

On Pilgrimage - March 1946

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, March 1946, 2.

Summary: Quotes from Cardinal Newman's Lenten sermons on the Cross and austerity. Comments on the sacrifices daily living requires, notes visitors: a priest and a former lieutenant, and upholds discussion as a necessity for indoctrination and clarification of thought. Contrasts the death of a Catholic worker with the birth of a baby to the wife of a political prisoner in jail for refusing conscription. Tells of the closing of the Boston House of Hospitality and ends by commending the volunteers who sell the newspaper. (DDLW #420).

This month begins Lent, and here is a quotation from Newman: "Think on the Cross when you rise and when you lie down, when you go out and when you come in, when you eat and when you walk and when you converse, when you buy and when you sell, when you labor, and when you rest, consecrating and sealing all your doings with this one mental action, the thought of the Crucified. Do not talk of it to others; be silent like the penitent woman, who showed her love in deep subdued acts You will be touched by the thought of His Cross far more by bearing it after Him than by glowing accounts of it. All the modes by which you bring it before you must be simple and severe."

In another Lenten sermon on work, he tells of "our endeavor to multiply comforts and get rid of daily inconveniences and distress of life." "Cold and hard lodging, humble offices and mean appearance are considered serious evils." "All things harsh and austere are carefully put aside. We shrink from the rude lap of earth and embrace of the elements and we build ourselves houses in which the flesh may enjoy its lust and the eye its pride."

It's good to think on these things in connection with our work. There is a great deal of cold and hard lodging to put up with around the Catholic Worker but the food is good. We do not anywhere near approach Peter's injunction to raise what we eat and eat what we raise, and do without what we have not. I was reading Willem's Life of Christ, which gives wonderful background pictures of life in the Holy Land even today. He was writing of how crowds would gather around a teacher, bringing their tents for shelter and some grain to grind, and live the simplest possible life the weeks they congregated about him. He was describing the crowds that came to St. John the Baptist. It made me think of our retreats, on the farm at Easton, and of how we are going to have to put up cabins when we can get the lumber, and tents until then. I understand that the Von Trappe family have an old C.C.C. camp where they have made the barracks into dormitories. How I wish we had bought a C.C.C. camp! But then, are there any C.C.C. camps next door to monasteries? I have insisted of late that no farming group should ever venture to start on the land unless they settled around a monastery or church. The Church, the Mass, had to be the center of the life of the community. For the last few days I was on the farm at Easton,

and since Fr. Roy is still away, on his pilgrimage through the South, the group have been walking in to Mass, those who are able. The others recite Prime and the morning offering together. Peter Maurin, of course, is not able to walk down and some mornings he has not been able to get up until late. So we beg your prayers for him.

Hospitality

We are always wondering what is the fundamental and most important aspect of the work to stress. Over the week-end, in spite of snow and ice and no taxis coming up the icy hill, and our own old station wagon right now on the bum, we had constant visitors. Fr. Michael, one of the mission band from Richmond, Va., came for an overnight visit, gave us a conference on Faith, Hope, and Charity in the evening, offered Mass for us in the morning and led a meditation on the Our Father, and then departed to our great regret around noon. Former Lt. Straub arrived for the week and helped chop wood and visited up and down the hill. We belabored him for going on to law school instead of stopping to think of the apostolate.

"Woe to you lawyers," John Daly proclaimed; he is a lawyer himself and a graduate of Georgetown.

Hans, who can cook, carpenter, do electrical work and farmwork, begged me one day, "Can't you find a farmer, a carpenter, a shoemaker, or someone besides *talkers*?" And he shook his head woefully. In vain do I remind him that round-table discussion is the first plank in our platform and serves the purpose of indoctrination and clarification of thought."If they would only go out and sit under a tree," he said sadly, surveying the grey and wintry scenes out of doors.

The trouble is that the kitchen, dining room and workshop are all together down in the big basement of the barn. And the trouble is that Fr. Roy and our neighbor Monroe Kressman and George Collins built a magnificent fireplace and chimney right up through the middle of the barn so that all are tempted to sit around the fire after a meal and discuss. Fortunately after breakfast comes the hour of meditation in the chapel, and after lunch comes the rosary; but after supper until Compline and after Compline, that room is the favorite spot of all. Well, spring will be coming soon and then we can indeed sit under a tree.

Death

As I write, here at Mott street, a telephone call comes from the farm, from Harold Keane, who is in charge in Fr. Roy's absence. John Ryder has just died at the hospital down in Easton. He will be laid out in the chapel in the barn tomorrow and buried on Saturday from St. Bernard's Church in the little Italian cemetery half a mile from our house. John made his confession last week, received absolution and the last rites where he lay in the little priests' room on

the farm. He had to be taken to the hospital because of hemorrhages just a week ago. Those last months he sat before the fireplace dressed in that rabbit-skin jacket that a veteran brought in from Germany, surrounded by friends. We knew little about him except that he came to us between jobs in restaurants. For a time he worked over in Secaucus for a pig farmer, cleaning out after and feeding the hundreds of hogs in that malodorous big business. What hardworking lives these, our fellow workers have led, and how brief indeed is this trial and testing. But now “he has rest from his labors” and may his soul rest in peace.

Life

Only a few days before John Ryder’s death, a new baby was born to Ann Thornton, a little girl, and we wired the news at once to Jon, who is in Danbury Penitentiary for refusing conscription. She will be born into eternal life in Baptism this Sunday, the day after the funeral, if they let Ann out of the hospital as she wishes, in seven instead of ten days. She is a strong girl, strong in body and soul, and has stood the sad separation from Jon these trying months with great fortitude. It was a pleasure to see her bright face, as she went with rejoicing, to the hospital last week. Angela Costanza, one of our volunteers at the retreat house, and a trained baby nurse, is living up in Ann’s place with the children while the mother is away, and when Ann comes home Angela will go up there daily to make the meals and do the washing for the next month until the mother is stronger. Thank God for this generous cooperation and loving kindness on the part of Angela.

Return

Another good piece of news this month is the return of John Paul Thornton, who had charge of the house for some time after Joe and Gerry Griffin left for Europe three and a half years ago. John himself was gone for two years—he was in the Philippines, New Guinea and Okinawa. Now he is going back to Fordham to finish his last year and get his degree, and at the same time, he is helping here as he has always done, which makes his working day one of about eighteen hours.

Closing

This month sees the closing of the Catholic Worker House of Hospitality in Boston, and the official disbanding of the group in Boston. Many are married and have families, and many are busily engaged in many other fields of the lay apostolate, in addition to having jobs. Ignatius O’Connor was the last resident of the house on Rollins street and has tried hard to keep things going. Now the work will be done by the Brothers of St. John of God, who have opened a

house for the feeding and sheltering of the destitute. The work of selling the paper, The Catholic Worker, is still going on. We deeply appreciate the written permission which the late Cardinal O'Connell gave us to sell the paper in front of the churches in Boston, Harry Dunne, as well as Ignatius, has been most faithful in selling the paper and turning in the money for the work, and they will never know how many they have reached. Only this past week we have had letters and visits from those who have received a copy of the paper on the street.

I am always reminded of the wonderful story of Brother Joseph, the helper of Fr. Damien, who became a Catholic from reading some Catholic literature in some rooming house in Tennessee, and went to help Fr. Damien as a result of another story he read in the library of the Trappist Monastery in Kentucky.

Many a life will be saved by some copy of the CW. So God speed Ignatius and Harry in their street apostolate.