

On Pilgrimage - June 1977

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Resting for health reasons, she comments on the activity around her. Reflects on “ebbing of life,” waiting, and the phrase “now and at the hour of our death” from the Hail Mary. (DDLW #578).

There certainly are many tensions and strains in communal living, and when Dr. Holbert and his dear wife Cornelia came to visit me they advised me to have a change of scene. They are such dear friends, I’m sure they don’t mind my talking about them in this column. They are both interested in our work. She is the librarian in Kinderhook, N.Y. (where they live), a few hour’s drive north of Tivoli, and when they go on trips together, she reads aloud to him while he drives. They are reading Dickens together - **Little Dorrit** (so is Deane Mowrer, who has the book on records).

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Sister Teresa from Maryhouse drove up to visit us, and drove me back to New York City with her, where we were in time for our usual Monday night Mass. It is always crowded, but Maryhouse is so big, and I am just staying in my room for some days. It is very restful.

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Isabelle Yanovsky telephoned. She and Vasha, her husband, will be over this afternoon . . . a lovely visit. They came bearing gifts – flowers, yogurt. How blessed to have such dear friends as Dr. Holbert and Dr. Yanovsky. Dr. Holbert says, “Change of scene, but keep in touch with your doctor in New York.” Dr. Yanovsky says, “Put on more weight.” My mother used to talk of ‘nervous prostration.’ I think this describes my sufferings, which are not basically physical. Physical enough, however, when you consider that one of my greatest joys used to be taking five-mile walks. When we started the *Catholic Worker* I used to walk up to the public library and back, when I was doing a research job a few hours a day. One of the books that has comforted me when I felt low was **David Copperfield**, and I liked to remember the astounding energy of his aunt, Betsy Trotwood, who went around chasing the donkeys. To re-read a good, long novel like **War and Peace** is also healing.

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Telephoned the farm at lunchtime, and found Tanya was having her eighth birthday party (very fancy) at that moment when I called, so I did not keep her too long. She sounded very happy. She is my oldest great-grandchild, and she spells April, Aperlé.

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When I was saying the **Our Father** and the **Hail Mary** this morning, it suddenly occurred to me how good it was to end our prayer to Mary with “now and at the hour of our death.” I don’t think I had ever realized how often we pray for the hour of our death, that it would be a good one. It is good, certainly, to have a long period of “ill health” . . . nothing specific, mild but frightening pains in the heart, and sickness, ebb-tide, ebbing of life, and then some days of strength and creativity.

“**Wait and do nothing.**” This is the line my sister and I are fond of quoting to each other. We had seen T.S. Eliot’s **The Cocktail Party** together, and brought home with us that motto. I have never read the play, but that still sounds like a very good motto to me. How wonderful to be surrounded by loving kindness. Tulips, a rose, a picture, food. Tender, loving care! We all need it, sick or well.

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Stanley Vishnewski, coming in to the city this morning, brought mail, which he had gathered from my desk unanswered.

Here, in New York City, I am more comfortable, physically more “private.” There are many workers. Some who work at First Street have their own apartments. Many of them have part-time jobs, where they earn the money for rent, and also for recreation or trips. At the Third Street women’s house, the workers all “live in” but are very efficient in the division of work and responsibility. Of course, each of us is “responsible.” I counted nine utterly reliable people, intelligent and trained, among the fifty who inhabit the house.

I have always thought that life at the farm was far harder than life in the city. There are good workers, but the kind of free recreation we have in the city, such as lectures or concerts, is offered only at Bard College, which is quite a few miles from Tivoli, and cars are always breaking down, and not all are good walkers.

In town, the physical work of the two houses – St. Joseph House and Maryhouse, with the work of mailing out the paper (we print 94,000 copies, and everyone joins in this job), not to speak of “having the house,” keeps everyone busy. No-one will ever say he or she is “in charge.” We have constant visitors, of course, from all walks of life.

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Now I am staying at the beach on Staten Island, where I am getting in shape for answering mail again, and resuming writing. This column is scarcely more than an apology to our readers and correspondents.

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We are saddened by the death of Mike Kovalak this last month. He had been with us for many, many years. May he rest in peace.