On Pilgrimage

Dorothy Day

Summary: Still awaiting Tamar's baby, she mentions neighborly visits and reflects on her family history, and criticizes poorly written books about Mary and the saints. Writes of "feasting and fasting" as Lent begins, enumerating the many mentions of food in the Bible and quoting Dostoevsky's character Father Zossima on the importance of fasting. (DDLW #477).

February

February 4th
Feast of St. Agatha
18 above
Steady snow all day

For a long time there are no visitors, then suddenly the day is full of them. Everyone is wondering when T. is going to have her baby. The mailman asks, neighbors send over presents. This morning Bud Yost came in with a bundle of baby clothes outgrown by some of his nieces and nephews. His mother is so young a looking woman that I had taken her for her husband's daughter at the apple paring last fall. They are local people and the farms now priced at $1,200 are worth, to them, $800; and this one, which we are renting priced at $2,500, worth $1,200. They themselves have been renters all their lives until suddenly the father, coming into a little legacy, was able to make a down payment on a place selling for $1,500. He works, his wife cans at home and sells her produce, the children, a son and two daughters, all help too. The son who visited us this morning has been cutting pulpwood.

One cannot help thinking that the men have an easier time of it. It is wonderful to work out on such a day as this with the snow falling lightly all around, chopping wood, dragging in fodder, working with the animals. Women are held pretty constantly to the house. Tomorrow I shall take to reading and pacing the porch, one of my favorite occupations. I've been reading the psalms for Matins and Vespers and by taking a stroll mid morning or afternoon I can get in the Little Hours. Susie is so crazy to get out, and suffers so with cold when she does.

I was reading in *David Copperfield* how Betsy Trotwood paced the floor for two hours while she unravelled problems, and at eighty could still do a five mile

stretch! She reminds me of my mother-in-law who at eighty plays croquet, walks, swims, listens to Churchill on the radio and in general is a vigorous old English woman.

In the afternoon Joe came in–he is moving and the problem of packing, finding a place for himself, wife and four small children is a hard one. He brought jam from his wife. Then in the late afternoon, Alma and Leslie who are on the next farm came, Leslie to fetch home a goat he was buying from Joe, and Alma to take a lesson in hooked rug making and knitting. Her baby will be due next August. She is a wonderful little housekeeper and cooks and cans and bakes. Their house is of logs, very uneven, low-ceilinged, irregular, only 3 of the 7 rooms inhabitable. But they are managing. She canned twenty roosters last week. Last month they slaughtered and the other day Leslie brought us some of her scrapple. She boiled the head and feet, picked the bones and ground them up, mixed them with home ground corn meal and cooked them like mush. The scrapple comes out of the pan in a firm cake to be sliced down and fried.

Little by little I learn more about the neighborhood. No Negro families for instance. All of Dutch or Irish descent. No unions. Stocking factory, Victor plant and mines all unorganized. This week there is an election to decide whether the workers in the Victor plant want a union. The local paper in an editorial urges against it. How can a union organizer get in one of these tight little communities. It certainly demands courage. And in spite of Republican propaganda to the contrary, it is not just "business is business," and the desire to increase the dues-paying members of a great union like the C.I.O. Auto Workers, of which this will be an affiliate. Power, perhaps, and the desire of the worker to feel his strength, his importance, his responsibility as a man, and not just a wage slave,–this desire motivates men.

Yesterday we went to Dr. Tobias–T. has been going weekly to him. His office is in a store just off the square. There were a dozen there before us. All poor people, all shabbily dressed, all workers of farm background.

There was one young mother with five children. When T. has her two trying to tear up magazines and spit on the windows, she is not at all embarrassed because all the mothers bring their children everywhere. They have to.

Dr. Tobias is an all around family doctor, a tired, youngish man, full of common-sense. He dispenses calcium pills to the expectant mothers, cough medicine to the children, etc. No prescriptions or going to the drug store. His charge for delivering the baby is $35. The hospital "The Pines," four dollars a day for the mother, one dollar for the baby.

Friday, February 6th

Feast of St. Dorothy

St. Dorothy is the patroness of gardeners and when I think of a garden I think of a garden enclosed, as the Blessed Mother is described to be. A wall is a lovely thing–with fruit trees and hollyhocks and tall things growing against it.

A garden not too small to have a grape arbor at one end where there can be tables and chairs and benches for outdoor meals. Such a garden is for women and children so that there can be no straying of little feet.

St. Dorothy, pray we may one day have such a garden, that we may settle long enough in one place to put roots in, if not our own, since we are pilgrims, at least a tree's, a vine's.

One of the vows the Benedictine's take is stability. And there is such wandering today, from job to job, from home to home. Most people want a settled place, but economic circumstances make it hard.

Our life is made up of meals. We have been making beautiful cakes, pies and cookies, much to the delight of David and the children, to vary our monotonous diet.

Susie has a good appetite and ploughs her way sturdily through a breakfast of wheat cereal, apple sauce and a full 8 oz. of milk. But Becky eats like a bird. A bit of whole wheat bread, a piece of apple, a handful of wheat when the chickens are fed, a piece of raw carrot, a bit of raw oats. She has a great liking for these things. T., when she was a baby, refused a bottle after she was weaned at 10 months, drank only a few swallows of milk, and made each meal a torment. Then when she had to be away from home at the hospital for a week with abscessed ears, she almost starved, since she would not take a bottle and no one had the patience to feed her. I can remember bringing her home from the hospital looking gaunt and starved, weeping over her all the way. Then she was so ravenous I had to get up in the middle of the night to make cereal for her. She had bronchitis that winter and I worried over her constantly. I remember one doctor telling me, "Throw away your thermometer. Babies are hard to kill." He was a clinic doctor and saw many sicker than mine.

O the generations of mothers! Of women and babies! I have pictures of my mother's mother and grandmother on the one hand, and myself and daughter and granddaughter. Six generations of us.

My mother used to nurse her baby sister as a little girl, and so had a taste of motherhood long before she had five of her own. That little sister died last year, and my mother four years ago. Charity Washburn, Anna Satterlee, Grace Day, Dorothy, Tamar, Rebecca, six generations living during wars, revolutions, earthquakes, hurricane, and more war.

My mother said as she was dying–"I have lived enough," But up to a week or so before her death her appetite for life had not diminished. She loved life, passionately, intensely, wanted to live, and felt that life was full, was thrilling even at seventy-five.

Her last child was born when she was forty-five and of course I thought of her as old then. She was not well after that for a year or so, and every morning I used to get up with my brother at four thirty–change him, feed him and put him into a warm carriage beside the fireplace in the library to take another nap while

I studied Virgil before getting breakfast. I was in my last year of the Robert Waller high school in Chicago and I loved Latin so much that I read the Ecloques besides the Aenead.

Our teacher, Dr. Matheson so inspired us with enthusiasm that he offered to teach Greek to any who wished to remain an additional period after school. A number of us did, and got through Xenophon and the New Testament. There are not many such teachers today.

I should not have studied half so well if I had not had that baby to get up with in the morning.

We were very poor then. My father's newspaper had failed and he was without a job for some time. It was not long after that he got another post as racing editor of a New York paper and our difficulties were over–we had recovered as we had many times before. Our status was that of most professional people in the cities. We owned nothing, only personal effects –we had nothing in the bank. We lived from week to week. We were poor but we lived as though rich. Our standards were American standards. On my father's side there were farmers and doctors in the South, Tennessee. The farmers were land owners but the moneyless doctor was the respected one.

My mother's people, on the other hand, were whalers, or mill workers. Her father had been a chairmaker, so his discharge from the army stated, after the Civil War, but he had been a war prisoner, had tuberculosis, and died young, leaving a widow with five children, so my mother at fourteen went to work in the local shirt factory.

Workers and scholars. How mixed up we are in the United States. And what misconceptions the rest of the world has of us. There is so much pose of prosperity in our big cities that when one sees a farm mother with home-made clothes on herself and her brood of children in a city bus station, she has the appearance of destitution. And yet she and her husband may own their acres, their home, their means of production.

In the slums, in the most crowded noisome tenements, young girls emerge for work as for the evening's pleasure dressed like movie stars.

Taking people all in all, it is hard to tell who are the oppressed, who are the proletariat, the dispossessed, the propertyless. Until suddenly (if there is peace, no threat of war, no increase of armaments) there is a depression, wheels stop turning, chimneys stop smoking, and 14 million people are out of work.

And that fear hits the countryside too. The stocking factory has closed down. The sand mines are idle. The Victor plant is pulling out. No cash income. How will we live? It is lonely in the country. There is relief in the city. There everyone's disaster is no one's disaster. Misery loves company. And so the farms are deserted.

Well, how do you live without cash anyway?

February 11

I began to write this on the Feast of our Lady of Lourdes when I went to my bookshelves to find something about our Blessed Mother to read. I picked up two books, opened them for a bit and closed them both with horror and sat down with my missal instead. I'm not going to mention the names of the two books nor their authors. I'd prefer to talk of the splendid hagiography of Fr. Thurston and Donald Attwater (the reused Butler), Gheon, Ida Coudenhove, Margaret Monroe and other modern writers.

In the first of the two books aforementioned, the saintwriter declares that the Blessed Mother, with lighted torches, was seen setting fire to a dance hall, where couples were carousing, and burning it to the ground with 400 people therein! The second book had a little chapter about eating: "The saints went to their meals sighing. St. Alphonsus, when sitting down, would think only of the sufferings of the souls in purgatory, and with tears would beseech Our Lady to accept the mortifications he imposed upon himself during meals. Blessed de Montford sometimes shed tears and sobbed bitterly when sitting at table to eat. If such have been the feelings of the saints what shall we say of those of Mary? . . . St. Jerome (in a letter to Heliodorus) said that this wonderful child only took, toward evening, the food which an angel was wont to bring her."

No wonder no one wants to be a saint. But we are called to be saints–we are the sons of God!

Thank God for the missal! I turned for refreshment to the Mass for the day.

"The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come." (That is literally true. In the country they have been pruning the fruit trees and grapevines the early part of this month.) "Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall. Show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears, for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely."

Filled with joy at this so different address to the Mother of Christ, I went on reading that chapter in the Canticle of Canticles–"Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The fig tree hath put forth her green figs; the vines are in flower with their sweet smell. Arise, my love, my beautiful one and come. . . . Catch us the little foxes, that destroy the vines."

The little foxes–it is about the little foxes I wish to write –the little foxes that destroy the beautiful vines that prevent the grapes from coming to fruition. In other words, the little misconceptions of feastings and fastings that keep us from rejoicing in true devotion during this season of Lent.

In the Mass of this very day there were two prayers, begging for "health both of soul and of body" and "that physical and moral health which we desire." I want to write about feasting and fasting and the joys and beauties of both,

because, although this is a feast day on which I begin this writing, it is also Ash Wednesday.

How much there was about food in the Old Testament. Adam raised food for himself and Eve, and did it with pleasure. After the fall of Adam, ploughing and seeding and harvesting, earning one's daily bread either as a husbandman like Cain or shepherd like Abel, was a difficult and painful affair. Sacrifices of food were offered to the Lord, whether of beasts, or of bread and wine–food because it represented our life–what we live by. We offered our lives to the Lord. We also lust after food as Esau did when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. The Israelites complained of their food in the desert and yearned after the flesh pots of Egypt even with the bondage and slavery it entailed, even though the Lord fed them bread from heaven and water from the Rock, food that had every delight and taste.

Who can forget the widow's cruse of oil which was never diminished; Ruth gleaning in the corn; Daniel and his three companions living on "oats, pea beans and barley corn"; and the meal that was served Daniel in the lion's den by the prophet Habacuc? St. Bonaventure said that after the long fast of our Lord in the desert, when the angels came to minister to Him, they went first to the blessed Mother to see what she had on her stove, and got the soup she had prepared and transported it to our Lord, who relished it the more because His Mother had prepared it. Of course.

How many times fasting is enjoined in the Old Testament. Whenever there was war, as penalty for their sins, the Jews were told to fast, and to fast joyfully, not with long faces. Over and over again the chosen people were urged to do penance, to fast, even their cattle, not only as a sign of sorrow for sins, an offering to God of their life, but also to have the means to show their love for their brother who was afflicted.

How shall we have the means to help our brother who is in need? We can do without those unnecessary things which become habits, cigarettes, liquor, coffee, tea, candy, sodas, soft drinks and those foods at meals which only titillate the palate. We all have these habits, the youngest and the oldest. And we have to die to ourselves in order to live, we have to put off the old man and put on Christ. That it is so hard, that it arouses so much opposition, serves to show what an accumulation there is in all of us of unnecessary desires.

Instead of quoting Fr. Lacouture or Fr. Hugo, Id like to quote Fr. Zossima, that very much alive character in Dostoievsky's Brothers Karamazov:

"The world says, you have desires, and so satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the most rich and powerful. Don't be afraid of satisfying them and even multiply your desires ... I knew one 'champion of freedom' who told me himself that, when he was deprived of tobacco in prison, he was so wretched at the privation that he almost went and betrayed his cause for the sake of getting tobacco again! And such a man says, 'I am fighting for the cause of humanity.'

"How can such a one fight, what is he fit for? He is capable perhaps of some action quickly over, but he cannot hold out long. And it is no wonder that the people instead of gaining freedom have sunk to slavery and instead of serving the cause of brotherly love and the union of humanity, have fallen on the contrary, into dissension and isolation.

"The monastic way is very different. Obedience, fasting and prayer are laughed at, yet only through them lies the way to real, true freedom."

I have always meant to go through the New Testament to see how many times food is mentioned, how many times Christ dined, supped, picnicked with His disciples. He healed St. Peter's mother-in-law and she rose to serve them. He brought the little girl back to life and said, "Give her to eat." He broiled fish on the seashore for His apostles. Could it possibly be that Mary was less solicitous for the happiness and comfort and refreshment of others?

It is a part of woman's life to be preoccupied with food. She nurses her child, she has nourished him for nine long months in her womb; it is her grief if her breasts fail her; she weeps if her child refuses to eat. Her work, as food provider is her pleasure and her pain, pain because of the monotony and because right now the cost of food has gone up one-hundred percent.

There are many ways to write about the problem of food.

The heretical attitude of mind which feels shame of the body, disgust at its functions, distaste at supplying its necessities, fear of its joys, has resulted in a most exaggerated attention to food. First we neglect it because we think of eating as a gross pleasure. Then we lose interest in preparing food for the family, then we turn to store and factory foods with all their talk of vitamins and calories.

From the standpoint of health, there are two good books which stimulate many thoughts on food. Dr. Price's *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration,* and Alexis Carel's *Man the Unknown.* We eat to have strength in order to serve God. If there are pleasures of taste to oil the heavy labor of production, we should take them gratefully from the good God. I'm sure the Blessed Mother did not neglect her family duties. I am sure St. Joseph provided a good piece of wood which Mary kept scrubbed and perhaps waxed, and she who "with her bosom's milk didst feed her own Creator, Lord most high," must have seen to it that suitable meals were served on that board to Him who was "like unto us in all things save only sin."

I have been getting an idea as to what was eaten in those days by what is eaten now by people in the same region. Reviewing a book for the Commonweal, *In the Footsteps of Moses,* led me to T. E. Lawrence, and then to Doughty's *Arabia Deserta.* At the same time I was reading Bazin's *Life of Fr. Charles de Foucauld.* And, of course, The Desert Fathers.

Wheat, butter and honey, dates, wine and oil, mutton, calves, fish and quail– these are all mentioned in the Bible. Aside from feasts there was a monotony

of diet that we should get back to for the sake of simplifying our lives, for the sake of being more truly poor with Him, for the sake of fasting, and for the sake of health. A handful of ground wheat with honey and milk on it makes a most delightful collation. A slice of whole wheat bread makes a fast day breakfast. You can buy a sack of wheat, a hundred pounds. You can live this way in city or country. This is Lent, and Lent is a wonderful time to begin again.

Back in May, 1741, Pope Benedict XIV said: "If this observance of Lent comes to be relaxed it is to the detriment of God's glory, to the dishonor of the Catholic religion, and to the peril of souls; nor can it be doubted that such negligence will become a source of misfortune to nations, of disaster in public affairs, and of adversity to individuals."

As in the days of the Old Testament, that prophecy of Pope Benedict XIV has come true with us.

February 16

Still no baby! When a mother nurses her children and conceives while nursing, there is no way of telling the date of the new arrival. It was usually thought that a nursing mother did not conceive, but we know several who do, most regularly, so they do not know whether the next is due January, February or March. Nor can the doctors tell! When my child was born I could be pretty accurate as to the date, but the doctor informed me I was two month's pregnant when I knew I was five. Another young woman I knew in the twenties kept going to the doctor for seven months being treated for anemia, but by that time it was obvious she was pregnant. Some women show their pregnancy most obviously, others so little that one often reads of young women giving birth to babies when no one expected it. One of the strangest cases I ever heard of was of a young woman working in Margaret Sanger's birth control headquarters (planned parenthood, they call it now) who confessed one day, to the girl at the desk next to her, that she was going to have a baby that very day! There was a great hullaballoo in the office.

Today is a great day even though no baby has arrived. A farm has been bought. Three hundred dollars down payment has been made to Mr. Unger at Stotler's Crossroads. The total price is twelve hundred dollars for seventy acres of land that has not been farmed for twelve years, although people rented there and lived there up to last summer.

There are seven rooms, and an attic for storage. There is a good tin roof, good wood walls, badly papered, good hard wood floor; the doors and windows are bad. The porch is falling down. The chimney is slightly askew, there is a flood in the cellar under the living room. Water is to be had from a spring five hundred feet away. There is a well by the barn, long unused. There is a well by an abandoned school house next door cemented over. The school house is also torn down. All the water must be fetched. All the wood must be chopped.

Right now, though the new farm is only half a mile across the creek, we must go ten miles around, up hill and down dale, because the creek is high. People

go around on horseback hereabouts; we are always passing them, we, who have no horse, in a borrowed car. They carry saddle bags, sometimes they ride side saddle, and look very ruminative, meditative, as they ride along.

Last Saturday there was a high wind roaring around the house. There was pouring rain that night and the night before, melting all the snow. Then when the wind died there was everywhere the sound of rushing waters.

Sunday at 6:30 we were able to get to Mass (and by leaving before the last gospel, we were able to get home in time for D. to go to the second Mass at 9:00.) The pastor is ill in the hospital, so every Sunday a different priest arrives. He talked last Sunday of the "Tribunal" of penance – a court where everyone was forgiven. What a strange court, indeed, when over and over, repeating our offenses again and again, we are forgiven; where everyone is forgiven! How different from *The Trial* of Kafka, where men are tried, found guilty and sentenced.

Today and yesterday it was like spring outdoors. I got up and made the fires as usual at seven, but by ten the children were on the porch without their coats. T. and D. took a two mile walk Sunday. She washes heavy clothes, today trousers and woolen underwear and shirts, yesterday blankets, besides the ordinary baby wash. She bakes, she knits, she crochets, she weaves, she pores over seed catalogues, she makes lists, her face is placid, happy, calm; but her feet drag, she shuffles along, and she feels heavy. She says it is a long wait.

We look at her and say, is it today? How do you feel? It is St. Ignatius' Day, it is St. John Bosco, it is St. Martin–all good names. It will be a girl T. says hopelessly, and D. shouts, "Don't you dare come home with a girl. We bought a farm. We need a boy to farm it."