

On Pilgrimage - October 1951

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Extols traveling by bus and recalls the many trips she and Peter Maurin made to spread the Catholic Worker philosophy. Travels through New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio visiting Catholic Worker farms, houses of hospitality, and family groups, highlighting their work, struggles, and joys. (DDLW #624).

There is a fascination about travelling, getting on a bus and going from town to town, visiting fellow workers, seeing again the houses of hospitality, the farms, the homes of young married couples whose lives have been given direction and meaning by the teaching of Peter Maurin. He used to love to go on a long trip, from coast to coast, a rather zig-zag route, nothing planned, dropping in on readers of the paper, speaking where he was invited. At one school he would talk of a philosophy of manual labor, at another on the use of force and the force of ideas.

Remember Phillip

I remember one such meeting at Notre Dame when Peter and I met, coming from different cities, and there was a gala luncheon in our honor and Emmanuel Chapman and Robert Pollock and Peter being so immersed in discussion that the meal dragged on for hours, and they continued talking all night, almost, and until we were put on the bus next day. Peter was going in one direction and I in another, and when he started to take a wrong bus and Chapman steered him to another, he said, "Oh, that bus to Toledo was all right. I know someone in Toledo." And as my bus started to move out of the station, Chapman ran along by the side of it, to make a few last points, calling out in farewell, "Remember Philip!" We had talked of the New Testament, so I remembered the chapter in Acts, when Philip ran along beside the chariot expounding the Scriptures.

Spirit of the Apostles

It was very much in the spirit of the apostles and the saints that Peter Maurin used to travel, talking to all who would listen of the mission on which we were all sent in this world, to bring Christ, and Him crucified to a world which was always forgetting him, and to bring Him as we lay folk can do, in our families, parishes, in the works of mercy, in voluntary poverty, in hard work. To live Him ourselves, and to find Him, to see Him in others. People like to read and hear about others, to dispel that sense of aloneness we all feel in this world.

As a worker, Peter had traversed this wide country with railroad gangs, with lumber gangs, and doubtless by himself, since he told me he had “hopped” freights and been arrested for so doing, as a younger man. Doubtless, too, he had walked. And that is the way the early Christians traveled, and the saints of the Middle Ages. It is not so long ago either, that travel presented insuperable obstacles. Peguy said that “the world has changed less since Jesus Christ than it has in the last thirty years.” And now it is with gathering speed that we are moving. As the cheapest way, we take buses nowadays and I often wish we could get back to travelling by ox carts, or mule back, or on foot, to get again that sense of leisure, for time to think, to ponder, to sense God’s infinity and over-all care, to get away from the sense of impending disaster which the radio and press bring us, the hysteria of fear and preparedness which they are building up and which we must resist as a step towards peace. After all, God is in His heaven. Juliana of Norwich said, “the worst has already happened, and Christ has repaired the great disaster of the Fall.”

Pipe Dream

The very people who shout isolationist and accuse us of wanting to leave others to be overrun by Communism, are the ones who ignore Christ in their brother next door, who do not fight the battle at home for social justice. It is an upside down world, and one feels much a pilgrim travelling through it. And it is good to have this sense, even if we have it as Maria did in War and Peace, like a pipe dream, wanting to get away from her harsh father and home duties, and travel in pilgrim’s garb through the length and breadth of that vast land, Russia. We can be pilgrims in our kitchens too.

Fall River

Having established that sense of leisure which a long introduction gives, I must get on with my travels. My first stop after I left New York was Fall River, where my talk was sponsored by the Martin de Porres bookstore. It is good to see these bookstores springing up all over the country but here again I would wish they were in the slums, and more for the poor and the worker. Of course it will be argued that the poor do not buy books, but I am willing to bet that if people are interested in books and ideas, they are going to buy them regardless. The poor, the proletariat, have so little money anyway that they might as well throw away what they have. Sow it in books, and sow the books afterward, and the harvest will be great. I remember the Radical book shop in Chicago, on North Clark Street, where people hung around and talked, and where a little theater was sponsored. If people hang around poverty more, come in contact with poverty, they will be less afraid of it. Revolutions have begun (and why not the non-violent ones) with the printed word. Madame Krupskaya brought Lenin to the worker through the workers’ schools and libraries that she and other

teachers and students were interested in. The students and the workers. Peter Maurin was vitally interested in reaching them. When he talked of reaching the man in the street, he went to the man in the street. The Legion of Mary has recently sent out a directive from their headquarters in Dublin for their workers to get out in the street with book barrows or push carts.

Newport

From Fall River, I was driven to Newport where I stayed at the home of Ade Bethune. Ade was in the west, also on pilgrimage, attending the Catholic Art Association meeting and speaking to groups. It was good to visit again the studio where my daughter lived for a year with other “apprentices” learning a philosophy of work. They got up and built their fires, shopped for cheap food, cooked their meals, went out on jobs as well as studied calligraphy and other forms of art, as their talents led them. For to Ade as to Eric Gill, every man is an artist.

Upton, Mass.

Mrs. de Bethune drove me to Upton, Massachusetts, on the next lap of my journey where I stayed at the Paulson’s home. St. Benedict’s farm was started by the Boston group of the Catholic Worker, with John Magee and Arthur Sheehan as the first trustee. Now it is John and Ade. And let me warn our friends that our sense of personal responsibility should go so far (Peter was first of all a personalist) that property should be held in the name of an individual or several individuals rather than in the name of trustees. Because the law is such that a trust can only be established by court of law and there is no legal Catholic Worker, since we are not incorporated, and no trust. In order to be able to deed and dispose of property, it should be the responsibility of one or two. The ownership of three of our farms has become an entangled affair due to our ignorance of the law. However, this may make for stability, who knows. Now there are four families on St. Benedict’s farm, and twenty-eight children.

Capital Needed

Gardening is done, rather than farming, because we have never had the subsidies a religious order has. We have no money for seed or tools, stock or machinery; one can garden by hand, but not far without horses, a plough and seed. Capital is needed. (It is the small capitalist who has kept a respect for tools, for land. It is finance capitalism which we seek to destroy.) One of the fellows on St. Benedict’s farm was brought up on a farm in Ireland and has the brawn and knowledge to farm, but to make a living for his growing family (there are eight children) he works in a nearby furniture factory every day. If anyone has any money to invest

in a family, to draw dividends in heaven, here is an opportunity. They have four rooms and ten people to share them and there is neither time nor materials to expand the house. Water must be drawn from a well, and half the children are babies, including twins. In the summer, cooking is done outside and washing, too. When I visited Marion it was a beautiful fall day and the stove set up outside, smelled of the wood fire and the good meal boiling thereon. The seven-year-old boy was carrying water from the distant well and the eight-year-old girl was helping feed the twins. "It's the first five that are the hardest," Marion said. She has the sweetest smile, and the warmest face; it is a joy to see her.

Family Life

That night we all gathered together to say the rosary at Carl and Mary's, and one of the Paulson boys fell fast asleep with his head propped against the wall. There were eleven children there, and the adults, and after we had prayed for peace, Carl read a chapter from the life of the Little Flower, a book written for children, but much of it in her own words, and there was indeed peace in that sturdy fieldstone house that Carl and the others had built with their own hands. He and Mary had lived a long time in one room as studio, kitchen, bedroom, and with a number of the children. There are six children now, the youngest only three weeks old. "I used to say I wanted ten children," Mary said, "but now I do not set any limits. What God wants I want. I love them all."

It is a joy to sit around the table with the family. Carl reads the Bible while Mary serves and the word of God brings strength and quiet even if the little ones do not understand it. They have read through the Bible once and now intend to start the Knox translation.

Apprentices

There is always work in Carl's shop, even for the two apprentices, the two oldest boys on the farm, Martin and Damien O'Donnell, who work after school and on Saturdays, and are becoming skilled at soldering the stained glass windows which Carl has made for the chapel of the University of Connecticut and the Sacred Heart Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. When there are no big orders, there are medallions for the family to hang in their windows. (There are two of these at Maryfarm, Newburgh, one of St. Peter drawing in the fish, and one of St. Benedict, hoeing a garden. The medallions can be obtained from the Designs for Christian living shop in Kansas City or from Carl Paulson, St. Benedict's Farm, Upton, Mass.

I am hoping that these farms, these families around the country will keep their own log books, their own journals telling of their life and struggles, for the comfort and solace of other families in the fields, factories and work shops. So

much beauty has sprung up in this synthesis of Peter Maurin of cult, culture and cultivation!

Providence

I visited Mary Benson and Frances Mazet, who have acreage in Rehoboth, Massachusetts and who I always feel are a cell of the Catholic Worker movement. Doris Ann Doran, of 221 Morris Ave., Providence, continues her work for the poor of Europe, sending packages even behind the iron curtain, and she asks your help again this Christmas.

From Providence, (I had doubled back on my trail) I took a bus for Worcester where I was met by an old friend Teresa McQueeney who used to help the Worcester House of Hospitality. She drove me to Brookfield, Mass., where Gertrude Powell also has a center to help the displaced in Germany. Both she and Doris Ann are working closely with Msgr. Fittkau who gave us our retreat on the works of mercy this summer. Gertrude performed many of the works of mercy for me when she gave me a set of Jefferson's writings for our library. The Communists have set us an example of studying the history of their countries. Mao Tse Tung always was a student until he was precipitated into the working class struggle of China. In New York the American Communists call the workers school, the Jefferson School of Democracy. Peter loved to quote Jefferson who said, "he governs best who governs least." Jefferson was a great libertarian, a federalist.

Orange, Mass.

From Brookfield, John Magee drove me to Orange, where he and his wife, Dr. Margaret McMenamy, make their home on a beautiful farm. They have seven children, and in addition Margaret is a practicing psychiatrist. John is active in the affairs of his village and community where the problems approximate those in the bigger cities. There was a strike on in one of the factories when I was there, there was the old struggle even for the right to belong to a union, and the old opposition of the rank and file Catholic who set himself apart from the affairs of his community and in his simplicity feared the "outsider." We drove over to Athol where we had a good meeting. There used to be a house of hospitality in Athol, thanks to Peter and John Magee who indoctrinated a friendly priest. Peter felt it was the responsibility of the parish to dispense hospitality and make centers for mutual aid and the words of mercy. Then indeed all men are brothers.

Rochester

I had to get a train to get out of Orange to go through Troy and Schenectady to Rochester. I much prefer the bus because not only you save half the fare and so

can save more money from your speaking engagements to pay bills at the house of hospitality at home, but also because you see more of the country. It is a joy to travel through the New England countryside, truly the most beautiful (if you love people) of all the sections of the country. The farms are small, family sized, there is one village after another, there is still something of the community spirit. It is still a microcosm of all the problems of the world too. There are all nationalities, French Canadians, Finns, Poles, Italians, Lithuanians, Irish and the old New England stock. There are factories, and farms. There are the small shops. Everything is on a smaller scale. The mills of course are appallingly large, but now that they have moved to the south and to Puerto Rico for cheap labor and to escape the problems of organization (we have not made a beginning of organizing into the kind of unions the Popes have written of) the factories have rented out space to innumerable other factories. But large as these mills once were, they could never approximate River Rouge where 200,000 workers toil in that great Ford plant.

Mrs. Weider

In Rochester I was the guest of Mrs. Lawrence Weider whose home is in Brighton on the outskirts of the city. (I have not yet heard how she was affected by the disaster which made thirty families homeless in that strange series of explosions from natural gas). I esteem and love Teresa Weider because of her unfailing love for the poor. Her house has always had a Christ room and many were the men who went from our St. Joseph's house on Front Street to convalesce at her home. She has performed the works of mercy all through her married life, and her husband has aided her. She has six children of her own, now all happily married and in the family apostolate. To further this apostolate, Mother Weider has helped in paying hospital bills and buying layettes for innumerable mothers. She has had printed and circulated 35,000 copies of a little booklet containing prayers and blessings for before and after childbirth. You can get a copy by writing her at Brighton, Westfall Road, Rochester, New York. She is spending the insurance money of her son, killed in the war, to help mothers of families. Outside her home is a beautiful marble shrine to the Holy Family, in his memory.

Trappist

Mr. Weider drove me thirty miles south to see the new Trappist foundation which was being built up on the unused acreage (1,000 acres) of one of the land owning families in the neighborhood. They were starting out with twenty-seven monks and with the seed and tractor to put some of those acres under cultivation. In other words they were sent out from Gethsemene in Kentucky, with capital. They had the man power, even money power. They had individual property, but corporate wealth of a kind. And they had the spiritual wealth of poverty, chastity and obedience. I hope that they pray for the little communities of

families who are making a heartbreaking struggle throughout the country to establish Christian homes (little monasteries) in the midst of black paganism, as Pope Pius XI called our industrial capitalist era.

Pittsburgh

The bus trip from Rochester, through Buffalo, to Pittsburgh was a pleasant one, through vineyards where the grapes hung in great clusters from the miles of vines that stretched through the fields. In Oakmont, outside of Pittsburgh, I stayed for a few days with the children of the poor, the children of broken homes, of suffering parents, of the materially and spiritually poor, of the physically and mentally poor. There are many kinds of poverty, and to live with it is to follow Christ. But these children, I am afraid, fall into the ranks of the destitute. Many of them are the unwanted, the unloved. When they leave they have no place to go. They have no relatives or friends.

Peguy

There is a magnificent essay of Peguy about destitution and poverty. He wrote that there was a conspiracy of silence about destitution. People like to pretend that it did not exist. The poor are just above the destitute and there is less difference between them than there is between the rich and the poor. "To tear the destitute from destitution is a prior and preliminary duty. So long as the destitute are not removed from their destitution, the problems of the city do not present themselves. To remove the destitute without a single exception from destitution constitutes a social duty before the accomplishment of which one cannot even examine what the first social duty is to be."

Oh, if the great body of Christians felt this duty, so that they examined their work and their expenditures in the light of it, what a difference that would make in the world. What a beginning of peace and love.

Father Farina

Fr. Farina who used to be in charge of the orphanage, and who gave those of us conferences on how to grow in love, has been transferred to Donora, Pa., where the 27 smog deaths occurred some years ago. Down in the valley are the organ pipes of the great factories and up on the hillsides are the little homes. On one side against which the prevailing winds blow, there is a desert, a dearth of vegetation which comes from the acid fumes of those great chimneys. On Fr. Farina's side, thank God, where his little Italian parish clusters around him, there are tiny lawns, and gardens.

Cleveland

Our house in Cleveland, the Blessed Martin House on Franklin Avenue, hangs over a bluff, too, looking down on factories and a river. It is surrounded by little houses, and the Blessed Martin house is little too. There are Negro families upstairs, and eight men sleep in the Blessed Martin house down stairs and do the work of serving the hundred men who come in every day to eat. St. Ignatius high school sends food to eat. Every Friday night a Third Order Franciscan group from one of the schools come with their moderator Fr. Donatus and clean and paint and give out clothes, and discuss the problems of the poor and the destitute, and what they can do to help.

Commune

At Our Lady of the Wayside Farm at Avon outside of Cleveland Bill and Dorothy Gauchat live, and Jack and Mary Thornton. Jack is working in a factory in Lorain and Bill is driving the school bus and working for a feed store. The families garden, but do not farm, again for lack of capital and the time. When you are heading a house of hospitality, trying to have occasional conferences on the farm, taking care of those destitute who come to you for housing, as well as take care of a growing family, the work of farming is not for you.

“One time,” Bill said, “a colored family drove all the way up from Arizona, looking for work in the factories. They had to eat out side restaurants and they found no place to stay because of their color. They heard of us and found us at eleven o’clock at night. Of course we had room. There was a Mexican family who stayed quite a while and then bought a bit of land and built their own home. There was one man who came and pitched his tent with us for himself and family when our outbuildings were all filled.”

Christ Bed

There is always a Christ bed in Bill and Dorothy’s house, though the five rooms are filled with their five children and themselves. The bedrooms, added on to the three room house which Bill and some men from Blessed Martin house put up with second hand lumber, are so small they hold only the beds. My bed while I was with them was setup in the middle of the living room floor.

Brick House Needed

My dream for the Gauchats is the old brick house across the road which used to belong to the farm they are on, and where they could truly take care of Christ their brother in the destitute. And Dorothy could teach the girls who come to

help in the household crafts. Indeed, Anita, their eight-year-old girl could teach too.

Dorothy makes rosaries and Christmas cards so if you are planning for Christmas, write to her, Dorothy Gauchat, Avon, Ohio. She and Mary Thornton are also making baptismal robes and candles. To work with one's hands, and then to share what one has made. Too bad someone does not buy that big red brick house for them or leave them money to do it with.

Detroit

To give to the rich a chance to share with the poor the opportunity of helping the destitute, this is an aim too, of the Catholic Worker. And the rich need us to remind them of this. And when I mean rich, I do not mean just those who live in mansions, who have wages of \$25,000 a year, a modest sum as incomes go in our capitalist society upper brackets. Two thirds of our people live in the destitute class, or one step above it.

New Landlord

And as I write about leaving money in wills, I am thinking of the amusing situation the St. Francis House of Hospitality, in Detroit, finds itself in. The landlady, an old Italian woman who lived in an unpainted house next door, died and left \$150,000 to the Holy Father, and also six miserable houses one of which is St. Francis House. She had six adopted children and they are combating the will. It is in the hands of lawyers and the wheels of the law grind slow, even when such a beneficence is not accepted. Whether or not our Holy Father wants to be, Mrs. D'Augustino has made him the landlord of St. Francis House of Hospitality.

Help Needed

I am here now as I write, in Detroit, and Louis Murphy, in charge of the work, has come in to interrupt my labors and take me to a meeting. They are, he said, one year behind in their rent. They owe more than five hundred dollars on that alone. The man came this morning to shut off the gas and electric at St. Martha House where there are three families and twelve children; also at St. Francis House where there are forty men and a bread line of five hundred a day. Fortunately we took up a collection at the meeting last night at the Knights of Columbus hall where the general public were invited, and we had \$112 to meet a few of the bills. It is all gone now.

The work here operates literally on the Providence of God. Out of Carleton, Marybrook is a retreat house on a farm, which Fr. Trese purchased with

his royalties from **Vessel of Clay**, and which has had weekend retreats and conferences for the past year, for worker and scholar, young and old. Justine Murphy and the four children are out there, and Sheila, aged three, comes in the morning and says “Dorothy Day get up. Mass is at seven thirty.” She looked at my books. “Are those for discussion?” she asks. “And see my new hat, my grandmother gave me. It is new. It did not come in.” Because these children too share with the poor and the destitute, and while their parents are the servants, caretakers, counselors, as well as leaders, the children are growing up in that tradition. Justine cooked all the meals while I was there, and everyone helped with dishes. Fr. Trese came and offered Sunday Mass, and in the afternoon there was a discussion.

And now I am in the city, in the midst of two million, where I am visiting St. Martha house and St. Francis House and Fr. Kern’s parish and clinic and cooperative home for old men. There is an oasis here and there, a leaven, a salt and savor, and plenty of good wheat all around, too.

Thank God to see the work go on.

We Did

When I left New York, I told Tom Sullivan to save half the paper for me to write about my travels, because like the sorcerer’s apprentice, I am going on and on. I can never say half the words that are in my heart, as I see the eager generosity of our friends.