

On Pilgrimage - June 1973

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Diary-like paragraphs for the month—peace meetings, walks, reading, a visit to her daughter and grandchildren in Vermont, planting, and prayers. (DDLW #530).

St. Joseph's House: May 2—Today everything is peaceful around the house at First Street. No drunkenness, madness, quarrelling, as on May first, our fortieth anniversary. Mass at 5:30 just before supper is a joy—eight of us there. Vespers are beautiful, and we have in addition to a short Scripture reading, a short reading from Peter Maurin's Essays.

Sometimes the house is like the reception ward at Bellevue Psychiatric. One can only bow one's head to the storm and pray. The Jesus prayer helps me.

May 3—I took the 3:00 p.m. train to Tivoli and read all the way. Some of the Peacemaker Group are already here. Margot Barnet of CNVA, Voluntown, Connecticut and Larry Aaronspere from Heathcote Center, Freeland, Maryland. Chuck Mathei is co-ordinator. A group of thirty or forty is expected. Emphasis around the country seems to be on land trusts. Land for the landless. The Peacemaker has already led the way by acquiring three pieces of land in West Virginia. Responsible people lease it for use, to raise food as far as possible.

May 4—Peacemakers arise at seven and breakfast; the first conference is at eight. I cannot get to the meetings. This morning I listened to tapes—the book of Acts, and one conference of Thomas Merton. Much mail, and I'm delinquent when it comes to mail. I delay answering—sometimes there are so many visitors, telephone calls, and just living with seventy or more people takes time. I take to my room, hide out, as it were, and tremble when I look at my desk. Please excuse me, all our readers whom I have neglected. Let this be a letter to you all. (Subscriptions should be sent to First Street in N.Y.)

May 5—Went for a walk in the woods and picked dockweed and dandelion along the way, for greens for supper. Then sudden news—a phone call from Vermont that Eric and Jo-Ann had a baby boy, Shawn, my seventh great grandchild. Rejoicings. Nick and Brenda have three children, the middle one a boy, Jude. Becky has Lara, two years old, and Susie has Tanya and Kachina, so there is a preponderance of girls.

Mary Lathrop is visiting Tivoli and painted a beautiful miniature ikon for part of her homework (a Scripture class at Fordham; she graduates this month). Father Andy and Marty Corbin drove to Toronto to speak at an anarchist conference there.

May 6, Sunday—Father Cletus, S.J. said Mass this morning. Mary Durnin is here from Milwaukee. Mike Cullen is ordered deported; appealing the case.

May 7—Cold and rainy one day, hot and sunny the next. Peacemakers are suffering from colds, sleeping in Peter Maurin house, 35 degrees at night. Stanley gave his slide show tonight—the story of the CW.

May 8—A class in a Sioux City Franciscan college interviewed me over the phone this afternoon. It was not too hard—a half hour of talk and questions and answers. Wrote letters till midnight. I wrote to Martin Sostre, who has been in solitary for eight years in Auburn Prison. Father Andy mentions him in the brief article he wrote on the anarchist conference which is in this issue. So little we can do! But letter writing is a work of mercy, too, so I hope he gets much mail.

May 11—Reading **Man Born to be King** by Dorothy Sayers, published by Eerdmans in Michigan. She and Rosemary Haughton are theologians, Scripture scholars and philosophers! Pat Rusk reminds me that Lady Abbesses in the middle ages (see Sigrid Undset's **Stages on the Road**) were practically Bishops.

May 15—Drove with Mike Kreyche and Rita through a downpour to the home and printshop of Daniel Bobrow, a Russian friend who lives up in the hills in back of Rhinebeck and has one hundred acres of untilled land. Father Clarence Duffy, now in Ireland, used to camp out there and tried to start a farming community. Mr. Bobrow, a gifted man of sixty, has been ill with London flu (which I think has been my longstanding complaint, but it has now left me). We were visiting to suggest he let us use some of his land—lease it or rent it? Is he interested in land trusts? Our eighty-six acres at Tivoli are woody hillside and a few fields, all ploughed, planted and well occupied by our young people.

Bob Fitch writes of California's first National Land Reform Conference in San Francisco, a coalition of Chicanos, Indians, farmers, former New Dealers working for distribution of land. Also through the Peacemaker conference we heard of a new paper, **Maine Land Trust**, Box 116, Brunswick, Me. 04011. It calls attention to the beginnings of other land trusts in Vermont and New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. So far everything seems to be on paper. Except the Peacemakers'.

May 17, Thursday—Left at ten for Vermont and arrived at two p.m. The car did not shimmy on the turnpikes, but it was hard going on the other roads. I found that the music room in Tamar's house, which used to be Eric's and is now filled with potted plants and rubber trees, and looking out on a greenhouse which Tamar and Hilaire constructed, had been prepared for me. The grandchildren had tried to cover up the gun rack of the boys' hunting rifles by hanging over them a beautiful spread Tamar wove, but the butts protruded! Everyone, Becky and John, Mary, Maggie, Martha, Hilaire and Katy all have been working valiantly planting potatoes, corn, beans, and transplanting from the greenhouse. We had fresh asparagus, potatoes and cheese, rhubarb for dessert, and Nicky and his friends have been bringing in a dozen perch and brook trout a day! Jimmy is working long hours in a local garage.

May 19, Saturday—The Hennessy family has twenty-five acres (or is it twenty-three), and there are ominous rumors going around about their neighbor who owns all the land above and below their house, barn and twenty or so acres, selling out to real estate speculators who want to put up condominiums and would like to pressure Tamar into selling. Vermont has become vacationland, ski resort, hunting and fishing territory. It used to be seventy-five per cent cultivated; now the farms are gone, and it is only twenty-five per cent cultivated. The Hennessy family raises all the food it can. They have twenty-five hens, some ducks, and there are two young Alpine goats, and they are looking for a couple of milk goats. John works in a machine shop (he is a gifted tool maker), works nights, and is building his own place on one acre of the land.

May 24—Eric brought over Shawn, less than a month old. His eighteen-year-old mother is out shopping . . . A great day for planting potatoes, onion sets, comfrey. Maggie is mulching, driving the tractor John bought, dragging a home-built cart full of the mulch to the field. The others do the pitchforking from barn to cart, and from cart to field.

Katy, thirteen, is reading, for the third time, the Tolkien books. She gave me **The Hobbit** to read, and my visit has been like the first chapter of that book when fourteen dwarfs arrived one by one, when he expected only one visitor. Brenda and Nicky came often with their three, Rhonda, her sister, with two sturdy boys. Some campers also arrived to sleep in the barn—there were great comings and goings, like at Tivoli. Everyone is a car hopper these days, so the four-hour trip which separates Tivoli and Perkinsville seems like nothing.

May 29, New York (First Street)—It looks now as though my summer will be spent in New York, or its immediate vicinity (Staten Island). A meeting with a priest from The Catholic Charities who was at the Cesar Chavez festival at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine last month, and our conversation about homeless women who sleep in doorways and empty buildings, led to a resolution on my part to start work at once to find a house for them. A letter from a Trappist Abbott containing a down payment for a house, the need for which we had emphasized in the May **Catholic Worker**, confirmed my decision. We should be nearby, so our volunteer help will contribute their youth and strength, and we want something between a Bowery flop-house and an old fashioned convent, where every woman will have little rooms of their own to keep their shopping carts and bags and such like small household goods. A large recreation room would be a help. At the Mott St. and Chrystie St. houses when Leonard Austin or Kieran Dugan brought records and called the folk dances, we all danced a Virginia reel together on occasion! We welcome any suggestions, as to available sites for our new venture.

A long paragraph in the introduction to Dostoevsky's **Possessed**, and a remembrance of Mrs. Jellyby in **Bleak House**, make me put aside this month all

references to Cambodia, Laos, Watergate, etc. “Least said, soonest mended,” my mother used to say. We all talk too much and do too little. God help us!