

Peter Maurin Farm - April 1954

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Experiences God's tenderness in the springtime beauty flooding her senses. Appreciates the improvements at the farm wrought by diligent manual labor and tape recorded retreat conferences by Fr. Hugo. (DDLW #666).

The spring peepers have begun their shrill sweet song each evening as we leave the chapel after rosary. It is still frosty and when the wind comes from the west it is biting, but the flowers are blooming, a mass of gold and purple, a conquering color, life victorious over death. We are beginning to look for dandelions for spring salad, and we wake to the singing of birds again.

Today, the wind is from the south and I can write with my door open so that I can look down over the yellow fields, and into the mass of rose maple and violet which is the color of the woods today. Outside my window the lilac buds are bursting out. Crows cry out in the woods. Starlings confer.

The way to God is surely through the exterior senses on a day like this. The round-bellied little puppy tied up by the back door, that Paul assured us has quite a touch of collie; that delightful Christina Maria who sings and smiles at four months,—and my own grand children with their dirty hands clutching bouquets of maple blossoms for the chapel all show us the tenderness of God. All the way to heaven is heaven on a day like this.

Bakery

A new exhaust fan was put in the bakery last month to get rid of the gasses which accumulate in that small outer kitchen which Betty uses to make the bread for the line. It is not the heat so much that one suffers from but the gas that forms and chokes one. The oven is an old battle ship affair which uses oil for fuel. I wish someone would come along who could build us a stone out-door oven such as Peter Maurin's peasant family used in France and I have been told can be found among the Pennsylvania Dutch to this day. Lacking that, I'd settle for one which runs with bottled gas. The former would be more in the spirit of poverty, however.

Hisaye is a Japanese American and is our best example of manual labor around here. She works without effort, quietly, efficiently, taking care of rabbits, chickens, washing up the kitchen, diningroom, hall, and corridors with a concoction of boiled onion skins and water which Mary Lisi, one of our Italian friends introduced us to. Our house is spotless, thanks to her, and yet she always has time to type articles, to read, both to herself and to little Paul. What an example of tranquility.

Tamar who remembers the 22 years of the Catholic Worker,—she was six when it started—says we are just going through a clean and efficient period. She has seen farms prosper and then grow up in weeds; houses flourish in order and disorder,—sometimes there are cooks, carpenters, electricians and other times there is no one and yet we somehow get along. It was dear Father Pacifique Roy, S.S.J., who started us off on electricity and modern plumbing to the loud cries of heresy of some of the medievalists in our midst. One can still be a St. Francis after a fashion, with central heating I am sure.

One of the things that Peter Maurin was always trying to teach us by his example was manual labor for the health of body and soul and mind, and the faithful work of people like Hans Tunneson, John Filliger and Joe Cotter, not to speak of the others like the three Michaels we have amongst us, Italian, Irish and Russian, are responsible for much of the order which is an image of heaven.

At this moment Italian Michael is out spreading lime and manure on the fields, and Fr. Duffy himself is out morning, noon and night, ditching, draining, spreading, seeding. The soil is being restored. The earth which has been sour and soggy and barren, is becoming the good earth, what with the loving care it is getting.

Essie, the cow appreciates the red top coming up in one of the fields, and has become content with us, her roaring moo gentling down to a murmur now. But she is a stubborn beast and lacking fences has to be tied, and often she gets loose and endangers the new orchard and the grape vines. We can well see how man dragged the animals after him in the Fall and made them share in his perversity and stupidity. The guilt is ours for which we can atone by our patience.

During the month we had a day of recollection, and played four conferences of Fr. John J. Hugo on a tape recorder for the dozen of us who were gathered together. His voice was clear and the points that he made about our baptism and what it meant to be sons of God, partakers of the divine life, our obligation to aim at perfection made the kind of a day that lifted us up from the humdrum of our lives and made us realize again our privilege and responsibility.

We had to borrow a recorder but Father Hugo has told us he will send us discs also so that we can use the record player that we have. We plan to have conferences each Sunday afternoon from now on, as soon as the records come.