

On Pilgrimage - January 1969

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Summary: Relishes the quiet of her room in their new house and describes the work and cost of renovation. Connects the many forms of love and how hard love is. She notes with bitterness the bombing of Catholic churches in Vietnam. (DDLW #893).

I am writing from First Street, and my window does not look out on people and trucks and the busy crossroads of Mott and Kenmare Streets, but over the roof of a one-story factory. On the next block north of us I can see five-story tenements, inhabited by working people, all the kitchen windows of which are brightly lighted at six-thirty or earlier each morning. We are shut in on the east by an old schoolhouse that has been converted into a factory and on the west by a warehouse ten stories high. The houses on Second Street face south, so they get the sun. That sun shining on the dark bricks is all the sun I see from my rear room. But I have silence, welcome indeed after the din of Kenmare Street. Silence, that is, in winter. In the summer, any conversation from the tiny back garden rises up clear and distinct to my third-story windows. But now, in January, there is the quiet that enables one to think.

Daily Mass

We are two doors from Second Avenue, and one block north is Nativity Church, a Jesuit parish. In a tiny chapel in the rectory, which seats maybe twenty in comfort, one of the young priests offers Mass each morning for the honor and glory of God, for the salvation of the world, and for each of us there present. There is a new church going up next door, and this is a piece of rebuilding which I welcome. The building was so very old that it shook with the trucks that thunder down Second Avenue all day. It was the parish council itself that demanded that a new church be put up and pledged the money to pay for it. The parish was originally Italian and is now Puerto Rican too, and we also belonged to it when we lived in the best house we ever lived in, at 223 Chrystie Street, which the city first forced us to repair, to the tune of twenty-five thousand dollars, and then took away from us some two years later. We look around and wonder how long we will be permitted to remain where we are now, in our new-old house, rebuilt at a cost of forty-five thousand dollars. We have two mortgages on it,

but the cost of paying them off will not amount to as much as the rents we were paying before on all the apartments and the loft building which housed the soup line and the work of the paper.

In the July-August 1968 issue of the **Catholic Worker**, by the way, there was a fantastic error which I forgot to correct in these more recent issues. I was trying to give a rough accounting of the gifts that enabled us to pay for the repairs demanded by the city. (We were told on buying the place that it could be remodeled for fifteen thousand dollars but the longer the work proceeded, the more changes needed to be made to comply with the building code, and the price soared so that I awoke at night in fear and trembling at our presumption, but fell asleep again when I remembered that the work was supporting about fifty people here in the city, let alone the thirty or so on the Tivoli Farm, and at the cost of the yearly salary or less of some of our political leaders. And St. Joseph had always aided us.)

The mistake made was this: I listed the sums given us by generous friends, and because none of them wanted credit I listed them under initials. For instance, N. P. \$2,000; M.A.B. \$2,000; J. B. \$5,000; E. W. \$500, etc. I did not go to the printer that month to help with making up the paper but left it to two of the other editors. As they read proof and made up the pages, one of them said: "What's happening here? We never get this kind of money. Some mistake!" And changed the column to read N. P. \$20.00, M. A. B. \$20.00, and so on. The other editor knew that we had received some large donations, but he never likes to insist upon his point, never wishes to dominate, so he shrugged it off, after saying that he thought I had it right in the first place. So this misinformation went into the paper. Anyone who saves the back issues can go back and read it over with correction in mind.

What riled me was the implication that what women wrote was not to be regarded very seriously. In other words, not much thought was wasted upon it. This is one example of the war of the sexes which goes on around the CW, one of the many wars. We have the war between young and old, scholar and worker, black and white, child- and parent, here and at the farm, so the CW is a good school, where we learn and must continually practice nonviolence in thought, word and deed. We should thank God for it. We are certainly not talking pacifism to a bunch of people who are agreeing with us. We have to try to live it. A daily examination of conscience tells us how often we fail. Whenever people criticize that spiritual classic, **The Imitation of Christ**, they quote the sentence—"Whenever I go out amongst men, I come back less a man." But I seldom return to my room in the evening without being sorry for some word I have spoken, some lack of encouragement given, some instance of cutting people short, some failure to listen, not to speak of being guilty of that horrible fault of enthusiastic people, talking while others are talking.

Discursiveness

One of woman's faults is discursiveness in speech. I had wanted to write in

this column about love, about being in love, about growing in love. It was not only the two weddings which took place last week—it was the strong happy feeling I always have when I receive communion and the strength and light and happiness which goes with it. There were just a handful of people in the chapel this morning, one of them a very thin man who had either come from the Municipal Lodging House or spent a night in some not too cold hallway in the neighborhood. He had a warm coat, but there was a stale odor of clothes long worn. There used to be many men from the Bowery or the Muni there when the large church was still standing, and I will be glad when the new one is completed so that the back pews will again shelter these homeless ones each day.

As I sat there after the Mass, my mind wandered to Cuba. Perhaps I was thinking of the need for a new social order, founded on work, not wages. But I remembered my first day in Cuba, in 1962, right after I disembarked from the Spanish line ship. I went to the Regis Hotel, near the waterfront, a place recommended by a black friend, Bill Worthy, who was one of the first to visit Cuba without a visa, and there I took the only room left—on the top floor, a center room without a window, only a skylight. I was tired from standing around while going through customs and lay down for a rest. I had an excellent little transistor radio with me that Stanley and I had picked up at a Bowery pawnshop where I had gone to buy luggage. Suitcases are always changing hands in a house of hospitality. Turning on the radio I was transported by hearing a recording of **Tristan und Isolde**, and all I could think of was how mighty was man's love, how tremendous a force, how transforming a power. And how wonderful it would be if our love for God, not just the desire to love God, were so strong that it would overflow into our work for man, for our brother (and all men are brothers).

Not only did I enjoy the music that afternoon but it gave me strength to get out alone and hunt up a little restaurant where I could get some supper and try to telephone. I had no friends there, but I did have the names of some of Bill Worthy's friends and my first visitor was Robert Williams and his beautiful wife. I will never forget his welcome, nor the visits I paid these people, whom I will always regard as friends. His newsletters from Peking, where he lived after he left Cuba, were filled with hatred of and revulsion at the things that are happening in the United States, but I felt then, as I do now, that that hatred too, was a part of love, a love for his own country and for his fellow sufferers, and a product of his loneliness in exile, his desire for home, for the South where he always lived and to which I know he wishes to return. That hatred too is part of love, an aspect of love, the bitterness and despair of the unwanted . . .

To be in love is to begin to have some knowledge of the love of God. It is the way we should love everyone, each person we encounter. It is seeing all as God sees them—as unique, lovable. In other words, it is a foretaste of heaven. It is the more abundant life, which Christ talks of. And yet there is so much suffering involved in it. We are unhappy with the suffering and the grief of loved ones; our own hearts ache, almost physically, and we are often heavy with sorrow.

Perhaps what started this train of thought about love is a paragraph about sin in the **New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults** (often called the Dutch Catechism), published by Herder and Herder. “It is sometimes suggested that it may all be explained as retarded development—not sin, but immaturity. Sometimes it seems that crimes are simply a matter of mental illness. But though there is some truth in these explanations, they are too smooth, too hygienic, to cover air that man experiences in his moments of truth: his tremendous, universal, inevitable and yet inexcusable incapacity to love.”

Yes, we love our own selves, and we love our own, our families, our children, but it is often a love of self, extended. It is not the love of God which we have glimpsed, which we have seen reflected in love of brother or love of country, or love of the Church, which strengthens men to the greatest sacrifices and endurance. It is seeing through a glass darkly, as St. Paul says, but we do get glimpses of this so mysterious love.

Love of Enemy

Some time ago there was a letter in the **Jesus Caritas** bulletin, which is published in England and is the organ of the Little Brothers of Jesus (of Charles de Foucauld). The letter was from one of the Fraternities in the Chinese district of Saigon and the Little Brother wrote of how much easier it was to lead a spiritual life in Hanoi than in prosperous and materialistic Saigon. It seems to me that I read this a year ago, and now Look magazine has published some articles on religious life in Hanoi among the million Catholics that dwell in North Vietnam. Here are those who are considered by the United States Government as the enemy, and yet they are the ones defending Christian values. Harrison E. Salisbury, in his articles in the New York **Times**, and now in the Bantam paperback **Behind the Lines—HANOI**, tells of churches bombarded by our planes as well as homes of civilians destroyed. He gives a good picture of the Catholic situation in Hanoi.

In the seventh chapter of the first book of **The City of God**, St. Augustine points out that the barbarian hordes who sacked Rome not only refrained from attacking the Christian churches built in honor of the apostles but protected those who took shelter there. We are not as merciful as these barbarians. Catholics in general associate the word **communism** with barbaric enemies of Holy Church, so that the majority of them have come to consider this war in Vietnam a holy war. We ourselves, liberals, radicals, pacifists, are guilty of contributing to the hate in the world when we fail in love of these our brother Catholics who feel that they are fighting evil and defending their country.