

On Pilgrimage - February 1968

By Dorothy Day

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Summary:

Resists the “January doldrums” and writes about the continuing struggle of California farm workers. Tells of her visit to Sicily and England, giving details of the plane flights and her reasons for preferring planes over buses and ships. Praises the work of mercy of a disabled man. Keyword: nonviolence

(DDLW #862).

My sister and I used to call them the January doldrums. I’m having them now, faced as I am with a lot of work on the typewriter that I do not want to do. There are piles of mail to answer on each desk up here at Tivoli. Marge Hughes has a heap of letters. Stanley has a heap, I have a heap. Marge’s Johnny has had flu and I’ve had a recurring cold. But do not think we are depressed. Interesting visitors arrive, there is interesting news in newspapers or magazines to be discussed, some good books come in from the publishers, and we are filled with vim. When we return to our desks, we are in the doldrums again.

Was it Dr. Abraham Low or Father John J. Higgins, S.J. (may they both rest in peace) who gave such simple and good advice in the group-therapy sessions known as Recovery meetings? To the woman who complained that she could not face the huge basket of laundry to be ironed—men’s shirts and children’s school clothes—the answer was: “Put the basket behind you, reach back and take out one shirt and iron it. Go on from there.” It sounds idiotic, but I start my On Pilgrimage article in this spirit. Just to sit down and put one word after another. I write this for your comfort. We are all alike, in that we are in the doldrums or the deserts or in a state of **acedia** at one time or another.

Delano Pickets

I am at Tivoli as I begin to write this. My room faces the river and I get up every now and then to see a ship pass by—freighters from Finland, tankers, cement barges, tugs, Coast Guard boats breaking through the ice. The freight train that just passed distracted me. As I used to do as a child; I counted the cars, ninety-seven of them, many of them marked Pacific Fruit. They made me think of our friends, Julian Balidoy, Fernando Garcia, Severino Manglio, Juan Berbo, Nicholas Valenzuelo, and others who stayed with us last year, in a cold three-room apartment on Kenmare Street. They would rise at dawn or earlier to set out on their daily job of approaching wholesalers and retailers, asking them not to handle the grapes coming from California, where so many of the workers in the vineyards are on strike. They are trying to build up a union of agricultural workers, and have succeeded in winning contracts with the growers, each success

won after the daily work of setting out on such visits as these and conducting continuing picket lines, which are in a way “supplicatory processions,” prayers, to the good God that He will keep them from bitterness and hopelessness and class war. The world is full enough of war as it is and daily there are threats of more wars. There are realignments of allies, a strange shuffling of forces. Weren’t Russia and China our allies in the Second World War? And weren’t Germany and Japan our enemies?

The alternative is to educate for nonviolence, love of brother (and all men are brothers) while being always on the side of the poor, a predilection shared by Almighty God and His son Jesus Christ, who, in Matthew 25, told us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the harborless, visit the prisoner (or even better, ransom him), visit the sick, and bury the dead—decently, with respect for that silenced body which has served for this all too brief life on earth.

God is on the side even of the unworthy poor, as we know from the story Jesus told of His father and the prodigal son. Charles Peguy, in **God Speaks**, has explained it perfectly. Readers may object that the prodigal son returned penitent to his father’s house. But who knows, he might have gone out and squandered money on the next Saturday night, he might have refused to help with the farm work, and asked to be sent to finish his education instead, thereby further incurring his brother’s righteous wrath, and the war between the worker and the intellectual, or the conservative and the radical, would be on. Jesus has another answer to that one: to forgive one’s brother seventy times seven. There are always answers, although they are not always calculated to soothe.

I can sympathize with the instinct of righteous wrath which leads people to take to arms in a revolution, when I see the forgotten aged in mental hospitals, and men sleeping in doorways on the Bowery, or fishing in garbage cans for food, and families in the slums, often with no heat in such weather as we have been having, and migrants in their shanty towns. We have heated the apartments at Kenmare St. with the gas oven day and night while the temperature was down to five below zero. We were more comfortable than the people in the better apartments across the street, where the boiler burst or froze up. Our cold-water pipes were frozen in half of our house but we were able to fetch water from one another’s apartments. There were two toilets to a floor and one on each floor was frozen and had to be padlocked.

The pickets from Delano have arrived, forty-five of them. They came by rented bus. The heating system failed on the trip. Now they are being given hospitality by the Seafarers International Union at 675 Fourth Avenue, in Brooklyn. I have spoken at communion breakfasts in the dining room of their hall, so I know how comfortable and well fitted out it is, an indication of the gains the union movement has made over the past thirty years.

Earthquake in Sicily

It is less than three months ago that I was visiting Danilo Dolci and travelling around western Sicily, which has since been stricken by earthquake and bitter rain and cold. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Dolci and to his fellow workers, and we hope that some of our readers will send him checks that will help them in the additional work which such a disaster has forced upon them. No matter how much governments and the Red Cross do, there is always more to be done. And donations, however small, are a reminder of sympathy. "Love is an exchange of gifts," St. Ignatius once said. Two of Dolci's books, **A New World in the Making** and **Waste** can be obtained from the Monthly Review Press, 116 West 14th St., New York, for \$7.50 and \$6.75 respectively. We highly recommend the **Monthly Review**, to which we turn for information about Latin American affairs. Subscription: \$6.00 a year.

I did not mention in my last account of my pilgrimage to Italy and England (December 1967) that, although I went by ship, I returned by air. In my many trips around the country over the years, I have usually gone by bus, partly on the ground of economy and also because it is convenient from the standpoint of the visits I made to various houses of hospitality. I would use a visit to a Texas school, where I received perhaps two hundred and fifty dollars, plus expenses, as an excuse to make a tour of Catholic Worker groups. Usually, by the time I got to San Francisco I was exhausted. But I can no longer use economy as an excuse. A trip to Minneapolis, for instance, is about seventy dollars by non-stop flight, and you can arrive as fresh as when you started out. When one has reached three score and ten years, traveling can be exhausting. It was this exhaustion after my Italian trip that made me overcome my fear of flight, which I think most of the older generation shares. Certainly it is just as easy for a huge plane to stay in the air as it is for a ship the size of the Waldorf Astoria to remain afloat. I can only marvel at men's accomplishment in this technological era and meditate again on the lack of development of our spiritual resources. I like to think of St. Paul's words: "Though this outer man of ours may be falling into decay, the inner man is renewed day by day." In the modern world it seems just the opposite: the outer man's youth is renewed by science and comfort and the inner man is corrupted by materialism. Anyway, I am partaking with joy of the beauty and comfort of flying now, and will try to pay for it with harder work and better use of my time.

In Rome I had met a Father Galli, who runs a center for young boys. He entertained a group of us at dinner one night on a roof garden just above the center where movies are shown and lectures and instruction given. He regaled us with stories of his visits to Staten Island and, on the morning of my departure, met Eileen Egan and me at the airport with a huge bunch of roses, and a relic of St. Helena for Eileen and a relic of the Holy House of Loretto for me. "This

also has flown,” he said to me, referring to the fact that the Holy House was supposed to have been miraculously flown from Palestine to Italy, (Pope John XXIII once made a pilgrimage to the Holy House). I am sure that many of our modern iconoclasts would like to bomb it out of existence.

But it was my rosary that I clutched in my hand as I made the plane a minute before we took off. Wedged between a priest and a brother on their way to London, I was reminded of the crowded buses of Mexico, where people (and sometimes sheep and chickens) were packed so close that I used to think that in the accident which always seemed imminent one would be well cushioned. The plane started off with an increasing roar of the engines, which, rising to a crescendo, made me think of a recurrent nightmare of my early childhood, a dream of a great roaring, beginning quietly and increasing to unbearable noise, which I somehow associated with my idea of God. What this noise conveyed to me now was a sense of enormous power, lifting us with a great thrust into the air. I did not realize that my eyes had been closed until I opened them to notice that we were already above the clouds and our heavenly conveyance was quite smooth, that is, until we began to feel that we were driving over rough roads. One of my seat mates said, “bit of wind, probably,” and none seemed concerned. It was a small, one-class plane and it took the stewardesses the two or three hours of the flight just to serve the luncheon. I ate heartily, although I don’t remember what I ate.

Feeling that I was now an experienced air traveller, I left England on a Pan Am two-class plane a few weeks later. It cost 75 pounds to fly and 95 to take the ship, and that did not include tax or tips to the omnipresent stewards, two for each table, two for each cabin, one for the library, one for the deck, etc. When they have cafeteria style and dormitory on ships, I will revert to sea voyage, but until then, for the aforementioned reasons, I plan to take future long trips by plane.

We arrived at the airport in good time for our flight but had to wait about three hours—a slowdown, one of the others travellers said, after we heard that a half a dozen other flights had been delayed. The waiting room was so commodious and it was so interesting to see all the families, whose children crawled happily about under foot, that I quite enjoyed the delay. And the flight itself was unbelievably beautiful, sailing as we were above the clouds, looking down over another world, of hills and mountains and deep valleys and even craters, all tinted rose and golden and deep purple, inspiring a great awe and thankfulness in the beholder, to the Creator of heaven and earth. “The world will be saved by beauty,” Dostoevsky says in **The Idiot**. And certainly beauty lifts the mind and heart to God. Coming down to refuel over Gander, in Newfoundland, the dark wild tundra laid out below us was broken up by sky-reflecting streams and lakes. All around the horizon were the remains of the sunset, a rainbow band as far as the eye could see, that faded quickly into the dark of night.

To get back to England—The first meeting in England was at a Friends Hall, and was the Pax annual meeting, where Archbishop Thomas J. Roberts, S.J. was

to speak. He arrived late and left early, being on his way to a dinner meeting. He was full of energy when he arrived, having just left a peace vigil in front of St. Martin in the Fields, across from Hyde Park, where the peace groups, including a number from the Pax Society, had been standing in the rain a good part of the afternoon. Prayer goes with a vigil, and the Archbishop told us delightedly that the nuclear-armed submarine, the blessing of which was being protested by the group, had stuck in the mud after being launched and had to poise there in ingominy until the tide came in and floated it off. The tides had not obeyed King Canute!

The Archbishop told of a delightful assignment he had received: to act as chaplain on a former troop ship which used to carry thirty thousand men. Troops are now transported by air, he explained, and with the breakup of the British Empire, a new use has been found for the ships. They are turned into floating schools, with dormitories for school children. The trip he is taking will be along the west coast of Africa, with a chance to stop at all the countries along the way. Amid-ships, in what used to be officers' quarters, instructors and their families can be accommodated.

David Cohen

It was on a bitterly cold Sunday afternoon that David Cohen came to the Gresham Hotel, near the British Museum, to pick up: Eileen and me to take us to tea in the East End, where he lives. Here was an entirely contrasting section of London. We took the bus through the quiet Sunday afternoon streets, and during our subsequent walk David was most anxious that we see some of the ancient synagogues in the East End. David is a Jewish scholar, and in addition to working for a living, spends nights at meetings and searching scripture to find all the parts of the Old Testament that foretell the coming of the Messiah and the evolution of the rites of the Catholic Church from Jewish tradition. He brought out page after page of manuscript as we sat at the kitchen table in his little three-room flat on Thrawl Street, eating sandwiches and drinking hot tea to keep warm. There was not a bit of heat in this old housing, which had been considered most comfortable when it was put up by the Rothschilds perhaps a century ago. That afternoon we saw Petticoat Lane, where there are push carts and an open air market every Sunday morning. We passed Toynbee Hall, named after Arnold Toynbee, "who died in the prime of his youth in 1883 while engaged in lecturing on political economy to the working men of London."

Commonweal Library

While on my way to Taena Community, my bus took me to Cheltenham, Gloucester, where I was invited to meet David Hoggett, a young man who was paralyzed from injuries received in a fall while he was working with the International Voluntary Service groups of students. He has been flat on his back ever since,

and has the use of only one hand and arm, but he can type, and he runs a free rental library which is kept down to room size by being very selective. The books deal with non-violence, community, the common good, peacemaking and social change. You can get a catalogue by writing to the Commonweal Collection, 112 Winchcombe Street, Cheltenham, Glos., England. "Normally the library pays the cost of dispatch, and the borrower, that of returning the book . . . But no one should be hindered for financial reasons from borrowing, and if necessary stamps for return postage will be sent with the book." We have contributed a few books to his library and I have borrowed a few of Danilo Dolci's which I could not afford to buy here.

Such valiant service warms the heart. I know of another bedridden person who carries on an apostolate by using her arms for working, and her crippled hands for writing, not only letters but articles.

And here I have exhausted my space for this month, have still not reached the Taena community, and will have to end, **to be continued**. Perhaps I can persuade the Taena people to supplement my brief account next month, with a communication of their own.

Archbishop Roberts

We had a delightful visit with the Archbishop later, at the Jesuit church of the Immaculate Conception, at Farm Street. This is a hundred-year-old parish, and the church reminded me of St. Francis Xavier's on Sixteenth Street, in New York. The parish house of the Farm St. church is large, with meeting rooms for lectures, and rooms for consultation with the fathers. Archbishop Roberts meets people from morning till night while he is in residence, and I take it that he is treated just like any other member of the staff, despite his ecclesiastical rank. The American Embassy was nearby, but we did not stop to demonstrate our feelings about the Vietnam War.

We wish to go on record as fully supporting Dr. Benjamin Spock and all others in their efforts to aid and abet those young men facing conscription and opposing the War in Vietnam.

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