

Of course, that seemed impossible for so many reasons. But I did not think so. You, Lord, allowed the Divine Word seminary in Epworth, Iowa to invite me to the school where most of the students were Asians, to have a sacred art show and to give a talk there. It happened that the motherhouse of the Philippines was up the street from this seminary. I wrote and asked to see Dom Brendan who then told me to talk to Dom Mark. Dom Mark was the superior of the Philippines and would be coming to Iowa in a few weeks to discuss the situation of the community. What was the chance for this to happen, one might wonder? But nothing is strange for You, Lord! So I arranged the date to go pick up my artwork at the time where I could go with Rev. Father to talk to Dom Mark. And I did. Now looking back, I laugh about it for I had no fear and had a lot of courage! I told Fr. Mark I wanted to go to the Philippines to help Abbot John Eudes with his mission. When he said it was not possible, I was very upset and cried like a spoiled child. He treated me like St. Therese, the Little Flower. He told me that I should read her autobiography and that he would pray for me, etc. When I told him not to tell Rev. Father that I was so upset and cried, he told me not to worry, because any man would be happy to know there is a woman who cries for him. (as we read this, Abba and I chuckled as we both laughed at me, the willing and fearless child of Yours!) So dear Lord, like Your Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux, I felt very sad and helpless.

Saying good-bye to Abba

The day came near when I had to say good-bye to Rev. Father. I could not hold my tears. I felt very hurt that You let me trust him and now he had to leave when I just began to learn how to live my spiritual life. I again felt like an orphan. With tears and anger, I told him that I wanted You, Your holy Body. I had no idea why I so desired You then. Now I understand that I must have perceived I did not know enough at the time, which truly I did not, to experience You directly. He was the one who helped me, and if he would go away, then I wanted You, Your presence. Somehow he understood what I meant right away. Sadly he told me I could not have the Eucharist. And even if I had permission, I must have a reverend room for Your Sacred Body to be venerated. So my world shattered as I watched the plane depart when the time came. With Your grace, I managed to spend some time talking to him at the airport before he left. I had no idea where he would be in the big airport, but You took me right to where he was. I got there just in time to see his back as he entered the restricted area before departure. Of course You gave me such a spirit that I called out for the security officer who could not refuse my pleading that he must go find Rev. Father for me, and he did. Thank You, Lord! During a week, I prayed and prayed and finally I got a phone message, which he let me know he had arrived safely. For about two months, there was no way to contact him directly. I never cried so much for days like a baby missing her mother. I finally managed to search the Order web site and found Our Lady of the Philippines phone number. With your grace, Lord, I reached him.

Rev. Father was very capable. He had such a strong temperament and brave spirit. Because of his love for You, he would do anything to please You. You must have wanted him to train me so I could be like him when it comes to loving You above all things. You know I, too, have that same temperament and spirit. However, mine still needed to be disciplined; Therefore, I have never been afraid to speak to him from the heart where Your presence has always been so strong that I can feel Your strength. Therefore, I have no fear. Yes, love knows no fear. Your spirit helped me discern when and how and to whom I should make Your will for me known. Because he was the teacher You have chosen for me, I have always been able to understand him well, and vice versa.

This is the very reason why he often made exceptions in dealing with me even though we were like heaven and earth in wisdom, knowledge and everything else. We always feel Your spirit in our dealing with one another. One time, when he still lived as a hermit, he was saying Mass privately in the Sacred Heart chapel while the community and I were attending Mass in the Abbey Church. All of a sudden, despite all the loud chanting, intuitively, I could hear him yell for help. I knew it was not possible that I could hear him. I thought I was just thinking too much, but I prayed for him anyway at the time. Later, I found out he had a stroke and fell during Mass! Thank You for saving him. He was able to recover after about ten minutes. Being a doctor, he could tell he had a stroke, and his memory was affected. He later shared this with me when I told him of my experience. It was profound. Here I am off track again, Lord!

It was because of his daring spirit, that Dom Brendan asked him to help Our Lady of the Philippines. He finally got a cell phone and used that to get connected with the internet to do e-mail. Prior to that, the Philippines brothers had to go out of the monastery to do email. My dear cousins Francois and Frederic who lived in France, helped direct him how to do so. They communicated through e-mails. (My two French cousins were very dear to me. I could only share my sufferings with them, especially Francois, during Rev. Father's absence. I am very sorry what for some strange reasons, they have not stayed in touch. I have tried but they chose to distant themselves. Whatever the reasons, I pray for their peace and their happiness and more importantly that someday they will get to know You, Lord.) Rev. Father finally connected to the world from a small island called Gimaras via e-mails. He had such great patience because at times, it took him almost thirty minutes to get connected to the internet, and sometimes, while doing his email, he would get disconnected so had to start the process all over again.

I really wanted to help when I knew what his mission was about. So despite all the terrible threats about foreigners being kidnapped by a group connected with extremist Islamists, Abu-Sayyaf, I determined to go visit him. You, Lord, knew I must do it. Traveling with Vy who went to Vietnam, I was in the Philippines for about two weeks. You knew how happy I was to see Rev. Father again. After my visit, I was determined to help do fundraising so the monastery could have enough funds to build a food processing building, which would help the brothers with their livelihood. I created a web site for the Abbey and started to talk about the Abbot's mission in the Philippines. That was when I found out who were his friends and who were not. People of this generation were just like those during Jesus' time who were fickle. When he was Abbot, they treated him with reverence and eagerness. When he was not the authority anymore, he was out of the picture. Only a few local church people who knew me, and many strangers, supported the mission. I thank my friends, family members and his classmates, most of whom were medical doctors. Dr. Ray Hartman was the faithful friend who gave me the list of contacts. Ms. Dianne Duerr helped get me in touch with expert fund-raisers. Thank you, Dianne! You are really a true friend to the Abbot! I had the privilege to meet with the good Mr. Rosati who was very kind and told me to never lose my spirit because, You, Lord, gave me that very special grace of being sincere, courageous and passionate to speak out my faith. Mr. Rosati used to work as a fundraiser for the Church. He left because he had seen some of his coworkers at their worst. When I met this good man, he was working for our college. Thank you Mr. Rosati! Another expert fundraiser was Fr. Champlin, a holy priest (May he rest in peace dear Lord) who raised funds to support and maintain the school for poor children in Syracuse Diocese he founded. He participated in dinner fundraising and even ran in a marathon to raise money. Being a holy priest, he had a lot of

support for the good cause and the glory of You, Lord. So I tried hard but even so I could just raise a small portion of what was needed. I thank Ms. Shannon who was in charge of the Geneseo Catholic Newman Community at the time. She helped handle the funds and wrote checks to Fr. Mark who would then transfer the money to the Philippines Abbey. You felt sorry for us and surely blessed our effort. I got news not long after, that an acting Abbot friend of Rev. Father from Belgium (and his monastery) generously contributed a large amount of money to the mission. May You bless them abundantly! The food processing building was finally completed, and the mission ended for the retired Abbot of Genesee. It took about two years. You then brought Abba back. He did suffer some health problems while staying in the Philippines, but Your strength and spirit helped sustain him as he endured. Eventually You healed him as he began to adapt to a new way of life, a more quiet and humble one with You and Your lowly creatures in the woods, back on the land of Our Lady of the Genesee.

Rev. Father return from the Philippines, Living as Hermit in Ascension Hermitage

I was so happy to have Rev. Father back. I had much more faith in Your love for him and Your amazing spirit at work in him who taught me how to deflect challenges in life with the armor of Your love. I thank You for his love and service to the Church there, especially the Trappist brothers with whom I continued to stay in touch for some years because I helped build their web site and maintained it. Spiritually, it was like spring again. Abba was back and lived in the woods as a hermit. He helped many people like me who came from all over the county, and some from overseas to seek spiritual direction from him. I was back on the journey in full. While he was in the Philippines, I read his translation of Evagrius Ponticus' Praktikos on the psychology of the spiritual life. Rev. Father and I exchanged questions and answers via emails so we were never separated in spirit. Our relationship grew ever stronger and closer in Your love, dear Lord. Suffering could do that to a relationship if the members stay faithful and united in You. In a diagram explanation, Abba helped describe how the two souls meet and go upward while traveling parallel together to seek You. On the other hand, what is not fruitful is when the souls tangle together and stay at the same place. They lock into each other and become stagnant! You are the foundation of that mutual love, strength and goodness of the parallel souls! Now as I look back, I could not have done the courageous things to help him with the mission if it were not for Your love for him that prompted me. O how unfathomable a loving Father You are. I learned to know You more and more through my suffering with my relationship with Abba who taught me by words and by deeds. You surely used his strong temperament to do great things for many. Of course, he was not a perfect man by any means. He set his goal too high and often he wanted to test us, so some of us students, the brothers and me, suffered in dealing with such a tough abbot. However, when it came to doing your will, with prayerful reflection and prudence in discernment, he was always a valiant monk who was not afraid of any challenge. His conscience would not permit it. I wonder whether all abbots and bishops are like that, being good shepherds who would lay down their lives for their sheep, even the ones that did not belong to them. I learned from him the way of determined action, Lord. It takes one to know one and to teach one. Later when he corrected me about something, I smiled and said, "I am your mirror image." Our dear Fr. Raymond even called me "the little John Eudes." May he rest in peace, dear Lord.

It was hard for Rev. Father not to be actively teaching and giving spiritual direction after coming back from the Philippines. Even though he had retired for a few years, he was very capable. He was content living as a hermit. But You knew he could do much more, so You took him to

Crozet, Virginia to be the Chaplain to the sisters for a few months. I booked a retreat there and enjoyed it very much. Mother Superior was very kind to me. As the matter of fact, Sr. Clare picked me up at the airport, and after hearing that I go out and give talks, she told Mother who asked me to talk to the community. On the days when they make cheese, Mass was said in private without guests or visitors. The loving sisters let me go inside their cloister to attend these Masses. Sisters would let me sit next to Mother during Mass. It seemed to be a great privilege, and I was grateful, but the independent me did not feel it was necessary. What I mean to say is that, wherever I sat, I would be perfectly content as long as I was able to go to Mass. Of course, I felt attracted to the sisters' way of life in which one has a community to support her. However, seeking and serving You, dear Lord, I feel You call me to a way of life vastly different than that. I am so independent. I am more of a hermit type! Once, I was taking an afternoon walk, and I talked with Nomi, my little sister on the phone. She asked with whom I was walking? "No one!" I told her. She was surprised and asked whether I felt lonely walking by myself. "No, I feel happy, carefree and peaceful," I told her. I remember, one afternoon when I took a walk and admired the beautiful landscape of the Abbey from the road, You gave me the insight that everything I could see around me with the naked eye belonged to me because they belong to You. Someone has to take care of Your gift on earth. In this care, the Genesee brothers. Thank you, brothers, for working hard to maintain and take good care of God's gift for all of us. The more we have, the more we work hard to preserve it, while others can just enjoy by looking at it, like me. Unless You, Lord, wants us to have the responsibilities to maintain and care for certain things, it is better for us to own nothing which can hinder our happy and carefree life to love and to contemplate You. Anyhow, I should have told my sister that I was walking with You, Lord, which was the simple truth. Again, I was convinced of my vocation of living the happy celibate life.

After the Crozet sisters' regular Chaplain returned from his trip, Abba returned to Genesee. Abbot John allowed me to pick up Abba at the airport. Abba gave me a fortune cookie, which he saved after having a Chinese meal with the Chaplain. Did you know what the fortune said, Lord? Of course You did, while it was a total surprise to Abba and me. "The saints could do it, and so can you!" All my life, I had never heard of a fortune cookie which said anything about faith, especially anything that has something to do with our Catholic belief. I knew it was from You who was encouraging me to keep on searching to love and to do Your will as the saints did. What made it even more special was that it came from the spiritual father. You allowed me to love You in Abba. You knew because of that love, I would admire, watch, learn and imitate the way he loves and serves You, faithfully until death.

Harvesting Black Walnuts

Abbot John loves giving the Blessed Mother flowers so I was more than happy to contribute. Thank You Abba John for allowing me to help. In the springtime, I would go around and gather flowers from different places. I made beautiful bouquets for the main church and the Sacred Heart chapel where Abba John Eudes, the hermit used to pray his Divine Offices since he did not pray in church with the brothers. So he would help me put the flower vase there. I asked Abba to please help me change the flowers whenever the old ones died. So he became the Blessed Mother's flower boy, besides Abba John. Abba John Eudes used to be more exclusively masculine, but You changed him, dear Blessed Mother. When I first asked him to please help me with the flowers, he would say "No". Then with a gentle smile, he told me a story, "One day I

was in the office with Fr. Louis Merton. He pointed to a rose he had in a vase in front of the Blessed Mother's statue. Then he said to me, "See that rose? It is not devotion. It is justice." So whenever Abba started to complain about my going overboard, and giving flowers to you so regularly, dear Blessed Mother, I would remind him of his "justice". The first time I did that to him, he told me another story. Fr. Louis submitted a request to Rome asking for some kind of permission. It was not granted to him. One day Abba came into Fr. Louis's office, with the rejection letter in his hand, Fr. Louis told his student, "They refused, and used my own work to quote against me!" Looking at me, the spiritual father humbly said that I was cleverly using his own words against him. Eventually, Abba was happy and was eager to do his "justice" whenever I handed him flowers. From then on, like Abba John, the Emeritus Abbot has become your faithful flower son, dear the Beautiful Lady. How wonderful for you, Blessed Mother, to have the two abbot sons doing their flower duty!

Abba also had a sprightlier and more human side to him, which I too learned to imitate. Around the hermitage, he fed wild animals. Ascension Hermitage was surrounded with deer, raccoons, squirrels, turkeys, and birds of all kinds. Discarded Monks' Bread kept these creatures of Yours happy, Lord. On the days when he was not scheduled to hear confession, to give spiritual direction or to give talks, he drove back to the hermitage after he finished working in the library. In the afternoon, he either cut fire wood for the winter or cared for trees, especially black walnuts. He was very proud of those beautiful black walnut trees, which he helped cultivate by clearing the wild vines that choked them. In the fall, he harvested the nuts and enjoyed eating them too.

One day, we met for spiritual direction under a nut tree in front of the Abbey. I found the little nuts fascinating, especially the way You formed them. Being an artist, I got distracted easily by the beauty and love of nature. So Rev. Father started to teach me about black walnuts. You know how I got so excited about harvesting, cleaning and shelling them. Abba asked Fr. Stephen's permission for me to collect the nuts which were very plentiful, especially at Bethany retreat house. I would gather the fresh green fallen nuts and place them by the side of the road. I ran over them a few times with my car. I also spilled the nuts along the gravel road so Abba could run them over on his way back and forth to the hermitage and to the Abbey. That helped separate the green hulls from the nuts. A few days later, when the yucky messy hulls completely fell off, with a pair of gloves, I carefully placed all the slimy nuts in bags and brought them home to wash them in the wheelbarrow. I had to rinse them so many times until the water became clear from being so black to begin with.

Like any vegetable and fruit I found in the wild, the nuts tasted much better since I worked hard for them. Boy oh boy, the squirrels in town loved me. After a few washings, I drained the mucky and soiled black dye off from the nuts. Then I laid them out in the sun to dry. The next thing I saw was a group of squirrels; one by one helping themselves to the nuts. While one tried to stuff a nut in the front porch railing, another tried to bury one near the waterlily pond in the back yard. I was annoyed because I knew they would not remember where they hid them. Then in the spring, the nuts grew into trees, and I had to pull many unwanted ones around the house! But for the love of You, Our Creator, I let them have their way. I had so many nuts that I could share with them. I roasted some fresh ones, and the rest I let dry before putting them in boxes and storing them for the winter. Rev. Father taught me how to crack and shell them with a hammer. I

also used a baseball bat and it worked well. Soon, I mastered it and could extract the whole kernel. Abba was not happy because his nuts were usually pretty much broken into small pieces. I was nice enough to share the shelled and unshelled nuts with the hermit. While my fingers got just a little discolored, his were always stained heavily! I always went after him to wash them well before he said Mass. Those were the good old days, which I enjoyed. I also taught my friend Debbie how to crack them. She thought I was crazy at first. Later, she too found it rewarding when she could extract a whole kernel (well, almost)

Hunting Asparagus

Then came the Asparagus season, which usually is from the end of April until early June. While I took walks on the Abbey land, I spotted new asparagus shoots in the spring. It was so rewarding and inspiring to see new signs of life as Abba often reminded me when we saw the baby geese. He too shared stories at his weekly conferences with retreatants and me about newborn fawns he saw on his walks in the woods. I really missed his weekly talks. He could talk about anything, and he could talk nonstop. Often I had to signal to him that it was time to stop lest the group miss Compline! I think I learned how to talk spontaneously from him, Lord. What a gift you gave him from which many of us benefited greatly. We thank You. There I go, going off track again just like my Abba! Anyhow, soon I remembered where the asparagus patches were. I checked on them in the early spring. They became my weekly vegetable during those weeks. I shared them with Abba and when there were more abundant, I gave them to Fr. Gerard to cook for the community so the brothers could taste fresh asparagus for a change. They often eat frozen food. Abba asked me to show him the patch in front of Bethlehem retreat house so he could pick them himself. Days later, he told me he found some and picked them. I was sure I had just picked them so there would not be any. I questioned him again lest he picked the wrong stuff. Sure enough, we laughed when I told him what he found were weeds! (Abba told me to leave this out, but I think it would add a little humor to our lives and yours who are reading this). Those wild asparagus were the best, most fresh and sweet. I know about ten locations where I can get them annually. Then there were edible weeds like Asian spinach and purslane which I could easily find and enjoy, but Abba and the brothers were not so fond of them. I guess they did not grow up being adventurous the way I did. As children, we ate plenty of greens we found in nature, and they were a great source of vitamins.

You give us, Lord plentiful food in the wild. You feed and clothe the birds. You provide with security everything for us humans. You told us not to worry about what to eat and what to wear. Our ancestors were much closer to You so they always gave thanks and made use of what You gave to this universe. Sadly, we, generations later, seem to be further away from You somehow for we think we can make better use of what You provided us with. Some of us think we do not need You, or worse yet, that You do not exist. What has become of this world? I remember hearing the prayer we made to You during the Lenten season, how we exploit and diminish the earth because of our greed and selfishness. Oh, forgive us and have mercy on us, sinners!

Study of Iconography with Vladislav Andrejev, the Founder of Prosopon School

I was quite active in promoting the spiritual group because I felt that was what You wanted me to do. I did not spend a lot of time writing icons. Many told me I was not using the artistic gift You gave me. I told them not to worry because I have a spiritual director! Strangely Lord, people