On Pilgrimage - June 1976

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reminds herself that "the work of the spirit" is as important as other involvements. Visits her daughter Tamar's place in Vermont and admires the handicrafts being taught and practiced, especially working with wool. (DDLW #570).

Several times, this past month, I have been warmed and also consoled and directed by things I had picked up and read casually. Twice again, words in the letters of friends like Judith Malina and Julian Beck of the Living Theatre, who are now in Italy, and Fr. Dan Berrigan, who visited Ireland, Greece and Tanzania, and spoke at our Friday night meeting in New York, have balanced that direction.

Gregory the Great, who lived around the fifth or sixth century, wisely said that if we pour ourselves too fervently in Church or State affairs, or let ourselves be too upset, we are weakening, or even nullifying our most potent weapons – the weapons of the spirit.

Perhaps even in writing this, as I sit by my sunny window at Maryhouse, resting my eyes by watching the street life below me now and then, I again avoid the work of prayer.

The work of the spirit is indeed **work,** and must be done. But my column is due, and I must write it. I must earn my bread and board.

Fr. Berrigan spoke of Belfast, of Greece and Tanzania, and of social order and disorder, in our fortunately large auditorium at Maryhouse (which was for many years a music school for east siders). It was a crowded meeting. When he reminded us all that we must never lose our hold on the life of the spirit and must strive to have days of prayer and silence together, I thought – "There is St. Gregory's message again!"

Tivoli

The St. Gregory quotation was from **Days of the Lord**, excerpts from saints past and present, compiled by Prof. William Storey of Notre Dame. I read it one morning at Tivoli, where I've been staying these last few months while Peggy Scherer was away.

It was no time of rest for me. I was too disturbed by wind and rain, being housebound, when I was longing to sit our by the river and enjoy the encroaching Spring. The trees were lush and green, forsythia had come and gone, Gordon had put in his flower garden, which will be a blaze of glory at our front door, despite babies and cats and dogs who trespass. But it was bitter cold and we

were still in woolies, and layers on layers which we could peel off one by one if the sun **did** come out. But when the sun came out, a bitter east wind bit into us.

I am used to going back and forth between Tivoli and the two N.Y. houses, and do not feel dislocated by this. I recall an old song I used to sing my baby brother to sleep with when I was fifteen, when he was fretful and teething. "I'm a pilgrim, I'm a stranger! I can tarry, I can tarry but an hour." It begins. The rocking chair soothed us both. And coming from a newspaper family, I am at home travelling. I am at home at Tivoli – at home at Maryhouse or St. Joseph's house. Problems of both, the sufferings in town and country affect me sometimes painfully, but they "make me think" as Peter Maurin once said when the Baltimore house of hospitality was overcrowded with black and white, and violence broke out.

"Was this what you expected when you talked to us of houses of hospitality?" I asked Peter.

He would be pleased today with St. Joseph's house on First St. and Maryhouse on Third, and centers springing up all over the country, so that the number is forty-seven, I believe.

Vacation

In spite of foreboding clouds, Stanley Vishnewski and I left Tivoli one morning, after Mass at the parish church at Tivoli, for Perkinsville, Vermont, where my daughter lives. I had not seen her in many months. There isn't much traffic on a Tuesday morning, and the trip was smooth sailing until we reached Springfield, Vermont. Heavy clouds over us let fall a torrent of rain, so that sometimes it seemed we were deep in water, and I feared we would be stalled. But we made it, though the rain was like a running stream.

The open fireplace with is blazing logs was a cheerful sight. All the while we were there it continued cold, and Nicky had to be at the wood pile, bringing in more logs.

Those at home now are Tamar, and the next to the youngest daughter, Martha, and Nicky, Maggie Corbin, staying with them, shares in the care of the goats and sheep with Martha. Down the road are Becky, her husband and two children. Stanley settled himself in the room at the head of the back stairs that lead up from the kitchen, which was warm with cooking. We call that room at the head of the stairs the "bookroom" and Stanley always finds treasures there that we have been looking for during the past year.

My room was the front room, the sunniest in the house, facing south and west, and is called the loom-room. There are also two spinning wheels – a large wheel, which can be purchased in Montreal, and the small kind which is much easier to learn with, and which takes up less room and is more decorative. Tamar is looking for another small, old-fashioned spinning wheel, since friends who

visit always want to try their hand at spinning. She teaches spinning Monday afternoons at East Hill in Andover, Vermont, where Richard Bliss heads one of those wonderful schools where the students raise their own food, build barns and bunkhouses, takes care of animals and learn handicrafts, as well as fit themselves for college. Tamar's youngest daughter, Katy, is there, as well as her youngest son, Hilaire. (We visited later in the week and had lunch.) Grace is sung before meals and there was a little concert afterward, with Katy playing her flute, and one of the other students, the classical guitar. Was it Mozart or Handel they played? Anyway, it was beautiful. Thank God there are schools like Richard Bliss's, where there is music and song and folk dancing, books and crafts and the manual labor of the farm.

Tamar's place is quite a contrast to the well-ordered school. It is an old, ramshackle, hillside house, gabled and unpainted, with a cellar to store vegetables and to ripen cheeses. There's a large attic and two floors of rooms crowded with all the paraphernalia of a home where nine children have grown up, and nothing is ever thrown out, and everything can always be used, because there is never any money to replace things. Across the country road, there is an old barn and a large meadow sloping down to a brook.

My room used to be the gun room, so called because of a rack of hunting rifles. There is fishing right now, and deer to hunt in the Fall.

Shearing

Not long after Stanley and I arrived, when the rain suddenly ceased, a summer visitor came and demonstrated for Maggie and Martha how to shear a sheep with electric shears. It was an astounding sight. The sheep was larger, it seemed, than the girl, Julie Levy, who held it up, back against her body, as she bent down over its head and sheared away at the fleece around the stomach, while the other woman directed her. This is the way it is done in Australia and in all huge sheep ranches, our visitor, who possessed the shears, told us. She was a good teacher, and when she left, the girls went on with the work. Tamar has only three sheep, so the work was finished before supper.

Later, Tamar cleaned and washed one of the shearings for me to bring back to Tivoli, so that in leisure moments in the evenings we could sit around the tables in the diningroom and tease the wool and card it (if we can find cards) and make some comforters for next winter. Right now our table occupation, after eating and clearing up, is to dump out a sack of soy beans and hull them. Later they will be soaked, boiled, converted into milk, and the mash made into tasty dishes described in one of the rash of cook books that people are studying now when our greed and the hunger of the world are being so emphasized.

A goodly number at the farm and at Tamar's are vegetarians. At Tivoli, we eat meat once a week for Sunday dinner, with cheese for the vegetarians. One can never get enough of that. Wish all the Trappist monasteries in the country

would each send us a cheese! Once in a while we receive such a one at Christmas. What a treat!

Experiments in Handicrafts

At our first farm at Easton, Pa., back in the thirties, we had an Angora goat, and Tamar made a blanket from the spun and woven goat's hair. She still has that blanket though all her children have slept under it outdoors, and have left it out in the rain for weeks on end. But it will last forever. St. Paul made his living by weaving goat's hair. He made it clear in one of his epistles that he earned his living and also supported others by his work!

I have made several comforters by hand – piled the teased wool onto cheese cloth spread out on a bed and then folded it over and covered the entire thing with calico or some bright material. Tamar suggested an even better way – to get samples of material, sew up three sides and stuff them, and then sew them all together like patchwork.

Perhaps I am going into all this detail because the weather was so cold all the month of May, and because there is a dearth of blankets at houses of hospitality. (Before her family moved to Montreal, Rita Corbin made many a comforter cover and stuffed them for our wayfaring guests.) My first night at Tamar's I had to have both a comforter and blanket, and the blanket was made by Maggie Corbin, Martin and Rita Corbin's daughter. In addition to spinning the wool with either handle spindle or wheel, she dyed it, set up the large loom and made a beautiful plaid blanket of many shades of yellow, tan and brown, combined with the natural wool.

Tamar's latest skill is dyeing. She would not call it a skill, because she feels she is always learning. She would say experiment. When I asked where she got her colors (hanks of many colored wool hung around the room) she listed – "Lichens, weeds, anything. Carrot tops, ragweed, nightshade, equisitum (horse tail), goldenrod, St. John's wort, sunflower petals, wild grape leaves, birch leaves, hemlock bark (it grows in swamps and is poisonous), black-eyed susan, dahlia and marigold. Varied colors can be made, depending on the mordant – alum, chrome, iron, copper, tine, each mixed with different flowers. Many of the secrets of dyeing, and of stained glass making have been lost." (Perhaps Carl Paulson, at the Upton, Massachusetts farm, outside of Worcester, can write us about that some day.)

Carl has made stained glass windows for the chapel on the Fisherman's Wharf in Boston, the chapel of the university of Connecticut, and for many churches besides. And Ade Bethune has designed many a church and installed many glass windows in churches, including one, many years ago, in the Philippines. There she had the children collecting bits of colored glass, including old bromo-seltzer bottles, which came in a bright blue, and broken up, provided many a piece for

a mosaic window. I know so little about these skills and arts, that our readers will forgive me, please, for inaccuracies, or faulty memory.

Meetings used to be held at the Upton farm in the summer, as well as at the farm of Dorothy and Bill Gauchat at Avon, Ohio, where Peter Maurin's synthesis of cult, culture and cultivation was discussed. My daughter spent a year with Ade Bethune in Newport, Rhode Island, together with Dorothy Gauchat and Mary Paulson, and other young "apprentices" to Ade, as we used to call them.. My daughter went on with her education in spinning and weaving at a French Canadian school, where such arts were taught.

Ammon Hennacy

We did not commemorate Ammon Hennacy, The One Man Revolution, as he called himself, in the January issue of the **Catholic Worker**. Perhaps the July - August issue will come out too late, to remind them of the anniversary of our great shame – the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Every year Ammon Hennacy, who was one of our editors, fasted completely from all food, except water, and picketed one of the Federal buildings, to do penance or, rather, to call us all to penance for this great crime of mass slaughter. Each year he added one day to his fast, for every year which had passed since the bomb was dropped. Eventually, he fasted 25 days straight. Let us all remember Ammon on that day.

The great World Eucharistic Congress is being held in Philadelphia this year, during the first week in August. On August 6^{th}, which we have come to think of as Hiroshima Day, I have been invited to be one of the speakers at that conference, and I shall certainly tell the story of Ammon there. The works of mercy, which our Lord told us in the Gospels were the criteria by which we will be judged, are the opposite of the works of war. August 6^{th} should always be a day of mourning for us all.

When Lewis Mumford, a great man of letters, was asked on television what his message was to the American people in this Bicentennial Year, he answered in one word, "**Repent**."