

C. W. Retreat

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1939, 4.

Summary: Points to Christ's example of getting away from the multitudes and the importance of finding Him for their work. Notes that a three day silent retreat attended by people from 15 Catholic Worker houses has led to a their renewed sense of strength, unity, and purpose. (DDLW #345).

Again and again Christ had to get away from the multitudes who were thronging about Him to be healed, to be fed, and to hear His words. We read of how He went away into desert places to pray. He went out into a boat, He stopped to rest by the well, he went up on a mountain. He even had to get away from His chosen friends. He went away, the accounts read, to pray.

Last month, seventy-two of our fellow workers came together at Easton, at the Catholic Worker Farm, withdrawing themselves for a time from the work, to pray, to meditate, to listen to the teaching of Christ, and to build up the reserves of strength they need. The retreat was given by Fr. Joachim Benson, editor of the *Preservation of the Faith*, a member of the order of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. Fr. Joachim has long been a friend of the work. He has visited us since the Fifteenth Street days and he knows our problems and has visited our houses throughout the country. For three days we had a closed retreat, silence was kept, as much as was humanly possible, no problems were discussed, no reading was done which was not spiritual. It was a time of real happiness.

For the past few years we have had colloquiums and when they were over, and the hours of discussion were past, everyone left, glad to get away from each other, glad to be free of all the talk. Problems did not seem to get settled. By the time this retreat was over, and we gathered together for a social evening of talk and discussion, we found such unity amongst us all, that there seemed no reason for discussion. When we separated, it was with pain, we hated to leave each other, we loved each other more truly than ever before, and felt that sense of comradeship, that sense of Christian solidarity which will strengthen us for the work. Fifteen groups were represented and we hope next year there will be representatives from all twenty-[one].

Many suffered great hardships to get here. They hitchhiked, the weather was cold and they had to sleep out, they hungered and thirsted.

We all convey again our thanks to Father Benson. God was good to him and to us. He gave him just the right words, he moved the hearts of all and enlivened them. There was no let down for one moment. It was not a question of swaying the emotions of his hearers either. Our wills were strengthened, our minds were stimulated. Practically everyone received Holy Communion every day and more than ever before do we recognize that here is the source of our greatest strength.

Of course the work at the houses had to go on while all of us were absent and we are indebted beyond measure to all our fellow workers who kept things going so well in our absence. To repay them, we are trying to send them off on retreats, two by two. This week, thanks to the editors of the Commonweal, two of the men who help manage the breadline are in Portsmouth Priory, sharing a retreat with them, with all expense borne by the others.

Living as we do in the midst of thousands, almost in the streets, I am often reminded of our quest:

"I will arise and go about the city: in the streets and broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.

"I sought Him and found Him not. . . . But, when I had a little passed by them, I found Him whom my soul loveth: I held Him and I will not let Him go."

We must all of us pass by these works of ours, because if we don't find Him and hold Him, how are we to bring Him to the others?