

On Pilgrimage - October 1956

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes minor trials with the housing department. Admires the work of religious communities and other groups on a trip that included days of recollection, time with her grandchildren, speaking engagements, and conferences. (DDLW #711).

The housing department announces itself as satisfied in regard to our New York House of Hospitality, but we have not yet received our certificate of occupancy because our night watchman has not been going around every hour on the hour with a clock which is a record which certifies that he has visited every floor through the night. Right now members of the staff are taking turns being night watchman. When I came in at 2:30 a.m. from Boston last night (I was speaking before the M.I.T. Catholic club), I found Charlie, Kerran and Hank still up, and Mike Kovalak was night watchman and making his rounds.

We have also had other summonses recently for leaving garbage can lids off (only for a moment while the garbage truck was approaching). I think Mike was trying to make things easier for them. He was fined fifteen dollars. Yesterday another summons was given to the two fellows who were painting the front fire escape, for dropping some paint on the sidewalk.

Down on Staten Island, we have been notified that the housing department has us classified as a multiple dwelling, and we are not permitted to have no more than two families and four roomers in the farmhouse. We had to fill out an affidavit and swear to it before a notary public as to just who was staying in this house. At present there is Beth Rogers, Agnes, Sidney, Stanley Vishnewski and Magdalene and her two children. In New York we are classified as a hotel. There is no such thing as a house of hospitality in the language of the housing department. So much for our trials.

I had one day of recollection with Dorothy Clarke and Bianca Nardi of Pittsburgh, and two days at Regina Laudis at Bethlehem, Conn., with Helene Iswolsky. The Regina Laudis stay was a visit, rather than days of recollection. I visited with Sister Prisca who is an oblate sister, and who used to be a member of our Rochester House of Hospitality group. One feels the strength of this community of nuns, this power house offering up adoration, thanksgiving, supplication and contrition for us all. There is the primitive simplicity of the early Benedictine communities, and the life of work and worship (they practice various crafts) is integrated and intelligent. They pray with the understanding, as St. Paul recommended. It is good to ask spiritual counsel of Mother Benedict. She advised me to read St. Gregory on Pastoral care, as good for anyone living in community and I departed too with a copy of the meditations of St. Gertrude, translated by one of the nuns of Regina Laudis. I thought of the work done by

the Nuns of Stanbrook, in the field of Carmelite spirituality, and Regina Laudis will be doing the same thing for the great Benedictine writers of the ages, we hope.

I had the joy of stopping for two nights with Margaret and Norman Langlois who has charge of some building operations there right now. There is not enough time to do all the things that have to be done—farm, build, study, pray. In this life we can only make beginnings. There is an intense life in this Benedictine center, and the joy radiates into the life of the families around. Norman and Margaret have nine children and their house is so big there is always room for guests. Marie Kenny who worked with us for a year on Mott Street, arrived just as I left, to stay for a few days of preparation before her marriage, at the guest house.

The Labor Day weekend was a great joy this year, and went off smoothly and happily with conferences and discussions and good meals. There were families and children visiting too, and we wish we had more than cow and heifer and geese to show them. We should have a sheep, a goat, a pig, some chickens and rabbits—all of which we have had in the past, as a sample of a little farm. We had a wonderful garden this year, but no one to care for the animals (aside from the cow).

Eddie Egan spoke extremely well and Bob Ludlow better than he did a year ago. His talk on tradition spurred us to invite Fr. McCoy to give us a talk on that subject this month.

I had a most wonderful week with Tamar and Dave's seven children in mid-September, while they drove with Al Gullion to visit friends through Vermont, with the hope of finding work and a place to live there. Such a move would be depending on a job, perhaps in one of the printing plants, in Chester or Brattleboro, and being able to sell their little house and four acres on Staten Island. I should be happy for them if they can do this, not only that they may be in the clear atmosphere of Vermont, where many of our friends live, but so that my visits with them may be leisurely and complete. As it is now, I run in and out, on my way to and from the city, to and from Peter Marin farm. We will miss them terribly at P.M. farm, but the neighborhood swarms with children and the house will always echo with them, and Charles Butterworth is studying weaving and will teach it to us there, lesson by lesson as he is taught. The lessons Tamar gave were always interrupted by babies, and setting up a loom in three installments is a hard job. We can weave; it is setting up the warp that is hard.

My vacation with the children was delightful and all the children were as good as gold. I would have a hard time managing three, of the age of Martha, Maggie and Mary, but with four older ones, up to eleven, helping, it was much easier. Magdalene helped me at the farm with the wash and we ate some noon-day meals there, and Ammon came and gave a day's labor, cleaning up the yard, and a happy time was had by all.

Aside from colds in the head and ringworm (which is now cleared up) no casualties. But I did a lot of praying to the guardian angels, especially when seven of the Zamarkies came over to dig and climb, build fires and engage in other exciting games.

The following weekend I spend near Stroudsburg at Kirkridge retreat house with the Philadelphia group of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. It was a rigorous weekend with conferences Friday night, Saturday morning and evening and Sunday morning. One-night-stands are much easier than these weekend affairs. What with Pendle Hill, friendship house farm in Virginia, and this one, during the summer I was too worn out to speak at our own farm over Labor day.

And now I am setting out on a trip visiting, although there will be some speaking too.

I will visit Washington, Louisville, Ky.; Memphis, where my address will be that of Helen Caldwell Riley, 218 (Rear) Turley, and from there will go down to various missions in Mississippi and Alabama, including a visit to Montgomery where the bus boycott is still going on and where the notion of non-violent resistance to oppression is slowly taking hold. I want to get interviews with some of the women who are helping in the struggle there. I can be reached at Montgomery, general delivery—and Gadsden, Holy Names Hospital.

I must return for a meeting in Lancaster, Pa. by October 19 and will write about my pilgrimage in the November issue of the Catholic Worker.