And For Our Absent Bretheren

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Alone in the country, she reflects on all the "absent brethren" in New York, soldiers, prisoners, conscientious objectors, refugees–the lonely multitudes in war time. Describes her daily prayer routine. Lauds the State School of Applied Agriculture where her daughter Tamar attends. (DDLW #397).

Long Island

Here in the country seven o'clock in the evening seems very late. It is pitch black outside and there is not a sound to be heard save the far-off whistle of a train, or perhaps some airplanes, or a car on the road. Some nights the wind is high and the maples outside my window bend in the blast and in my imagination I can almost hear the boom of breakers, the roar of the sea eight miles away. It is good to live on an island, even though you are in the middle of it and the beloved sea is eight miles away on either side.

Evening Prayer

"They are saying compline now in New York." I think to myself up in the dining room of St. Joseph's House, and I can almost smell the remains of the dinner, and the hot smell of dish water, and hear the swish of the mop as Chu or Joe or Shorty clean up.

A house of hospitality is a family, and as such is a small community. Chu did not join us in the rosary. Joe always did, and Shorty needs to be reminded. Compline afterward ends with:

"*May the peace of the Lord be always with you.*"

"And with our absent brethren."

Wherever They May Be

And we all think of Joe and Gerry, in Lebanon or North Africa or Egypt, and Jim O'Gara and Tom Sullivan may be on the Gilbert Islands now, and Arthur Ronz in India, and Jack English on a bomber (we have not heard from him for months), and Ossie Bondy and Mary Powers and Bob and Mary Walsh and Jim Quinn in England. We think of those at the ends of the world first, and then we think of those in the conscientious objector camps – Dwight and Jim Rogan and John Doeble, Ray Pierchalski, and all the rest at the Alexian Brothers Hospital and Rosewood Training School for the feeble minded and imbecile and all the other camps around the country; and Jack Thornton and John Brenan and

Martie Paul and John Cogley, Hoosag Gregory and Curt Watson, somewhere in army and navy camps around the U.S. And those in jail who have either rejected conscription completely or whose status as c. o.'s had not been approved.

I have more time, down here in the country, to think and to pray, so my mind keeps searching out, thinking of this one and that: Private Welch from Erie, who came in so many times last summer to help us mail out the paper and clean beds; Jim Doerner, also in the army, from St. Cloud, and his eighteen-year-old brother, a red-head, hitchhiking around the country before he was inducted, and Norman Hawkins, discharged after service in North Africa – and oh, all our readers who write to us from all over the world – all members of the Catholic Worker community, as I myself am and always shall be.

Yes, I have time down here in the country and that is what I came down here for, to have time to gather together and hold in my prayers all those members of our family, all these dear to us.

"God, give them peace!"

Their Message Gleams

It is one way to pray for peace, to ask for peace in the hearts of each one of us. When I say the Office each day, and I say it with the remembrance of the words of Pius X, calling for "an active participation of the lay people in all the public and solemn prayers of the Church," there are many verses in the psalms that stand out like stars on a frosty night.

*"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any harm come nigh thy dwelling."*That dwelling may be a tent in Africa or India, or a tree in the Islands. But there can be fortitude and peace of heart there.

I remember once seeing a man on our Mott Street breakline, reading the New Testament. That man was at peace. God with him, he was not a poor man.

*"A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee."*This verse I do not like to say. All I can think of is the ghastly loneliness of standing unharmed in the midst of ten thousand slain. No. "Let us die together," St. Peter said.

Of Loneliness

Loneliness! I think of that, too – of the loneliness of those far away, of the loneliness of each one of us, whether we are in a Catholic Worker kitchen, or breadline or office, my own loneliness here so far away in the blackness of a wintry night, with storm in the trees.

And then I think of those in jail, Hazen Ordway, Harold Keane, John Powers (who wrote Day and Night in the County Jail); Stanley Murphy and Louis

Taylor. And always I remember the blackness of the sixteen days I spent in jail in Virginia for picketing the White House so many years ago. I think of my sister-in-law's sister, Paula, who was in jail for sixty days in Los Angeles. (She was one of the leaders in a clothing strike). She agrees with me that no one ever forgets the horrors and the miseries, and the loneliness of jail.

*"And with our absent brethren!"*I, too, am one of the absent brethren these days.

But there is not much time to be lonely.

Those Who Suffer

Jail and concentration camps. How many thousands are spending endless nights and days there? Refugee camps – where are the homeless of Berlin and Hamburg spending these winter nights? What are they eating in Europe, and how many are dying in Calcutta?

What of Fr. Don Hesler – one of our own from Maryknoll, whose parents gave us our Michigan Farm – what is he doing in the Stanley concentration camp at Hongkong? God be with him and all the other missionaries, too, throughout the world. And the priests at home —-

So they file past my mind's eye, as I kneel in the chapel of the convent next door. To be in the country, miles away from associates, living next to a chapel, rising at 5:30 for Mass and going to bed at 9:30, keeping to a routine of prayer, meditation, study, spiritual reading and writing, is to lead a full life. The days are never long enough. There are meals to prepare, wheat to grind for bread, sewing, washing and cleaning.

St. Rose's Community

Though there are hours of solitude, the solitude is only comparative. There are neighbors, of course, in the guest house where I am staying, three others besides myself. There are about twenty-five nuns in the convent, young and old, and there are five teaching at the parochial school in the village, two and a half miles away. The convent and the guest house are being made over to be used as a convalescent home. The others in the guest house eat in the convent, I am the only one living apart, hermit-like. There eight children boarding in the convent, which used to be an industrial school for girls, and on the hundred or more acres there are five farmers, living in various out-buildings, but eating together in the main building.

Sometimes I do not exchange a word with any of these, my neighbors, and other times one or another of them is chatty. Then, too, half a mile away, there is Teresa, studying at the State School of Applied Agriculture. I can visit her often, but her hours are pretty well crowded with studies and with classes and

barn duties so that it is only on Sunday that she is at leisure, and an occasional Saturday afternoon.

An Exceptional School

It is a pity that more Catholics throughout the country do not know about this school. I shall write to Monsignor Ligutti about it so that he can carry an article in his quarterly, Land and Home. I shall write also to the Commonweal so that their readers may learn of this exceptional school.

There are no Catholic agricultural schools in the United States, and Peter Maurin has long urged his Salesian friends to start them. A great many of the State schools of agriculture deal with thousands of students and teach agriculture as a business. At Farmingdale, Long Island, however, there is not only class work and laboratory work, but there are months of practical barn experience and outdoor work.

The school accommodates about 400, but on account of the war there are only about 150 students. There are about fifteen girls and additional young women who have been studying all summer who are part of the Land Army or Crop Corps.

Animal Care

Barn duty starts with the first day of school, and students have to get up at 5 or 5:30 and show up in the blackness of early morning at the cow barn, the horse barn, the chicken coops, the pig pens. For the first two weeks Teresa was in the bull barn, where they also keep the calves. There were blisters on her hands from using a barn brush and cleaning up the place. Maureen, her roommate, was put in the horse barn, and had to get into the stalls with the huge draft horses to curry them. This is no place for those who do not care for farm animals.

Farm practice means going out into the fields and gathering potatoes, or cutting cabbages, or unloading trucks of feed, picking apples, or making crates. Farm carpentry is taught, too, and in the horticultural courses you can see the girls high in the trees, pruning along the roadside.

Diverse Training

There are sheep and rabbits and bees, and for the most part the professors are teaching the students how to live and work on the family-sized farm. At assembly once a week the students sing folk songs and hymns, and when I went there for dinner on Thanksgiving Day one of the professors said grace while all the students stood.

Yes, it is a healthy atmosphere, there at the school, and those of our readers who are interested and wish to learn more of it may write to the school at Farmingdale, Long Island, and get the catalog. For those living in New York State the tuition is free, and the board is something like $135 a term. It is a two-year course, six months of which is given to paid work on a farm. There are also many short courses offered.