

Day After Day - June 1942

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Expresses a joyful heart in the midst of war preparations. Visits friends, Bishops, and West Coast Houses of Hospitality in Seattle and Los Angeles. (DDLW #217).

Spokane, Washington.

The rain pours down. I missed the tornadoes and the floods in Oklahoma and Texas, but the rain has followed me. It seems to me the few sunny days were those I spent on the buses, and they were hot indeed, with perspiring men and women, crying babies, crowded bus stations and lunch counters.

But this season of the year, Pentecost, is so beautiful, that rain and cold, however unseasonable, cannot dampen the joy of the heart. The magnificent country side shows forth the glories of God and following the office in the short breviary that the monks at St. Johns, Collegeville, have gotten out, one can say with awe, "how wonderful are thy works, O Lord! In wisdom Thou hast made all things, the earth is full of Thy handiwork."

It is impossible not to have the heart lifted up in joy and love, it is impossible to resist that peace of heart that descends upon one, in spite of a world at war.

The Holy Father's message, recalling one to the spirit of the early Christians, His plea for an early peace, contributed to the joy of the holy season. We print excerpts of it in this issue because in many of the places I have passed through a great majority of our Catholics have not seen it. In San Francisco there was a full page given to it, the Northwest Progress, diocesan paper of Seattle, printed it entirely, but many of the diocesan papers contented themselves with a few paragraphs. The Pope is our leader, our general, he represents Christ on earth, he is the successor of Peter. If only we would hearken to him !

Reading

My reading has contributed to this peace of mind. "Hearken to the Voice," by Franz Werfel, is the story of Jeremiah, a long book of 800 pages, and I read it in

Los Angeles and on the bus coming to San Francisco. Peter Maurin says the way to study history is through Bible history and the history of the Church. We will have then a philosophy of history, a perspective. Certainly a study of the Old Testament in these times helps one to the long view, one thinks in the light of eternity.

My library, as I travel, is made up of missal, Bible, short breviary, the Life of Janet Erskine Stuart, her travels and letters, and the last number of Land and Home, Monsignor Ligutti's rural life journal. Whenever I read the Bible on the bus, someone asks me if I am a Seventh Day Adventist or a Jehovah's Witness!

Spokane

I am just resting in Spokane for a day between buses in order to write this column and catch up on some letters. I am the guest as usual of Marycliff where the Franciscan Sisters teach. I'm not trying to see any more schools as this is a bad time of the year, crowded with examinations and graduation. Tomorrow I leave for Butte, then Dickinson the next day, and the night of the third day I'll be in Minneapolis to visit our house there. It is a long jump across country and that trip over the plains makes me think of Russia (which I have never visited) and the various accounts of travel in that land. Thinking of that vast land on the other side of the world, as I cross the plains of Montana and North Dakota, will somehow make me feel closer to home.

Rumors

But in Seattle one does not feel that Russia or Japan are far off. Rumor had it, while I was there, that a few aircraft carriers were lurking in waters between Seattle and Alaska, and that invasion, or attack, was imminent. Everyone is convinced that almost anything can happen in this war, and in spite of the optimism decried by the president, the expectation on the west coast is that our huge navy yards, ship yards, aviation plants will sooner or later be bombed. Not that there is any sense of hysteria. As the Italian saying has it, "everyone's misfortune is no one's misfortune." In general, no one seems to realize the war except as a gigantic adventure and a great prosperity suddenly descending upon us. There is more money than anyone has seen for a long time and people are stocking up on clothes, electric iceboxes, stoves and other equipment that is still being sold, and the stores still seem to be pretty full. There are evidences of boondoggling on a large scale, at big salaries, and I when I think of the men on WPA accused of leaning on their shovels (in the face of the tremendous public works they accomplished) and at the miserable salaries the public complained of I could weep.

Looking at the country and its people aside from the supernatural point of view, it is a discouraging sight. Practically every young man is effected, women are threatened with mobilization, and pagan attitudes prevail. There is a more determined turning to creatures and away from God. God help us all.

Seattle, Washington

For once a mild day, and as yet no rain, though it threatens. I am sitting on the top of a hill, in a lovely garden outside of Our Lady of Lourdes Church where we are having a “day,” beginning with solemn high Mass at ten and ending with Benediction at three. The Church is a small wooden one holding about 500 people. It has been a rural Italian parish but now one of the Boeing aircraft plants is down one valley and workers’ homes dot the country side in the other. But it is still country, nevertheless, with cows grazing in an orchard, birds singing in the meadows. In the field on the other side of the church within 100 feet of me as I write these notes, a huge monster of a barrage balloon shaped like a fish, is tethered to the ground, and around it are tents and huts for soldiers.

On the other side, in a lovely little monastery garden, there is a machine gun nest and an anti-aircraft nest set up, all camouflaged, surrounded with sandbags, and covered with branches. This is within the precincts of the church garden itself and I thought of Spain and how the priests were accused of setting up machine guns in the turrets of their bell towers. I do not doubt but that if the army planted the bell tower of any church in America, they would be moving right in.

In the prayers I was reading, “behold the works of the Lord and make his works resound!”, but see the works of men.

When I arrived in Seattle there were a dozen of our fellow workers at the station and it was suggested that I have this little day of quiet out in West Seattle on this beautiful mount. But how hard it is to close the eyes to the works of men. Seattle is the most militarized section of the country I’ve seen yet. Encampments, navy yards, ship yards, airplane plants, lumber mills and everything guarded heavily so that even in the city the vacant lots have huts and tents. Over Bremerton, across the bay, the air is filled with barrage balloons, but hereabouts today they are all tethered in the fields looking like nothing else but grotesque idols, deities of the state, served by a uniformed priesthood who put their trust in all these works of their lands, to save them from the wrath of the Lord. Meanwhile “His eyes look searchingly upon the nations.”

Practicing Murder

On the way over, one field was full of soldiers practicing bayonet drill. The crouching attitudes as of wild beasts, the lunges, the springs, the stabbings, the grimaces, gave the heart a fearful wrench. And these are men, creatures of body and of soul, temples of the Holy Spirit.

However, Pere Yves of Paris writes, “to judge badly of human nature is to judge of the sun by its eclipse, of the flower when it is faded.” In these attitudes we are seeing men as they have become perverted by the fall, not as they can be by virtue, of the resurrection and ascension of our Lord.

Augustus Bown

One of the best visits on this trip was to the home of Augustus Bown, long-shoreman, union man, father of seven, the eldest of whom is an expert pianist and who has won a scholarship at Maryhurst College in Portland. Edith Mary accompanied Marion Anderson, the singer, when she visited here, and it looks as though she, too, was going to be a genius of whom her race and the rest of us can be proud. Mr. Bown told us of the struggles the union had to keep the gains that it had made, and the threat of administration representatives to bring in a “labor battalion” to take the place of union men.

The high wages the men are getting at present are for dangerous and onerous work, and Mr. Bown himself is just paying off his debts after lean years, and at that is having a hard time getting all his children clothed and educated, even on the salary which now insures what the Holy Father calls modest comfort for the working man. They are buying their own home (sixteen dollars a month payments) and Mrs. Bown pointed with pride to the great living room where it is possible to have meetings. Last time I was in Seattle we had a meeting in her home and we were bulging out the windows, there were so many there.

Thanks to the efforts of this valiant woman, a center for Negro work has been set up in the neighborhood, named after Catherine de Hueck’s *Friendship House*, and its patron is the Blessed Martin de Porres. Sister Bernard, of the Sisters of Providence, is in charge of the work, and she and Miss Egan have done a noble job of cleaning and painting and gardening around the roomy house that Bishop Shaughnessy bought for them.

Bishops

During this trip I have seen Bishop Kelley, Bishop McGucken, Archbishop Cantwell and Bishop Shaughnessy of Seattle and all have been very cordial and friendly.

Archbishop Cantwell, in speaking of the apostolate of the laity, called attention to Fr. William O'Connor's recent book on the lay apostolate which has just been published by Bruce. He also mentioned that he enjoyed Carleton Hayes' book "A Generation of Materialism."

With Bishop Shaughnessy's permission I spoke at the seminary at Seattle. I also spoke at Friendship House and twice at the House of Hospitality, which continues though, of course, the need right now is much less.

Of all the Seattle group, Norman Hawkins, Tommy Scanlon, Ford Tuohey and Phil Hargreaves are now in the army, the latter classified as IAO, for noncombatant work.

Of those that remain H. K. Kendall, who lived at the House for a while as its leader, is interested in a paper of his own, *Social Action*, and in a group at present called the Resurgents, made up of Bob Campbell, Buck Williams who are also interested and are officers of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists.

West Coast Houses

So the House of Hospitality is being managed by Isabel MacRae and those who remain of the group will work under her leadership. She cannot, of course, live at the house, but an old fellow worker, Robert Keith, still strong and active, is running things with the help of a former truck driver and some half dozen others. A bread line is kept going and about a hundred and fifty are fed a day. Only about ten are put up right now, but the house will hold about twenty.

The House in Sacramento, which was bought by the Bishop for the work still goes on, though the night I was there, there were only half a dozen in the house. There was Arthur Ronz, a young fellow, part Bohemian and part Mexican by blood, but pure United States by upbringing who started the house under the Bishop, and is in charge. Two priests, Father Lyons and Father McHugh, have helped constantly. Dick Davis was cooking while I was there. His job had been cooking for railroad gangs and he was just resting up between jobs. There were two migrants, on their way to the asparagus beds around Reno, and a sick ship yard worker who was going to a clinic for some excruciating sinus pains in his head that kept him from working.

All around the house are Mexicans who work thinning beets and that morning as I awoke to go to a six-thirty mass a truck from the valley was loading up outside the window with a dozen women aged anywhere from 16 to 70. A grueling day of hard work ahead of them from dawn till dark, and then we complain of fatigue!

Arthur's work has been so good that rumor has it a larger building will be taken for the future, and then the Sacramento bishopric will indeed have a hospice.

Los Angeles

The Los Angeles House of Hospitality, under John Wagner and Jeanette, his wife, continues steadily, cheerfully on. It is in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city surrounded by Negroes and Mexicans, all of whom John tries to help. The house has a truck and picks up sufficient food not only for the line but also for the desert camp where always a few men are recovering from some sickness or other, and even for neighbors who come in to get assistance. Jeannette takes care of the desert camp, which is a piece of property which belongs to her son and which they have built up not only for themselves, but for those in need. She is a woman of wide experience and knowledge with a tremendous vitality. We drove out to visit the camp with her and with some Los Angeles friends, and Jeannette introduced us to desert tea, which she can pick from a shrub growing around the house, to her turkeys, rabbits, and to a very good meal which she had on the table in a scant half hour after we got there. It is incalculable, the amount of good a house of this kind does in the "little ways" of the works of mercy. Jack has a benign spirit, and a steady watchful eye. If he sees a man sick on the line, he plucks him out and takes care of him out in the camp for a while.

That camp is one of the most beautiful places I have seen for a long time, set out as it is in the very heart of the**desert which slopes steadily up to the mountains which loom on every side. Such beauty rejoices the heart.

It is hard to do justice to the work of such men as Jack Wanger, Arthur Ronz, H. K. Kendall, Ford Tuohy, Norman Hawkins and others who have lived in and helped these West Coast Houses of Hospitality at one time or another, and have kept the movement alive. War, family, other vocations have taken many from us and scattered them over the face of the world, but some will always remain, and we feel sure will be continuing the work when we return another year.