

On Pilgrimage - December 1969

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Responds to those who critique their work as a band-aid for a cancer. Reaffirms the necessity for the works of mercy. Tidbits of life at the worker: getting out the paper, a trip to the sea, books arriving. Travels to PA and OH and reflects on the work of miners. Visits house in Cleveland and Detroit. Is moved by a Pentecostal prayer meeting. (DDLW #905).

Sometimes our hearts are heavy with the tragedy of the world, the horrible news from Vietnam, Brazil, Biafra, the Israeli-Arab war. And here it is Advent and Christmas time again, and with it the juxtaposition of joy and sorrow, the blackness of night, brightness of dawn. What saves us from despair is a phrase we read in "The Life of Jesus" by Daniel Rops, "getting on with the business of living." What did the women do after the crucifixion? The men were in the upper room mourning and praying and the women, by their very nature, "had to go on the business of living." They prepared the spices, purchased the linen cloths for the burial, kept the Sabbath, and hastened to the tomb on Sunday morning. Their very work gave them insights as to *time*, and doubtless there was a hint of the peace and joy of the resurrection to temper their grief.

"The past year has been difficult," one of our friends writes, "particularly in dealing with the problems of relevancy. To many in the peace-resistance movement, feeding and sheltering the poor is looked upon as non-revolutionary and a mere band-aid applied to a cancerous world. To many, only when the American giant is confronted at its jugular vein is it worth-while. So our involvement and work has really been put into question. Perhaps we attempted to justify ourselves too much or spent too much time attempting to answer the question. But it seems clearer (now), and it can never be completely clear: we must continue with our work and look upon it as a practical response to a revolutionary gospel. The fact remains that while slaying the giant, the wounded have to be cared for. Perhaps those who come by can see the necessity of caring for one another and recognizing the importance of community."

We have heard this same word, "a band-aid to a cancer," from Boston and Milwaukee and even from the Australian bush within the last year. Perhaps it is only those words of the gospel about the corporal works of mercy, which in a way include the spiritual works of mercy, that has kept us going all these years. We are commanded over and over again by Jesus Christ himself to do these

things. What we do for the least of these, we do for Him. We are judged by this. It is the picture of the last judgment in the 25th chapter of Matthew. Actually, we here at the Catholic Worker did not start these soup lines ourselves. Years ago, John Griffin, one of the men from the Bowery who moved in with us was giving out clothes, and when they ran out he began sitting down the petitioners to a hot cup of coffee, or a bowl of soup – whatever we had. By word of mouth the news spread, and one after another they came, forming lines (during the Depression) which stretched around the block. The loaves and fishes had to be multiplied to take care of it, and everyone contributed food, money and space. All volunteers who come, priests and people, nuns and college students, have worked on that line and felt the satisfaction of manual labor, beginning to do without themselves to share with others, and a more intense desire to change the social order that left men hungry and homeless. The work is as basic as bread. To sit down several times a day together is community and growth in the knowledge of Christ. “They knew Him in the breaking of bread.”

We have said these things many times in the pages of *The Catholic Worker*, but is to reassure these dear friends that I write this again. Perhaps it is easier for a woman to understand than a man. Because no matter what catastrophe has occurred or hangs overhead, she has to go on with the business of living. She does the physical things and so keeps a balance. No longer does the man sit as a judge at the gate as in the Old Testament where the valiant woman is portrayed. Now when women are putting their hand to the machine gun and joining in the violence which is racking us, the men join in the healing and the nourishing, the building and the spinning and the weaving, the cultivation and the preservation of the good earth. Now there is neither bond nor free, Greek or Hebrew, male or female – we are a little nearer to the heavenly kingdom when men are feeding the hungry. It is real action as well as symbolic action. It is walking in the steps of Jesus when he fed the multitude on the hills, and when he prepared the fire and the fish on the shore. He told us to do it. He did it Himself.

The last issue of the Catholic Worker went to press on October 24. To rest our eyes from the proofreading and the typewriting of articles, Stanley V. and I decided to take a day off from duties. He was on a little vacation from Tivoli, to see his family perhaps in Valley Stream, to look up books at the second hand store, and to buy paper for his small press. We took the Volkswagon and drove through traffic to South Ferry. For foot passengers the fare is still five cents each way on the ferry to Staten Island. There was a strong wind and it was bitter cold and the waves were so high that salt spume blew in our faces on the lower deck and one could laugh at the idea of air pollution in this wind that came from the East over the Atlantic.

When we landed at St. George we drove down to the end of the island, to our old beach house, and visited our next door neighbors, Helen and Walter and went to visit the old Spanish camp where the bungalows are all occupied since there is still such a housing shortage. These are frame summer buildings and front the bay, and when there is a storm some of the beach and the bank that

risers ten feet above the beach are washed away with the high tides. The crash of the surf, the smell of seaweed and good salt air, the bitter cold, the sight of the cruel sea – all the senses are engaged in such contemplation, and the interior senses too, the memory, the understanding and the will. When I visited Loretto, Pennsylvania a few weeks later, to speak at the seminary and the college, one of the seminarians said that he had seen the ocean that summer for the first time, and it had terrified him. But He holds all things in the hollow of His hand, I remember at such moments, when the imminence of nuclear war oppresses.

Stanley said, “Mention in the paper that we long for the sea, some of us at the **CW** and maybe someone has a little beat-up shack that we can heat with driftwood where we can go and meditate. Maybe finish up a book or two. Near New York. Maybe Great Kills where the fishing boats come in.”

It is a good dream.

Friday after we had gone to Press with the October-November issue, I spoke about my trip to Chicago and Milwaukee at the evening meeting. Pat Jordan and Bob Gilliam and Mickey Kraft took care of the paper this month and I did not go to the printer. Martin Corbin will be free for more writing, translating and editing. At the farm Ron and Elizabeth Gessner are in charge and Rita Corbin is free to do more art work, not to mention keeping up with family duties. Sally Corbin, the seven year old, or is it six, sat and listened to Stanley Vishnewsky addressing fifteen high school students from Rhinebeck last month, and kindly pointed out his inconsistencies. He said, for instance that Peter Maurin held up the picture of the family as a basic institution, and a community as an extended family; then later he said he traveled the countryside and went to many cities preaching the gospel of social change. “How could he,” Sally corrected him, “travel around and yet be part of a family?”

Stanley gave her pencil and paper and asked her to write out her comments and corrections, which she did. But she likes to talk. “Why should grown ups do all the talking?”

Gary Sekerak and Michael Scahill were in charge of the soupline today, giving John McMullan a rest. Sister Donald washed dishes after perhaps two hundred people, Wong and one of the girls waited on table.

Much good material on Land Trusts and other material which Danilo Dolci, Cesar Chavez and Joe Geraci will be interested in, came from the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions today.

The National Catholic Reporter Reader also came in the mail today, which makes fascinating reading. Especially good is an article on priestly celibacy which started off a lot of the controversy. An article on Nobel Prize winner Beckett is in this morning's Times. Beckett wrote us once saying that the Catholic Worker had the best review of his play “Waiting for Godot.” The review was by Ned O’Gorman, poet and critic.

Ned’s book, **PROPHETIC VOICES, Ideas and Words on Revolution,**

published by Random House, also arrived. Our own James W. Douglass, whose address to the Fellowship of Reconciliation appears in this issue of the **CW**, has the leading article in the book, "The Revolution of Peace." I say "our own" because we have been publishing his articles since he was in college. He is now teaching a course on Non-Violence at Notre Dame. Since there were a number of arrests at Notre Dame this week of resisters to recruiting for the CIA, and Dow Chemical, it would seem that the course being taught is a most stimulating one. I go myself next week to speak at an open meeting in the evening and attend two seminars.

Also in Ned O'Gorman's book there is a series of extraordinary articles or paragraphs or definitions by many of my favorite writers. There are two by Thomas Merton, *Purity* and *Death*. Startling.

There was also in the mail the newsheet TEMPO published by the National Council of Churches, Box 81 Madison Square Station, N.Y. 10010, \$3.50 a year sub. Harvey Cox writes the kind of movie review I like to read, and the book reviews are very good. One issue had superlative articles by Rabbi Abraham Heschel and Rev. Andrew Young. It's hard to get any desk work done when mail can so occupy you.

November 1.

Tom Sullivan called and told me our friend Fr. Kohli was having a prayer and scripture meeting every Friday night at St. Patrick's Church at Glen Cove, Long Island. Tom is not far from Glen Cove and attends these meetings. He spent nine months with the Trappists in Conyers and has the habit of prayer. Now he is a counsellor at Roosevelt School on Long Island, which is 90% Black. Tom keeps me up on news from the Trappists in Georgia where he goes to make a visit and a retreat each year. I get interesting letters from another Trappist monastery, Nuestra Senora de Solentiname on Lake Nicaragua, from Ernesto Cardenal, poet friend of Thomas Merton who made his novitiate at Gethsemane under Fr. Merton. He expressed much interest in the book I had mentioned to him on Catholic Pentecostals which emphasizes a return to prayer. "We try," he writes, "to give this message with our life here in Solentiname and the reason for the existence of our little community is prayer. We have two young married men in this community, and it is not, properly speaking, a monastery in the traditional sense of the word. We do not pretend to follow any preconceived model. La Primera regla es que no hay reglas. This sounds very much like our rule, 'Love God and do as you will,' which St. Augustine wrote so many years ago. In other words, if you love God your will is His will!"

November 4.

This Tuesday morning I set out by bus for Loretto, Pennsylvania where John Butler, who helped us most of last summer, is in the seminary. I was to speak at St. Francis College and at the Seminary. From Harrisburg on we had climbed steadily all afternoon and arrived at Ebensburg after dark where I was met by John and another seminarian. Seminarians are radical, but the audience at the

college was a bit belligerent over some of the points I made about interracial justice. They could overlook my pacifism, they expect that of a woman, but my assertions that there was hostility when a Black moved into a white neighborhood, and that white people were harassed and intimidated if there was any possibility of their selling to a black buyer, met with vehement denials. There was no discrimination and the Blacks could buy into any neighborhood they wanted, several members of the audience asserted, and with hostility.

John and his friends do a good deal of work in Altoona and Johnstown among youth groups, so they know the problems. Next day we visited a very modern coal mine (though I didn't go down), and I was instructed in detail by the manager about the very complicated and up-to-date safety devices, and about how much it cost to start an operation and how long it would take to get any return on the investment of some ten millions of dollars. Which led me to ruminate aloud on the whole structure of our society and the idea of money being fruitful and producing more investments and interest and dividends, and under all this superstructure, man's labor, his work in pitch darkness, aside from the light of his miner's lamp, his long journey to his work underground, disputes about portal to portal pay, etc. Miners put in an eight-hour day, and have a half hour for lunch and six hours of work, they are such distances under ground. Orwell's **Road to Wigan Pier**, which is a study of unemployment in Britain, has a long section on the work of a miner which is a must for those interested in man's *work*. I asked if the men could stand upright, and the manager admitted that in some places the men had to work bent over all day. "They get used to it."

We were high in the Alleghenies and the trees were already stripped bare, but the scene was beautiful. When I think of man's work, and what men are capable of, the great knowledge they have in so many fields, it hurts to realize that so much genius and hard labor are put forth in the interests of profit for the idle few, for the haves of our society, who have the money to invest, who know how to play around with money, make it increase, under our system. In the middle ages money lending at interest was considered a sin and classed with sodomy. How far we are from thinking of work in this light.

November 6.

In Cleveland I spoke to the First Friday Club, and had a good visit with Iola Ellis and Joseph Newman. Afterwards I went to Our Lady of the Wayside Farm where Bill and Dorothy Gauchat have their hospice for crippled and retarded children. I have always been so impressed with the loving kindness and the beauty of the surroundings where these children are being cared for. There are ten or eleven of them there now, some of them blind and deaf, some of them epileptic, twisted and distorted in body, some of them little crib cases, some of them able to sit up in a chair, some of them able to crawl a little, and all of them with an expression almost of listening on their pale and suffering little faces. I saw how much music could do to lighten their sorrowful waiting. One little blind one with two earphones lifted her hand and beat time to the music

which was being played, and another tapped with his feet on the floor. A little black baby in a high crib who has just about everything wrong with him likes to be taken out of his crib and rocked for a while each night by Dorothy, and one can see a sweet little smile stir over his face as she holds him. And he, too, responds to music, classical or rock.

The hospice is on Colorado Avenue between the towns of Avon and Lorain. It is a beautiful old building with many large rooms on the first floor where all the children must sleep. Upstairs there are playrooms and a kind of gymnasium where the older ones can exercise. Because her house space is so limited and the children who survive need larger beds and therefore more space, Dorothy has been carrying on a campaign for funds. It has been impossible to get money from state or foundation, but by personal appeal over the last few years, the Gauchats have been able to raise \$75,000 of the \$150,000 which are needed to put up a large wing for the children. Never a day passes when there are not more requests for care for these little ones. If she can raise another \$25,000, a bank will loan them an additional \$50,000 so that building can begin in the spring. We hope our readers will help in this good work. So many of the little ones are left to die in mental hospitals, the only other place where they can be put. As Jean Vanier, son of the former Governor General of Canada wrote in the Jesus Caritas Bulletin, "These little ones are good for two things, they can *be* loved, and they can love. These innocents! Sinless and suffering, a mystery, not 'vegetables' but little human beings, capable of loving, and evoking love!"

It was my great joy to be present when a bishop of the Cleveland diocese came to this home. There at Our Lady of the Wayside Farm he confirmed these little ones, together with one child of Dorothy and Bill, Colette. Later at the church in Avon, an adopted son of the family received the sacrament from a wheel chair. At the church service there was organ music and a choir and three or four boys playing on trombones and other horns and the congregation sang and the sounds of triumph rose to heaven. Ever since hearing the horn in the Gelineau Psalms, I have loved horns in the church. At the Christian Brothers at Barrytown they once had organ and trumpets at one of their celebrations. The more instruments, the more music, the merrier. Rejoice, even in tribulation. We must remember the Dailiness of Grace, as one of the Village Voice writers titled her interview with me a few weeks ago.

I visited the thrift shop which Iola Ellis operates to help support a settlement house for Blacks in Cleveland. I visited a community of married folk who live in four adjoining houses. The families have moved back in from the suburbs to the heart of the city and aside from the schools not being so good, they are well pleased with the move. They are closer to the poor, to the urban problems. They are near each other, near a church, and a few blocks away there is a house with eleven rooms where two priests live with the single members of the community. Because I had to go to Detroit I had too short a visit with them, but I feel close to this effort, this beginning.

Detroit

In Detroit, I stayed with Louis Murphy and Justine (and now only two of the children are home, Bridget and Christine, but with Maureen, Sheila and Kevin dropping in from their work). Sheila shares an apartment with another girl and works at the **Ad Hoc Committee**, the name blazoned over a large bank-like building downtown where other radical groups are centered. She is interested right now in working on the problem of police brutality, and sending observers to demonstrations. Kevin is doing his alternative service in a large mental hospital on the other side of Detroit. We had dinner with friends at the Martha House, teachers from Monteith, men in the labor movement, and Fr. Kern a parish priest most written about for his hospitality and interest in all the affairs and problems of this hemisphere. Martha House and St. Francis House have been Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality for thirty years.

Lou drove me to see Mother Brennan who helped us this summer at Tivoli during the Pax conference and for a week afterward, and whom all of us will always think of with love and gratitude. We drove also to see the new house of hospitality at Saginaw which Jim Hanink and his wife started last June and which is beginning a precarious existence. Repairs have been made, rooms painted, equipment brought in, and now there is a request for rent payments to be made. The group needs help, and we sent the Michigan mailing list to them so that they can send out an appeal. It was good to meet with them briefly and talk to the men who were there, who were already starting the work of the kitchen and the upkeep of the place. There was one family, man and wife and baby, the man an invalid and the mother working nights as a waitress. Paulette Curran who was with us at Tivoli all summer, is contributing her services and only today a letter came from another girl who wished to be assigned to some work and I thought of Paulette's need for an assistant.

Pentecostal

In Ann Arbor I went to a Pentecostal meeting at the Newman center. I have never heard more beautiful singing. Prayer ran like a murmur through the hall, and I thought of the breath of the Spirit passing over the waters. There was one speaking with tongues, brief and clear, though I do not know what language it could have been, and there was an interpretation. There was a scattering of older people in the group of worshippers, but mostly they were all young. The mood of waiting, of expectancy, was strong. Here was faith. If you ask your father for a loaf will he give you a stone? If you ask for a fish, will you be given a serpent? If your earthly father knows how to give you good gifts, how much more will your Heavenly Father hear the prayers of His children?

Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. And I felt a blaze of joy that this is so, and that here, and

all over the country there are these groups growing, in prayer, in glorying, in thanksgiving, and in asking.

The need for prayer! All those at that meeting were going out to a hostile world, a world of such horrors just this last week that it is hard to see how happiness can ever come to us again. I accuse the government itself, and all of us, because we are Americans, too, of these mass murders, this destruction of villages, this wiping out of peoples, the kidnapping, torture, rape and killing that have been disclosed to us so vividly this past month. Reparation is needed. We must do penance for what we have done to our brothers. We are our brother's keeper.

But meanwhile in this hushed room there was prayer, for strength to know and to love and to find out what to do and set our hands to useful work that will contribute to peace, not to war.

Love is the measure by which we will be judged.