

On Pilgrimage - March 1960

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes her travel tips on a journey to Chicago. Visits her childhood street and reminisces on their poverty, learning to pray, and her vocation to poverty. Tells of a picket line in support of a tax resister and defends their use of the name Catholic. (DDLW #762).

I arrived in Chicago at two in the afternoon, and it was good to see Nina Polcyn waiting for me at the train as I got off. I am carrying too much luggage, what with a briefcase, big suitcase and over-the-shoulder bag which is always full. The shoulder bag has lunch in it, powdered coffee, toilet articles, a kimono, diary, short breviary, New Testament and a missal. I do not see how I can do without any of them, coffee included, and Ammon would laugh at that. He is always talking about these people who can't start the revolution without an aspirin and a cup of coffee.

My briefcase is always full. It is an old black one, nice and soft with use, and as it was ripped open on the sides, Mary Hlebein of Maryhouse, Little Canada, sewed it up for me with her strong hands. She said it reminded her of her farm mother sewing up her brothers' and sisters' ripped shoes. Mary reminds me of the women in *O Pioneers* or *My Antonia*, of Willa Cather. The briefcase has one strap of blue plastic and one broken off short leather strap. It is filled with correspondence, manuscript, clippings, pamphlets, a few books, and I am always thinning them out and sending them back home for our library. Valuable material and good for the archives.

It is always wise to carry a big enough suitcase to sit on while you wait in line for a bus. Also to have one big enough so the driver does not make you carry it inside the bus, lifting it up high steps, and then again into a high rack. I have learned all these little comforts through long experience. As to bus riding, I am sure I would have been more comfortable coming from Fargo on a bus than I was on the old car added to the half-empty train, the Empire Builder. Instead of having one of those seats with leg rests and foot rests, with plenty of room between chairs, I was put in a car with crowded old seats, broken-down, and over-heated. It was no better than the Pennsylvania trains between New York and Washington. But I got here quickly, and that is why I had taken the train, in order to see Ammon again before he went to Notre Dame and Purdue, and to

have a visit with Fides Publishing House who are bringing out my THERESE in the fall.

Nina and I went to the St. Benet Book Shop on South Wabash long enough to see if there was mail, and to pick up some of Nina's "home work" before we went to her apartment at Thirty-third street and South Park, a great block of buildings, with sixty five per cent Negro families. It is called Lake Meadows and was built by the New York Life. There is another project going up called Prairie Shores which is 35 per cent colored and seventy five per cent white, which is swankier, Nina said. Gordon Zahn lives in the same block as Nina and our old friend Don Klein who spent some time with us on Chrystie street, and wrote an article about us in Milwaukee, is part of the management in this project, where he lives with his wife and children. There are twelve buildings in the block and five thousand people in them and there are great spaces all around and a vast view of the lake and sky, and the buildings are so far apart that this expanse is not obscured. Right now however, a thick fall of fine snow is coming from the east, and whereas before I could sit and look out at the lake, slate-grey yet clear so that I could see the horizon and the water towers far out, now a dizzying whiteness fills the air, and sky, lake and buildings are all obscured. It is good to be inside, no engagements, and time to sit at the typewriter and catch up on this travelogue.

But I am glad it was so clear yesterday, because Nina drove me along Cottage Grove Avenue to 37th street where the Day family lived when we came east after the San Francisco earthquake. It is still there, that long block of flats, three stories high, and there is still the apartment with one window looking out to the lake, where my sister and I used to draw pictures, and write stories and dress our dolls. It is a solid colored neighborhood now but then it was all white, and our school was the Doolittle school where I had a fine teacher in fourth grade who made school stimulating for us all. There was a little Episcopalian Church where I learned to pray the Psalms and the minister's name was Wilson and he had a daughter by the name of Dorothy too.

It makes me realize what a hard thing, what a supernatural thing a devotion to voluntary poverty is, when I remember how snobbish I was at the age of eight. I was much ashamed of the house in which we lived, and used to walk down the street with my little school friends who lived on Ellis Avenue and duck into the apartment house on 37th street, pretending to live in that more respectable building instead of in a flat over a saloon and a row of stores. One could go out the back way and up the back porches to one's own apartment that way and all the buildings were owned by the same man. The laundries in the apartment house were used by the tenants on Cottage Grove avenue as well as in the higher priced house.

What a suffering children grow go through over clothes and appearance! And yet how happy I was the year I lived there. There was a row of Stevenson and Dickens and Poe on the mantelpiece and my father would not allow any newspapers or magazines in the house. There was no radio or television then. We had to buy

on the installment plan, having lost everything in the earthquake, and that was a shame to my mother. Our beautiful old things, which had followed us from Bath Beach, New York “around the Horn” we used to say, to California, had all been sold to get us east and to give my father a new start. He did not go to work right away, but wrote a novel and short stories and we had our first taste of poverty there. It was there too that I first began to pray, on my knees by the side of my bed at night, because I had seen Mrs. Barrett playing, and her little daughter Kathryn and Mary Harrington had introduced me to the Blessed Mother and the lives of the saints.

I am glad the house is still there and I should have liked to go up and see the back porches where we spent so many happy hours, and the kitchen which my sister and I used diligently to scour, after we had read the Polly Pepper books and got a little philosophy of poverty and of work.

If I lived now in Chicago, I would like to live there in that same place, which is a slum most certainly. Or one could take one of those little houses and do much with it to bring beauty and simplicity there, the beauty and simplicity which are part of the poverty exemplified by the Little Sisters of Jesus over on West Adams street, in their third floor tenement apartment.

Of course I am enjoying mightily the comfort of this great block of buildings on 33rd St. which is interracial and most successfully so, and I feel that all families should have the conveniences and comforts which modern living brings and which do simplify life, and give time to read, to study, to think and to pray. And to work in the apostolate too. But poverty is my vocation, to live as simply and poorly as I can, and to never cease talking and writing of poverty and destitution. Here and everywhere. “While there are poor, I am of them. While men are in prison, I am not free.” As Debs said and as we often quote.

Nina is doing a wonderful job of integrating cult, culture and cultivation, the synthesis which Peter Maurin was always talking about. Her shop is always my headquarters in Chicago, and it is there people come together, from there ideas are spread, people are brought together in all branches of the apostolate. She is as much a Catholic Worker as ever and her works of mercy reach out in all directions. She has an understanding of poverty and of destitution and always a readiness to share in the one and to alleviate the other.

When we got home from our little tour of the neighborhood and I had explored the view from the eleventh floor, Ammon came for supper and brought us up to date on his journeyings as well as on the news of our own workers in Chicago. He had no sooner arrived in town on Saturday when he was called on to picket in front of the courthouse for Roseanna Robinson. They are keeping up a vigil night and day, people joining for a stint of three hours at a time. I certainly hope to join them sometime these next few days. Roseanna is a young colored woman who had refused to pay any income tax 85 per cent of which goes for war, or to file any returns. She had been given an indeterminate sentence and she is now for two weeks on hunger strike. I suppose they will forcibly feed her. The

newspapers are paying little head to this, so it is necessary to have the picket line, and Karl Meyer has gotten out a leaflet which is signed by The Catholic Worker, 164 West Oak street and the War Resisters League which takes in all those who are not Catholic who wish to participate but might hesitate if it were only under Catholic leadership.

Already there have been complaints and the Chancellor of the diocese has telephoned the headquarters telling them to take the name Catholic off their headquarters and literature.

Fr. LaFarge, in his latest book said that one of the evils in the church (which our Lord compared to a net filled with good and bad fishes and a field filled with tares as well as wheat) was a bullying clergy and a fearful laity. Those are not the exact words but I hope I am not misrepresenting his idea. Certainly the Monsignor in this case was abusive and domineering in his telephone conversation, but Karl who is anything but fearful, submitted cheerfully and now the house is called St. Stephen's House, since St. Stephen was the first disciple to serve tables. As for the leaflet which was being distributed, the new edition was to be signed "friends of Roseanna Robinson."

I had also been reading Evelyn Waugh's life of Ronald Knox as well as glancing through Fr. LaFarge's, and in the book on Fr. Knox, I began to get a glimpse of what was meant by various priests who felt that we should not use the name *Catholic Worker*.

According to Waugh, Knox was the fourth chaplain at Oxford, and whereas the others had called themselves Catholic chaplains of Oxford, he always was so exact as to term himself the chaplain of the Catholics at Oxford. When the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists started years ago, the chancery office in New York saw to it that they did not call themselves The Catholic Association of Trade Unionists.

The Catholic Association or The Catholic Worker sounds official, as though we were speaking for all Catholic trade unionists, or Catholic workers. Karl Meyer got this point right away, where as it took me years to understand the objection to our using the name. After all, we have the right to use it as well as the Catholic War Veterans, I used to say. Karl said, "After all, there are only two or three of us at Oak street doing this work, and even those who help feed and house the poor may not agree at all with us on pacifism or on the demonstrations and jail going, and giving out leaflets. We are certainly not *the* Catholic worker in the broad sense."

Some few months ago we were accused before some Congressional Committee of usurping the name Catholic, and the statement was made that the Cardinal had threatened to take us to court to make us change it. And also it was implied that we were not good Catholics at all, otherwise we would not be pleading for such prisoners as Martin Sobell. We were pleased to see that James Carey, one of the vice presidents of the CIO came to our defense. Certainly Cardinal Spellman

has never spoken to me on the subject, and in all 27 years of our existence, he has given us absolute freedom and shown us courtesy and kindness.

But I begin to get the point, and I am glad to see that Karl was so agreeable about it. We do not represent the Catholic worker. We are merely a group of Catholic Workers (and not manual workers at that) who are trying to express a Catholic point of view, one of many Catholic opinions. We cite our authorities, for instance, in our stand on peace, –Archbishop Roberts, S. J.; Dom Bede Griffiths; O.S.B.; Canon F. H. Drinkwater; Fr. Franziskus Stratmann, O.P.; Mgr. Ottaviani, Cardinal Secretary of the Holy Office; Pere Regamy, O.P.; etc. etc. But the vast majority of Catholics have not begun to think on these things yet. A thousand years are as one day in the sight of the Lord, and Christianity is only two days old.

Next issue: Interview with Archbishop Roberts, S.J. now lecturing at Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington; visits with the Sioux Indians in South Dakota, and brief mention of settlements and work for the poor along the way.