

On Pilgrimage - June 1979

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reminisces about Peter Maurin and summarizes his program and repeats his favorite slogans. Snippets about books she's reading, comings and goings, protests, and mail. Notes the Watergate scandal. (DDLW #599).

I woke at seven this morning, thinking of the thousands converging on Washington, D.C. to protest nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. A carload left from here last evening: Sister Teresa, Kathy, Greta, Janet, Father Geoff and Belinda. A met them all as I was coming from 5:30 p.m. Mass. Others are going by bus.

Peggy Scherer and Dan Mauk are staying home to make up the May issue of the paper.

My job is prayer—sometimes, I feel it is like a prayer-wheel, mechanical.

“His strength is as the strength of ten, because his heart is pure.” Pure in this case means single-minded. Our Catholic Worker family has this single-mindedness. “It all goes together.”

Our Program

My mind goes back to the time I first met Peter Maurin and he began “indoctrinating” me with his simple program of 1.) Round table discussions for clarification of thought, 2.) Houses of hospitality where the “works of mercy,” corporal and spiritual, can be practiced and taught, and 3.) Farming communes which will lead to decentralization of our capitalist economy.

We have tried to stick to Peter’s program, but sometimes when I got myself involved in labor conflicts such as “strikes” in industry, such as the auto workers, Peter would say sadly, “Strikes don’t strike me.” And as to “organizing,” he would point out that “self-organization” is the beginning of a healthy society. “Be what you want the other fellow to be,” was one of his slogans. He liked slogans, because in a few simple words they “made a point.”

One of Peter’s points was that money-lending at “interest” was “usury,” and that usury was considered a sin. He had a favorite “essay” beginning “When the Irish were Irish a thousand years ago” and went on to tell how they brought the Faith to Europe with their missionaries, when it was being corrupted by money lenders. He did not hesitate to go with his “teaching” to John Moody of the Moody Investment Service and Thomas Woodlock, editor of the **Wall Street Journal**. Nor did he hesitate to accept money, to help the Catholic Worker with its “works of mercy,” corporal and spiritual, from these two friends of ours.

I am reading **All the King's Men** by Robert Penn Warren (about Huey Long of Louisiana) which Stanley Vishnewski brought me. A first-rate book. I had worked in New Orleans on the daily newspaper **The Item**—feature stuff, human interest stories. For instance, the “taxi-dancers.” A fascinating city. When I was assaulted by the “taxi-dancers” in a tavern, John Dos Passos, the writer, was there. I had a black eye from a heavy cup thrown at me. At that time, living down near the river, I wrote about the cathedral where I began to go to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament each night. When I got news of the sale of a novel to Hollywood, I came back to New York City and bought a bungalow on Staten Island.

Writing personally means the reader identifies with the writer. Writing “I” the reader reads “I.” In newspaper work, women were almost forced into it. My first jobs were at the University of Illinois and the New York Socialist **Call**.

Barometer falling. I was up early, reading John Cogley’s paperback, **Religion**.

Jane Sammon and Marj Humphrey are just back from their Mexico trip.

Stanley went to St. Vincent’s Hospital today to be operated on for a rupture. Father Geoff took his place at the Friday night meeting, showing Stanley’s slides of Peter Maurin. Tom Sullivan also spoke, and Gerry Griffin was there, both of them past editors of **The Catholic Worker**.

I became addicted to “detective” stories when I broke my arm at age twelve, and my Aunt Jenny sent me one Sherlock Holmes book a week. Dorothy Sayers’ novel, **The Nine Tailors**, is a fascinating story. She is a true intellectual, who also wrote forewords to Dante’s **Divine Comedy**. Another good mystery story is **Miss Pym** by Josephine Tey. I loaned some “Boney” books, about an Australian detective, to Father Lyle Young, himself an Australian.

On May 15, the anniversary of Peter Maurin’s death, Father Geoff borrowed a car and took Deane, Jeanette, Dan and Frank out to visit Peter’s grave. They brought me back little plants for my terrarium.

Stanley is back from the hospital and looking fine.

I am re-reading Tolstoi’s **War and Peace**. I like a good, long book to live with for a few weeks.

Several of the young people went up to the Times Square recruiting station on Armed Forces Day to distribute **The Catholic Worker**, and some people they encountered sent their greetings to me.

Pat and Kathleen Jordan and their children are on their way West by bus to visit their parents in St. Louis and California. During the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, the Day family went by train from New York to California. I was born in 1897. I remember the trip well, and have loved travel ever since. My mother was a valiant woman, traveling with four children under eight years old and stopping over between trains to have a glimpse of the Fair.

Saw the story of Watergate on television. The case of Bob Ellsberg's father (The Pentagon Papers) helped bring this scandal to light. "Power corrupts." (Lord Acton) "Every class can be corruptive." (Koestler) "No one liveth to himself alone." (Leviticus 19).

Greta Lindstrom brought in a good cup of coffee with my heart medicine this morning. Different young women come, and it gives me a chance to get acquainted with new volunteers.

Received a most interesting postal card from Victor Stier, of a cemetery in Holland which used whale tusks as tombstones for the whalers. My mother's grandfather was a whaler.

Marie McCall, who each year sends us home-knit scarves for our needy ones, sent me a gorgeous photo of a painting of a grove of trees, which fits into my Psalter. What an artist!

In a recent **New York Times** Sunday magazine section, there were some beautiful reproductions of Kremlin Art (religious) that is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art until September 2nd. I am again reminded of the Dostoievsky quote, "The world will be saved by beauty."

There was a vigil in Washington Square the night before an execution in Florida. We are a barbarous people to still use the death penalty. Ammon Hennacy and Mary Lathrop used to picket Sing Sing prison when they had such executions there.

Deane Mowrer is planning to go with a crowd of Catholic Workers to Shoreham, Long Island on June 3, to demonstrate against the proliferation of nuclear power plants with their dangers.

My brother John came to visit and brought our mother's two little travel diaries. What a gift and how I look forward to reading them.

My youngest granddaughter, Katy, a graduate of the East Hill School in Vermont, wants to go to New York University, and tells me she will be able to get a loan from the government. She has been interviewed and accepted.

Since then, I've been remembering my two years at the University of Illinois, where I was "working my way." There were no loans then. Actually, tuition was only ten dollars matriculation and twelve dollars a semester, with extra fees for science courses.

I told Katy that "working my way" at that time for me meant working four hours a day in a professor's family for board and room, and that working her way here in New York and living at Maryhouse meant her giving us some time in the housework here! Actually, there are a goodly number of students with us who "have the house" on certain days or hours, and what a good example they set for others. They have what Peter Maurin called, "a philosophy of work."