

On Pilgrimage - January 1973

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reflects on art and Dostoevsky's phrase "Beauty will save the world." Laments the encroachment of the "totalitarian State," notes the spread of tax resistance, and inveighs against the Vietnam War. Admires the war resistance work of folk singer Joan Baez. (DDLW #527).

I write this in my room at Tivoli which looks out over the river which is not yet full of ice floes as is usual at this time of the year. But there was snow in the night and I shall be house-bound for a few days. But Jan. 1-3 were three beautiful days of sun and thaw, and I walked a bit and made a little garden in a glass dish of mosses and tiny plants. C. S. Lewis in his autobiography **Surprised by Joy** describes just such a tiny garden which his beloved brother gave him when they were children.

"Beauty will save the world," Dostoevsky wrote. I just looked up this quotation in Konstantin Mochulsky's **Dostoevsky, His Life and Work**. Helene Iswolsky, our scholar in residence, attended his lectures in Paris before the 2nd World War. The book was translated by her friend Michael Minihan, and dedicated to her and published by the Princeton University Press in 1967. It is a mine of information about this author's life and work.

In a paragraph on page 224, in speaking of art, Dostoevsky is quoted as saying, "It has its own integral organic life" and it answers man's innate need of beauty "without which, perhaps he might not want to live upon earth."

"When a man is in discord with reality, in conflict . . . the thirst for beauty and harmony appears in him with its greatest force. Art is useful here because it pours in energy, sustains the forces, strengthens our feeling of life . . . Man accepts beauty without any conditions and so, simply because it is beauty, with veneration he bows down before it, not asking why it is useful and what one can buy with it . . . Beauty is more useful than the simply useful, for it is the ultimate goal of being. On this height, the way of art meets with the way of religion."

Peter Maurin talked much of a new synthesis of "cult, culture and cultivation," and I think he emphasized these ideas because he was a French peasant, always close to the soil, an great reader, scholar and teacher, and had done the ugliest and most laborious of manual labor (giving up his original profession as teacher to emphasize St. Benedict's philosophy of work).

It was Jack English who, in one of his letters from the Trappist Monastery in Georgia, wrote to me that line from Dostoevsky's notebook, "Beauty will save the world."

Interviewings

Because the CW persists in its program of the *personal* practice of “works of mercy” (the most direct opposition to works of war), we have had much publicity of late, and the time which was supposed to mean “rest” for me has been interrupted by interviews and visits of French-Canadian and American television crews. But it has been interesting, too. They seem to have enjoyed their assignment, and we naturally love those who love us. (The National Educational Television Network plans to present a view of the Catholic Worker on the evening of January 23.)

The American crew expressed the fear of more government repression of free speech in radio, television and press—a very real threat today.

They know of our own conflict with the IRS. We live in what we can only regard as a temporary truce. We have not applied for or received tax exemption. The letter we received (and published) from the N.Y. State Offices of the IRS stated:

"After examining your financial records and reviewing your activities for the above years (1966-1970), we find that you are not required to file annual returns for the years shown, and no further action is necessary regarding the proposals in our letter of January 17, 1972.

"Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

District Director

Internal Revenue Service"

The Washington official representative who met with us conveyed to us the respect they held for our religious principles and assured us that the presented bill for almost \$300,000 could be ignored. The matter would be dropped, it was indicated (but, “for the present” was the qualifying clause in my own mind).

Mr. Nixon’s first statement that he would attack the problem of “permissiveness” was a warning note. The jailing of newspaper reporters, the Ellsberg trial—in fact, any criticisms of government policies or actions was going to meet with repressive measures.

The tax refusal movement all over the country grows. The conflict between State and people is coming out into the open here in the United States. The Totalitarian State is not just Germany (Hitler), Italy (Mussolini) and the USSR (Stalin), but is here and now with the “all encroaching State” as our Catholic bishops once called it, involving China and ourselves, as well as Russia.

The State

“A thousand years are as one day” in the history of the Church, so of course the Church has not gotten very far in the solving of this problem which started

with Constantine. Actually if the State, City, and the whole secular world with its “inspector generals” and bureaucracies did not demand our conformity to such insane standards of luxury, Holy Mother the Church would not have to be pleading for funds for schools, and books, and buses, and health and welfare aids. (As St. Hilary wrote a thousand, (or a few days) ago, “The less we ask of Caesar, the less we will have to render to Caesar.” This was his commentary on Jesus’ words—“Render to Caesar the things of Caesar and to God the things of God.”)

How good it would be to see the Church closer and closer to poverty and the poor; little schools set up on every block, in idle rooms, in empty buildings, with the students themselves helping repair them and getting meanwhile some sense of the joy of manual labor (and the pains of it, too). And idle Church-owned lands given over to the disorderly poor, the unworthy poor, to build up little villages of huts, tepees, log cabins, yes, even outhouses. Which might come to resemble (if a Church of sorts were built in the center) an ancient Irish monastery. Ireland used to be called the land of Saints and Scholars.

Actually, we see some of these attempts today in “communes” all over the country and among the dreamers, the “freaked out.” Even the shacks of the farm workers on the lands of the growers could be made into a community of common purpose—“to make the kind of society where it is easier to be good.”

Overcoming our enemies is slow work indeed. Loving our enemies is commanded of us by Christ. And I can lie here on my couch on a snowy January afternoon and dream dreams, and write this letter to our readers. But of course our greatest enemy is ourselves, our lethargy, our neglect of those most powerful means—prayer and fasting (and the sacraments).

The War

Actually I was trying as I began writing about my little terrarium, to comfort myself, because of the horror of our times, these times of savagery, lies, greed—and implacable determination on the part of one man not to be “the first President to lose a war.”

In the sordid ugliness of our slums one can find beauty in the clouds, in a clear sky, as Ruskin said. Tom Sullivan’s article in this issue recalled to me the beauty of a human being who had been thru war and the humiliation of beatings in a prison camp and who sat by the bedside of a dying woman, Peggy Baird, my old friend, and drank with her and talked literature with her and when she said she wanted to die a Catholic brought out that beautiful old Baltimore Catechism and “brought her into the Church.”

He lived thru the horror—he was also involved in contributing to the horror, as each and everyone of us Americans are now, one way or another. We are all guilty. “He who says he is without sin is a liar,” Scripture says, as a dear black neighbor on First Street, clutching my hand, assured me last month. And don’t we all know it!

Joan Baez

Joan Baez, who sang at two of my meetings on the West Coast last winter, went to Hanoi and miraculously lived thru those bombings last month. She and a few others, acting as postmen for the prisoners of war, brought and returned with letters. Yes, the world will be saved by such beauty, such courage! She stood on a balcony in Hanoi and sang to the people in the midst of this inhuman war. How could she keep that heavenly voice of hers from trembling with the fear she confessed to enduring all thru her visit? She has suffered imprisonment (and her mother, too) in protesting this longest war in U.S. history.

I hope you have all seen those pictures of her accompanying the children in Birmingham, Alabama, as they faced up to, marched against, police dogs and men lined up some years ago against demonstrating women and children of the South in a racial and class war which goes on still, and is even more prevalent in the North.

Reading is an escape from agony. Solzhenitsyn's works—**The Cancer Ward**, **The First Circle**; Harrison Salisbury's **The 900 Days**, **The Siege of Leningrad**. Such books remind one that in such crises today man often is of indomitable spirit. "There is that which is of God in every man," the Quakers say.

Rejoice! Phil is Free!

He came to us, as his brother Fr. Dan Berrigan did last spring, to say Mass at St. Joseph's House, First Street, the day after his release from Danbury Federal Prison.

Father Phil Berrigan is now with his Community, a Josephite parish in Baltimore, where our beloved Fr. Pacifique Roy used to live. I received a rejoicing letter from Brendan and Will Walsh, our Catholic Worker fellow workers in Baltimore. Remember, St. Paul wrote: "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice!" Maybe, if we pray hard enough we can bring about a purifying defeat for our country, and begin a new life, at home, and stop making instruments of war.

I'd like to end with a beautiful quote from Rosemary Haughton—a reminder for each and all of us:

"There are not many ways to God, but only one, and it lies through the depth of a man's own soul, when he leaves his false self behind, and stripped, and alone like the myth heroes—goes into the darkness. The darkness may be a catastrophe, personal or communal, or it may be the yearly, daily round of ordinary living, continued when the first enthusiasm has died and there seems no reason to go on and do right except clinging to a laughable conviction that there is something worth going on for. And in the depth of this darkness is Christ, who passed from the world and the flesh that we know into the complete world and the whole man."