

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1975

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Summary: Meandering reflections on joy in the midst of trouble, irritations mixed with beauty, peacemaking and resistance whilst threats of war persist. Invokes numerous Saints. (DDLW #553).

This summer, at least 4 months of it, I am spending at Tivoli, and even here one is hard-pressed by the trials and “trouble-ations” of the world around us, but joys and sorrows always go together in our CW houses and farms which are increasing and multiplying.

Helene Iswolsky, in one of her talks about Russia, quoted a peasant saying that in a field where a poisonous weed was found, there was also found its antidote.

This morning, outside my window a huge ship—The Star Nadine, Moravia, a monstrous tanker—sailed seaward. Many times a day, long freight trains pass. Usually tankers come up river to the Port of Albany to unload. But to see them loaded up to the gunwales, decks almost awash, one wonders what their cargo is. Sometimes life is a nightmare. Without the faith, in this time of wars (not yet of pestilence, though germ warfare is discussed) how can one be happy?

For me the Jesus prayer, used by the Russian pilgrim, is that remedy growing in the field that Helene Iswolsky speaks of—the Jesus prayer in the supernatural order and in the natural order. The lovely sweet clover is blooming now, thickets of it, which Stanley and Rita and I picked yesterday in the field off the CW property, down by the railroad tracks and the river. Supernatural and natural joys so often go together.

Joy lifts the heart out of fears and forebodings. “Rejoice always,” St. Paul wrote, “and again I say rejoice.” Joy brings with it courage also, courage to endure.

There is a “rattling of sabers” again. This time the threats of the Secretary of Defense that we might use nuclear weapons against North Korea!

We never get very far away from the crises of our day. While we enjoyed one of the two-week annual sessions of the Peacemakers, in June, we could reflect that down the river on the property which used to be a Christian Brothers school there is now a Korean “institute” of some kind, bought by a South Korean.

Interruptions

It is Sunday, and I was writing this as a “meditation” and it is often interrupted. Just now my oldest great-granddaughter, Tanya, came in covered with dirt. On inspection I found she was covered with streaks of resin from the tall pine tree near my little porch room and with it all the dust and dirt which sticks to the resin. She delights in climbing to the very top of the pine trees. My daughter Tamar’s advice to me has always been—“Don’t look.” (Nicky’s, as a child was, “Not me,” and Mary’s was “Me too!” I told this to the Allens at Tucson, Arizona, who had ten children then and she said her motto was, “Let go—let God.”)

Tanya’s bath took quite a time. There are two baths on each floor and I found the first filled with the laundry of one of our guests, all of whom, I am happy to say, feel much at home and at ease hereabouts. The three buildings fill to overflowing all summer and spill out on the lawn.

Peacemakers

The Peacemakers discussed, among other subjects like voluntary poverty, life styles, etc., the kind of demonstrations to show our determination not to pay income tax which goes for building up monstrous implements of war. Wally Nelson and his wife Juanita were there, both of whom are familiar with arrests and jailings. I got acquainted with them years ago when Koinonia, in Central Georgia, was literally under fire from the small-townners all around them. Barns had been set afire, houses shot into, fences cut down so that the cattle of the agricultural community escaped. The late Clarence Jordan, the minister who started this now thriving community, narrowly escaped death many times. The Nelsons, Ross Anderson, who is also with us today, and I were there giving not only moral but physical support. Ross and I (we are the same age) cooked for the community and Wally risked his life going around in overalls as a black farmer, trying to buy seed peanuts. Mrs. Jordan and I had attempted this but were hounded by a carful of white men who shouted that I was a Northern Communist whore! I’m not sure that they didn’t add Catholic to that. I had been called the same in newspapers in Memphis, Tennessee, where the first agricultural union was being set up in the Thirties. Lives were lost in those early years.

Where there is trouble, there the Peacemakers have been also, finding the antidotes to hatred in every field.

Always there are numbers who stay on at Tivoli after the conference to help catch up with the farm work. Others drift in, whom we presume are peacemakers, but find out later are not. They are just passing by, dropping in for a visit.

Friends of The Family

There is a little known book of Dostoevsky called **The Friend of the Family** which I often turn to for comfort. **The Friend of the Family** has often been brought to mind around the CW. There are always those who, with an air of authority, speak for the CW Movement and assume an authority they do not have. There are of course all those (most of the family) who try to follow Christ's example at the Last Supper when He washed the feet of others. He had come to serve, not to exercise authority.

Here at the farm no one wants to exercise authority—to be “in charge.” When a painful decision has to be made, a group gathers together and discusses it earnestly and, I am sure, some of them prayerfully. In the City, no one is ever “in charge.” They just take turns “having the house,” which means having to say no to an aggressive drinker, or separate men in a sudden, murderous quarrel.

But there are always others who assume authority which they do not have. This problem has always and will always be with us.

One example of what we suffer happened years ago. A Bowery man carrying a large, old fashioned typewriter in the direction of a pawnshop was stopped by a policeman who asked him where he got it. “The Catholic Worker,” he answered. “They own all things in common, there.”

The policeman brought him and the typewriter back to us, and we sadly confessed to our ex-guest that such generosity wasn't quite our rule of life as yet.

They are still mailing out the June issue at First Street. We were shorthanded, and so later than usual. (They sent out eighty-five thousand papers, not counting some taken by some of our very winsome panhandlers to sell daily on the street. Maybe we will have to stop the street selling.) “We are all made to be exploited,” one of the family at St. Joseph's house said.

Rain Needed

Farmer John tells everyone to pray for rain. “Tell St. Isadore the Farmer our crops are burning up,” he said this morning. This afternoon it rained, but not enough. The thunder is still rumbling; it is humid and sticky with enough lightning to have caused our house lights to go off. “No reading tonight,” someone groaned. “And I'm in the middle of a good book.”

As for me I have been going to bed at dark. If I put the reading lamp on, the little porch where I sleep swarms with all kinds of insects that fly in your eyes, your hair, your nose, your ears, and then in your mouth of you leave it open. I have been pestered with all kinds of insects, remembering St. Benedict Joseph Labre, the derelict saint of Rome, who slept in doorways and disregarded his vermin. (The Montreal house founded by Tony Walsh was named for him.) We will pray to him. We do not have his endurance. There is also St. Francis Xavier.

When he was in the Indies, St. Ignatius wrote, begging news of how it was going with this lonely apostle at the other end of the world. "I am interested to hear even of the fleas that bite you," he wrote. And of course, speaking of fleas, there was St. Teresa of Avila whose convent was plagued once with some kind of insect and she wrote a song which her nuns sang in procession, a song of petition, and was never afflicted again.

This is really no joke. The slums of New York, not to speak of rural slums, are so afflicted, summers and winters, besides suffering rats and mice.

We live in the midst of such unbelievable beauty, here at Tivoli on the Hudson, that there has to be some fly in the ointment. There are so many here suffering real illnesses; there are so many of the lonely, the sick and depressed, homeless and wandering, that I must refer to the minor irritations that afflict all of us lightheartedly.

Thundering again. A dead calm prevails. No sound of rain. Last Sunday, New York subways were flooded, and no rain at Tivoli. St. Isadore, St. Benedict Joseph, St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa, pray for us. Not about anything in particular. Just pray for us, and our readers, our writers and all those who break bread with us.

Thursday, July 10. Late yesterday afternoon the rain started, a gentle steady rain, heavy enough to keep everyone indoors, while Stanley showed his slide shows. From my room I could hear gales of laughter and cheers. His commentary, uninhibited by my presence, was full of his usual dry wit.

In the afternoon we had a beautiful concert, violin and piano, given by Dennis who lives with us much of the time, and Elizabeth Esher, our dear neighbor who, with her husband, drives us to Mass and doctor appointments when the cars are broken down or not available. Both are accomplished musicians, and we had Vivaldi and Haydn and other composers.

We have not had Mass in the Chapel for some time, but the Blessed Sacrament is there, thanks be to God. Many make a morning meditation, and there are evening Vespers.

Taxes

Next issue, I will try to write more about federal income tax which is providing the weapons for war—why we pay local taxes and not the federal income tax. We recognize the seriousness of this and the risks involved for families. The Bromley case is an example. Their house was sold from under them in Cincinnati but they have not yet been evicted. The price paid was excessively above its value. It looks like the government is trying to make an example of them. (It was not bought by friends and given back to them—an erroneous rumor; the Bromleys would not have put up with a connived sale which would mean still more money going to the government for war.)

This is a good and historic case, involving as it does, simple, plain and powerless (?) people.

Which reminds me, **More Power Than We Know**, by Dave Dellinger, published by Anchor Press - Doubleday, has just arrived.

Right now I am reading **Love and Success** by Dr. Karl Stern, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) a truly great collection of essays by a very learned man. Both to be reviewed later.

One must have a quiet life, and have time to read slowly and thoughtfully, to do a review. We do not have a quiet life here.