

On Pilgrimage - October 1965

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: While in Rome during the fourth session of Vatican Council II, she and a group of women fast and pray, aiming to influence the council deliberations on war and non-violence. Emphasizes the need for lay input in addressing the problems of the modern world. Describes her accommodations and dinners with bishops and friends. (DDLW #832).

“We have two days in each one here in Rome,” a young Jesuit from Malta told me. “That break in the day from 12:00 until 4:00 which bothers tourists and catches them unawares, brings about this multiplication of days. I wake up at 4:00 a.m. and so get in a good day’s work and am ready for lunch and my siesta. Then I begin again and work until midnight, with a break for dinner around 8:30.” The signs on the shops say: **Open 8-12, 16-20**, or the equivalent. Of course many of the Council Fathers do not have this relaxed way of dealing with time. Mass at St. Peter’s is at 9:00; the session lasts until 12:30; a press briefing is held until 1:30 or even 2:00; there is a brief lunch; panel discussions in many languages at 3:00; conversations that go on until after 5:00—and then I suppose they rest until dinner. I have had the joy of meeting many friends, bishops, priests and lay people from all over the country, here on the streets of Rome and at these meetings, not to speak of luncheons and dinners. As usual my life is full of contrasts, dining out with bishops and at home on a hard roll, a paper cone of olives and a piece of mozzarella cheese. You can live cheaply in Rome as a pilgrim if you know the simple trattoria, hot shops and pushcarts, and you see many a dignified citizen lunching on a sandwich as he walks along the streets. There are even the restaurants of St. Peter, supported by the Vatican, which the guide book **Europe on Five Dollars a Day** warns are for the poor and not for tourists.

The room in which I am writing reminds me very much of our own Italian section in New York. It is a small room with a very high ceiling. The immense window takes up the whole rear, and through my Venetian blinds I can look down one flight into a large courtyard divided into two parts by a wall, over which a luxuriant grapevine climbs. Pots of ivy, roses, and other plants fill one court, and the other, directly under me, is festooned with clotheslines. The sheets hanging from them help reflect the light up into my room. The windows are wide open and there are shelves of plants under some of the windows and little birdcages hung next to others. Children play in the yard, and there are fountains and tubs of waters for washing clothes at each end. Sometimes you can hear the fountain running all night. Rome is famed for her glorious sculptured figures in every piazza. There are always people taking their ease around these fountains, and children bathe in them in the summer. It is hot now during the day, but there is an autumn chill in the air and at night a wind springs up.

My room costs seven hundred lira a day, which amounts to a little over a dollar. (A dollar is worth six hundred and twenty lira). Bus fares are fifty lira, and I pay two fares each way to get to St. Peter's and back. the streetcars and buses are crowded and, because of the double-day, there are four rush hours.

I would not like to think of driving here, but I am getting quite accustomed to the rhythm of traffic, thanks to the reassuring briefing I received from Vincent McAloon, the head of the Notre Dame Alumni Center (Large Brancaccio 82). Mr. McAloon gave a discourse on how to cross a street that was so inspiring that I have been able to proceed with confidence in the midst of the wildest assault of foreign cars from all directions it has ever been my confusion to see. I go stolidly ahead, and, miracle of miracles, cars make way, dash fore and aft of me. In the two weeks I have been here, I have yet to hear the clang of ambulances. As one Dominican brother explained, "You present them with your life, these drivers, and they graciously hand it back to you."

Fourth Session

And what of the Council? They have scarcely gotten into the thirty-thousand-word pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which will eventually, after debate by the Fathers and subsequent revisions, be promulgated, either as a new constitution (in which case it will be doctrinal and claim the assent of clergy and laity) or as a "declaration" (which term might lessen the authority of the text). It is clarification of this kind which is being attempted at the afternoon panel discussions. Father John Courtney Murray was the chief consultant at the first week's panel. Ten other theologians took part, including such diverse authorities as Monsignor Francis J. Connell, editor of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Father George Tavard, and Father Frederick McManus, the last two most sympathetic friends of ours. The panel meets in a small theater with a main floor and a balcony, so there is plenty of room. Every effort is made to answer the questions of the press and other people attending.

Last March, John Cogley wrote in **America** that he felt "on the outside looking in," that there did not seem to be a genuine confrontation of the laity and clergy, bound together in the service of the same cause, the Church's **aggorniamento** or renewal. "Secular wisdom was missing." The Fathers of the Council and their theological advisors "are at their least impressive both substantively and rhetorically when they attempt to deal with thorny practical issues like nuclear war or the population problem. . . clerical and lay mind are both necessary to shape a total Catholic response to the modern world, which is one of the aims of Vatican II. . . but the Council's emphasis is overwhelmingly on the former. . . the layman is an intruder of sorts and sooner or later recognizes the fact."

This may be true during the Council sessions in Rome, but when I read the document on the Church in the modern World, which notes the "interventions" of the thousands of clergymen who commented on the original draft, it seemed

evident that laymen had, however indirectly, contributed their thought on vital questions of the day, whether they are represented by the revolutionary tin miners of Bolivia, the hard - pressed families, youth “stirred to rioting” or women no longer accepting their lack of status in the Church and the world. The result has been calls for discussion from both sides, so the document seems a tortuous affair, veering to this way and that. It is hard to see how the work of discussion, clarification, and voting will ever be accomplished. But Cogley went on to write of the sense of mystery and the awe he felt during the assembly of the Council and of his conviction that in a group coming together with such lofty aims the presence of the Holy Spirit is indeed felt.

New Friends and Old

I arrived at Naples on the Raffaello. I have a great love for St. Raffaello, patron of travellers, to whom Ernest Hello, the French mystic, once addressed a prayer beginning: “Lead us to those we are looking for, those who are looking for us.” I was led at once to the Notre Dame Center I mentioned earlier and to Vincent McAloon, who found me a place to live and who directs me daily on my involved journeys around Rome. At this center of hospitality I have received my mail and here I have met Dr. Joseph Evans and his wife Hermine, of Chicago, Richard Carbray, who teaches at Rosary College, and James Douglass, who teaches theology at Bellarmine College, in Louisville, Kentucky. Douglass has been meeting every day with bishops to discuss the paragraph in the schema on the Church in the Modern World that deals with the weapons of modern war. I too have been watching and praying about article 101, which concerns the rights of conscience of Catholics, humanists, and all others averse to the use of violence. I have with me three hundred copies of the summer issue of the **Catholic Worker**, which was dedicated to the bishops of the Council. Thanks to the American Pax Association and its secretary Howard Everngam, this issue had already been sent to the bishops of the entire world.

I have also met Donald Quinn, the editor of the **St. Louis Review**, who is here with his wife, Bob Hoyt, the editor of the **National Catholic Reporter**, and Monsignor Francis Brown, the editor of the Steubenville **Register**. I had dinner with Monsignor Brown, Bishop Shannon, of St. Paul, and Frank McDonald, a Notre Dame man now at Oxford, who is spending this time at Rome because he is learning Italian and is fascinated by the Council. The bishop talked about tradition, quoting T. S. Elliot, and Frank, who could be included among the rebellious youth whom the Council schema says must be listened to and taken into consideration, was deeply impressed. I thought of how rare such men as Bishop Shannon are, men who show respect for all others and listen to them with sympathy. In his **Journey of a Soul**, Pope John XXIII paid tribute to one such priest, Father Francesco Pitocchi, who was always ready to listen to the poor. I am thinking of myself as I wrote this, and of how those as old as I do not listen enough, with warmth and loving kindness. Not that one should

not speak. Certainly I myself find it easy to talk to someone who talks readily, just as I relapse into silence before the silent.

Among other great ones of the clerical world with whom I dined were Archbishop Thomas D. Roberts, Bishop John Wright, of Pittsburgh, and Bishop Joseph Brunini, of Jackson. And I briefly encountered others, whose hospitality cheered me, like Bishop Paul Hallinan, of Atlanta, Bishop Delargey, of Auckland, New Zealand, and Bishop Eustace Smith, O.F.M., of Beirut, Lebanon. I had lunch with Mariella Benziger and her sister, with Janet Kalven, of the Grail, with Father Riches, who is a convert and a cousin of the two Fathers de Menasce, whose writings in the **Commonweal** have impressed me so, and with Sister John Baptist, from California. And I paid my respects to his Beatitude, Maximos IV Saigh, Patriarch-Cardinal, who offers his liturgical worship in Arabic and Greek.

I met Trappists too, priests and students who are permitted to speak and visit while in Rome. Father Lamb is a friend of Father Charles English, one of our former editors, and we had a pleasant day together before he went back to his studies. He gave me the address of the Little Sisters of Jesus, whose place is on the Vicolo de Onofrio, in a poor section across the Tiber. The headquarters of the Little Sisters is on the grounds of the Trappist Monastery at Tre Fontana, which I visited last time I was in Rome on the pilgrimage of women for peace.

Happy Beginning

But I must pay tribute to St. Anthony and to the honesty of the Italian people. When I arrived in Rome from Naples, I tried to telephone Vincent McAloon from the terminal. I was not able to reach him and was about to get into a cab when I realized that I had left my bag hanging on the telephone. Ruth Collins had bought the bag in India and given it to me a year ago, and it contained my passport, purse and travelers checks, not to speak of books and so on. Praying desperately and with my heart pounding, I rushed back to the telephone and found three men standing there, a soldier and two porters. “**Dove? Mi bolsa?**” I gasped. I was answered with beaming smiles and led away by one of them to a counter for tourists, where I was given my bag, to the happiness of all. Two thousand lira sounds like a big reward, but it is about three dollars and fifty cents, a very small sum in comparison to what I had almost lost. It was a happy introduction to Rome.

A week from now I shall begin the ten-day fast for peace, initiated by Chanterelle del Vasto, in which a score of women from all over the world will take part. Certainly prayer and fasting are needed today, our own work to overcome the spirit of violence in the world.

Ed. note: On the day before going to press, we received a communication from Dorothy Day, who writes that she and the other women have completed

their retreat and fast, and that she will be back in New York on October 22nd. “Everyone,” she adds, “said our visits and our fast and vigil (we each kept an hour before the Blessed Sacrament each day besides daily Mass) did much good.” The fast was publicly announced during a Council session by Bishop Boillon, of Verdun (France).