

On Pilgrimage - December 1957

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Summary: Account of a trip through Chicago, Minnesota, and onto Montreal. Comments on the interest of students in pacifism, singing psalms in English, riding the bus, and prayer—"A fundamental study." (DDLW #733).

My trip took a little over three weeks, but it would take three or four issues of the CW to deal with it completely. The story of a trip is always sketchy.

I left off my account last month with my visit to Detroit. The Greyhound bus station is diagonally across the street from St. Aloysius Church, which is the downtown church everyone goes to in Detroit, like St. Francis in New York and St. Peter's in Chicago. The bus trip to Chicago was an easy one; we stopped only once at Jackson, where there were postal cards in the bus station of the "model" prison at Jackson, a horror which is written about in **Break Down the Walls**.

Because of engagements in New York, my trip had to be a swift one, and I stayed only a few days in Chicago, speaking at Alvernia High School, and at the University of Chicago where the students themselves called a meeting which was very well attended though they had only a days' notice. The issue which all the students, in every city I visited, wanted to talk about was pacifism of course. War, the draft, education, employment, man and his relation to the state are all issues he is vitally interested in, or should be.

I stayed with Nina Polcyn who has moved from the near north side to West Argyle, where her little apartment faces a park and is just down the street from the north branch of the Chicago river. Ed Marciniak, Editor of **Work** and his family live near by and so does his married sister with her husband and children. All are active in the apostolate.

Everyone was having Asiatic flu or what resembled it, and I too had one of those colds that enable you to take a day off with impunity since you can scarcely breathe and do so much coughing and sneezing that you are a danger to society. So I had telephone visits with Fr. Chrysostom and Gordon Zahn, who is teaching sociology at Loyola and other friends, and did not even make the attempt to get to the Peter Maurin House, comforting myself that I would be back in a few months to keep an engagement in South Bend. Since I have to

go to Rochester and Buffalo again in January, I'll probably continue the trip to take in Louisville and St. Louis.

Maryhouse

My next stop after Chicago was St. Paul, where a group of women who two by two have come to help us at Maryfarm in the past, are living a communal life, a group working toward becoming a secular institute. At present most of them are supporting themselves by working in hospitals as practical nurses. Maryhouse is delightfully situated on the outskirts of St. Paul on Little Canada road, and the few acres surrounding them are under intensive cultivation with fruit trees, garden, and shrubbery. With an additional house for summer guests, there is ample room for retreats in summer, but right now they are concentrating on Sunday afternoon discussion groups once a month, in addition to the hospitality they always practice. It is a rural community around them and the parish of Fr. Durand is made up of farmers as well as city workers. There is a new church and a fine school.

Using Maryhouse as my headquarters I went out to speak at Mendota, St. Peter's parish where our old friend Fr. Harvey Egan is now stationed. Formerly he was on the furthest border of the diocese, on the border of North Dakota and Minnesota, and the saying was that on a clear day one could look all the way west to the Pacific. It is a beautiful parish with church and school situated on the Minnesota river.

I spoke also at Maryhouse on Sunday afternoon, and then at St. Mary's hospital at a meeting arranged by Grace Carlson, a Catholic to whom I feel closely drawn because she spent some time in a federal prison for radical activities in the past.

The next morning Fr. Marion Casey called for me and drove me to the Humphries in St. Cloud where Don Humphries has a big studio. He makes chalices, paints, carves, makes furniture and does many other things, including talking, very well indeed. Mary has not only raised children, eight of them, but once when they were living on St. Isadore's farming commune in northern Minnesota and the men were away on jobs, the story is that she snared and killed a deer for food for the young ones. A valiant woman. I would like very much to see the story of St. Isadore's written, by Al Reser, or his wife, by Don or Mary, or Martie Paul; or by Fr. Cordes or Peter Maurin, both of whom are dead now. I have a picture of Peter digging a ditch on that farm, where the men spent more time fishing and hunting than they did farming, and which was paradise to some of them and a purgatory to others. What didn't Peter Maurin lead us all into!

There was another member of a Catholic Worker group, Mary Katherine Finnegan, now Mrs. Carlos Cotton, at the luncheon, mother of half a dozen, or is it seven. Her husband is an artist and was then working in a quarry so I didn't see him this trip. But Joe O'Connell, whose St. Joseph carved from Indiana limestone is on our front stoop, was there, and before I went to St. John's at

Collegeville to speak to the students at four o'clock, I went to his small house and studio a mile away from the monastery, and saw his wife and children again. The oldest Cotton boy was there to clean up the studio, and we rescued him from a long walk home in the rain by giving him a lift. The studio is a frame, covered with very heavy plastic which forms very adequate walls and ceiling. Joe is going to put a stove in it for winter working on the Holy Family group he has been commissioned to carve for an orphanage in Chicago. He never seems to be without a commission, (nor does Don Humphrey) and he says the days are not long enough to do all the work he wants to do. It was a very good meeting at St. John's and I could not stay for too many questions because Fr. Casey had to leave at five for Hutchinson which was a two hours' drive south and west. Evening devotions were at 7:30 and my talk came afterward. While I had been in Detroit, an organist brought some tape recordings to the House of Hospitality to play us some congregational singing of the psalms put to modern chant. The singing was from a French parish. I was startled and delighted to hear the same chant at Fr. Casey's, the psalms in English and the antiphon repeated in chant too by the congregation. After hearing one or two verses everyone could join in, and the melody was so haunting that it continued in my head for days. I understand that Fr. Casey and Fr. Muellerleile obtained booklets which the Grail had on display at the Liturgical conference at St. John's during the summer, and which I unfortunately missed, having spent that time in jail.

The next day Fr. Muellerleile came to call for me in the afternoon; I visited every class room in the school meanwhile and talked to all the children and then in the twilight we drove to Fr. Paul Judge's grave in Willmar and prayed there that he would bless us all and keep close to us and the work we were trying to do. He loved giving us retreats, and begged me before his death to write the story of our retreat movement which I hope some day I can do. Fr. Muellerleile had just been transferred from Mendota, where he had just finished building a school, to Redwood Falls where he was going to build another school. Now that I have grandchildren, I can well appreciate the urgency of this and can forgive the bingos and card parties which seem so much a part of raising money for this. I would like to urge upon the bishops the idea of the non-payment of taxes by Catholic parents for school taxes, when they are sending their children to Catholic schools and so are paying double for their education.

Mrs. Muellerleile, Father's mother packed a good lunch for me and I took the two forty-five train which stopped at every station, including one ten minute wait so everyone could get out and have coffee. From Minneapolis at seven in the morning I took a bus for Duluth.

In Duluth I was met at the bus station by two young priests Fr. Sheuer and Fr. Rush who had been told to keep me company until our friend Georgia Kiernan could get away from school to meet me for a three hour visit while I waited for the bus to Sault St. Marie and North Bay and Montreal. We had a good visit and I got news of Fr. Hughes who had driven me around the Mesabe Iron range years ago, and who is now teaching mental prayer to a group who meets with

him. Fr. Wendell, New York Dominican, gave us a series of talks one summer on prayer, and one very notable vocation developed as a result of it. Jim Clark, a fireman, went to the Capuchins and now he is far away in the missions on some islands formerly held by the Japanese. What would not happen if we were taught more about prayer. We ought to ask, like the apostles, "Father, teach us to pray." A fundamental study.

Georgia and I drove later, down to the breakwater and sat there watching an ore boat go out into Lake Superior, and it was windy and the surf pounded with a heavy roar against the rocky breakwater.

The bus ride from Duluth was beautiful. On a bus at night, when you are sitting in the front seat, the road is illuminated by the headlights, and the pines stand out, and we watched for deer. It was forested iron country and we went through little towns and felt ourselves to be far away from the cities. I rode from three that afternoon until the next night, stopping off in great North Bay where I stayed in a little hotel at the bus station, and slept. The bus left the next morning early and got into Montreal at night and I was met by Tony Walsh and his friends and driven to Dixi MacMaster who from her invalid's bed at her sister's in Mont Royal carries on an extensive correspondence and writes for Unity, the paper, which is the organ of the St. Benedict Joseph Labre House of Hospitality. My two days there were like a little retreat, since what we were talking about was the secular institute in formation of Jesu-Caritas of the Little Sisters of Jesus.