

On Pilgrimage - February 1955

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The Catholic Worker, February 1955, 1, 4, 6.

Summary: On a long winter trip through Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana she tells of efforts for the common good of many people and parishes. Comments on the plight of Mexicans and Indians. Keywords: community, liturgy, personal responsibility (DDLW #682).

Feast of St. John Chrysostom

Little Canada, St. Paul

We are in the depths of the winter now. When we got up this morning it was thirty below, by the time we set out for Mass at seven thirty, we were swathed with scarves, clothed in “double garments” but it was calm so it was not as cold as yesterday when it was exactly zero and a high wind. What beauty of snow and blue sky with the stark dead outlines of trees resting against the sky. All is so still and quiet. Yet what seems like death is the most profound life and will burst out again in a few more months. Spring is late here in Minnesota. There is something tremendously invigorating about this weather. I press on tomorrow to St. John’s, Collegeville, then to North Dakota and on to Montana. The busses keep running, the windows so frosted over that you can only see out if you are up near the driver. The light snow flows across the cleared roads like milk, blown by the northwest wind and the drifts pile high. We have had snow twice this month, but no real blizzards yet.

Guadalupe Parish

Yesterday I spoke at St. Catherine’s College and two of the girls from Maryhouse were with me, Dorothy Kregle and Marie Knisley, and we met Mary Lou Hennessy and Eileen Lexau there. All of us had lunch together with Sister Mary Edward and because Mary Lou and Eileen had worked with Friendship House we began talking about the condition of minorities in Minnesota. A governor’s investigating committee has put out very good reports about the situation of Negro, Mexican, Asiatic and Indians in this section (there is a very large Indian population), and

Fr. Gilligan of St. Thomas' college heads the committee and introduces the reports. Sister Mary Edward gave me her copies to read.

After lunch we set out to visit the church of our Lady of Guadalupe in the Mexican section in South St. Paul, in a section where the river is apt to overflow its banks. I noticed as I drove past several synagogues that it was also a Jewish quarter too. The homes were very poor though there was an attempt to keep up many of them, and Mary Lou pointed out one house where the Mexicans had to pay as much as \$65 rent for two rooms. How the poor are exploited, and with what patience and tenacity they hang on, working in the canneries and the fields, sticking it out in this so cold climate compared to Texas and Mexico, in order to have the greater education and job opportunities of the north.

There is a poor little church down in that section, a frame building and painted a bright swampy green. It was light and warm inside and had the feeling of a much loved place. There was a shrine to our Lady of Guadalupe and no matter how garish the decorations, this presentation of our Lady is always of unutterable beauty. She is the patroness of the Americas and I love to visit her in the shrines, and make special requests there. They are usually in the neighborhoods of the poor.

What was my joy to find that this was a place where a miracle had taken place back in 1944 when a woman on her way to Rochester clinic had been instantly healed of kidney stones and dropsy by her prayers. Mrs. Mayme Nels Sjostrom of Stephen, Minn., was the name of the woman and her letter was nailed up in back of the church. On her way to Rochester to have an emergency operation she said to those who were driving her, "I would like to drive through a part of the town where poor people live." In passing the church she got out and went in for a visit and on praying at the shrine was immediately healed. "Now I want to lead a model life," she wrote, "and I go to Holy Communion and my husband goes with me."

Maryhouse

This is my last day at Maryhouse where I have been writing for the past month, going out from here to speak to groups around the twin cities. What to say about this little oasis of peace. I notice Tom Sullivan calls Chrystie Street an oasis of chaos in his last column, but I am sure his fellow workers both men and women in St. Joseph's house do not feel that way. He says it to tease Veronica and me and the rest of us women who do indeed think of these centers, houses of hospitality and farms, as oases of peace.

Maryhouse, Minnesota, is not directly associated with the **Catholic Worker** but is a companion work, another one of those small groups scattered around the country and doing the work of the apostolate. Two of the members are at present carrying the burden for us at Maryfarm, Newburgh, taking charge of the retreat house there, which means that they cook, wash, mend, serve others

in every way they can. Two are in training, taking a practical nurses' course at Red Wing, Minn., one works in a parish, and several are here, one of them teaching school, the other in an office. A few take paid work, to keep the home fires burning and the others give their services. What a need there are for such centers all through the country.

I was thinking while I visited the Mexican section yesterday how good it would be for an apostolic family to be living out there in the midst whose house would be open to the children of the neighborhood, and where there would be family prayer and reading and observation of Sundays and of seasons and feasts and where each could learn from the other, and that mutual aid which is the most personal and direct charity in the true sense of the word **caritas**. I thought of the Paul Moore family in Jersey City, where this Anglican priest and his wife and children live in a colored section and have their doors open always to all the young folk of the neighborhood. Where love is, there God is. These are those immediate and personal works that Pope Pius XII calls for in his 1952 Christmas message. If we are children of the church, how we should pore over these, study them, read them over and over, as letters from a dear father.

But I started to describe Maryhouse. When the girls began in 1944, they started with a retreat at St. Anthony's, Oakmount, which was where we met them. When they returned home, they pooled their resources and their savings, bought a little house in a poor section and began to work among the Negroes of Minneapolis, helping Fr. Hirmann and performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It is interesting to note that Dorothy McMahon who taught the colored children catechism used the same Mother Bolton Method in teaching some neighbors of ours at Newburgh, and also Sally Appleton, a Vassar graduate who was working with us that winter. Sally was baptised by Fr. Lynch who in turn sent her out to teach one of his converts, a mother with young children.

Fr. Durand is pastor at Little Canada and he has a Parish with a fine school with a bowling alley and skating rink in the basement. He has a credit union which has out at present eleven real estate loans and 119 personal loans. There are 323 shareholders. Loans are cancelled in case of death or disabling illness of the borrower, thanks to insurance coverage. There is one paid secretary, interest is 5 percent (which is too much), but loans are made on character not collateral. There are many of these small credit unions in Parishes, 821 now, banks are beginning to get worried and want them taxed. Non-Catholic credit unions number 49,880 in the western Hemisphere, according to the register, with 9,000,000 members. This is the way to get out of the clutch of the loan sharks with their usurious charges, and this is one of the little ways to rebuild society within the shell of the old. Fr. Leo Ward at Notre Dame has written many books about credit unions and cooperatives.

Orin Doty

At one of the meetings this month I met Orin Doty, one of four brothers from Bruno, Minn., who served two years at Ashland, Kentucky, and Springfield, Md., Federal prisons for not registering for the draft. After they were released in June, 1952, they were automatically registered by the prison authorities, without their consent and receiving their draft calls, which they disregarded, they were once again arrested, tried and sentenced to two years. This was appealed, but the sentence stands, and within the month they may have to go back to prison. Orin is 26 and his brothers are 24, 25 and 27. What courage and what devotion to principle! When Orin was in Ashland, Ky., he shared a dormitory with 100 other prisoners, mostly moonshiners, though there were a few other political prisoners. Dashiell Hammett and Fred Vanderbilt Field were there on contempt charges because as members of the America Civil Rights Congress they would not give the names of fellow members.

In prison Orin said he read the Catholic Worker and so got acquainted with us. The father of the Doty brothers served time himself during the first World War.

I had lunch with Grace Carlson, who has also served a jail sentence at the woman's Federal Prison in West Virginia, as a result of the Smith Act during the war. Her activities were in the trade union field and in the Trotskyite faction of the Communist party. Now that she has returned to her faith, she is one of the rare exceptions, like Douglas Hyde in England, who is not acting the part of a stool pigeon, putting the finger on former associates. She believes with us that the positive work of aiding the worker, and helping the poor is the way to combat communism.. I got to know her better on this trip and admire her immensely. She told me some of her jail experiences and I am hoping we can run some of her story later in the paper. She is a strong, happy person with a keen mind and brave heart.

My month in St. Paul has been a very busy one visiting the sick. Fr. Judge and Fr. Egan, both of whom were seriously ill, took up some of the days, then there were meetings at St. Mary's Hospital with the nuns and with the nurses. It was good to meet Sister Eugene Marie who is one of fifteen children raised on a ninety acre Minnesota Farm. There are many valiant women in this order of St. Joseph. Another one is Sister Anne Marie who has a home for exceptional children although she is crippled and has to work from a wheelchair.

Other meetings were at Allen Tate's, the Visitation nuns, Univ. of Minn. Philosophy Department, at Bob Christiansen's, Univ. of Minn. Ag. Newman Club.

Rural Parishes

For the last week it has been my great joy to visit several rural parishes in Minnesota, North Dakota and now Montana. I was driven by two Buffalo, N.y.

priests, students at St. John's, together with a sculptor, Joe O'Connor who teaches at St. John's and his wife and baby, to Fr. Fehrenbacher's parish which is in a tiny town in central Minnesota. There we had a meeting in the evening and cake and coffee later and just as the meeting was breaking up Frank Kismarcik, former head of the art department at St. John's and Bob Rambush of New York drove up to spend the night. What with three unexpected guests, Fr. Fehrenbacher had to put one of them on the floor. It was good to wake up in the morning to look out at a far reaching expanse of snow, the few little houses around the rectory by no means shutting off the horizon. A few dogs scampered in the snow and the snow was scrunchy under foot. It never melts out here, once the winter sets in.

Bob had just flown from New York and brought me news from Chrystie street. He had just made a move to an old house on Fourth Street and the Bowery, and Tom Sullivan threatened to make it an annex to our house of hospitality. But he does not frighten Bob who has always been quite at home with us, serving the line as he has in the past, since his marriage, making his home also an open house.

I took the bus at Sauk Center which was Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*. It was ten miles from Brooton, Fr. Fehrenbacher's town. His parish covers other missions around. The bus was one of those new double decker affairs and very comfortable riding, though overheated. It was so crowded with men in uniform that only the rear seat was empty, and one sprawling young man took up two thirds of that. A stout woman from Valley City, Montana shared the rest of it with me and after a nine to four thirty drive to Jamestown, North Dakota it was good to get out and stretch. Fr. Hovda met me there, and with Fr. Benson, also from the Fargo Diocese, we went to dinner at the home of a Presbyterian minister who teaches at a local college. His wife is from Connecticut and both are friends of the paper. Their four children are both unrepressed and most well behaved, and although they were not of school age yet, they waited most courteously until all the family had been served before they passed their little plates. It was a good evening of music and conversation and our host talked of legislation and of the Indian in North Dakota. There are 75,000 of them and in most destitute condition. Here again are the poor, and all too little done for them and few interested in them.

The report of the Governor's interracial commission of Minnesota on the Indian is an 80-page report which could be read without profit as dealing with all Indians as a people in this central northwest. Ministers, Priests and Rabbi as well as interested lay people are on this commission, and the students of St. Catherine's helped gather some of the data for other of the booklets, of which there are half a dozen. The one on the Indian was written in 1947, and in the chapter of Indian culture and white civilization, there is the beautiful paragraph MINE AND THINE.

"Two other customs, common to many Indian tribes, which were in conflict with the prevailing practice of the white man's culture and which have been influential

in the process of acculturation were the Indian's concept of property and the practice of "give away." Property was not individualized. Property, whether in the form of land, homes or produce, was not bought or sold. Land was plentiful, homes were easily built or replaced, and food was gathered in abundance. The few more personal belongings of an individual were not reserved or held within a family group, but at the time of death might be buried with the deceased or given away. Throughout the life span of an individual, merit did not accrue to the individual through the acquisition or accumulation of goods; rather, merit was determined through the distribution of wealth."

The pamphlet goes on to tell of the Indians' "traditional concept of cooperative enterprise, his unfamiliarity with a concept of working for wages or individual gain or of receiving money without effort through the disposal of resources. His concept of property, its uses and values, and his practice of "giveaway" made his acceptance of and adjustment to the prevailing economic system difficult if not immediately impossible."

Ammon Hennacy has written at length on the Hopi Indians and how they have clung to their traditional way of living, and there are probably other Indian groups throughout the country whose culture is still being preserved. Who knows when atomic warfare may so destroy our civilization (and David Lawrence says in his column from Washington that future conflict which seems so imminent off the China coast will be "unrestricted in weapons,") that we may be forced back into communal and cooperative patterns of living.

Berlin, North Dakota

After our dinner, Fr. Hovda drove me out of Jamestown, 10,000 population, south on gravelled roads over rolling country, to his parish which takes in the town of around 150 population. In either parish he has about thirty families of German-Russian descent. This means that originally German, they were invited by Catherine the great into Russia, around the Ukraine, to introduce their farming methods among the peasants. Later, due to their desire to escape conscription and constant government taxation, they emigrated to this country. I spoke to these parishes after the seven-thirty and ten-thirty dialogue masses Sunday morning, and the churches were both full, and all of the parishioners went to communion at the first Mass, not so many at the second. Both parishes took up collections for the Catholic Worker. I spoke in both places for three quarters of an hour, giving a resume of Peter's three points, the paper and clarification of thought; houses of hospitality; and farming communes. One woman came up to me later and pointed out that her people had lived in family community in Russia, even before the Russian revolution, so it was a pattern of life familiar to them. "But if we did it now we would have to learn to get along together," she added. And such a family commune would indeed be a school of sanctity as well as a school for God's service.

There was more time to talk when we had dinner with a farmer and his wife later and we spoke of the depression, dust storms, grasshoppers and cactus, taxes, mortgages, war, peace and the state. We spoke of how the farmer sold his wool for 25 cents a pound and then bought his blankets and clothing at the store for much cash. How he sold his wheat at four dollars and fifty cents for two bushel and then bought it back in bread and cereal, and of inferior grade too, with little nourishment left in it. How he brought his wheat and corn and oats to the big feed dealers and bought it back in feed for his cattle.

The voices of modern business, the cry of the advertisers, in press and radio and now television are systematically robbing the people of their hard earnings, and big business has become the big lie, so gigantic a lie that it is believed. That is what is said of Hitler—if the lie were shouted brazenly enough, if the great lie stunned with its effrontery, it was believed. Big business and the government, the all-encroaching state is dictating the small farmer, the individual owner out of business, and one sees collective farming, like that of Russia, only here it is for the benefit of the company, the corporation.

“Can one really not listen to the government?” one woman asked me simply.

And her son answered, “If one is willing to forego the ‘benefits’ and is willing to do without those luxuries which people have come to think are essentials.” “He who is a pensioner of the state is a slave of the state” Samuel Johnson once said.

Slaves of the state, slaves of the big corporations. One sees plenty of it on such a trip. The priests are close to the people, one sees the life of worship growing but when it comes to the material needs of the people, whether it be work, community, a cultural life, recreational life, there is much study needed. We are creatures of body as well as soul and the poverty of the city and of the land must be remedied. In the cities one sees destitution and such poverty as that of the Mexicans, huddled in hundreds of shacks around the big sugar refining plant in Billings which I was to see later. Thousands of these Mexicans harvest the sugar beet crop, and many stay and settle in the north and the poverty of their lives here is some indication of the complete destitution they suffered in the past.

Liturgy and sociology go together, and one cannot read an epistle of Gospel telling of the love of brother which is the fulfilling of the law and our first obligation (owe no man anything save to love one another, for love is the fulfilling of the law”) and of the feeding of our enemy as a way to peace, without condemning the economy under which we live, a war economy.

The people respond to truth, and thank God there are such responses to the liturgical movement through the country. The evening masses in such a section as this in North Dakota means that Fr. Hovda’s people can have mass on the Feast of Candlemas and St. Blaise and first Friday. There is a certain amount of vernacular in the ritual so that people can “pray with the understanding.”

But the Holy Father in his Christmas message has said,

“The possession of truth, if it were to remain closed within themselves, almost

as if it were an object of their contemplation for deriving there from spiritual pleasure, would not be of service to the cause of peace; the truth must be lived, communicated and applied to all phases of life. Also truth and particularly Christian truth, is a talent that God placed in the hands of his servants in order that, with all that they undertake, it may bear fruit in works for the common good. . . How many, perhaps even priests and lay Catholics, ought to feel remorse for having instead buried in their own hearts this and other spiritual riches because of their own indolence and insensibility to human misery. . . nor would those priests and laity fulfill their obligations, were they voluntarily to close their eyes and keep silence concerning the social injustices of which they are witnesses. . . ” In another part of his message the Pope says that whereas in both camps Capitalist and Communist there are those “in whom the imprint of Christ is preserved in more or less active degree,” in the one truth is suppressed by the Government and in the other by “excessive timidity” and lack of confidence in themselves, the people and their representatives, should give proof to others of a more firm courage in foiling the maneuvers of the obscure forces which are still trying to establish power hegemonies, and they should also show more active wisdom in preserving and swelling the ranks of men of good will, especially of believers in God, who everywhere adhere in great numbers to the cause of peace." His several references to those outside the ranks of believers, with whom we are to work, are especially worthy of study and application. It is again the need to study the doctrine of the common good.

My well marked up and underlined copy of the Holy Father’s Christmas message has been brought out again and again at meetings, only to find that people, our own Catholic people, have not read it.

Another thing to note: Even in these smallest communities, in places of only a few hundred inhabitants, in a countryside where thirty families make up a parish, the venom of the enemy is spread. And I am not speaking of Communism, but of racial hatreds. One large farmer going to Los Angeles for the winter, brings back the poison with him of “hundred percent American” groups who whip up hatred for Jews and for communism, for any scapegoat that will free them from a sense of their own personal responsibility and guilt.

One of the biggest problems in poverty in North Dakota is the Indian problem and most of the Indians are Catholic according to the pastor of St. James Church in Jamestown. And once again people are seeking for the Federal government to solve their problems instead of taking the immediate and Christian way of personal responsibility. There is need of an orphanage for Indian Children, is there—need of support from the government? If each family took in orphans there would be no need of the government entering in.

Montana

If I don’t cut this short Tom Sullivan will cut it for me. But a travelogue without the applications would be a mere Baedeker. Here I am now in the Muscleshell

Valley in Ryegate, Montana, stopping at the rectory of Fr. James Kittleson, formerly of Denver, and now of the Helena Diocese. He owes his transfer to the fact that he taught catechism as a seminarian and worked among the sugar beet workers in Montana and his bishop kindly turned him over, at his request, to this northern diocese, where he is as happy as a fish in high water, to use an eastern seaboard simile.

Before we came up to Ryegate, Fr. Kittleson drove me through the aforesaid Mexican Quarter and showed me the Church of our Lady of Guadalupe where he had been pastor for a year up to last August. In that time, with the help of funds from Extension in Chicago, and his friend William Joseph, sculptor and painter of Denver Colorado, he turned a former skating rink into one of the loveliest little churches I have ever seen. A painting of St. Joseph on one side of the church matches in color the traditional Virgin of Guadalupe on the other side. The stations of the cross are extraordinarily effective, carved wooden figures, painted, standing starkly against the white wall of the church. The wide, shallow church was bright with sun and cheerful with the noise of two carpenters who were mending and varnishing pews. On Sunday morning there is a mass sung by the congregation, and in the afternoon at four thirty there is a dialogue mass.

Ryegate

We drove the sixty miles up from Billings to Ryegate, through a long valley where strip farming of wheat made the land a vast checkerboard in spots and like roman stripes in others. For miles around on either side of the road are these fields of wheat, and in some places one could see the winter wheat coming through the brown soil. The long untilled strips of stubble were yellow. On the horizon the rim rock was topped with pines. The ground was rolling and although there was a good highway to Ryegate, we took the back gravel roads to see more of Fr. Kittleson's parish which is much larger than the state of Rhode Island and yet has a population of only 70 families. His people are also German Russians, and many of them have as much as four sections of land, 680 acres to a section. The small farmers who had only quarter of a section of land were crowded out by drought and depression and the others who could stick it out increased their fields. In addition to wheat they raise cattle and sheep. As we drove we saw a herd of deer feeding on the winter wheat. There are antelope too, and the wild beasts who prey on the stock are the wild cats and the coyotes. There are prairie dogs and gophers in this part of the country, and coming up by bus, watching the road from the front seat at night three times I saw kangaroo rats scurrying across the highway.

Father Kittelson has no housekeeper so he is fortunate right now to be having a visit from his French mother and Norwegian father from Denver (both born in this country.) The rectory is humble enough to be indistinguishable from other houses around, and big enough for visitors, with four bedrooms, and living room,

dining room, kitchen and office, and Fr. is going to have some of the Mexican boys up from Billings during the hunting season. Next door to the rectory there is a public school, grade and high school. Out through the countryside he pointed out schools to me where there were only three and five pupils and yet were kept open because next year perhaps ten more would be entering.

I am fortunate to be ending the Christmas season of the church which I began in Monsignor Hellriegel's parish, here on the feast of the purification with Fr. Kittleson. His church is small but simple and the maroon drapes behind the altar, and all the candles lit on altar and in the body of the church and the snowy vestments looked very beautiful this morning. The church was half full, though this was Wednesday and everyone received communion, men, women and children. The two altar boys, one of Dutch descent, one Russian German, had breakfast with us afterward and spoke of how they loved to go hunting with bow and arrow for rabbits and squirrels. (Don Humphries of St. Cloud was hunting for deer with bow and arrow this fall.) They had quite a job this morning, those altar boys, what with the blessing of the candles, the procession, and the lighting of the congregation's candles again before the Gospel and Preface. We were prepared for the feast last night during the regular Tuesday devotions by reading of an article from *Worship*.

Tomorrow in spite of a heavy fall of snow around Billings, I will set out for Cody, Wyoming where I am to speak tomorrow night. Later I will visit Georgia Kernan and then come back here to set out for other visits around Montana. That will be a March On Pilgrimage.