

On Pilgrimage - January 1963

Dorothy Day

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Summary: On a speaking trip, weary of Winter travel, she mentions the strong interest in Cuba and the social changes in Latin America among her listeners. Visits her family in Vermont and extols family life as the ordinary way of working for the common good. Observes a group of men who had made "a cursillo, a course in Christianity" praying together and asks all to pray for men joined together in love. (DDLW #799).

Detroit, Mich., Jan. 6. I am writing on a mild Epiphany morning, grey and windless but with a threat of snow in the air. I am praying it will hold back until I return to New York. I have traveled too many icy roads by bus from one end of the country to the other.

I should like rather to be snowed in for the remainder of the winter at the little beach house on Staten Island, a Catholic Worker farm nearby, always someone to walk the beach with and gather drift wood, and there to catch up with Catholic Worker chores, such as mail and writing.

Of course best of all would be to be caught this way in Perkinsville, Vermont, but there would not be much chance of catching up with my work there. Living with nine children is truly a life at hard labor, physical labor, that is, and as the community at Brook Farm complained, it is hard to write books, prepare lectures, and answer letters in this atmosphere. However, I tasted some of the womanly joys of family just before Christmas when I had almost a week with my daughter and grandchildren, who on the last day of my visit had to dig me out and push the car besides to get it started. Even at that, Tamar and I were held up by a gasoline truck which had skidded across the road, but we called on all the active saints to assist the men who were pushing the truck, and lo and behold, the cab portion pulled out of the ditch, and the tank portion followed easily after, and the long line of cars, many of them on their way to work in the tool factories of Springfield, were speeding on their way. We caught the bus by one minute, and by the time I reached New York eight hours later the snow had ceased and the roads were clear.

Siena College

I am always glad when speaking engagements call me to New England so that I can have these brief and delightful visits with the Hennesseys. On this occasion I had spoken at Siena College at Loudenville, New York, just north of Albany, a boys' college staffed by 70 Franciscan priests. The meeting was well attended though the boys were preparing to go home for the Christmas holidays the next morning. A young Cuban was there, but he said afterwards that he could not bring himself to come near me until the question period began, so I do not know whether I was able to reach him at all with the gist of my talk, which was a plea for Christian love, the folly of the Cross, the laying down of life for one's brother rather than the taking of it and in defense of the Faith, the need to find concordances rather than to root out heresies, as our dear "campesino Pope John" has said. That phrase in relation to Pope John was used by the peasant leader in Northeast Brazil, a man generally looked upon with fear as another Fidelista.

There is so much to say and to write that I would like very much to get out a pamphlet about Cuba and the Church, if I could find anyone who will help pay the printing bill. (Rogowski, our printer these past 28 or 29 years is always ready to be paid on the installment plan.) There is much interest in Cuba today among all the college students to whom I have been speaking, and I am not saying that they agreed with our point of view, only that they feel the nearness, the tremendous vitality of the social changes that are taking place now in our hemisphere and which involve all of Latin America.

At Loudenville there was a large group of students from the neighboring State Teacher's College who came to the meeting and who wish Tom Cornell or Charles Butterworth to come speak to them at greater length on Peace and the works of Peace.

This last week I have spoken to three classes at Notre Dame, premedical students and engineers. I was invited by Father Rulke of the Religion department. Also, I spoke to St. Joseph's novitiate of the Holy Cross Brothers.

It was good to have visits with Terry and Ruth McKiernan and Julian and Mary Jane Pleasants together with half a dozen other families earning a living in the academic field and in shops and factories. Terry himself has the House of Bread bakery and I have asked him to write about it for the **CW** many a time. The normal life in this world today and always is that of the family. The majority of us are called to marriage and not to celibacy.

Indeed virginity, according to some of the Fathers of the Church, is martyrdom and certainly all are not called to be martyrs. It is the life of the family in this world which most concerns us, and its temporal needs for land and bread and the work that goes with them.

Many of the students to whom we speak are married and certainly preparing to be married, and preparing for work not only to earn a living but to contribute

to the common good. There is nothing that we do in the line of work which does not involve this business

of earning a living. Certainly I am glad when my books sell, and when I get “honorariums” for talks, to help keep the work going.

The Coming Week

During this coming week I am to speak at Immaculata and Marygrove and St. Paul’s by the Lake; and also at Wayne University Newman Club and at Monteith College; and lastly to a group at TriCity College at Saginaw. Another reason for my trip at this time (but it always seems I travel through storms in midwinter instead of to the Sunny South) was Karl Meyer’s wedding to Jean Francis, whom he had met while she worked at the **American Friends’ Service Committee**. She is from the Midwest and her heart is not only with Karl but with her work. Fr. Damien, the Servite priest who is so close to our hearts with his interest in our work, officiated. Karl has a new house on Mohawk where he will live on the one floor with his bride and the men in the house of hospitality will live downstairs. They are keeping the place on Oak Street which is not far away until the building is finally condemned. Karl works to support the houses of hospitality (with the vicissitudes which he tells about) so I hope their wedding presents include cash gifts to help with materials for repairs on the new St. Stephen’s House, which is much to my taste with its fruit trees in the back and the tree in front dotted with English sparrows all fluffed out to resist the cold of midwest winds. I enjoyed great comfort from Nina Polcyn’s hospitality, God bless her.

Detroit Again

The work in Detroit is in its 25th year and it was to celebrate this quarter century of work that I came. I’m praying that Lou Murphy will take time off to write about the work himself, which is many faceted, what with farm and city work, two houses of hospitality,

and encompasses work in the parish, since all his children are going through the parish school which is crowded with 8 nationalities. Two are now in high school.

It was good to visit the farm at South Lyons, where the Martus family lives. They worked for a time with Fr. Hessler in Yucatan; the Johnsons, the Meltons and the Cruchs all live with their combined 26 or more children. It is not a farming commune, but it all began with one large farm owned by the Hessler family. We had time to visit only the Johnson family and to look in on the Meltons (the parents were out). I am eating one of Mrs. Johnson’s cookies now and carried away a loaf of the good homemade bread. The Houses of Hospitality keep the Murphys in town ten months of the year but there are the long summer and winter visits.

To me Lou and Justine are a living example of the truth that voluntary poverty and the good life go together. But then, of course, they have the vocation to it, the gifts for it, the strength to take it. In praying for an increase of God's love, I have always prayed too for the strength to endure the embrace of "this tremendous lover," to use Francis Thompson's phrase.

Cursillos

Perhaps the most moving experience of my trip was the sight of a crowd of **cursillistas** (those who have made a **cursillo**, a course in Christianity) kneeling around the altar after the weekly Saturday noon Mass which is the follow-up of the Cursillo.

A conversion of heart comes about in these cursillos, enlightening the mind as to the workings of grace. I have mentioned before about my coming in contact with this movement for men in the West and Southwest, as well as in Mexico City.

The score or so of men had received Holy Communion, and made their thanksgiving, singing the Benediction, had listened to some spiritual instruction, then went to the top step around the altar and said their own prayers. A few of them spoke briefly to God, present before them and in them and with them, and then joining with their hands on each others' shoulders they sang together, **De Colores**, a brief verse before they went their ways.

And I thought of the last time I had seen men in a body with their arms entwined, hands placed on each other's shoulders, singing. It was in Cuba, at the close of a meeting,

and it was a triumphant, defiant and joyful **Internationale** they were singing, as they swayed back and forth. There were five thousand people there on that occasion.

Pray with me that men be joined together in love, so strong a love in their march Godwards, that they will draw all with them, that all suspicion, anger, contention, bitterness and violence be burnt away in the fire of this love. And may it open their eyes,

the brightness of this love, to the works we can all perform together in building up a new society, in our work for food, clothing, shelter, education and health for all men, for these are the works of mercy, of love and not of hate, the works of good, not evil, of God, not the devil. And where there is no love, put love and we will find love; because love is the measure by which we shall be judged.