

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1971

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Summary: Preparing to depart for a peacemaking pilgrimage of Eastern Europe and Russia, she recalls her early fascination with Russia and the role Russian novelists played in her religious conversion. Especially singles out Dostoevsky's character Fr. Zossima. Apologizes for being behind in her correspondence and confesses to being fearful of take-offs and landings of planes. (DDLW #511).

The column for this month is just an introduction to the one I will write, God willing, for the September issue, which will be an account of a visit to Eastern Europe, which includes Warsaw, Leningrad, Moscow, Budapest and Bucharest. In a few hours I am setting out for the airport to meet Nina Polcyn, of Chicago, and there we will meet up with fifty or so other people who are all making the **Promoting Enduring Peace** pilgrimage, a three-week visit which will be sightseeing and seminars, a mere taste of course, but perhaps the first of other visits to the Soviet Union. There are members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the American Friends Service Committee on the trip and many teachers and students, and the leader of the trip is 80-year old Jerome Davis, who was formerly for many years on the faculty of Yale Divinity School. I have been given a fellowship for the trip by Corliss Lamont and am very happy to be going.

Seeing Russia

Whenever I have dreamed of a trip to Russia before, it was with the idea of a long train journey on the way home perhaps, from Moscow to Vladivostok, with time to ruminate on my visits to what are shrines for me—Leningrad, Moscow, Zagorsk—the great churches which are now museums and the churches which are still functioning. But we are living in an age of plane travel, so I take off this afternoon from Kennedy Airport and tomorrow night I will be sleeping in Warsaw.

From my high school years, I have been fascinated by Russia, and it was the books of Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov which did much to bring about my conversion. I was haunted by Lenin's struggle for faith in **Anna Karenina**, by the reminiscences of Fr. Zossima in the **Brothers Karamozov**, Rashkolnikov's in **Crime and Punishment**, turning to the Gospels in Siberia, Turgenev's story

of the crippled yet radiant peasant girl in one of his **Sportsman's Sketches**, etc. There is a fascinating book, **The Humiliated Christ in Russian Thought**, by Gorodetzky, printed by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, I think, which brings out what I mean. (I am writing in haste with no books to check my spelling, so please excuse.) The very struggle for non-violence, and growth in love of brother, love of enemy, which goes on within us all, the very struggle to put off the old man and put on the new, was made easier by those words of Fr. Zossima which I have so often quoted, "Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." (In my little brochure, printed by the Paulist Press, called **Meditations**, the publisher, or blurb writer, gave no credit to Dostoyevsky's Fr. Zossima, but attributed the words to me in a paragraph on the back cover.)

Saying Good Byes

As I write people keep coming in to say goodbye. Yet I will be gone for only three weeks, and when I return I hope to go up to the PAX conference which is held at Graymoor this year. And of course I shall continue to travel since I have engagements in the midwest and far west in October and November. What with speaking engagements which take up perhaps a third of the year, and going back and forth between farm and city, my life is indeed an active one and it is hard to do the writing I should, the letters I should answer. So much of the correspondence of the **Catholic Worker** is intimate and personal, because our readers, so many of them, become part of our family that it always hurts me to have to delay answering, or just to acknowledge communications. Others of course help, and we are blessed with many volunteers especially in the summer. Some take a year or so with us to help and are very interested right now in the Farm Workers' struggle, and tenants' groups and neighborhood problems. But not many write about these things. Students have had enough of writing, enough of books (text books) for a time. So I make apologies for us all for omissions, delays, and I ask prayers, when you read this, for the trials and trouble-ations, as John Fillinger our farmer calls them, of those at the farm, and those in the city, and right now most especially for me.

I confess to fear and trembling at the take off and the landing of planes. The speed is so terrific that I feel it is a miracle when we have accomplished either height or landing. When I am in the air, gliding so comfortably among the clouds, over the clouds, I recognize that the plane finds it no harder to sustain itself in the air than a giant steamer the size of the Waldorf Astoria hotel has to float on the waters of the ocean. God has us all in the hollow of His hand. My heart and my soul know it but my flesh trembles. Mary Lathrop, the darling, drew me a wonderful picture of a plane sailing through the clouds, and under it were the sustaining wings of two great angels. A beautiful line drawing, and when I find it we will have a cut made of it for the paper so others who share my fears may be reassured.

And here is Arthur J. Lacey on his way to the printer, and sitting, patience on a pedestal, waiting for me to finish. So when I mend a suit, and shine my shoes which are a bit down at the heel, and repack my suitcase, throwing half the stuff back in the wardrobe, I shall set out for the airport, with Tom Cornell ferrying me with a borrowed car, to meet Nina at the American Airlines, and transfer ourselves to the Pan Am where we will meet the rest of the tourists.