

On Pilgrimage - November 1964

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Remembrances of many who died this past year—former workers, guests, friends, benefactors—with descriptions of their work and character. Says their deaths are not cheerless as they will be with God. Mentions lists she keeps in her prayer books of those for whom she prays. Keywords: obituary (DDLW #820).

This is the month when we pray for the dead and read over again The Dream of Gerontius, and the teaching of St. Catherine of Genoa on Purgatory, who said that next to Heaven, that was the happiest place one could be because one is **sure** and secure. If the pains of separation are the most we have to bear, and they will be proportionate to our love, there must be great joy there. These are matters of faith, and a mystery.

Joe Hughes

When we think over some of the deaths that have occurred among us this last year, it is good to keep this in mind. Just two days ago, Marge Hughes called me up to tell me of the death of her husband. He had fallen on the street unconscious and by the time he arrived at the hospital he was dead of a heart attack. He was buried at Seneca Falls, his home upstate, and we ask our readers to pray for his soul. He came to us in 1936 during the first of the seamen's strikes along the East coast which resulted in the formation of the National Maritime Union. Together with Charles O'Rourke, Bill Callahan, John Cort, and Austin Hughes, his brother, who had been shipping out on the Great Lakes, he helped run the soup kitchen on Tenth Avenue which we kept going for three months or more, during the '36-'37 winter strike. He wrote a number of articles about it for the CW. When we were running the "Ben Joe Labray" columns (after the fashion of the Roger de Coverly papers) he was one of many writers of that story of the jobs of a wandering worker which appeared for months in the late thirties in the **Catholic Worker** I wish we could republish a series on poverty—those of the Ben Joe Labray (St. Benedict Joseph Labre) series and the John McKeon series on "Poverty's Progress." Perhaps they may come out some day in paper back.

Stephen Johnson, for a long time editor of **Catholic Missions** under Bishop Sheen, is another old friend who died this year. He and his wife had a little apartment with us when we lived on Mott street in the Thirties and I always remember him sitting quietly in his corner under a lamp in the bedroom, reading Scripture. He is survived by his wife Mary, who was such a mother to all the young ones around the Catholic Worker. She is living in an apartment near Medical Center, and fortunately she has two other former Catholic Workers

living in the same building, Eleanor Corrigan Gosselin, and Kay Brinkworth. She will not be so alone. May he too enjoy rest from his labors.

Then there was Victor Smith, of Maryfarm, Easton, Pa., who leaves a widow and (is it?) ten children. There is another family, the Christophers and their children, with her on the farm, so she also is not left alone. Eve Smith was a refugee from Germany, and worked with us at Mott street and on Staten Island before she married Victor. They lived for a time in the city, but later moved to Maryfarm and Eve wrote a number of the Farm articles for the **Catholic Worker**.

And then there are those who were with us at Chrystie st. at St. Joseph's house of hospitality, Jim Gosselyn, Indian Pete, Josephine, and others who came in on the soup line and whose names we do not know. The year before, Tom Cain, Molly and Joe Roche died at the Peter Maurin Farm. And Molly and Tom are buried in St. Joseph's cemetery there. I will always remember Tom for little hermitages and meditation places which he built down by the brook at the foot of our fields, for his calligraphy, map making, his study of the stars and of botany, his interest in the liturgy and music. Joe Roche worked with us for years at Maryfarm, Newburgh and at Peter Maurin Farm, Staten Island. He had been badly crippled in early life while working on a farm upstate. His brother buried him upstate.

We all have dear memories of Molly. All the letters we got from one of our young delinquents on Staten Island who ended at Dannemora, mention her: –"Give my love to Molly, –I remember her laughing at my jokes." When she was in Chrystie street she used to watch television at night from five to nine. When there was a comedian on the screen, I could hear the canned laughter, strange in the silence of a room filled with men who were going to sleep on the floor when television was shut off, and then suddenly Molly's laughter would ring out and the others would laugh too, because of her.

Here and there in my missal, my little office, lay breviary, Imitation, I have lists, some of the dead, and some of the living, and when I remember the dead at Mass I always add, "all those listed in my prayer books." Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

There are lists of saints in the Mass, and time out for us to remember the living and the dead. And my dead include martyrs on the labor movement, Harlan county miners, Memorial Day massacre victims, the five little children killed in Birmingham, and all those tortured and lynched by all our fellow human beings who give themselves over to those black forces of evil—of cruelty and hatred and lust for murder, which rise within them and take possession of them. Oh, God, you must—you will—wipe away all tears from their eyes, you must make up to them for all the agony they have endured, which their families have endured.

Even as I write the mail comes in and with it a letter returned to me marked DECEASED. It was a note I had written to Madeleine Krider, a former neighbor in Staten Island, so she must now be added to the list. She was one of our

benefactors, coming to our aid when we were forced to buy the first house on Chrystie street when we had to leave 115 Mott street and could not rent another. Many of our readers helped, and one of those who came in to the office to leave a donation was Madeleine, who offered to loan us three thousand dollars without interest for as long as we needed it. She did not have much herself, making her living by cleaning up and renting bungalows at Midland Beach so that she could live at home and take care of her mother who was bedridden with arthritis. She herself lived in one of the bungalows, a little narrow, vine-clad cabin-like affair, one of a row built before there was a building code, on tiny plots of land, put up mostly by the owners themselves. She had worked hard at manual labor, and she lived poor herself but she said that our paper made her feel ashamed of being a landlord and living on rents. Not many months passed before she came to see us again to tell us that in reading the Sermon on the Mount, part of which we quoted in that month's issue of the paper, she had been struck by the statement that when one loaned one should not ask a return of the money, so she wished us to consider the matter closed.

Later on, her mother dead and her own health deteriorating, she decided to sell the few little houses she had and go down to a tract of land she had bought in Florida, west of West Palm Beach, and build there a place where we were welcome to use with her as a house of hospitality for any one who needed a change of scene from New York. She invited various members of our Staten Island community to visit her, but they all clung to the familiar community in and out of New York, so she had to work with the poor down there. She had had built for herself a small cement block house, divided by a breezeway, so that she could occupy one part and her guests, when she had them, the other. At first nothing worked out. She took a few alcoholic women but was not able to handle them, and they too preferred the freedom of their lives in town. Then she discovered the town dump as a place where one could encounter the poor. She herself retrieved furniture and lumber which others had thrown away, and during one of her visits, she met a little family: the wife dying of cancer and the husband and son trying to take care of her in the truck in which they lived. They were migrants, spending all their time in Florida, which is a vast state. She took in the family, and the women stayed until she died in that little house set in a pine grove, so near to and yet so far from the homes of the wealthy.

Then she began visiting the migrant camps and helping the Puerto Ricans and Negroes who worked the crops, collecting clothes and food for them, and trying to teach catechism to their children.

On one occasion of sickness among relatives in New York State she came north again and the story St. Francis told, "This then is perfect joy," came very much to my mind. She arrived at what was then St. Joseph's Loft on Spring street, where we were daily being insulted by neighbors because of our guests from the Bowery and where on one occasion Judy Gregory and I had had eggs thrown at us as we came from Mass on a Sunday morning.

Madeleine came in the evening and there was no one there who knew her, and I

was on the farm on Staten Island. She was unostentatious in her dress, a tall thin woman, nervous in manner. She was referred by whoever it was in charge of the office, then to the Salvation Army, where she could get a bed for the night for thirty five cents, sharing a huge dormitory with the derelict women from the Bowery. I was not too much surprised at this, since on several occasions I myself had been taken for a Bowery woman, both at the Municipal lodging house and at a Catholic nursery where I was abruptly dismissed by a busy young nun at a day nursery. I had gone there trying to get the child of a young unwed mother taken care of, but before I could even make my wants known I had the door shut in my face with the curt remark, "Go away, I can do nothing for you!" I could well understand a young nun in the midst of some crisis with a score of tiny children being hasty and thought nothing of it—was even glad to be so closely identified with the poor as to share the insults and contempt they encountered.

But Madeleine—sick as she always was! And our benefactor! But she went where she was told, and shared the lodging of the poor, overwhelmed with compassion for them, and only wishing she could do more to help them. As though this encounter with our hospitality was not enough, when she came to Spring street for a cup of tea the next morning she met with more rudeness. She asked for a cup of hot water and was brought coffee instead, which she gave to an old woman sitting next to her. When she went over to the sink to get some of the boiling hot water from the faucet, the dish washer snarled at her, "Don't you like the way we wash dishes around here?"

But she finally got the cup of hot water to make her tea from the tea bag she carried in her purse, and she got the directions to Staten Island and visited us there and when she told me the story, she felt only sadness at the way poor, old and unattractive women are treated. As for herself, "This then was perfect joy," bringing her a bit nearer to the suffering of Christ and by her very sharing, lightening to some degree the burden of others.

I thought of these things when I received the terse message from the postoffice, "Deceased." I have no way either of knowing whether it was really true, because we only exchanged notes yearly. I knew she had gone to a nursing home some months before. Death is always taking us by surprise.

For those who will say, "Dear Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," such stories of the deaths of his little ones are anything but cheerless. "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," Jesus said to the poor criminal dying in agony nearby on the cross.

"What is it I love when I love Thee?" St. Augustine asked. I have only an old translation here at Perkinsville, but I will copy the passage and maybe it will induce our readers to go back to this wonderful book.

"Thou hast stricken my heart with Thy word and I loved Thee. Yes also heaven and earth and all that therein is—behold on every side they bid me love Thee. But what do I love when I love Thee? Not beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, not sweet melodies

of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love when I love my God. And yet I love a kind of light and melody and fragrance, meat and embracement of my inner man, where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. That is what I love when I love my God.”

Lord, increase in me this love. Take away my heart of stone and give me heart of flesh. In Thee have I hoped, let me never be confounded. I believe, help Thou mine unbelief. I pray for this for all of us, in the words of Scripture itself, uttered by the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, and who told us—“Ask and you shall receive.”