

On Pilgrimage - November 1965

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The Catholic Worker, November 1965, 2, 6.

Summary: Tales of her travel to Rome to join twenty women on a ten-day fast for peace at Vatican Council II. Shares vignettes of friends, clergy, meetings, books, prayers, Masses, and accommodations. Describes the pain that accompanied her fast. (DDLW #835).

There were thirty-five bishops on board the Raffaello on the way to the Council in September and a great many priests, so there were masses morning, noon, and night in the little chapel. Bishop Mark McGrath, of Panama, concelebrated every afternoon at five o'clock with other priests and on several occasions I had the opportunity to talk to him about Schema 13 and the paragraphs concerning war and peace and conscientious objection. Father Allan Cormier, a young Holy Cross priest, was on his way to study at Strasbourg (one of his teachers will be Yves Congar) and he had introduced me to the Bishop, who said he had met me when he was an undergraduate at Notre Dame. He remembered we had a house of hospitality at South Bend, run by Julian Pleasants, who now teaches at Notre Dame and continues to carry on some of the traditions of the CW, in that he lives on the land, keeps a cow, and is near a few other families with like interests who are both workers and scholars. Bishop McGrath receives the **Catholic Worker**, and I gave him **Reconciliation Quarterly**, published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an unusually good issue, with articles on the Church and State and conscientious objection in Italy and a comment on Pope Paul's talk to the Belgian soldiers. There were also very good articles in the **Jesus Caritas** Booklet No. 23, including those by Yves Congar and Stanley Windass and one by Father Rene Voillaume, Prior of the Little Brothers of Jesus, on "The Christian in the World Today."

Penitential Procession

The Council opened with a penitential procession on the feast of the Holy Cross, with the Pope, cardinals, bishops, and clergy proceeding from the Church of the Holy Cross to St. John Lateran, the Mother of all the churches of Christendom. It was a most solemn procession, with litanies and the Parce Domine sung and the loud speaker system was good, so every word could be heard. Before the singing began, the women around us were reciting the rosary together, and later

during the procession there were the litanies. I was with Doctor Joseph Evans and his wife Hermine, of Chicago, and James Douglass, with whose writings our readers are familiar and who teaches theology at Bellarmine College, in Louisville, Kentucky.

The procession made me think of Vincent McAloon's description of the funeral of Palmiro Togliatti, the secretary-general of the Italian Communist Party, who died last year. There had been a procession of Communists which proceeded for three hours through the streets of Rome, past closed churches, a somber and silent procession, startling in black but lightened with red scarves and red flags, and dramatized as they passed workingmen's clubs and headquarters, by their silence and upraised clenched fists. I wondered why all the churches were closed; perhaps it took place between twelve and three in the afternoon, when they are all closed anyway.

Relic of Franz

Later that night at dinner, Hermine Evans told us of her visit to the home of Franz Jagerstatter and her talk with his widow and now married children. The widow gave Gordon Zahn a few bits of Franz's bones, which had not been consumed by the flames of his cremation, and Gordon gave one to Archbishop Thomas Roberts, who put it in his pectoral cross. Archbishop Roberts prepared an intervention on Jagerstatter which he was not permitted to deliver at the Council; instead he delivered it as a eulogy at a press conference held in the hall of the communications commission, which was large enough to accommodate quite a gathering of newsmen from all over the world.

For non-Catholic readers who do not understand the significance of relics, one need only substitute the word **souvenirs** and remember how we all treasure mementoes of those we love which we keep to remind ourselves of them.

When my friends from Chicago had left Rome and Jim Douglass was busy visiting bishops, I often got to bed early, after a seven o'clock Mass at St. Mary Major, and read two books, one of them the life of Pope Paul VI, **Apostle of Our Time**, by Rev. John Clancy, who is now, I believe, teaching at St. John's University, in Brooklyn. It is a fascinating book, which shows the wide experience our present Pope had in dealing with the practical affairs of the huge diocese of Milan, and tells how he said mass in the factories and helped rebuild the working-class sections. I felt that **Time** magazine had treated him unfairly indeed by giving the impression that he was a man at home only in the State Department of the Vatican, protected from the life of the real world about him by his desk and paper work. With all the talk of reforming the seminaries today, it was interesting to find that Pope Paul had never lived in a seminary, but carried on all his studies while living at home in the midst of a family where the father and brothers were engaged in journalistic and political work. Both by his reading and his work he kept in contact with and took part in the work of his times.

Manzoni's Novel

For lighter reading there was the great Italian classic, **The Betrothed**, by Alessandro Manzoni, with its engrossing story of war, famine and pestilence, and the touching romance Bergamese peasant and silk weaver and his betrothed. I had wanted to read it because Pope John quoted from it in his **Journal of a Soul**, speaking of the stirring sermon of Cardinal Federico Borromeo and his rebuking the peasant priest for his cowardice. It is a stirring book and the new translation in the Everyman edition is an excellent one.

One day I had lunch with Father Bernard Law, editor of the diocesan paper of Mississippi, and later we visited the shrine of St. Benedict Joseph Labre, which is a little church not far from Notre Dame Hospitality center, which is located at Largo Brancaccio 82. The center is surrounded by places you want to visit on foot; St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, the Colosseum, the great railroad station and bus terminal, and the open-air markets. Jim Douglass and I had dinner with Bishop John J. Wright at the Piazza Navona, and the next day launched with Cardinal Eugene Tisserant's secretary, Father Riches, who has a little parish of Rome. He had heard me speak at Santa Clara, California, where he had taught for a period, and we talked together as fellow converts. He and his cousins, the two de Menasce priests, are converts, originally from Alexandria, Egypt, and educated in Rome. The next day, Archbishop Roberts, his unofficial peritus Richard Carbray, and I went to pay a call on His Beatitude, Patriarch Maximos, at the Salvator Mundi hospital on the Janiculum Hill. On the way I saluted the statue of Garibaldi, who was God's instrument in relieving the Papacy of those encumbrances the Papal States, and preparing the way for the great part the Church had played in this century. Never when she was a great temporal power was the Church listened to with such attention as she is today. One might say the work of detachment has only begun. As I passed this great equestrian statue I could not help but think of the words of Bishop P. N. Geise, of Indonesia, who said that we must seek poverty, live poorly, build poor buildings, take in the poor where we are. He himself gave up his Dutch citizenship. The Bishop of Mwanza, in Tanzania said; "The world is not divided into the East and the West but into the haves and the have-nots. Only a wealthy country can afford the luxury of all this private ownership."

Our meeting with the impressive Patriarch Maximos was a brief one. He said that he would speak in season and out of season, in the Council and out of it, on the subject of peace. I think he was the only one at the Council who invariably spoke in French instead of Latin. But with his double dignity of Patriarch and Cardinal he could do as he pleased. Later, when he heard of us twenty women who were fasting for peace, and praying for the light of the Holy Spirit to descend on the Fathers, his comment was "Water nourishes!"

Another evening there was a dinner at the convent of the Canadian Sisters of the Precious Blood to honor Archbishop Roberts on the anniversary of his 56 years as a Jesuit, 40 years as a priest and 28 years as an archbishop. There were

three bishops at the dinner, one from Peru, one from Southwest Africa, and one from the Amazon. Guests included Dr. Gordon Zahn, Professor of Sociology at Loyola University in Chicago, author of **In Solitary Witness**, the life of Franz Jagerstatter (reviewed in the July-August and September issues of the **Catholic Worker**), Father Joseph Small, S. J. from Seattle, and two Maltese Jesuits, Father Ghigo and Father Tonna, who were in charge of distribution of all news bulletins. It delighted me to see the small narrow cells, formerly occupied by the Sisters, in which the bishops stayed on either side of the long sitting rooms, which was also the corridor between the row of little bedrooms. The bishops' quarters were comfortable, but certainly not luxurious.

Vatican Radio

It was intriguing to visit the Vatican Radio, where Father Ellwood Kieser, Paulist, made a taped interview with me for his program **Insight**, which is broadcast in California.

There was a happy meeting with Barbara Wall, of whom I had heard much but whom I had never met. She with her husband Bernard started the English **Catholic Worker** many years ago, perhaps before their marriage, and now they are grandparents. Bob Walsh took over the CW and the Walls published a magazine called **Coliseum**, probably the first venture in lay intellectual discussion of theological, as well as sociological, problems of the day. Bernard Wall is a man of letters and his wife is a novelist as well as essayist, journalist, and translator.

Cardinal Suenens

The only time I spoke in Rome was informally at one of the regular Monday afternoon meetings held at the headquarters of Cardinal L. J. Suenens, of Belgium. The guest was Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary, which has spread from Ireland throughout the world and is doing significant work in Africa and the Chinese People's Republic. Fearing that some of those present might dismiss the Legion as merely a pious organization with little social emphasis, I told of my encounters with the Legion in prison, when one of the correction officers in the New York Woman's House of Detention started a Legion group on her own time and did more than anyone else I encountered in the prison to bring some reminder of the beauty of religion into the lives of the women there.

October First

The fast of the twenty women, which I had come to join and which was the primary reason for my visit to Rome during the final session of the Council, began on October 1st, which was a Friday. The night before I had enjoyed a

feast with Eileen Egan, who was on her vacation, and an Indian bishop, at one of the most famous restaurants in Rome, as the invited guest of Signor Rossi, who operates the Scoglio. I felt rather guilty at prefacing a penitential fast in this way – thinking of St. Augustine’s and Tolstoy’s discourses on the greedy appetite for food, which continues through old age.

But Eileen reminded me that after all penitential Lent was prefaced by **carnevale**, which means farewell to meat as well as a celebration. So I enjoyed the pleasant evening, and certainly felt all the better for it those first two days of my fast, which are supposed to be the hardest.

The next day, very early, I checked out with my suitcase from my little room on the Via Napoleane 111, proceeded by cab to the American Coffee Shop on the Via Conciliazione to check my bag, and then on down to the great square in front of St. Peter’s to wait for Barbara Wall and Eileen Egan at the end of the Colonnade. We were going to mass together on that First Friday morning.

Without tickets we could not have got in, since all the masses which preface the meetings of the Council are packed to the doors. The laity receive communion not at the main altar but at a side altar. All around there were confessionals, frequented, I was edified to see, by bishops and cardinals, with their scarlet and purple robes billowing out behind them on either side of the open confessionals, taking as long. I noticed, as nuns, who I always thought were scrupulous indeed, judging by the length of their confessions.

But I was able to go to confession on that last visit I paid to St. Peter’s, and I felt with joy and love that warm sense of community, the family, which is the Church. How the Council has broken down barriers between clergy and laity, and how close the bishops seem to us when they are together from all parts of the world, at home in Rome, and not set apart alone and distant on episcopal thrones and episcopal palaces!

The mass that morning was in the Syriac rite and was sung, so it was not until ten that I arrived at the Cenacle on Piazza Pricilla, which was on the other side of Rome in a district that I had not yet visited, on the edge of the suburbs. There we gathered in the garden, twenty women, and a few of the male members of the Community of the Ark, including Lanza del Vasto, whose wife Chanterelle had initiated the fast. He led us in the prayers that we would say each morning as we gathered together after mass, the Our Father, the peace prayer of St. Francis, and the Beatitudes. Afterwards, the trained members of the community sang. Then we went to our rooms, which were on the third floor of the old convent, looking out on gardens and sky.

Each day we followed a schedule. There was mass at seven-fifteen and then prayer together. From nine to twelve we kept our rooms in silence, reading, writing or praying. During the day we divided up our time in the chapel so that throughout the day and night there was always one of us keeping vigil. At noon we went to the garden and read together. Readings included a book by Martin Luther King, and an account of the work of Father Paul Gauthier, who

founded the Companions of Jesus the Carpenter, in Nazareth. Most of us had some sewing or knitting to do. The wicker chairs were comfortable, the garden smelled of pine trees and eucalyptus and sweet herbs, and every day the sun was warm. Other members of the Ark, who were running an exhibit on non-violence, came and told us news of the visitors to the exhibit and of Fathers of the Council they had talked to.

At four in the afternoon there were lectures by priests, and at six a French doctor came daily to see how everyone was getting along. Two of the women were ill during the fast and had to keep to their beds, so the lectures were held in Chanterelle's room. Prayers again at seven or eight, and then silence and sleep – for those who could sleep.

As for me, I did not suffer at all from the hunger or headache or nausea which usually accompanies the first few days of a fast, but I had offered my fast in part for the victims of famine all over the world, and it seemed to me that I had very special pains. They were certainly of a kind I have never had before, and they seemed to pierce to the very marrow of my bones when I lay down at night. Perhaps it was the hammock-shaped bed. Perhaps it was the cover, which seemed to weight a ton, so that I could scarcely turn. At any rate, my nights were penitential enough to make up for the quiet peace of the days. Strangely enough, when the fast was over, all pains left me and I have not had them since. They were not like the arthritic pains, which, aggravated by tension and fatigue, are part of my life now that I am sixty-eight and which one accepts as part of age and also part and parcel of the life of work, which is the lot of the poor. So often I see grandmothers in Puerto Rican families bearing the burdens of the children, the home, cooking and sewing and contributing to the work of mother and father, who are trying so hard to make a better life for their children, so I am glad to share this fatigue with them.

But these pains which went with the fast seemed to reach into my very bones, and I could only feel that I had been given some little information of the hunger of the world. God help us, living as we do, in the richest country in the world and so far from approaching the voluntary poverty we esteem and reach towards.

Kind Visitors

I must not forget to thank the visitors who came; Richard Carbray, Bishop Shannon of St. Paul, Abbot Christopher Butler, of Downside Abbey, Barbara Wall, Eileen Egan and Mrs. Stephen Rynne (Alice Curtayne); who wrote the lives of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Brigid of Ireland and is now covering the Council for an Irish paper.

On the night of the 10th of October, the fast, those ten days when nothing but water passed our lips, was finished, but hard though it was, it was but a token fast, considering the problems of the world we live in. It was a small offering of

sacrifice, a widow's mite, a few loaves and fishes. May we try harder to do more in the future.