

On Pilgrimage - October/November 1972

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Recovering from illness at the Tivoli farm, she reflects on prayer, praying for those who commit suicide, avoiding judgment of self and others, paying taxes, living and working in community, and resisting government bureaucracy. (DDLW #525).

Always I have loved the Psalms, and my morning and evening prayers, alone and in common, are made up of them. The **Our Father**, the one and only prayer Jesus Christ taught us, I say three times a day on my knees, if possible. But there are, of course, lines in the Psalms I ignore. “They do not speak to my condition,” as the Quakers say. One such line is “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.” I prefer the words “God wills that all men be saved.” I don’t want to see my fellow men falling all around me.

Remembering the Dead

Right now I bring this up because November is traditionally the month when we commemorate the dead. Nov. 1 is All Saints Day. Nov. 2 is All Souls Day. This year, among all our other dead, we commemorate the deaths of Saul Alinsky and Paul Goodman, both of whom I believe did a great amount of good and had the clear intelligence the older St. Teresa so esteemed in spiritual advisors. I do not separate body and soul, secular and spiritual. They all go together. Both men brought about great clarification of thought (the first plank in Peter Maurin’s program), and brought hope and self-respect to the oppressed in the field of economics and education.

St. Augustine (to whom Paul Goodman was rather startlingly compared, it seemed to me, because of his public confession) wrote in **The City of God**, “All men are members or potential members of the Body of Christ.” So we should look upon them as such. If in some ways they are our opponents, or at least inimical on some issues (like sex)—well, Jesus told us to love our enemies, many of whom are of our own dear household. He also told us **not to judge**. Hard sayings.

Fr. Zachary, God rest his soul, a priest at the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe on 14th St., said to me years ago, “There is no **time** with God.” And he told me to pray “in the future” for an 18 year-old friend who had committed suicide. “Since there is no time with God, your prayers now will have called down the grace of a happy death. At the moment of death that boy will have been given the choice of light or darkness, beauty or ugliness, peace or endless horror.” (And who does not long for light and happiness?)

So I include all the unhappy deaths of all those who seem to have rejected all religion. “Religious” people are so often responsible for turning them from Him.

Reasons for Hope

I am here at Tivoli where I am remaining now, not only because of a cold affecting my throat which is hard to shake off (a recurring cough keeps me from speaking), but also to escape some of the demands of visitors, telephones, hospitality problems, over-crowding, noise, etc., which make up our life at First Street.

There are many samples of heaven as well as samples of hell. The latter include sicknesses, mental illnesses, the loneliness of old age, as well as of youth. Even in community there is loneliness and the bitterness of class war, race war, conflict between children and parents, workers and scholars. (We are indeed schools of non-violence, wherever Catholic Worker houses of hospitality are set up. We do not live in an ivory tower.)

But the view at Tivoli is heavenly. The tidal river flows up toward Albany and down towards New York. Beauty of sunrise and sunset, magnificent color all around us of sumac and maple, the joy of having little children around, and always work to do.

We are crowded of course. Everyone wants a room of his own! Which leads the young to live in hermitages, tents, sleeping bags, sheds and barns, scattered around our 85 acres. Our three houses are all in use. They have been described as “decaying buildings on an old estate.” Continual repairs are necessary. Lumber has been obtained by our unpaid labor of tearing down an old barn, a dangerous job. The young, male and female together, are working at one such job in the neighborhood now.

Picking apples, pears, plums, and grapes brings in food and means the additional work of preserving and canning. There has been frost, so hundreds of green tomatoes are being wrapped and stored. What with harvesting and barn wrecking, our own houses themselves are neglected, and dirt is tramped in. The few confined to housework resent it and charge that they are doing all the work—laundry, cooking, cleaning, dishwashing. There are 70, including the dozen children, who joyfully contribute to the disorder.

Working the Land

But what happy activity! People get over their “mads” easily. Looking at it all with a revolutionary eye, I am happy. It means Peter Maurin’s Philosophy of Work is spreading. **People**, not **Federal Governments** are taking over in many ways all around the country.

We are sick and tired of bread and circuses, government checks, which when they are increased to take care of man's needs, only mean rents are raised, and food costs go higher. It is rumored that Medicaid is coming to an end, protests mount. But if all this disorder of government bureaucracy will drive people to the land, to community, as it seems to be doing, there is hope for the future. We all have to learn the hard way.

On East and West Coasts paramedics, medical students, and doctors are operating free clinics. Free universities are opening, closing and reopening. People are sharing as never before, what talents and skills they possess.

We have to be patient with ourselves as well as others, and humble at seeing how little we can do.

Must Study More

The tide of violence and repression may also be rising, but it will force us to study more. I cannot recommend highly enough Lanza del Vasto's book **Return to The Source**, printed by Schocken books. We had been reading passages from it (which sold over a million copies when it first came out) in the chapel every evening, and are only beginning to realize how profound is del Vasto's understanding of India, of sex, of religion, as well as of Gandhian principles. He is himself a Christian, a Catholic.

He is on a short lecture tour now and we hope to have him for a day or so. We have been a bit afraid of him in the past, his communities in France and South America seem so perfect, and we so lax in our own, so compromising in our principles, so inadequate in trying to work out, by non-violence, a new social order, so unbalanced in our emphasis on man's freedom (and our own), and so undisciplined. And yet we have a sureness we are on the right path. We are learning. As St. Paul says, in addition to not judging others, we won't judge ourselves either.

Compromising

We know we are always compromising. Our space is limited as well as our money; so often after helping with initial payment of rent and utilities we have to put people on "welfare." (But what a cost in time and energy that means.) We use the local hospitals and get state care. And so on. We pay our local taxes on the house on First St., and the farm at Tivoli because we recognize our community responsibility. Taxes are about a thousand a year here in Tivoli, and the local newspapers in Hudson and Kingston are mistakenly publishing the loss of this revenue to our little village, after all the publicity about our contest with the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Government over the nearly \$300,000 tax bill the local IRS officials said we owed for the last five years.

(We would like to call attention here to the fact that this huge sum included fines and penalties and perhaps interest which grew month by month, and so reached this horrendous figure).

We repeat—we are not *tax evaders*. We willingly pay our local taxes though we supply our own water and sanitation services here on the farm. Probably it is fire department, and police department and ambulance services, including highway police, that the state considers itself to be supplying us. We have good relations with all, probably because we had to ask help in getting a violent epileptic, on one occasion, and one madman, another time, to the hospital. These are the only such incidents in the 8 years we have lived here. We are usually the ones helping them, running a local “poorhouse,” in fact, and not funded except by our readers, and all our young volunteers, who work without salary.

Strength of Prayer

But our peaceful revolution goes on. And learning from our friends all over the country, and from the letters of our readers, we are strengthened to resist the ever-increasing pressures of State and Federal Government and corporations and conglomerates!

“Dear Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief. In Thee have I hoped, let me never be confounded. Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.”

There is a terrible saying a priest once quoted to us, “He who says he has done enough, has already perished.” If we went daily to our local Church, and there, in the presence of Christ, brought our problems, our pain, our suffering at our failures, and our mistakes which contribute so much to the sufferings of others, then I think we would be more nearly doing “enough.” The growth of prayer groups all over the country does not mean a slackening of the struggle for peace and justice, but a strengthening of it.