

On Pilgrimage - November 1959

Dorothy Day

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Summary: After visiting her daughter Tamar in Vermont to help with sick grandchildren, she visits a nearby Carthusian monastery. Mentions a pamphlet on the Eastern churches and urges us to pray for peace between the churches if we want world peace. (DDLW #758).

Jonas came in this morning with fresh ground peanut butter and a can of honey for the Hughes children's school lunches, also some liverwurst which he gets for thirty cents a pound, unsliced. He is good about small errands, picking up this and that, like a funnel and a piece of Syrian pastry.

I gave him a copy of the paper bound volume of **The Long Loneliness** (85c) with an inscription of gratitude for all the little things he does in the Catholic Worker movement; his Friday night brewings of sassafras tea, his trips to and from the island, his bringing to us old customs from Lithuania, his homeland, such as the unleavened bread each year stamped like a Christmas card for Christmas Eve, a reminder of fasting, and a rejoicing, too.

He began telling me how he had taken my book from the library when it first came out, and many of his friends read it. One of them, a man from the old country, was much interested in all the work. Jonas said he built an oven which would sleep four people, one on each side, one in the back and one on top! It made me think of those marvelous movies about Maxim Gorki, **University of Life**, which I saw years ago at the Academy of Music in New York, when they used to show foreign films there. Now we have to go to an old broken down theater on the far east side, near Avenue D, The American Theater, strangely enough, where they show foreign films Thursday and Friday.

I begged Jonas to find his friend and bring him down to construct such an oven for us at one of the beach cottages. We could heat it with driftwood, and when a family showed up, the children could sleep warm and snug around the oven. It kept a four-room bungalow warm on Long Island, Jonas said. If his friend does not show up, perhaps some other reader of our paper knows how to build such a stove, and if we begin with that, we'd like an outdoor bake oven such as they have on Pennsylvania Dutch farms also.

To Tamar

Sudden illness in the family meant a weekend visit to Tamar this month, and I had the joy of being with the children and also the joy of her swift recovery. There are two very good young doctors in nearby Cavendish, who on two occasions have come in their jeeps in the night to take a patient to the hospital, who cover a wide mountain region and run a medical center. There is a hospital in Springfield where many of the local women work, so when Tamar had to be there for a few days, she had the comfort of visits from neighbors, and also the knowledge that one of her neighbors had gone to the house to do the laundry and bake a batch of bread and cakes. One is apt to remember silent Calvin Coolidge and to form a picture of Vermonters from him, but they are sociable, friendly, even voluble and keenly interested in the real life around them. No wonder that so many New Yorkers move up there and are willing to endure the uncertainties of poor wages, lack of jobs, for the joys of the keen winters and the short but work-filled summers. Gardens are so full and abundant that I heard one man say he was glad the frost had come so that work in the garden could be considered finished for the year. Everything grows very well. No one would believe the size of the potatoes that grew in the Hennessy garden. There is plenty in the garden yet, not dug nor stored, so the work goes on there still.

There had been too much rain recently to work out without sinking shin-deep into rich soil; but Stanley and Walter, his brother, on strike from the Baltimore steel mills, helped get the wood in, wheelbarrow load after load, both in cellar and woodshed. And there still remains wood to bring in before the snows come.

Tamar and I spent our time in tidying up the house and doing a great wash, to be hung out the one day when the sun shone a little. I can see where a dryer is even more essential than a washing machine for a young mother. Becky and Susie do their own washing and ironing and that of Mary and Margaret, too. The boys wear flannel shirts and dungarees to school.

Now there is only Martha and Hilaire at home and it is a lesson to us to listen to those sweet, tender and gentle little voices, talking to each other, playing together. Children from two to four are utterly adorable. Martha engaged in one of our theological conversations during lunch. "God made everything," she agreed, even the rain. But **why** did He make us? That was the problem. "I just don't know," she said. "Because He loves us," I told her. "Yes, He only loves little children," she stated firmly. She finished her lunch to settle down to her favorite book, a collection of Bible stories full of old pictures with much detail. Her favorite picture, I am sorry to say, which she pored over with fascination, was the slaughter of the innocents. "Just look at that wicked man chopping off their heads!"

Carthusians

On the way home I stopped off to see Fr. Cosgrove in Chester, Vermont, and later in the year, I am speaking at his parish which holds within its boundaries the small Benedictine monastery at Weston, and a former member of a Catholic Worker group, Allan Sheldon, who headed the House of Hospitality at Rutland, and the farm outside of it.

We drove from there to Whittingham near which small village the new foundation of the Carthusians is situated. You go up a country road, climbing steadily, and there to the left is a small farmhouse with a little chapel on one side as you enter, and a small office on the other side. We were greeted by Fr. Boylan, the only Irish Carthusian, who entertained us with tea and little rolls and jelly, and talked to us of the new foundation and the life of the Carthusians. We could look out the window as he spoke, and see the long country road which led down into the woods where the monks have their cells, each one apart from the others. Solitude and silence are the marks of the order but not a day passes that some visitors do not find their way to disturb that solitude even though they are far out of the beaten path. But there is always a guest master to greet the visitor, so that the other monks may keep to their forest cells.

“They talk of the minimum dosage of this or that vitamin which is needed to keep the body in order,” he said, “but what would you say was the minimum dosage of prayer?” And when we did not answer, he said, “Twenty-four hours a day. We must live in a state of prayer, all of us, the layman as well as the monk. We must love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, all our strength, and our neighbor as ourselves.”

Carthusians go to bed at seven-thirty every evening, but then rise again at ten-thirty to resume praying until two. They return again for three hours more sleep. This broken sleep is part of their penance. They eat one meal a day, at eleven each morning, and then nothing until the next day at eleven.

“Not even a hot drink in the morning?” we wanted to know. But he assured us, nothing else. “You have a headache for the first six months,” he admitted, “but after that you forget about it. You are in the habit of fasting and you do not feel it. The average age of the Carthusian is eighty-five years.” (He admires Ammon’s fasting.)

They have received about 400 applicants, he said, since they arrived in America from Spain, but only a few have been accepted. The Order arrived here to start a foundation, thanks to the efforts of two priests, Dom Verner Moore, formerly a Benedictine at the Catholic University whose latest book, **Insanity and Sanctity**, we have just received for review. (This priest psychiatrist has written many other books.) The other priest was Monsignor Fiorentino who gave us many retreats in the past, both at Easton and at the Newburgh farms.

We spoke of our famous retreat, first given us by Fr. Pacifique Roy and later by Fr. John Hugo, whose **Applied Christianity** and **Gospel of Peace** are so

well known. We neglected to tell Fr. Boylan of Fr. Farina's most serious illness in Pittsburgh, but we are telling him now so that he will pray for him and for his retreatants and penitents who loved him so dearly and are so prostrated by his illness. Fr. Farina gave our retreats at St. Anthony's Orphanage at Oakmount, Pa. when Fr. Hugo could no longer give them. Both are now pastors of big parishes in Donora and Pittsburgh and most fully occupied in the great building program which is going on all over the country. What strange purification is this, that emphasis is so laid on the building of churches, schools, rectories, convents – plants, in other words, so that now priests do not have time to preach the word of God! On the one hand, forebodings of war and the wiping out of cities; on the other hand, a mad heaping up of brick and mortar rather than of living stones of the temple of which Christ is the cornerstone. Too much attention to the drives for building funds, and too little to the growth in the knowledge and love of God. It's like people always getting ready to live, getting ready to teach, to preach, to providing the place, rather than going as our Lord did, without place to lay his head, communicating the good news, instructing hungry people, people hungry in heart and soul for the knowledge that would make them realize what it is to be a child of God, a son of God.

Fr. Boylan told us that at the Grand Chartreuse, most famous Carthusian foundation, there were 60,000 visitors in one year, to see 20 monks, living in solitude and silence. They solved the problem by having at the gates a model of a cell, chapel and garden, to satisfy the curiosity of the busloads of tourists and visitors who try to reach their monastery. But to whatever solitude monks go, people of the world, in their hunger for the spiritual, follow after. Not to stay, but to cry out for spiritual food. It is the work of priests in the world in ordinary parishes, to give it.

(I spoke at communion breakfasts this last month in a parish in Brooklyn, St. Finbar's, and at Pius X at Bethpage Long Island, where Monsignor Scanlon and Fr. Boyd respectively and their assistants are giving the good bread of doctrine to their parishioners.)

Another Parish

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I must not forget to call attention to the work of another parish group, Our Lady of Peace, in Mt. Vernon. They recently sent us a very interesting pamphlet of 82 pages with a letter from Cardinal Tisserant blessing "the purpose that has inspired them to compose this useful manual which, by recounting briefly the history and the characteristics of the Christian communities of the East, will spread among Catholics of the Latin rite a knowledge of their brothers of the Oriental rites, which are numerous in the United States today."

"Due credit for hours, days and weeks of work in the preparation of this pamphlet must be given to those who have contributed their time and abilities so generously,"

a postscript says. "The tremendous amount of research that goes into a booklet such as this, is to a large measure the effort of Rev. John Slivka, pastor of St. Nicholas of Myra Church in Yonkers. To Brother Aurelian Thomas, F.S.C., of the faculty of Manhattan College, must be given the credit for organizing the research material, and last but not least, to the volunteers of the staff of Our Lady of Peace Library for sacrificing many evenings to the work. All have given out of love of Holy Mother Church."

"The Church of Jesus Christ is neither Latin nor Greek nor Slav, but Catholic; accordingly, she makes no difference between her children, and Greeks, Latins and Slavs and members of all other nations are equal in the eyes of the Apostolic See," Pope Benedict XV wrote.

I write enthusiastically because this is the most compact and comprehensive handling of a very difficult subject, and covers even a table of reading references on the Eastern church found in the Catholic Encyclopedia.

I myself am interested in this booklet because of my interest in things Russian. You may obtain copies by writing to Our Lady of Peace Library, Mt. Vernon Council, Knights of Columbus, 128 Stevens Avenue, Mt. Vernon, N.Y. The price is not given on the pamphlet, but if you send a dollar, they can send you extra copies if it is too much, and you can give them to those interested.

Anyone interested in peace in the world should be keenly praying for peace in the churches, so long separated, and we need to know, in order to love.

The Month

Aside from the one weekend, my month was spent on Staten Island, where I shall stay until the first of the year. Perhaps then I shall start out on my trip to the west coast, but the illness of a dear friend delays me now. I say this because each mail brings in an invitation from the west, to speak to this group or that, and the **Catholic Worker** family of readers want the editors to visit, and as one Franciscan priest of San Francisco wrote, bring a little clarification of thought. I want to see Fr. Kittelson of Ryegate, Montana again, and go with him to see our Hutterite friends. I'd like to get up to the Doukhobors to visit Helen Demoskoff who first wrote to me from jail in Canada. (It was Tolstoi who paid the way of the Doukhobors to Canada from the royalties of his book **Resurrection**.) I want to see my niece in Seattle, and Maryanna Manyon at Mt. Angel, and Brother Antoninus at Oakland – I could go on for a few more pages.

At the same time I have an engagement, I notice, at the New School of Social Research on February 11, so my trip could not be too long a one. Ammon Hennacy, however, announces from his prison cell at Sandstone that he will start traveling on his release in January, and keep going all around the country until time for the next air raid drill on New York and our next demonstration, and our next stay in the prisons of New York.

At the present moment, Judith Gregory is helping the Highlander folks in their trial at Montegle, Tennessee, and will write about it in the next issue if she has not landed in jail herself. But Deane is home, working on Spring Street, and Beth and Stanley and Charles Butterworth at the farm and myself at the beach houses. Bob Steed should be writing about his trip to Ft. Detrick where there is a vigil and silent protest against the preparation for germ warfare, and of his day in Washington with Fr. Havda and his visit with the Stanioffs in Maryland. I mentioned it because he is carrying a heavy load in the city, at St. Joseph's Loft on Spring Street, and the actual performance of the works of mercy means very often there is not much time to write about them.