

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality

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Summary: News from St. Joseph's House—a summons from “Holy Mother, the City” for housing code violations, visiting Asian priests, a new subway nearby. Expresses wonder at what can be achieved materially, if not spiritually. (DDLW #690).

No use trying to revive Chrystie Street. If Roger or Charlie or Al or Peter or any of the others around the house don't write it, we'll just have to collect a few notes every month to let our readers know that things are still happening. Oh for a dull moment!

The latest is a summons from The City to show up before the Housing Authority to answer to violations of the multiple dwelling act.

The summons is to Tom Sullivan, but Tom being in a Trappist monastery, and the house now being in my name instead of his (in accordance with our expression of personal responsibility in contrast to corporate responsibility as it has become under corporation practice in business) I will have to answer to the court.

We have not been able to get any clear answer as to what the code is or what the law is, and whether we fall under the multiple dwelling law. We are a house of hospitality, not a lodging house, and nobody pays either for bed or board, and we are a family, living

under one head, which at present is Charlie McCormack. Of course the family has become quite large, fifty-five of us. What is happening in the case of all the Puerto Rican families to an apartment, and charged Park Avenue prices by the landlords?

If this summons business continues, and the judge refuses to come visit St. Joseph's

house to see the comparative comfort of our quarters, we can foresee that we will be spending some little time in prison in the near future. Certainly there is no money in the treasury to pay unjust fines.

Holy Mother, the City

In spite of the acrimony of our dialogue with her whom we have nicknamed Holy Mother, the City, New York does try to do right by its children. Nowhere else in the United States does one find such a municipal lodging house, such hospitals as Bellevue, such a place for the works of mercy as Welfare Island. Considering the fact that the Catholics form the greater part of the population, perhaps because of the influx of the Puerto Rican, our city government is doing far more than taking up the slack.

Last month Al Gullion found a man crouched over the ash cans in front of the next building and in addition to emaciation and dereliction, if one can use such a word, the man complained of not being able to breathe. He was able to walk the twenty steps to the station wagon and was taken to Bellevue, put to bed there, and given immediate care. Next day we had a telegram collect, that the man was in critical condition. A week later we received a notice by telegram that he had died, another week later came one of these frightening blue papers from the hospital, a service of notice upon the same person, now alleged mentally-ill, that he was going to be committed unless someone showed up before the Supreme Court which sits for such cases at Bellevue.

Priest from India

For the last month our house has been blessed by the presence of a young priest from South India, Fr. Emmanuel Vasuvasum, who after fourteen years spent in Rome, found the contrast with Chrystie street quite astounding. He showed perfect grace in adapting himself to his surroundings and we had some most illuminating conversations with him on the subject of Buddhism and Hinduism. Fr. Suarez and Fr. Pinto, also priests from India spoke at the Friday night meetings last month and were most interesting.

Fr. Janner

Our Puerto Rican priest at Nativity parish, Second Ave., brought a bus load of his parishioners to Maryfarm for a Sunday picnic after the seven o'clock Mass. It was a

beautifully hot day, the ground was baked as hard as cement and though we prayed for rain we were delighted they had so good a day.

Fr. Janner is hoping to find some nearby camp for his boys, and for his young married couples to use during the summer. Failing that, he hires busses to take his summer schools on outings once a week. I mentioned this because last year he got help from one of our friends and maybe they will remember his work again.

New Subway

There is a project under way to build a new subway down our street which will make for much confusion and activity. Every block or so there is a pump going, a drill going on, as though they were seeking oil or some other such treasure. What they are doing is actually drilling and taking samples of clay, rock or whatever there is beneath all those pavements and water systems and wirings that overlay this rock which is Manhattan, and find out now how to set about their work. What a complicated and tremendous task! What knowledge and vision is necessary for this work. In addition to the hard labor of those manning the pumps, bringing up the yellow clay water from below, there is the man with the plans, the blue prints, the director, without whom nothing can be done. When we were young and singing the class war song we thought that only the workers did the job. Beginning with planning the farm at Easton, we soon learned differently. Of course we had the off scourings as St Paul called his fellow Christians. But we spent at least five years putting up with fetching water from the spring, doing with candle and lamp light, and enjoying it too, until Fr. Roy came along.

That is all right for a family at first, but as the children come along, the women get tired of being the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. The men draw enough for the barn and the garden. Fr. Roy by his direction and knowledge had us digging trenches, laying pipes, wiring the barn and house, all in a few months. When one sees bridges and dams and tunnels and such things as this new subway, one is amazed at what man can do, in the material field. And he has hardly explored the surface of the spiritual. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. If there were a proper synthesis, if our order were geared to man's needs rather than his desires, if production were for use rather than profit, then "it would be easier to be good,"—as Peter said,—“to put on Christ,” as St. Paul said.