

On Pilgrimage - June 1957

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, June 1957, 2, 8.

Summary: Describes the Catholic Worker as “an inn by the side of the road” and explains the attraction it has for people who want to do the works of mercy. Also talks about visitors, diminished interest in May Day rallies, groups for the mentally ill, and a delightful week of caring for her grandchildren. (DDLW #723).

The Catholic Worker is like an inn by the side of the road, with travelers coming and going, staying a day or a month or years, and the travelers are workers and scholars, poets, politicians, propagandists. Perhaps I should say that St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality is like that, but the fact is that people are attracted to the CW, to the publication itself, because of its ideas. Write about peace and freedom and people who want to work as pacifists and anarchists come wandering in and become part of a community. You write about the works of mercy, and people who want to perform them come to try to put into practice the things they read about in the lives of the saints. But to me, the best thing about the works of mercy is that they become mutual aid, people helping each other, cooking meals, going to market, peeling vegetables, washing clothes, or giving them out, making beds, putting people up. Love is an exchange of gifts, St. Ignatius said, so true charity, caritas, enters in and mutual aid means true justice.

Hungarians.

John Gabor, a Hungarian from Canada who had been working in the past with a community similar to the Hutterians at Bright, Ontario, dropped by to pay a call on his way to Koinonia where he had been recently staying to help them with their farm work. He told me of a Sister Elizabeth, also a Hungarian, who is in Hamilton, Ontario, I believe, starting a home for old people, and the house they are building up there is very much like a house of hospitality. And down in Georgia, at Koinonia, last month I met Zoltan, a rebel if there ever was one, famed for stealing a Soviet plane and escaping from Hungary. After serving the U. S., he became a pacifist and is helping the community while he visits there. When Ammon’s book arrived at Koinonia, he carried it around with him under his arm, reading it at odd times. He said he quit being a Catholic when

he was twelve, on account of the problem of poverty of the peasants and the wealth of the clergy. Just at a time when we are all concerned with Hungary, we meet these representatives from Hungary, that tragic land,—the non-Catholic, the practicing Catholic and the fallen away. We may not understand all the complicated problems of Europe and the satellite countries as they have been termed, but somehow we are constantly having close contact with their people. Years ago, Hugo Gellert, the Hungarian artist, a vigorous anti-Horthy-ite, told me of conditions there, and I went on demonstrations with him and other radicals, when representatives of that government came to negotiate a loan at Wall Street.

May Day

There was no parade, no demonstrations in Union Square this year, not only because the Merchants Associations had taken over that section, but because there has been such internal troubles in the Communist Party that it was felt there would not be much of a showing. In the years of the depression, all the left, socialists of every description, locals of many of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions paraded down Fifth Ave. and on occasions there were floats and banners and artists, writers and publishers joined in with labor to celebrate this traditional day.

This year there were a few meetings, one of them not far away from us on Second Avenue, which became, before the evening was over, an overflow meeting into another hall, and then many were turned away. Among half a dozen others, I had been invited to speak. That afternoon Pat Rusk and some of the other friends of the CW distributed papers in the Square, so the day was not altogether uncelebrated.

May Day is the feast of St. Joseph the Workman, the artisan, so the problem of automation is a fit topic of discussion for such a day. In 1933, when **The Catholic Worker** started, the problem was one of unemployment. Now we have full employment, sixty-eight million on the job they say, but that means women working to pay off the debt load and double jobs for many a father. Our breadline is still long and men over forty five have a hard time getting work. We got a letter this morning from the house of hospitality in Portland, Oregon, Blanchett House, saying there were a thousand meals a day being served. Men are waiting out there for the strawberry picking season to begin. Solutions for the problems of the corporation farms must of necessity be short range ones, immediate solutions, such as those proposed in the article on stoop labor by Ted Le Berthon in this issue, but there needs also be discussion of another social order without the fearful inequalities that exist today under the capitalist as well as the communist systems of government. We call attention to the Koinonia principles on page 8.

Recovery Meetings

Every Saturday and Sunday at two o'clock there are **Recovery** meetings, group therapy for those seeking mental health. The Sunday meeting is at St. Francis Xavier Information Center on Sixteenth street just east of Sixth avenue. The group leader is Wm. Oleksak. Fr. McCoy who is our first Friday night speaker in June is present at these meetings and is very much interested in the program of this group. Fr. Higgins, S.J., of St. Louis, will speak at **The Catholic Worker** on June 21 about this work. The Saturday meeting is at the Presbyterian Church meeting hall on East 42nd Street, east of Second avenue. All are welcome. If a meeting becomes too large, they can split up into smaller ones, or a small group can give a demonstration of the group meeting for the others. Preferably all should participate, in one way or another. I found both meetings very interesting and helpful and shall go again.

The big week of this month for me was the time I spent with my grandchildren, while Tamar and David went to Vermont for a vacation, visiting families and looking for a new home. They found a place, twenty acres, apple orchard, house with eleven rooms, furnace, inside plumbing, for \$6,000.

Nickie was making his first Holy Communion this month, and Eric and Susie were being confirmed so they had to do extra studying along the theological line. This also made them very good during the eight days of my baby sitting. Aside from a couple of infected feet which cleared up at once,—bits of glass and splinters and thorns—and various hair raising escapes (I caught Nickie tearing through the woods with a foot-long carving knife) and a few falls from trees (only tumbles) the guardian angels did a good job. We prayed quite a number of times during the day to them.

>Angel of God, my guardian dear
>To whom God's love commits me here,
>Ever this day and be at my side,
>To light and guard, to rule and guide.

Every time I thought of it, I said it. And I made the children say it with me morning and evening, and as part of the grace at meals three times a day. Even Little Martha, who is not yet two, folds her hands sweetly and holds herself in grave attention. Margaret, three, makes a lopsided sign of the Cross, and she is very helpful at clearing the table. The older girls can wash dishes and Mary, the fifth child, is good at drying them, but she is a wild one, swift as the wind, with bright blue eyes, and wide face and short hair which she would dearly love to be able to wear in a pony tail.

The first five children are the hardest, our dear Marion Roche of St. Benedict's farm at Upton says, and surely I had an easier time baby sitting with the seven of them than I did some years back when there were only two. We had lunch under the mulberry trees, and a picnic at Wolf Pond Park, with Magdalene and her two children, and she helped me keep up with the wash which was impossible for me because of leaky pipes so that I could not keep the stove going

for hot water, nor could I use the washing machine which had been out of repair for some time. Every afternoon there were extra children, the Zamarchi's, the Scarpullas, and traps were set in the woods, and there were visits to the pond down the road for frogs and a hard time finding all the children for supper at six. There was much homework, and the family rosary at night when Martha had been tucked into her crib. Margaret and Mary could take it, after their fashion.

There were a few cool days when I had to start the furnace, the kitchen stove not being usable what with the leaking water pipes and tank. When there was nothing more exciting going on, Becky and Susie hugged the radio for an hour before supper, listening to rock and roll. It was my first introduction to it, and now I know all about Elvis Presley, Guy Mitchell, Perry Como and Pat Boone, and Gail Storm singing **Dark Moon** and Teresa Brewer and her **Empty Arms**. **Pledge of Love** is one of Becky's favorites, and **School Days** is Mary's, but Eric and Nickie are apt to jeer at such songs as **All Shook Up** though I saw Nickie putting on an act with a duck-hair-do and sideburns to tease the girls. I must say I find more melody in this music they like than in the be-bop and jazz my nephews were interested in some years before. I can remember the stab of joy that came to me with the popular music of my own day when they were singing On Mobile Bay and Schubert's Serenade will always be associated in my mind with first love.

We had a good time, those eight days, with pancake suppers, and popcorn in addition to the healthy soups and whole wheat cereals with honey and butter. you have to do without many other things to feed such a raft of children these days. But what a joy it is to see them "eat what is put before them." Of course I was careful to put before them what I knew they liked as well as what I knew was healthy. An exception was Nicky's first communion breakfast. After that holy day at Our Lady Help of Christians Church in Tottenville, Staten Island, (where I had been baptized and Tamar too), with Sister Michael shepherding her little flock of fifteen or so, dressed in white, boys as well as girls, with ribbons with gold lettering, with choir singing simple doctrinal hymns, with Monsignor swift but not too fast, the whole service conducted with ease and love and delight, the sacrifice offered, the banquet received, the worship offered, we all were overcome by peace and even the little restaurant in the Tottenville station took on a look of quiet comfort. There Nickie and the other children celebrated his first holy communion-breakfast with a delightful feast of chocolate sundae and doughnuts.