also in relation to your contribution to the good of the Church. Why do you serve? Is it not because you believe in the power and the goodness of your King? Do you serve Me because you trust Me to care for you and to care for that which is important to you? I believe this is true. I believe that you understand something about both My power and My goodness and I believe that you rely on Me to care for your loved ones even in their sufferings and rebellions. Dearest apostles, to make way for your King you will have to fall back from drawing attention to

yourself. One falls back, in this instance, by giving constant credit to the One who is fighting the battles and winning the souls. And the war is for souls, dear apostles. I am craving allegiance from all of God's children because I am craving what is good for them. Those who are away from Me must see the goodness in you. You are truly offering the best possible message for everyone you encounter. Your message is one of love and welcome and you give the message as the messenger of the King. Be at peace. I am all powerful and you are on the side of heaven.

June 30, 2012 Carla's poem for Diana

Beta Lyrae

*A star becomes a giant when it has
escaped from the main sequence; when it is
depleting at the source and on its way
to dwarfdom. This, a paradox in words,
is perfectly consistent in itself.*

*The star less massive, once upon a time,
had given itself over to its twin:
an anxious, pulling wight; she who would hide
behind her stolen bounty as she tugs
and draws; makes time run faster every year.*

My sister leaps before me draped in purple,
her face a study: triumph gashed by pain,
flamboyant as an opal torched by fire.

A peacock on the half-shell orders

let it be / the same.

Gravity. Too much of it. She's straining
to join completely or to pull away
forever. In the dark, the huntress calls her
with ancient runic magic
spells / her name

--- she's off again. She signs and dances, darting
off one foot's toe she topples, slams the brakes,
sprays fairy dust between the breakfast napkins
a crumpled joke
that fails / falls into rain.

*Old women, old women, old women, they cry
wither, oh wither, oh wither so high?*

My sister arabesques, begins a painting
with two swipes of a broom. Three hundred grapes
give up their shapes and melt away to madness
but what was ever mine /
or ever sane?

Diminishing. Too frightful. I'm explaining
myself to clouds and eremites. I'm done
or nearly so - was I the bigger one

at first / at last?

Does anyone remain?

My sister twists in tempests, swathed in white.

Her face is bright, she japes, for she has won
some basket that they give for free at fairgrounds

her arms gang agley:

now, it has begun.

...to sweep the cobwebs from the sky

but we'll be with you by and bye

My sister barrels through me like a doorway

I do not see and yet believe she is

nineteen times as high as Beta Lyrae

escaping the main sequence, on her way

to clear the moon.

Diana's return poem:

White Dwarf

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_dwarf

The White Dwarf's shine is faint

when you are far;

when closer, she is everything

you are.

**When purple hunts with red
the color's blood;
Two by two, they gather
for the flood.**

**Uncertain Noahs,
hot when they're begotten;
their doves fly North the moment
they're forgotten.**

*(A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye...)*

**And in those icy climes,
alone, apart;
the shortest line between two points
remains a heart.**

*(Bright as a star when only one
is shining in the sky.)*

Sangfroid, sangrail, sans tu –

Black Giants fall...

A matchbox made of hope

and that is more.

Is more than all.

July 7, 2012

From Distance Learning student Richard Birdsall:

I think DL can work when the opportunity for authentic exchange is created. That opportunity is created by the instructor who creates an environment safe for the sorts of relationships you hoped to allow. Through your own honesty and transparency a place is created where students can honestly express themselves without fear of denigration or criticism.

The success of your DL courses is a joint enterprise requiring a fearless shedding of meaningless gesture and egotistical posturing. While a joint enterprise you had to take the first step which you did in your course texts, in the assignments requiring personal responses, and in your own reactions to our assignments.

Your desire for real exchanges revealing real personalities behind the anonymity of the web bridged the cyber-divide where we can so easily hide, projecting instead a false self. But you refused to do that yourself which invited each of us to respond in kind.

WHAT I WILL MISS!

Leave taking August 13, 2012 (when I left my daughter's house in California to return to the Seminary)

Seeing the Faces of my Family every Day or Evening!

The Jacuzzi, Pool, and Lovely Weather!

The Gorgeous Jump (my daughter's last name) Villa!

Gourmet Lunches and Dinners!

The Beauty and Softness of Percy (the large cat) !

Your Friends Galore to Sample and even Get to Know Sometimes!

Diana:

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Unexpected mirthful fun!

Sudden pleas to stay – so I feel wanted!

That Beautiful Lively Face and Warm Lush Physique!

Great Advice, Sometimes Unwanted, but often really Helpful!

Hospitality of Home and Heart to my Friends!

Furniture Art!

Pete and Chris:

Strong, savvy, men to help and protect me!

Handsome Physiques to Admire!

Sudden Unexpected Smiles!

Great Sportsmanship – Darts, Volleyball, Swimming!

My Prayer: Thank you, God, for inventing the Fountain Valley branch of the De Sola/Chervin/Conley/Brown/Jump family. May my dear hosts be healthy, happy, and someday know Your love the same way or even more than I do and bring me back to more than “Another Day in Paradise!” (words on a plaque at the pool of the rented house)

August 18, 2012

At Carla’s –At the end of a long conversation, my daughter Carla said regarding our addicted relative:

“Maybe we need to stop trying to think of ways to force her to seek real help or else, and just accept the suffering of watching her suffer. AFTER ALL, JESUS DIDN'T TELL US, IF YOU PROMISE TO REPENT I WILL COME AND DIE FOR YOUR SINS. HE JUST CAME AND SUFFERED AND LOVED US. AND HE DIDN'T DEMAND A NOVACAINE EITHER!

I will meditate on this long.

September 2, 2012

Yesterday I made a vow of silence about the relative and her elephants. Silence with her and others. I woke up thinking I should, jokingly at least in my head, start Talkaholics Anonymous for those who talk obsessively about their problems and work out solutions that only work in their own heads.

September 20, 2012

Diana's Birthday Poem to Pete

Birthday poem.

**When curled up like a snail
and blue
yours is the hand
that helps me through.
I, brave and fearful, face the world -
yours is the voice that says, "Unfurled,
you're beautiful", and that is all
that matters when the day unwinds;
our blanket talk, our same of kind,
our silent world, the way your hand
removes the pain without a word
and when you speak, the dancing eyes,
the challenge spark, the seeking foot
that finds mine in the dark,
the hearts
lost to us now, but still enough
to tell us that love's just a touch,
a sigh away. Uncurled,
your hand, my heart, our souls, our world.**

D.

September 21, 2012

Letter to Fr. Dennis:

I have been in a sort of grey night of the soul for 4 years or so. Occasional consolations but much less illuminative insights. One might say that I tend toward a sort of manic illuminative state. It seems to me that the Holy Spirit is telling me that I needed this purification, of what I call the grey night of the soul, and that I am being led into a new state - much simplified.

To greatly slow down; to talk less and more softly; to gently pray for each person that comes to mind or who I encounter.

My sense is that this is more like the normal state of your soul that I could observe and want to imitate.

October 10, 2012

Talk with Fr. Kolinski – stop thinking about the future. One day at a time. “Into your hands, I commend my future.” Pray over and over again.

October 18, 2012

Good friends are better than fantasy communities.

Fr. Dennis, sterling soul -

you stand as proof

there is a way to be

stripped of self-pre-occupation.

Eyes steadily intent

on Him alone -

on His Way.

I seem not willing to be like you -

but to know you is till

to be strengthened.

Without so strong

a Simone of Cyrene

to help carry my cross,

I might, this year,

have collapsed

under the weight of being me!

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**Like the restraint
in the feet of a dancer
waiting for the right moment
to stamp his foot down...**

**Your eyes rest
with patient pity
that the waves of my verbal bravado
might subside**

**so that I could know that your
and His mercy
encompasses my fears.**

October 28, 2012 before Hurricane Sandy

Letter to Fr. Dennis: With John of the Cross on one side, but I can always write off partially what he wrote as meant for cloistered Carmelites, and you on my right side where I have to see, I see it in your eyes, that with God's grace it is possible to be detached and therefore liberated and at PEACE...

Well, the first step to change is seeing the beauty of the ideal! "There is no peace without surrender" said one of my long dead spiritual directors.

November 3, 2012

I had thought it was a false rumor that we give all of the 37 Vietnamese full scholarships to be here at Holy Apostles to study.

Fr. Mosey, the Rector, said to me, "it is because of teachers like you who work for nothing or for a pittance that we can do this."

Tears of joy that because of my simplicity of life thing and that of others here, we can help the poor of the Church in Asia!

November 14, 2012

Image of Spiritual Leadership for Fr. K.

Some days your soul is soaring

And we, the followers,

Feel elevated to a higher place

Under the shadow of your wings.

Nov. 17, 2012

Fr. Dennis was talking about how typically men express love by doing things for others, not by saying "I love you." He mentioned how a husband will get mad if his wife complains about not hearing "I love you" enough. "What's the matter with you," the husband could say, "look at all I do for you! Isn't that enough to prove I love"?

November 19, 2012

Dear Carla, twin sister,

For a woman like me with a father-complex, how healing this semester has been. I have 3 priest friends and the lay Dean, working so hard to keep me here by advice and prayers.

Now they have removed the last obstacle to being here in the Fall semesters with the promise of a beautiful room for classes where the Dean himself will personally buy me a lovely quiet heater!

November 24, 2012

This old student of mine from Virginia and her charismatic Carmelite friend started off at midnight Thanksgiving to get here in time for our Mass. They made it. Catherine, the former student, is divorced/annulled, empty nest, 3 kids now adult discerning vocations out of Steubenville and Catholic U. She maybe wants to become a late vocation enclosed Carmelite but she was so thrilled with the atmosphere at Holy Apostles she is now dreaming of the possible Missionaries of the Holy Apostles villa across the street, as I now call it, and volunteering to teach ESL to the Vietnamese, maybe using Carmelite writings as

the material.

Dec. 4, 2012

Dear Fr. Dennis,

I was musing about how, in a certain sense, Jesus will keep me to my promise of return to this hub of hope because I will miss a specifically merciful expression in your eyes at table as you genially respond to the manifold foibles of such a variety of us.

I fancy that you make a very conscious decision to sit here or there with one or another ensemble with the resolution to fulfill the task of such works of mercy, waiting for the pause in bravado, that one of us may let the mercy of Jesus flowing through that glance, enter our poor desperate hearts.

Blessed be such pauses.

Whether I have captured your motives here or not, I cannot believe that you have not perceived that common bravado trait and its causes in the little group of some of my friends. Is it this trait that you lack that makes it possible for you to minister to us? My widow friend Marti is more like you in this, I think. It is not revealed in her glance but more in her inadvertence.

December 8, 2012 by Carla Conley – so much Martin’s style – the beginning of her Adam Caedmon piece:

The Forgotten

Preface

On the third day, Infinity, delighting in Himself and His creations, plants a garden in the east, near to the borders of heaven, set amongst the water that had previously thought itself complete. The water, no longer a sole creation, is now unable to dream it is round and entire. It had been warned by the sunrise whispering stories of circles outside of circles, but had been able to maintain a luxurious deafness, as does a child alone deafen himself to stories of a sibling’s birth.

The insurgence is comprehensive. The water twists around the uninvited garden and divides completely, spawns itself again as male and female. Twining sinuously above, the dark ocean maintains an illusion of stewardship, declares himself still king. But a crystal sea splinters and wanders north of the garden, absolving herself in slow, holy trickles: a fledging and utterly inexperienced immaculateness.

Then, to the dark waters above the garden, Infinity comes again, chortling with new contributions: the genesis of earth. The water seizes and tumbles the weak stones, breaks them

down but cannot destroy them; has only grated them down to silt, or in moments of monumental weakness, lent himself to a marriage of silt and sea and nurtured mud. A bitter salting of suspicion: the war has come and the war will never end.

Inexorably, the mud slues north toward the shining crystal sea, toward she who offers, toward she who has become an unadulterated smooth translucency. The mud slides up the fingers of Infinity: blind, seeking and seeded. In its mouth, it bears a prophecy. Deep in the womb of the crystal sea, the fetal earth grows visible. It can be seen to be transforming.

Even as far down as the south, something solid begins rising up over the belly of the water: clots of earth hurled and huddled together, the footprint of a behemoth not yet limbed. In the east, the garden flowers and delicious scents waft on the wind. In the north, the crystal sea soothes and cultivates.

But in the west...in the west, a hard and solemn crust is forming, desolate and forsaken. It broadens as if stricken, flat and morose. The scents of the garden flee on bird wings from it. The mother sea can give it no solace: it has traveled past her grasp. Rock abides here and forms develop: prodigious darknesses, caves made for shrouding, oblivious to redemption. The great experiment has found a stage, here where hope is inert and traitors from the east poke wet noses into dry channels seeking victory.

Plucked from the garden, dressed only in the earnest dew-struck skin of knowledge earned at such a price, shamed yet still mostly innocent, as close as twin to his second coming but with no heralds and no sudden bright star in these sullied skies, the father of nobody is sent down on a chute of anthems and abandoned with his single companion. Near the Cave of Treasures, below the garden.

Reading this I thought how can I choose between truth and beauty – I have to have both the seminary and the family.

December 28, 2012

Martin taught Carla and Diana how to make a house into a world. I can't do that because the Church is my home.

From Journalist to Blogger: 2013

(A lot of these blogs are short here because I took things from the old journals, as I reviewed them, so that new blog readers could enjoy things I wrote back in the 90's. So those parts of the 2013 blogs are not included again here; only the new experiences.)

Blog 37: Jan. 1, 2013

Topic: Attitudes toward Ministry

A priest who teaches seminarians was giving a lecture to them about wrong ways to minister. I happened to sit in on the class and I took notes on points that seemed to me to apply not only to priests but to all Catholics in leadership.

To summarize some of the points made:

The priest is a mediator between the people and God out of love, not out of power. He is not “the king of kings,” but the footwisher.

He will not be afraid that his weaknesses will be manifest, but, instead, should evangelize through his weaknesses as a wounded healer not as the judge; listening to what they say and what they don't say. [I didn't take this to mean that the priestly ministry does not include teaching and judging in the confessional, etc. but that these should not be done either out of a sense of power but out of love.] The pastor should not make it seem as “if you disagree with me, you are in trouble.” He should not appear as a know-it-all. Some priests seem like giants of intellect but dwarves in the heart.

If the priest realizes that he has been wounded, then he puts himself in the shoes of those also wounded. He should not think of others as sick and dysfunctional, but as vulnerable brothers. They are dealing with their hurt.

The Church is not a democracy, but also not an aristocracy. The middle ground is ministry of love.

Blog 38 January 2, 2013

Topic: English Weekend House Parties 21st Century Style and Holy Day Masses

I am a big fan of English novels, especially ones written by the greats such as George Eliot, the Bronte's, Jane Austin, Dickens, etc. In many of them the plot unfolds during long weekends at manor houses. The sumptuous feasts, the hunts, the evening games, become for me a kind of archetype of old-fashioned hospitality. On such English weekends, Sunday morning saw most of the family and guests off to the old Church in the village.

I was reflecting on the contrast between those scenes and extended family visits 21st century style. Some obvious differences might explain part of the problems of weekend plus visits in our times. Contrast the 10 acre mansion in rural England with a small house in the suburbs in USA today? Contrast the butlers, and maids, cooks, handling all the physical things with one harried mother imploring help from the visiting women to feed 20 at a table that usually serves 4 people with card tables for extensions on either end? Contrast some of the guests off at 6 AM to the hunt back then, now jammed into a family room to watch TV with empty six packs decorating the carpet...No wonder grumbling, sarcasm, and grim faces can manifest under such circumstances!

In a general way one could find a pattern like this: joyous arrival of family and friends with the feeling that one has the most beautiful, perfect, wonderful family and friends in the whole world; little conflicts about trivia with the feeling that how can anyone do these stupid, wrong-headed, dysfunctional things; large conflicts about politics, morals, religion with the feeling that one needs to leave all these people and join a radical activist group who all agree with me or repair to a hermitage; after sufficient libations of “sister” alcohol a feeling that I won’t be able to stand it when this amiable group separates at the end of the visit; as the weekend comes close to an end the sour-grapes feeling that one should never give or accept such invitations; at the actual time of departures - hugs and tears!

On the part about Sunday Mass or Christmas Mass or Easter, one could add this contrast. In 19th century England, home festivities were a joyful overflow of Church attendance. In our Catholic Church there was a teaching about “the domestic Church.” It stood for all believers did in the home to live out the faith and hand it on generation to generation. Nowadays, sometimes, we have a sort of heresy of domesticity in which non-practicing Catholics and members of other faith groups as well, substitute for the Church liturgies home traditions chosen cafeteria style. Of course, done with love, God doesn’t reject the Christmas trees, carols, Nativities, presents, etc., but how does Jesus feel when his flock refuses to come to receive His very Body and Blood on the same days?

My prayer: Jesus, You don’t want us to spend visits of family and friends in bickering, harsh judgment, and anger! You don’t want us to spend holy days exhausting ourselves in hospitality like your friend Martha? Yet You do want us to be close to family and friends even when there are real conflicts. We offer to You our pain when others reject the supernatural gifts You bring us in favor of the human gifts. We pray that we may find ways to emanate Your love to all and show our joy in Your most august gifts, so that others may also long for them.

Blog 39: January 8, 2013

Topic: Alice Von Hildebrand in her 90’s

Before my snow-bird flight from cold Connecticut to Sunny California this month, I got to visit Alice Von Hildebrand in a rehab facility where she was recovering from a fracture. I thought I would tell you about the visit as an inspiration, especially for more elderly Watershedders or those who might dread the thought of living long.

In the year 1958 I had a great joy of meeting within 3 minutes two of the most outstanding Catholic women of the 20th and now 21st century: Madeleine (to become wife of Lyman Stebbins, founder of Catholics United for the Faith), and Alice – always called Lily by friends (to become wife of Dietrich Von Hildebrand). At the time I was an atheist seeking truth. For the “miracles” that led to my meeting these two holy Catholic women and their husbands and finding Christ in the Church see my autobiography: *En Route to Eternity* - Miriam Press or www.rondachervin.com click on books, then free e-leaflets and go to Saved!

Most of you know Alice Von Hildebrand from EWTN appearances, and so you only know her as a widow. When I met her she was in her 30's, beautiful, very European, eyes shining with loving interest in whoever approached her. All of these adjectives still apply. Just the same, even though I had seen her a year ago, still flourishing, having learned in her late 80's how to e-mail to satisfy publishers of her articles and books, I was a little afraid that after her fall she might be so diminished in strength that our visit would be very sad.

My friend and driver, Marti Armstrong, also a dedicated widow, accompanied me through the corridors of the rehab center where we found dear Lily sitting up in bed, eyes shining with joy to see us. Within minutes she was talking not about her physical state but about the most important ideas she wanted us to be sure to convey to others. These insights will follow; but first a description of how she continued with her train of thought even while hanging onto a walker, and going through the corridors of the rehab at a rapid pace, accompanied by her attendant. The scene called to mind a response of a priest in his fifties. When I suggested he might want to build a retirement home on the property of his parish, he replied after a day or two: “You know, Ronda, I looked up the word “retirement” in the Concordance and I couldn't find it!”

Now to the insights I have been pondering since. “We have to baptize our pleasures.” Lily explained that it is not that we need to pray for suffering only as Christians, but that we need to take in the pleasures always with gratitude instead of greed.

The other point she explored with us was one of her husband concerning “the theme of the moment.” When choosing between two good possibilities, we must always pray to understand the theme. I recalled what was to me at the time of my conversion a rather shocking example often given in my own spiritual formation by those in the Von Hildebrand circle. If you are with a lonely person in pain who wants to be diverted by

playing cards, that is not the moment to insist that discussing a spiritual book would be better!

Since the visit, a month ago, I have been working on the “theme” challenge. Sitting in a spa with my seven year old grand-daughter, I wanted to give her a little catechism class, but she wanted to talk about her dog. Why not postpone my desire to evangelize the dear little one, to follow the theme of building a bridge to her heart through the doggie?

However, the main lesson I took from the visit is that I cannot insist that seventy-five is an ideal time for me to retire in the face of Alice Von Hildebrand’s enthusiastic philosophizing and teaching at age ninety.

Blog 40 January 10, 2013

Topic: How Catholic does a Novel have to be to be Good for Catholics to Read?

When I visit my daughters, voracious fiction readers, they have a stack of novels ready for me piled up on the bed in the guest room. I love fiction but I vet each one first to see if it is so anti-Catholic I shouldn’t read it. Anti-Catholic could mean against the Church as such or full of immoral scenes, etc.

There is a middle category. Fiction written by writers who are somewhat religious, or very religious but not Catholic – as least as far as one could tell, but that have important moral and spiritual messages explicit or hidden in the plot and character depiction. A new British writer for me along these lines is Jane Gardam. Her most famous prize-winning novel is entitled *Old Filth*.

It concerns a hero who is called Old Filth because he was the lawyer who invented the joking advice: If you Fail In London, Try Hong Kong: capitals = Filth. The book is about a category of the wounded I didn’t know existed called the Raj Orphans. These were children born in the colonies such as Malaya, Hong Kong, India, etc. who were sent at an early age back to England to foster-homes and boarding schools so that they would not die of infections at the colonies and, also, so that they would be brought up English instead of going “native.”

The man who became Old Filth was such a child. I will not give away the fascinating plot. What I want to focus on is how even though the characters are mostly Christmas/Easter Anglicans and not “into spirituality” she manages to throw in lines about how evil abortion is, how long living together sexual relationships are wrong and unhealthy, and how repentance with confession to a priest can redeem and heal an entire life. In the Von Hildebrand circle it was taught that when reading novels not written by strong Catholics we must look to see, not how much evil is depicted, but where “the light falls.”

I think it is good for Catholics to read such books and copy some of the ways to get across truth in this reader-friendly way vs. only the direct route of truth proclamation pro-life Catholics such as myself prefer.

Blog 43: January 16, 2013

Topic: Crosses follow us everywhere!

As you know, if you have been following my blog, I left Connecticut to get out of the cold. But in California, where most people never even put on the heat if they even have it, it is very cold this winter. So here is my “witness”: “you know it’s too cold when the physical plant manager at the Church says he doesn’t have to clean the toilets because no one wants to sit on the cold toilet seats! They rush home instead!”

Blog 44: January 19, 2013

Topic: God’s love is greater than the devil’s hate

My spiritual friend, Bev Hinkel, a faithful reader of this blog, sent me this wonderful meditation:

**God loves me more than the devil hates me.
I have nothing to fear except fear itself.
Perfect love casts out all fear.
God's love for me is perfect.
Therefore I will not fear _____. (fill in the blank)**

I was writing to one of my daughters about a future possible project. Should I try or not? She replied in such an amusing way: “No way to tell until you try it. I suggest exerting forceful control on the part of you that likes to frost the cake before the ingredients are even stirred together, much less baked and cooled!”

The new techy Ronda thought that I could eliminate more manila files by transferring old photos onto my screen saver. I picked out 50 of my favorites from old folders and got one of my grandsons to photograph the photos and put them up so that every five minutes so that they would circulate when I was not directly working at the computer in tandem every five minutes with one of my favorite pictures of Jesus. The unpredicted effect is that I pray for each of these members of my family and friends even more often as their faces pass by daily!

I used to think it was kind of phony the way photos usually capture the best posed face of the person. Candid shots, of course, often reveal some of the less pleasing features that happened strike the photographer as worth saving. However, since putting up these photos on the screen of the computer I have been thinking it is a kind of healing exercise. Why not be thinking of the most loving face of everyone I have known instead of some expression manifesting conflicts with me! A foretaste of the resurrected body in heaven?

Blog 45: January 21, 2013

Topic: Ministry to the Homebound

When I joined the Legion of Mary again here in California, I thought I would love best to go door to door because I have such a zeal for evangelization. For lots of reasons that isn't such a good choice: physically, it is hard for me to stand outside talking to people vs. being seated; but psychologically, I tend to argue when I meet someone who doesn't accept Catholic teaching. I noticed that my Legion partners gently flow with love toward the ignorant in a way that seems better.

So, when it turned out there was a need for another person to help with Eucharistic ministry to the homebound, I thought I would try. Especially I wanted to try because I am always hope, hope, hoping that if I am ever home-bound daily communicants at the Church would bring my Savior to me more than once a week.

What I found this Sunday doing Eucharistic ministry to the home-bound is that I can almost "feel" the grace coming out of the pix (the golden or silver holder) into my hands. Then I see how lamb-like the home-bound are! In one respect or another they might have been arrogant or feisty at former times of their lives, but now they are just trapped by the ailments of their bodies with eyes full of gratitude that we come to them to visit and that we bring them their source of hope for eternity.

My partner, a former businessman, does this ministry in his elderly years to make up for years in the past of a rather luxurious life-style. When he retired, he got the grace to want to come to daily Mass and, then, asked Jesus to use him in service to the Church. He jumped into Legion of Mary with both feet.

After a few hours of home visits with Jesus I thought, maybe this is not just for them, but for me, because this way I get more out of my head into my heart.

Blog 46, January 29, 2013

Topic: 2 Great Books out of Africa and Germany

I happened to be reading two stunning books in the same week involving the type of courage we need for our times in our society. One is Chinua Achebe's Nigerian novel entitled *Things Fall Apart*. Considered to be the most popular novel ever written by an African writer, it describes the contrast between tribal life in a village long ago, before and after the coming of Anglican missionaries. The descriptions of life in that village display a mixture of laudable tribal kinship solidarity with peculiar pagan fears including the idea that twins come from bad spirits and have to be done away with immediately. Everything considered bad is thrown into what is called "the evil forest." When the missionaries come the people are flabbergasted that the Christians are willing to build their church in the evil forest given them free by the tribal leaders who imagine their gods will destroy these crazy men immediately. The cheerful survival of the missionaries in the evil forest and the beautiful singing of Christian hymns plays a large role in opening the villagers to conversion! What struck me was the incredible courage, in the Lord, of the missionaries, to come into so alien a place and risk death to bring Jesus to these peoples.

Simultaneously I am reading a biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Eric Metaxis. Many years ago I read Bonhoeffer's book about ethics and was surprised at how much this evangelical German pastor emphasized natural law. Of course I knew that he died in the concentration camp for his collaboration with those plotting to kill Hitler. Reading the long biography, however, provides quite new perspectives. For example, as a young man, waiting until he became twenty-five to be ordained, he visited the US and sat in on classes at Union Theological in New York. Way back then, in the 1920's, the seminarians were already mocking basic Christian doctrines and de-mythologizing Scripture. His impression of American Christianity would have been totally negative except that someone took him to a black Church in Harlem. There he encountered the vehement, yearning, love for Jesus in the black Gospel churches. It made a deep impression on this highly sophisticated European theologian.

Reading of those many German pastors who openly defied Hitler's attempt to found a German Church that would replace Lutheran doctrine with pagan, anti-Semitic, eugenics philosophy, and totalitarian views, gave me hope for us as we battle in our time against dissent and compromise as Catholics.

Blog 47 February 4, 2013

Topic: Attitudes toward the Body and Attitudes toward Death

I have been reading a long biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous Lutheran theologian of Germany during WWII who was part of the plot to kill Hitler.

Reading these words written right before he was hung in retaliation, I had many thoughts.

“Death!

Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal, death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish the walls of our temporary body, the walls of our souls that are blinded, so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden. Freedom, how long we have sought thee is in discipline, action and suffering; dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord.”

At first I was delighted with the faith revealed by Bonhoeffer at a time of maximum tension. But then I began to wonder:

Do his sentiments manifest a dualism different from our Catholic legacy of Aristotelian/Thomistic hylemorphism where the body and soul are considered a composite rather than the body being like the prison of the soul as Plato thought?

Is Dietrich Von Hildebrand’s idea of death more realistic, as described in his book *Jaws of Death: Gates of Heaven?* In that treatise, he maintained that fear of death is natural even for strong Christian believers and that we have to pray for grace to trust that Christ will bring us through judgment to purgatory or heaven. Of course we have examples of some martyrs, such as St. Laurence or St. Thomas More, who got such grace at the moment of death that they could joke about it.

Bonhoeffer’s words make it seem as if we would not long for the resurrection of our bodies.

My prayer is “Father, creator of heaven and earth; Jesus redeemer, Holy Spirit, comforter; help us to heave our anxious souls up to You, so that we can hope even as we don’t fully understand.

Blog 48 February 8, 2013

Topic: St. Josephine Bahkita –a Saint for the Battered

If you don’t know her, google our new saint, Josephine Bahkita, whose feast day is today, former slave in the Sudan, brutalized, who became a holy nun. Her forgiveness of her tormentors will thrill you.

About a different subject, a daughter of mine was advised to deal with painful hormone problems by taking a contraceptive pill. Even though she is anti-contraception, this would come under double-effect if a side effect was making the lining of the uterus inhospitable to any embryo that could be conceived in the process. Her response was: “I get this terrible image: a tiny thing but with a face and a toothless brave smile...it swims with great difficulty to the place that is meant to be home. But it is not home, it’s a chilly inhospitable environment which will kill her. I won’t do it.”

It is a poetic rather than literal image since the embryo wouldn't yet be able to smile, but it made me cry thinking how many of these are flushed out every day in our culture of death.

Blog 56, February 20, 2013

Topic: More Insights

A few days ago I was talking to an old friend who used to be a charismatic covenant community leader. Gabriel Meyer, asked about a problem replied, "Don't try to find Jesus above and transcendent of the problem, as if to escape to Him from the problem. Instead you will find him in the problem." I guess is a matter of willingness to bear the pain underlying the problem with and in the heart of Jesus, vs. using prayer as a way to escape. The latter is also legitimate, of course, but when I come down, the problem and the pain is still there. But when I leap into the heart of Jesus in the problem, then I feel a sense that He is more important than the problem and will bring graces of healing for me in that same problem. How? Because I will give less weight to the various possible solutions to the problem and more to just His love?

The pastor of our Church here in California, with regard to the line in the Our Father prayer, "lead us not into temptation" said that the Fathers of Church wrote that the greatest temptation is not to believe God loves you. If you don't believe that, then you despair and stop working for the kingdom.

A beautiful quotation from St. Augustine from the Office of Readings: From the Office of Readings during Passion Week Sermons on 1 John:

"We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as he is" - The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not see what you long for, but that very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.

"Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait, he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is given to us.

"So, my brethren, let us continue to desire, for we shall be filled (like St. Paul) 'forgetting what is behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on to the prize to which I am caned in the life above.'"

And this interesting quote: "Reb Nachmann says that people only hate when they are sad. Imagine there is someone in the world I can't stand the most, I hate that person, and every

day I hate that person more. Now imagine that you are at your children's wedding, dancing, the happiest day of my life, and that person comes to the door. What will happen? I will interrupt the dancing and run to the door and embrace and kiss my arch-enemy and I will say my precious friend and I will not be lying..."

Blog 57: February 21, 2013

Topic: Examination of Conscience

Someone suggested it 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?

Blog 63: March 6, 2013

Topic: More Helpful Lenten Thoughts

Dr. Richard Geraghty, the 10 Minute Philosopher on EWTN, and Bob Olson, Lay Evangelist, and I do a radio blog once a week. You can find the older ones on www.spiritualityrunningtogo.com on the Open Door segment. Now we are conversing on Open Door about the Baltimore Catechism. The topic came up as to how it is that in describing in the usual terse manner why Christ died for us, it doesn't mention the word "love." I came up with an analogy about Christ dying on the cross out of love that you might find useful:

A family has a beloved dog. But the dog is starting to bite the neighbor. If that dog bites again, the police pick the dog up and bring him to the pound (hell). So the family goes to great expense (the crucifixion) to make a wire fence around the whole property to save the dog (the garden now becomes that dogs heaven).

Well, all analogies limp, but still I like it.

My pastor, Fr. Jerome Karcher, told us today: Forgiveness is hard but non-forgiveness is harder because we have bitterness in our hearts – the remedy is to pray for them from our hearts.

Blog 68 March 13, 2013

Topic: All my Books about Love in one Volume

Some of you have read one or two of my books on love written throughout 40 years or so! I have put them all together into one cheap print on demand and Kindle through Create Space. You can find them on Amazon under The Way of Love Chervin.

Blog 69: March 14, 2013

Topic: Viva Padre Francisco I

Today was one of the happiest days of my life. Tears of joy, like and unlike the tears of joy when Cardinal Ratzinger became Benedict XVI, even more of a surprise. The like part was joy that forced of dissent in the Church didn't reach to the top. The unlike part is that Pope Francis combines magisterial orthodoxy with such a love for justice and for the poor. All the Popes of recent times have those features as well, but he seems to have them in super-abundance including simplicity of life. For forty years as a Catholic teacher I been insisting that it is not right for anyone to live in luxury if others are starving and here, apparently, is a Pope who makes that visible by riding the bus and fighting for social justice in South America where there is such a disparity between rich and poor and not, as far as I know, fraudulently poor.

Blog 71: March, 2013

Topic: Denial

One person is in denial that over-eating is gluttony – after all it's not the innermost circle of Dante's hell! Another person is in denial of harshly judging people who over-eat? Another person is in denial that harsh judgment of others for their harsh judgments all day long, and this is also a harsh judgment!

I love humble sinners who admit to their defects and sins and beg us to pray for them. What upsets me is those, like me sometimes, who are busy reciting the sins of others and rarely talk about their own defects and sins as things that need brotherly and sisterly prayer. Denial is not being weak. It's pretending one is not weak out of pride or fear that others will judge us harshly if we admit these things. Of course, usually they are judging us harshly even when we never mention those sins.

I realize that a therapist would say, people are in denial because they have been so wounded as children by harshness of parents and others that they cannot bear to open themselves to more judgment and instead try to hide their defects and sins as much as possible. I believe this is true, but then we need to ask for prayers for healing of our wounds and get spiritual and/or psychological counsel vs. putting up a façade of how flawless we are.

So what are you in denial of the sinfulness of: here's a few we rarely hear of from the pulpit: being in debt from wanting more luxuries than one can afford and putting it on the

credit card instead of enjoying a simpler life-style? gossiping about the faults of others more than we pray for each one; Envyng those who wallow in sins we wish we could commit without guilt? Unhealthy dependencies? Trusting in fallible humans and then wallowing in disappointment when they fail us vs. trusting in Jesus our Savior?...Making idols of our successes by boasting of them vs. giving all the credit to God for the talents He has given us?

Want to add to the list?

Happy end of Lent in case you want to squeeze in one more Confession before Good Friday?

And be sure pray for dear Ronda to stop enjoying calling people on their denial! Doing it in a witty manner probably isn't enough of an excuse, is it? So be sure to judge me harshly for writing this blog! Smile! See why God made sure that being a woman I would never be preaching from the pulpit?

My prayer: dear Jesus, in Your mercy, liberate us from these layers of judgment even as you heal us of the wounds that can lead us to defensive denial. Pour Your love into us that we may be both merciful and authentic at the same time.

Blog 74: March 20, 2013

Topic: Airplane Evangelization

Dear Readers,

I made it safely for 2 weeks back East. On the way I had an amazing experience. I had a connection in Atlanta. Half the people got on the plane and then they announced that due to hail on the jetway, we had to wait before getting on the plane. Meanwhile the time of departure kept changing. The pilot actually visited us in the waiting area and apologized for the delay. That was surprising but not so far out. Later, when we got into the plane 3 hours later, we were told that there could be something wrong with the tail of the plane and that within the next half hour or so the maintenance would come and either the plane would be grounded or we would leave. Then, he added:

“I am sorry my airline is very inefficient about handling such situations.”

Pondering this I started thinking that this was kind of risky for him to say. Suppose they told us we had to stay the night in a motel but since it was weather related we would have to pay. Someone could insist that since even the captain said it was inefficiency related the airline had to pay.

Ronda to Flight Attendant: I'd like to compliment the pilot on the way out on taking this risk because he seemed to care more about us being inconvenienced than about the reputation of the airline.

Attendant: Of course, he's talk to you. He is that kind of man.

With an hour or two to think up what I would say I wound up with this little speech:

"I teach seminarians ethics, and I want to tell them about the wonderful thing you just did, taking this risk..."

He looked mildly pleased and said thank you for telling him.

He didn't seem like a Catholic. Since I wear this large crucifix, a Catholic might have asked what seminary, but just the same I continued:

"Our new Pope, Francis, is doing the same kind of thing. Pope Paul VI said there's no peace without justice. John Paul II says there's no justice without transparency. I think Pope Francis is going to bring in transparency."

And, "I am 75 and I was thinking this is the last misery delay I am going to go through. I am quitting travel. But because of what you did I thought "Heh, traveling I could meet wonderful people. So I'll go Delta since they have pilots like you."

He smiled and said "It's Delta's policy to be honest."

I replied, "Well, I've been traveling for 45 years and this is the first time I ever heard such honesty."

Besides this, the man next to me in the row was a very tired Mexican man. He wanted to sleep, not talk. But toward the end when he was awake in my halting Spanish I talked to him about his work in construction as a painter, about dedicated widows, and late vocation priests at the seminary, etc. He seemed pleased I talked to him.

Blog 78: April 5, 2013

Topic: How to convert atheists?

This subject came up recently. There was a famous Jewish background but atheistic philosopher, Mortimer Adler, who was converted primarily by St. Thomas Aquinas' 5 Ways to prove the existence of God. That is rare. Most atheists become convinced in the reality of God and/or the Divinity of Christ because of many diverse kinds of religious experiences. C.S. Lewis, for example, was moved to consider the reality of God because of the virtues he found in Christian friends, but then by the famous argument in Mere Christianity that Christ was either a mad-man, a liar, or really God as He claimed.

Here are some examples of conversions in my own family from atheism. Myself you can find on www.rondachervin.com free e-books – leaflets - the one called Saved: the story of Ronda Chervin's conversion. (You may have read this earlier in this book or other books. If so, skip ahead!)

My twin-sister thought I was crazy to think God existed or that Christ was divine. She was a materialist when I converted at 21. What got her started toward her conversion to the Catholic faith a few years later was that she suddenly saw my soul in the midst of a conversation. She saw it in my eyes. This religious experience got her to think maybe immaterial things exist such as souls.

It is my belief that many people convert from atheism in relation to their highest value. My sister's highest value was beauty. She was a modern dancer at the time. But she also loved the beauty of classical music. She would listen to Verdi's Requiem over and over again and she got a sense of Christ from that music. Also she loved St. Augustine's Confessions.

My mother, brought up as an atheist, and an ex-Communist, thought I was crazy, also. From the loving friendship of many Catholics, she began to look into the faith. For her friendship love was the highest value. She converted some 10 years after I and my sister became Catholics.

My husband was brought up orthodox Jewish. His story can be found in the book of stories called Bread from Heaven sold by the Association of Hebrew Catholics. Basically, when he was a youth he wandered out of the Jewish ghetto on the lower East Side and came to the public library. Reading from A-Z he came upon Jesus. He was fascinated. He became an atheist as a teen, as did many second generation American Jews. He met me in his 40's. He thought he might find Jesus through osmosis if he married a former Jew who was a Catholic, even though I was an atheist with only a cultural Jewish background. I prayed and prayed he would have a vision of Jesus. Once he was near a huge crucifix in Rome and Jesus said in his heart: You need me more than I need you! He was not a philosopher but a fiction writer. He spent 20 years working on a novel about Christ and Satan in the Desert, the question being how can Jesus tell us to be lambs when to survive we have to be wolves. This book Children of the Breath, available from CMJ Marian publishers ends with Jesus leaving the desert to become the sacrificial lamb. He became a Catholic at 60 years old

partly by reading the Baltimore Catechism which was much clearer than the many books priests and philosophers gave him to read. His highest value was life and he longed for the eternal life Jesus promised. When he asked a famous Jewish convert why He became a Catholic, that convert, Charles Rich, said simply: “because you get more.” Appealing, in this way, to a similar background on the Lower East Side filled with push-carts!

My father was baptized in the Presbyterian Church because of his Christian mother. He became an atheist at age 12. So strong was his atheism that he spend many decades writing atheist leaflets, especially trying to prove that the famous American Presidents were all atheists. He was alarmed that his divorced wife and children would become Catholics. Nothing in what I gave him to read reached him as much as that I read a biography of Lincoln and put post-its on the famous passages where Lincoln said he could not stand the tragedies of the Civil War deaths without his faith in God. My father did not realize that many Presidents who were not Church-goers were still believers in God and often in Christ. Years after his death I met a Catholic woman who lived near my father. She said that in the year before he died I spoke to a Catholic priest. I will not know till heaven what that conversation was.

I prayed for each of these family members every day of my life. I am sure that some of my arguments filtered through but it seems as if prayer was the most important help. We must always remember that God loves every person infinitely more than we do. If, as we teach, when they die they see Jesus, and they followed the light as much as possible, they will choose Him and be saved. We are not to judge how much they followed the light, just to pray for them. “Love covers a multitude of sins,” Jesus taught. Since we rely on this concerning our own sins, we must do so when thinking about the sins of others whether sins of doubt or moral sins.

Blog 77: April 3, 2013

Topic: An Amazing Grace for an Atheist

Tease: Can anything good come from a Jehovah’s Witness

One of the reasons for my trip back East was to meet the plane where Diana's daughter and son-in-law were coming back from Malawi where they were for 2 ½ years in the peace corps. While there in a rain forest village my grandson-in-law, brought up as an atheist, was befriended by a native Jehovah's Witness leader who insisted that he read the Bible and pray. In the course of this, my grandson-in-law realized that Christ was real and divine because he was trying to be a good person in the peace corps to save Malawians, but he

found that he had no peace because of his non-forgiveness issues. But when he prayed to Jesus all the hate and anger went away! Isn't that glorious? Since he didn't like the fundamentalist ways of the Witnesses he thought he should be a Catholic instead.

He came to Easter Mass with me in New Jersey where the whole family was renting a house to celebrate. It happened the priest in the walking distance parish was an Afro-American charismatic who danced from foot to foot anointing the people with holy water and whooped it up with joy. Sean said that he had thought a Catholic Mass would be more solemn and supernatural! I told him to find an extraordinary form Mass in Nashville where he will be next visiting his mother. He came to the Easter Monday Mass and liked that better. He insists that I push him into the Church and instruct him and tell him what to do.

Please pray for him, especially when we get to the part about the moral teachings of the Church. He has heard about these from me for years but he may think my ideas are optional, especially if he winds up in an RCIA run by dissenters.

Blog 79: April 6, 2013

Topic: A Fascinating International Conversion Story

A man sent me this witness story about his father:

Professor Mario Hübner Lehrer

Testimony of a Life

1925-2008

He was born on October 22, 1925 in Nizankowice, a district (Przemyśl) that used to be part of Austria and was ruled by the now declared Blessed, Emperor Charles I of Habsburg and his wife, the servant of God, Empress Zita of Bourbon-Parma, in a multiracial, cultural and religious society that today is part of Ukraine at 3 kilometers from Poland. He was Austrian at his heart without undervaluing his Polish nationality, whose language he still remembered, as well as other Slavic languages of his native region.

Because he had a universal outlook, he never tried to hide his roots nor the languages spoken at home (German and Yiddish), mastering them to perfection to the time he died. He loved the German language, which he always spoke with an Austrian accent; it was part of the language of protocol of his people. They used it in their activities and even for the invitations for his parents' wedding.

This profound scholar had seen the light for the first time in a pious and sincere, religious Jewish home, that proceeded from the priestly caste, Zadik Kohen. He was the oldest and favorite grandchild of his maternal grandfather, who with varied interests was a businessman, active civically, and became part of Nizankowice's city council. His grandfather was highly educated, generous, and affable with a profound spirituality and prayer life; he was connected to rabbinic universities (Yeshivas), he is now buried in the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. His grandfather greatly impressed him and they retained a great love for each other until the end of their lives, both dying coincidentally on yom kippur, the most sacred day in Judaism.

He immigrated with his parents to Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, a totally different world from his native country that he never forgot although he was never able to return to it. An active and grateful man, he became part of his adopted country and made Spanish his principal language which he spoke without a foreign accent. A born polyglot, he also learned Hungarian, French, and English. He completed his Bachelor's degree in medicine and his medical studies at the University of the Republic, Uruguay in Montevideo.

During his infancy, adolescence and youth, his restless genius pushed him to become a voracious reader of the most varied religious, political, moral and philosophical themes. He sought the Truth in all areas, including medical, that made him become one of the pioneers in immunohematology in Uruguay; not only human but also animal. He investigated and made scientific discoveries through self-teaching and received national and international recognition. In his search for the Truth, he went through a period of atheism, something contradictory in a Jew that in itself necessarily implies being observant of the religion, especially after receiving a very good, solid religious education, at home as well as in pious practice. He also received religious and biblical knowledge in community institutions from the Jewish community, parallel to the Uruguayan public education. He reacquainted himself with his Hebrew roots in Catholicism after reading the biography of St. Paul, a Jew who, following the orders of the Sanhedrin, persecuted the first Christians who for the most part were Jewish. Later Paul became one of the principal apostles of the gentiles (who were not Jewish). St. Paul's biography was the decisive instrument to his conversion.

Just as St. Paul, his conversion in the Holy year, 1950, through baptism was the fruit, not of a rationalization, nor personal convenience, but of an infusion of faith, a gracious gift given by God, not merited, supernatural, not contrary to reason, as explained by St. Thomas Aquinas, philosopher and theologian with an Aristotelian base, who many times used the works of the Jewish Spaniard, Maimonides.

After becoming Catholic, at different times he wrote many articles with religious themes in various Catholic magazines and newspapers with a national circulation. However, he never abandoned his universal interests, also writing about cultural, scientific, economic and current political themes. In 1954, he was the first exponent in Uruguay of the person and spirituality of the Jewish philosopher, convert, and member of the Carmelite Order, Edith Stein, while she was quite far from canonization.

A holy Christ-centered man, very devoted to the Blessed Mother, firm and immutable in matters of faith, morals and personal convictions, personal and political philosophy, without ever contradicting his beliefs, he always kept faithful to the Magisterium and always maintained a coherence between his behavior and his beliefs.



Having formed a solid, cultured, simple and happy home, based upon his faith in Devine Providence, he died in Montevideo, in his home after a long physical ailment on October 8, 2008 surrounded by his loved ones, totally serene and conscious with an image of Our Lady Mother of the Devine Providence of his native Nizankowice , in the year of St.

Paul , and having close to him the special blessing that his compatriot, the Blessed John Paul the II had sent him. It was, without his knowing it, the Eve of Kol Nidrei, when the Jews begin to celebrate the Day of forgiveness.

On another topic all together: I recently had several intense bouts of anger, most of them concerning dissenters from moral truths held dear in our Catholic faith. I wrote to a priest about how to deal with this, telling him that I always try first spiritual warfare in the form of rebuking the spirit of anger, or despair...and laying it at the feet of Jesus. This is a technique described in great detail in the book *Unbound* by Lozano.

I was surprised by his reply but I think it is important for me to ponder and act on and you might find it important to ponder also.

“The Prayer to St. Michael and other "techniques" can be helpful, but are only "techniques" to help deal with a given situation. There's the danger that they treat only the symptoms, not the cause.

I don't know what your understanding of "the spirit of ..." is but I have noticed that often people are talking about an evil "spirit" (demon), who is tempting them into sin. The problem with such prayers and techniques (such as "I rebuke the spirit of dissent ...") is that it tries to deal with the problem as if it was something external to the person, making

the person just a victim of evil influence, when in fact, we ourselves, more often than not, are the problem. Many people blame the devil for many things, but the greatest source of temptation and disorder comes from within ourselves. Therefore, although such prayers can be of help, the real solution lies in treating the cause itself--our vices, our disordered emotions, our pride, etc. The solution is found, not so much in prayers, techniques, and calling off spirits, but in changing ourselves--i.e., cultivation of the virtues that will squeeze out our vices and make of us a new person.

Virtue is what helped the saints love sinners... Patience and compassion helped them deal with all of the imperfections and foibles of others. Humility helped them realize that they have their own imperfections and foibles. We can't act as if we want to control everyone, in order that they march to our tune, when we want and how we want. (Ronda's thought here is that for teachers, like myself, this is particularly hard to get because in the classroom precisely we sing the tune and the students have to march or flunk out and they have to do it the way we want and when we want. So we expect the same obedience when we are in other situations such as social situations or family situations with adults.) Humility helps us see our own shortcomings and realize how we can be a thorn in the side of others, while thinking that we are always right. Common sense helps us realize that there is not and never will be an environment where everyone is perfectly pro-magisterial in the way that we want them to be. There is no such thing as utopia on this earth.

Remember that Jesus ate with sinners and didn't fly into a rage because they didn't immediately accept Him. We attract more flies with honey than with vinegar. If we really want to convert the world and make a difference, we have to live among sinners (sometimes very big sinners) and show them the beauty of Christianity and not try to shove it down their throats. We also can't just isolate ourselves from them, so that we can feel comfortable. You yourself wrote that "Jesus wasn't a zealot and He had much more than I to come against."

I'm always amazed at how Providence works in our lives. These last couples days I pondered about what I might write to you. Then, suddenly today, as I was reading Psalm 37 in today's Office of Readings, it was as if I was being given exactly what I needed to convey to you.

Do not fret because of the wicked

.....

Calm your anger and forget your rage;

do not fret, it only leads to evil.

For those who do evil shall perish;

the patient shall inherit the land.

Surrender to God, and he will do everything for you. (antiphon)

And what is absolutely essential for one attempting to live the Christian life? Detachment from self. We all have to practice detachment from things of this world, things that are external to us, but detachment from self is far more difficult because "self" is internal to us. It goes to the very depths of our soul and is our most prized possession. Only when we strive for detachment from self, do we begin to see our own miserable imperfections and worry more about how much we offend God, rather than how much others offend Him because we have passed judgment upon them. We won't concentrate so much on whether others are the problem, and may begin to think that "perhaps, I'm part of the problem." Only then, are we no longer driven to control and demand. And it is only then, that we can begin to achieve true peace and love people into the Church through prayer and patience, rather than by force.

Blog 85: April 15, 2013

Topic: Unexpected Illustrations of Truths

I teach a course on The Nature of Love. In it we read The Heart by Dietrich Von Hildebrand. He has a chapter on tenderness in contrast to a kind of paralysis of the heart exemplified in doing one's duty by others but not with tender empathy.

In answer to a question of mine about tender emotions in their lives, an African minister in a Canadian parish wrote these words. They jolted me away from arguments about immigration policies to more of a response from the heart:

“Hildebrand seems to suggest that tender emotions are highly sensitive and are often compassionate, considerate and understanding of others and able to imagine the depth of another person’s feelings.

“When I first moved to North America the move was not an easy process for me as a single person. I came to Canada with very high expectations hoping for a greater life or as they say to pursue the American dream. But things turned out to be just the opposite and I found myself living just to survive to pay my bills. It reached a point where I experienced some depression but fortunately after living here for more than 10 years I have accepted the reality of living in North America. I work with many immigrants who struggle to adapt to the environments: economic and social institutions. Difficulties in overcoming these challenges have affected many immigrants’ long term prospects of adjusting to a different culture, learning a new language, and accomplishing in the labour market. For example, I know of many examples of skilled immigrants who arrive with a sense of adventure and optimism, only to be disappointed and sometimes overwhelmed by obstacles to meaningful employment. Some people that I work with have built up frustration to the

point of depression and some have suffered from mental-health problems to point where it has affected their ability to deal with the daily challenges of life.

Being in depression is horrific. I always think how hard it is to adjust into a new environment. I often feel pain for their struggle especially those who come with large families. Out of my own experience, “I understand and feel the pain” of what these immigrants go through. I always try to share my own experiences of something that I have done in the past that may be helpful to them. Responding with tender emotions such as identifying with their condition is a wonderful thing to be able to do; the rewards are gratifying, to see those struggling with adaptation discover that the road to achievement often involves bumps, pitfalls, and setbacks. Adaptation is never out of reach, no matter how hopeless the situation might seem. Change is possible with the right treatment and support, and by having the right attitude and not giving up—even if you’ve tried and failed before. But by examining the problem and thinking about change, you’re already on your way.”

On another related question he responded:

“Most people in ministry do not like to be objectified but desire tender emotions from their spiritual leaders. For example, nobody would be amused if a pastor welcomes them, spent time meeting with them, or had a meal with them but later discover that it was only done out of duty or pastoral obligation. Such an action would be considered hypocritical or insincere. Duty without tenders emotions such as love and joy reflect that a person does not care and treasure the one they serve. When we love the ones we serve and treasure them, just the opposite happens where duty is not done out of obligation but out of love and joy.”

“One of the breakthroughs I have experienced in showing tender feelings is that it makes others less likely to resort to trickery and deception to get what they want or to get attention. When other people’s feelings have been uplifted and they know they are loved, is much easier for them to change or improve in their moral lives than if their lives have been taken for granted.”

The students had an option to “Describe key moments in your life when you were moved in your heart to respond in a new way to other human beings or to God.

He wrote: “High expectations can have a positive effect because at times help people meet their goals. Low expectations can lead to negative impact where people tend to underperform and may lose confidence in their abilities and show symptoms of dissatisfaction. I think it is important to have a good balance between the two in order to have a healthy church. Because of my personality type, I tend to have very high expectations for the people I serve to the point that it is becoming a problem to some. The expectations I have developed for the people have even caused me not to enjoy my congregation the way I should. I find myself disappointed because certain goals are not

met. The end result of all this is that I am at the point where I am filled with ingratitude and unable to give thanks to God for the people he has entrusted me with.

The expectation I have for the people come from within me. Since I tend to be a perfectionist, I expect people to live up to my expectations. It takes much to be satisfied with what I do. I am beginning to realize that if I continue like this I am the one who will fail eventually. I need to remove the pressure from my shoulder.”

Blog 87, April 20, 2013

Topic: A different thought about terrorism

I felt compelled to watch hours of the TV coverage of the Boston Marathon suspects manhunt, praying all the while. Did any of you catch where afterwards some of the police chiefs thanked the TV viewers for praying for them! In the midst of this, the odd thought came into my head that one might think of St. Paul before his conversion as a terrorist. So he could be the patron saints for praying for terrorists! On more consideration I think that is not exact. He was an arm for the Pharisaic theocracy of the time in initiating terror for the Christians and that is different somewhat from the case of our present-day terrorists. Lord have mercy on the victims, on the terrorists, on every person desperate for psychological and/or political reasons.

Blog 90: April 24, 2013

Topic: Terrorism

I guess sitting and praying in front of the TV during the manhunt after the Boston Marathon massacre worked in my mind to bring up more general thoughts such as this one: In our personal lives, if we tend toward anger, are rage and threats a sort of emotional terrorism?

On quite a different topic, from Abraham Low, founder of Recovery, Inc. (this fits me to a “t” about anxiety about tiny things now that I am doing, so few “big” things).

“To (a perfectionist) every puny endeavor, each trivial enterprise is a challenge to prove and to maintain his exceptional stature. His life is a perennial test of his singularity and distinction. For him there are no trivialities, no routine performances. He is forever on trial, before his own inner seat of judgment, for his excellence and exceptional ability. He cannot achieve poise, relaxation, spontaneity. He cannot afford to have the COURAGE TO

MAKE MISTAKES. A mistake might wipe out his pretense of being superior, important, exceptional. With no margin left for mistakes he is perpetually haunted by the fear of making them.”

Blog 91: May 3, 2013

Topic: Back from EWTN

I had a wonderful trip to EWTN to do a series for Johnnette Benkovic’s Women of Grace on the book I co-authored with Deacon Richard Ballard and Iconographer Ruth Ballard called What the Saints Said About Heaven. You can order this from Tan or from EWTN on-line catalog. I also did an interview for Book Mark on The Way of Love – the 4 booklets in 1 volume latest book of mine. 400 pages, only \$10 paperback; for less money as an e-book. You can order that from Amazon.

A double insight came to me about self-esteem. Before I left I was complaining to my daughter about senior moments. She is tired of this subject. She suggested this method: Take a sheet of paper and all day long make entries in 2 columns: What I did passably and Where I forgot something or made a mistake. You will soon see that the left column far outweighs the negatives in terms of ability to reach a goal, even a tiny one. This method helped me greatly when I dropped my boarding pass into the trash with a Starbucks coffee cup. Happily I noticed the loss about 5 minutes later and the pass was right on top of the other junk in the trash bin. Still, I had succeeded in 20 others things that same day.

Another self-esteem victory. I generally think of myself as an aggressive, confrontative, awful person, but a friend took a photo of me at EWTN. I looked so loving and sweet and humble! Okay, you can say, well sure, because you were imbibing the graces of EWTN, but it happened that the moment before the photo I was grumbling about a trivial annoyance. Seeing the photo was a big healing moment. So, who wants us to think that because we still have sins, faults, and character defects we should close up shop? Satan. And who wants us to thank Him for all the love that is in our hearts in spite of those sins, faults and defects? Praise the Lord.

On a less personal note, here is something from my journal I pasted here just before I left for EWTN:

LOURDES, France, SEPT. 15, 2008 (Zenit.org).- For those who suffer and are struggling, the strength to carry on can be found within the smile of the Virgin Mary, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope said this today at the homily he gave today, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrow, during the Mass with the sick at Rosary Square at the Marian shrine in Lourdes. Some 70,000 people participated in the Mass.

The Holy Father offered a reflection on the smile of Mary, who he called the "teacher of love."

He noted that the tears Mary "shed at the foot of the cross have been transformed into a smile which nothing can wipe away."

"Christians have always sought the smile of Our Lady," Benedict XVI explained, "this smile which medieval artists were able to represent with such marvelous skill and to show to advantage."

"This smile of Mary is for all; but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein," he said. "To seek Mary's smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship which binds us to her whom Christ gave us as our Mother."

The Pope continued: "To wish to contemplate this smile of the Virgin, does not mean letting oneself be led by an uncontrolled imagination. Scripture itself discloses it to us through the lips of Mary when she sings the Magnificat: 'My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Savior.'

"When the Virgin Mary gives thanks to the Lord, she calls us to witness. Mary shares, as if by anticipation, with us, her future children, the joy that dwells in her heart, so that it can become ours. Every time we recite the Magnificat, we become witnesses of her smile."

Bernadette

The Holy Father said that St. Bernadette Soubirous "contemplated this smile of Mary in a most particular way" when Our Lady appeared to her.

"It was the first response that the Beautiful Lady gave to the young visionary who wanted to know who she was," he said. "Before introducing herself, some days later, as 'the Immaculate Conception,' Mary first taught Bernadette to know her smile, this being the most appropriate point of entry into the revelation of her mystery."

"In the smile of the most eminent of all creatures, looking down on us, is reflected our dignity as children of God, that dignity which never abandons the sick person," the Pope said. " This smile, a true reflection of God's tenderness, is the source of an invincible hope."

Benedict XVI continued: "The endurance of suffering can upset life's most stable equilibrium, it can shake the firmest foundations of confidence, and sometimes even leads people to despair of the meaning and value of life.

"There are struggles that we cannot sustain alone, without the help of divine grace. When speech can no longer find the right words, the need arises for a loving presence: We seek then the closeness not only of those who share the same blood or are linked to us by friendship, but also the closeness of those who are intimately bound to us by faith."

Strength

"I would like to say, humbly," the Pope proposed, "to those who suffer and to those who struggle and are tempted to turn their backs on life: Turn toward Mary!

"Within the smile of the Virgin lies mysteriously hidden the strength to fight against sickness, in support of life. With her, equally, is found the grace to accept without fear or bitterness to leave this world at the hour chosen by God.

"In the very simple manifestation of tenderness that we call a smile, we grasp that our sole wealth is the love God bears us, which passes through the heart of her who became our Mother."

"To seek this smile," he said, "is first of all to have grasped the gratuitousness of love; it is also to be able to elicit this smile through our efforts to live according to the word of her Beloved Son, just as a child seeks to elicit its mother's smile by doing what pleases her."

During adoration it occurred to me that St. Joseph could have repeated the words of the Hail Mary to Mary each day. I think I read this once in a long book about St. Joseph but it came up to my mind and I think it is a lovely idea. As I gaze at the statues of Mary and Joseph and the infant at the altar I can think of this.

I witnessed the heroic virtue of my pastor dealing with a person who drives him crazy. I thought, a good part of the heroic virtue of a priest is having to be seen and judged in every act by his parishioners.

Blog 94: May 10, 2013

Topic: Biography of Pope Francis

I rarely buy books, because I can borrow them from the Seminary library free, but I wanted to read a biography of the new Holy Father asap. I assumed since it came out so soon it was an old biography quickly translated by our dynamite Ignatius Press, but it was

written by Andrea Tornielli quickly in Italian after the election. This fine journalist knows Pope Francis personally from trips he made as a Bishop and Cardinal to Rome.

I highly recommend it to get a more personal sense of our new Pope. It will not change anything you heard from commentators like those at EWTN but it has a preface by Fr. Mitch Pacwa, so that might help the way.

What impressed me the most is his personal response to friends and strangers. For example, he had an on-going ministry to those in the terrible slums of Buenos Aires (note, these are not like our slums in the US – some of the people live in cardboard boxes or crates!) The biographer describes the Cardinal seeing a beautiful prostitute selling her body for her drug habit. Whenever he would see her he would say “God loves you.” Eventually she left her addiction and her trade, came back to the Church and is now learning how to minister to drug addicts at her previous place of “business.”

Of much lesser importance, my granddaughter told me that when she misses me (she lives in a different State) she watches me on You-tube. I didn’t even know I was on You-tube! Most of them are bits coming from a debate I did with an activist atheist (he stands on street corners telling people why religion is terrible and atheism better.) I debated with him on a TV set up on his web. His name is Justin Vacula – a former Catholic. You might enjoy it, unless he has cut up my stuff in such a way as to trivialize my golden truths!

A new venture. Ever hear of MOOC – this is a set up for massive on-line courses. The way it works is that, for free, people associated with some organization can take courses for a certificate. The professor does it for free, but gets all this exposure to his/her ideas. The students rap with each other on the site and the teacher can come in at will to clarify but need not. In this case the MOOC is from the National Catholic Education people, and I am doing Way of Love: 100 Steps Spiritual Marathon that initially was on this blog.

An 85 year old priest substitute at my parish in California told this fascinating story. He was at the seminary and he couldn’t make it with the Latin component of philosophy courses. He had to memorize Thomistic definitions in Latin for exams. He left the seminary and was drafted into the Korean War. When the captain in his boot camp held up a bayonet and said “what is a bayonet for?” and the men had to respond with a yell “Kill! Kill! Kill!” he had a conversion moment wondering why he had left the seminary for this! When he returned to the seminary, post-Vatican II, his studies were easier and he has served 50 years in the priesthood.

Blog 95: May 14, 2013

Topic: New thoughts about non-religious holidays

I tend to belittle non-religious holidays, but this year I had a few surprises. Going around to bring the Holy Eucharist to the homebound, some of whom were mothers and grandmothers, I had to see that for them flowers and cards, especially if their children and grandchildren don't live near enough to visit, was something heart-warming and deeply moving. Picture a woman of 85 in a wheelchair with Alzheimer's, in and out of coherency. She is fingering a large mother's day card with signatures of all her grandchildren from one of her children's families with a beatific smile on her face.

At the parish, the priest when mentioning praying for mothers included this time step-mothers and godmothers. I thought that was a loving gesture. My twin-sister, who never conceived though she would have liked to, always calls on mother's day to thank me for the family my husband and I brought forth that she enjoys as aunt.

On a different note, the husband of a wife who died in her forties of melanoma wrote me, "I feel no anger, but I'm kind of jealous of God now."

Blog 96: May, 2013

Topic: The Pilgrim Virgin

Forty years ago a group of Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima women brought the Pilgrim Virgin statue to my house. I was in a hurry and not at all delighted when they opened up a large prayer book for us to go through together as a welcome to Mary's week's visit to our house, but, of course, I acquiesced. So, that made it much more amazing that when we came to a line about "Mary exchange your heart in me for my heart" I was flooded with graces of visions, locutions, and, even for 2 whole years, of peace! Now 40 years later our Legion group brought the Pilgrim Statue to a homebound woman. It was so moving to me to see her joy and say those prayers once more.

If you never had this experience, look into it.

(AT THIS POINT IT PUT ONE FOOT IN ETERNITY ONTO MY WEB-SITE TO REPLACE FORMER JOURNALS)

GRACES 2013

(Again, these entries overlap in time with the blog for 2013 where most of my thoughts are recorded.)

January 26, 2013

I was reading a biography of Bonhoeffer and it brought me into German culture. I woke up with the word Isenheim ringing in my heart. What followed seemed to be words from the Holy Spirit that I need to be much more willing to suffer in imitation of the crucified Jesus of the Isenheim Altar Piece of Grunewald – long a favorite. Be more of a pilgrim; get rid of even more stuff.

February 7, 2013

My daughter, Carla, has terrible stomach pains and the doctor recommended that she take the contraceptive pill not to avoid babies but to help the pains associated with menopause. Even though this is permissible as double effect since she would love to have more children and it is not her intent to avoid them, Carla wrote these lines: “I get this terrible image: a tiny thing but with a Martina face (her youngest child) and a toothless brave smile...it swims with great difficulty to the place that is meant to be home. But it is not home, it’s a chilly inhospitable environment which will kill her. It doesn’t seem to matter how small the chances are (of getting pregnant at 50 years old).

February 22, 2013

I had an amazing grace this morning. I was kvetching and groaning over the latest about the gay lobby at the Vatican and during rosary. I was thinking how this follows me everywhere with all the misery experiences with persecution by Catholic homosexuals of me for teaching Courage, and some close, close Catholic friends who seemingly turned out to be scandalously homosexual, etc. etc. etc. I thought, I need to just get away from this subject except for teaching Harvey at the seminary.

I noticed at the morning Mass after the rosary a man who just came back to the Church. He was the type I gravitate toward - seedy, ravaged, with beautiful intense eyes. Immediately I thought - maybe this man is a homosexual.

So, later after coffee and donuts this man introduces himself. We get talking and he mentions that he has come back to the Church after a long time away (he wears a rosary around his neck) and is on disability. He is fifty but looks sixty-five. Casually I ask what his disability is. He leans over and whispers in my ear "AIDS." Then he says - don't mention it to anyone else. You look as if you wouldn't ostracize me. I tell him about Courage and he

can't wait to google it and find a group to attend because he is trying to be chaste. As I leave, the man gives me a kiss on the cheek with his icy cold lips!

When someone is a hidden active homosexual or a dissenter on the wrongness of it, I get enraged, but when it is someone looking for help my heart melts.

Feb. 24, 2013

From Lily (Alice Von Hildebrand) regarding looking for perfect places: "You are - like Daniel - a creature of longing and desire and nothing will satisfy you until you experience the sweetness of Christ.

March 5, 2013 Reading old journal 2002 when I am leaving for Solitudes – Jesus says to see each new place as a gift. There were many gifts for me at each place I have been. Now see the next phase for me as gifts) Then looking at the composite volume of Way of Love it seemed that God poured graces into me to realize that the only thing that counts now about me is that I do this Way of Love myself by praying absolutely constantly. On the "negative side" maybe I am too weak to bear the crosses at each place without an alternate in queue!

April 9, 2013

Dear Ronda,

The Prayer to St. Michael and other "techniques" can be helpful, but are only "techniques" to help deal with a given situation. There's the danger that they treat only the symptoms, not the cause.

I don't know what your understanding of "the spirit of ..." is but I have noticed that often people are talking about an evil "spirit" (demon), who is tempting them into sin. The problem with such prayers and techniques (such as "I rebuke the spirit of dissent ...") is that it tries to deal with the problem as if it was something external to the person, making the person just a victim of evil influence, when in fact, we ourselves, more often than not, are the problem. Many people blame the devil for many things, but the greatest source of temptation and disorder comes from within ourselves. Therefore, although such prayers can be of help, the real solution lies in treating the cause itself--our vices, our disordered emotions, our pride, etc. The solution is found, not so much in prayers, techniques, and calling off spirits, but in changing ourselves--i.e., cultivation of the virtues that will squeeze out our vices and make of us a new person.

Virtue is what helped the saints love sinners and not want to kill them. Patience and compassion helped them deal with all of the imperfections and foibles of others. Humility helped them realize that they have their own imperfections and foibles. We can't act as if we want to control everyone, in order that they march to our tune, when we want and how

we want. Humility helps us see our own shortcomings and realize how we can be a thorn in the side of others, while thinking that we are always right. Common sense helps us realize that there is not and never will be an environment where everyone is perfectly pro-magisterial in the way that we want them to be. There is no such thing as utopia on this earth.

Remember that Jesus ate with sinners and didn't fly into a rage because they didn't immediately accept Him. We attract more flies with honey than with vinegar. If we really want to convert the world and make a difference, we have to live among sinners (sometimes very big sinners) and show them the beauty of Christianity and not try to shove it down their throats. We also can't just isolate ourselves from them, so that we can feel comfortable. You yourself wrote that "Jesus wasn't a zealot and He had much more than I to come against."

I'm always amazed at how Providence works in our lives. These last couples days I pondered about what I might write to you. Then, suddenly today, as I was reading Psalm 37 in today's Office of Readings, it was as if I was being given exactly what I needed to convey to you.

Do not fret because of the wicked

.....

Calm your anger and forget your rage;

do not fret, it only leads to evil.

For those who do evil shall perish;

the patient shall inherit the land.

Surrender to God, and he will do everything for you. (antiphon)

And what is absolutely essential for one attempting to live the Christian life? Detachment from self. We all have to practice detachment from things of this world, things that are external to us, but detachment from self is far more difficult because "self" is internal to us. It goes to the very depths of our soul and is our most prized possession. Only when we strive for detachment from self, do we begin to see our own miserable imperfections and worry more about how much we offend God, rather than how much others offend Him because we have passed judgment upon them. We won't concentrate so much on whether others are the problem, and may begin to think that "perhaps, I'm part of the problem." Only then, are we no longer driven to control and demand. And it is only then, that we can begin to achieve true peace and love people into the Church through prayer and patience, rather than by force.

**Yours in Christ,
Fr. Dennis**

(AT THIS POINT I PUT ONE FOOT IN ETERNITY ON MY WEB).

