

On Pilgrimage - June 1948

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reports on the planting and variety of produce on the farm at Newburgh, NY, and the repair of two serviceable cars. Describes the plans for turning the barn into a dormitory for mothers and children who are on retreat. In the city, an unexpected death of a neighbor and bouts of measles and chickenpox among the children. (DDLW #263).

Maryfarm, Newburgh

Every day the planting goes on. Tomato plants, cabbage, celery, asparagus, rhubarb, peppers, carrots, beets, beans, so much that I cannot think of it all. Today, a hot June day, it has been onions. Jane has begged onions from the wholesalers and John Filliger and Tom and George and Jim have been out since lunch putting them in. They were soft ones, which they were unable to sell. We have not been able to buy onion sets, the time for them is past, the onion growers around Florida, New York, tell us.

The cow is giving twenty-four quarts of milk a day and we can use every bit of it, with eighteen sitting down to table, quite aside from retreats. People come to retreats and stay awhile. People pass by on the road, and come in to stay awhile. Several leave and several arrive.

Last week it was Father Francis Meenan's retreat that brought the crowds, a retreat for men, and they all said it was the best yet. I went to New York to take care of the office so that all at Mott street could come to the farm, over the Memorial Day week end. No one on our block seemed to be going away for the holiday. It was as noisy, as crowded as ever. On Sunday morning there was one of those tragedies which attracted a still greater crowd. A woman down the street who had lost her husband a few months ago, was washing her windows on a Sunday morning, fell three stories to the ground, and was killed instantly. I passed her on my way home from Mass. With the crowd and the ambulance out in front, I thought it was someone being brought to the hospital, a routine we had become used to at 115. It was a terrible shock as I passed down the middle of the street to see the figure of a woman lying in the gutter, amongst all kinds of litter, half covered with a piece of brown paper from a neighboring butcher shop.

It always seems an interminable length of time for police, ambulance, doctor to arrive.

It was quiet enough around the office. A few visitors came in, bringing boxes of clothes. Marge was housebound, what with the children having measles, German measles and chicken pox right after each other. Women were sick in the house, and some who were not sick were disorderly.

During the last two months, Johannah and Tommy have been praying for a station wagon to take children and their mothers to the farm. They had gone up in it to Newburgh last year, but this year the old wagon has fallen apart. So they had started to pray. Lo and behold, a friend of the farm turned over his 1932 Chevrolet to me, and after seventy-five dollars' worth of work on it, I was able to drive Bridget, Anne and Dave back to New York in it with no mishaps. We came over the new Storm King highway, picked sweet clover on the way, enjoyed the view of the river if we did not enjoy the sound we made between the echoing mountains. We sounded either like a Mack truck or an aeroplane, but I trust after we got the muffler fixed (there are a few large holes mended with tin cans) we will have a little more holy silence. I was afraid the children would feel that St. Joseph had let them down. I myself was much pleased with the car. But the children were delighted, and insisted on calling it their station wagon. I had no sooner arrived boasting in my new conveyance, when Tom Sullivan informed me that another friend had given a 1924 Columbia which was in much better shape all around, upholstery, engine, tires, general appearance, etc. To think of it, a car for the farm and a car to pick up stuff around New York! Both small cars that do not use too much gas. The men in the office talk of exchanging the two for a truck, but I am dead against it. These will get us there.

When I returned to the farm last Tuesday, I brought Johannah with me to recover from her measles, German measles and chicken pox. Since she arrived she has fallen on her nose, barked her shins, had a skirmish with the dog, made friends with the bull, and helped milk the cow. Now we learn from New York that Tommy has mumps, so she just won't go home until this awful siege is past. The only thing left is whooping cough.

As I write, supper time approaches. Helen has gone down the road to collect some promised rhubarb, Florence is mending here on the porch where I write, Peter is reading, and Charlie is tearing around inside, concocting one of his wonderful desserts. He has been serving us tender milkweed tops which taste like asparagus, and we have also had lambs quarters, dock weed and dandelion greens aplenty.

Last night we put up a shrine to St. Joseph behind the abandoned school house down the road, using the seven-foot statue that had been given us some time ago.

Hans Tunnesen is busy working on a new floor in the unused barn, which will be a dormitory for mothers and children (the barnyard will be made into the bull pen for the youngsters that Tim O'Brien wrote about some years ago). We

got the lumber for \$275 and we haven't a cent to pay for it. Brescia, the lumber man in Montgomery, is trusting us and we told him we would have to pay in dribs and drabs, just as we could beg it. So those of you who are interested in family retreats are invited to chip in. There are six retreats scheduled for the summer months, and there will be weekends in the fall. We have already had three retreats this Spring. Of course it will be during the summer months that the families will wish to come, so we could not wait for the lumber. St. Joseph was so prompt in sending the cars, we are sure he will take care of the barn floor and staircase and chimney for us.