

# On Pilgrimage - November 1967

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*Summary: Reports from the Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate in Rome and receives communion from the Pope. The conference "resolutions" seemed inadequate to her regarding birth control and war. Says "No one of course was really satisfied with the resolutions but most felt that they were beginnings of discussion, and that a great deal of work was necessary on the part of lay people to work and study and develop a strong conscience about the problems of the day." (DDLW #857).*

## **Rome, October 11-18.**

Via della Conciliazione is a long street stretching from St. Peter's to the Tiber and at the beginning of that street there is the Palazzo Pio with its great auditorium where the plenary sessions of the Third World Congress for the Lay Apostolate are being held. The last congress was held ten years ago and many of the 3,000 people here were present at that Congress and speak of what a difference now. One man said, though he may have been exaggerating: "Last time there were twenty cardinals sitting on the platform and the speeches were each an hour long. This time the red hats are in the audience and only one now and then at the conference table." It was truly a meeting of the laity. And how hard it is to give an impression of such a meeting of folk from all over the world, from all the continents. I spoke to Alexy Boulevsky, from Moscow, who represented the Moscow Patriarchate.

There are so many pilgrimages to St. Peter's of people from all over Europe who come in their national costume that one could not tell which were attending the Congress and which were on a pilgrimage. On Sunday morning last there were four busloads of peasants from Yugoslavia in most beautiful costumes, men with their pure undyed wool suits set off with darker wool from black sheep and their perfectly round bowl-like hats; the women with long pantaloons and gaily embroidered aprons, looking like harem beauties. Eileen Egan, who has traveled the world over with Catholic Relief Services, went to them and with the aid of an interpreter found that most of them were Albanians. Mother Teresa, famed for her Calcutta work for the dying (she once spoke at the *Catholic Worker*) is an Albanian and Eileen found three of her cousins among the pilgrims.

The great square of St. Peter's, encircled by the Bernini colonnades, harbors many a picnic and all around the vast square, there in the shade of the pillars, families were eating their lunches, which included spaghetti, roast chicken and, of course, bottles of wine. It would be nice to see the same at St. Patrick's in New York.

## Great Honor

I suppose I should have begun this account with the high honor paid me and the Catholic Worker at the Congress. On the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, whom I have so often quoted, I received Holy Communion from the hands of Pope Paul himself—truly an overwhelming honor. Only one hundred and fifty of the three thousand delegates, auditors, consultants and experts were so chosen. Of those one hundred and fifty, only one other was an American, an astronaut, Colonel James McDivitt, who presented the cone of his space capsule to the Holy Father.

A journalist came to me afterwards and wanted to know what my emotions were on this occasion, and I could only say that I had been concentrating so much on the proper procedure of walking up the carpeted stairs, and turning away and walking back along the priceless carpets, past the red upholstered armchairs where the cardinals and members of the Synod sat and getting back to my place, that I could think nothing, feel nothing, but only say most heartfelt prayer for Pope Paul, who has been ill, and who looked that morning as though he were under great strain. He seemed, however, as the Mass went on, to draw strength from the numbers of the people.

I was told of this honor the afternoon before, while I was in the great auditorium of the Palazzo Pio. I was listening with such intense interest to the words of Rev. Valdo Galland, general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation, who was talking about the situation in Latin America, referring particularly to the guerrilla warfare going on there, and the tragic death of Che Guevara, that I did not realize that Donna Myers was trying to tell me something important. So many people come up to greet you or tell you they heard you speak five, ten or fifteen years ago, that I kept saying to her, “Wait, I must hear this. I’ll see you later.” But she had another message to deliver and went on, telling me to pick up my special ticket right away.

Of course I was happy at that Mass, feeling as I did that I was representing the men from our soupline, the pickets from Delano, and all Cesar Chavez’s fellow workers in California and Texas, and the little babies and small children of the agricultural workers who are at present at our farm in Tivoli in the day-care center.

I prayed, too, for all our readers and writers, all those who break bread with us, all those we encounter each day. I prayed for the dead, including Che Guevara, who figured so prominently in the minds of men this past week. And for Lolita LeBrun, one of the Puerto Ricans in prison for the violent assault on the House of Representatives some years ago, who had just written me, and for all those nonviolent ones who are in prison today, for their conscientious objection to the terrible Vietnam war in which we are now engaged.

## Impressions

When we 150 privileged ones were herded behind the wooden fences that are constantly being shifted around in St. Peter’s, there were three ushers who kept track of us most carefully. We were their charges and they kept counting us. At first to see that no one else crept in, under

the barriers, and later, I suppose, to see that there would be sufficient hosts consecrated for us in Pope Paul's ciborium. Anyway, it made me think of prisoners being counted over and over. Then too, they were watchful of our dress. One African woman in gorgeous native costume let her scarf slide down around her waist, exposing neck and shoulders and bare arms. An usher pushed in to redrape her. Another young woman did not have a veil and a piece of white chiffon was provided. It seemed to me that it was long before communion time that we were ushered out two by two, to form two columns on one side of the great central altar. We were pushed forward and then backward, so that we would be evenly distributed. It was then that I noticed how the carpets were attached to the marble floors by very wide pieces of scotch tape, a thoughtful piece of housekeeping to keep the cardinals from stumbling. I may say that I was very preoccupied with whether I was going to stumble, or whether one knee would give way under me as I ascended or descended the steps. And all during these distractions the Sistine choir sang a great Gregorian Mass, with the Magnificat at the end.

## The Work of the Word

Actually, the important part of the Congress was the workshops. At the big general meeting there were only a few speakers and most of the meetings were to listen to reports on the workshop. Since reports were in any of four languages we were happy to use the very good earphones and transistor sets, which helped us to understand not only the French and Spanish speakers, but those who spoke indistinctly in English.

The workshops were groups of 15-60 people, English-Spanish, English-French, English-German, etc., with different chairmen who led discussion on man's spiritual attitudes, the family, tensions between generations, cooperation between men and women, social communications, economic development and access to culture, peace and world community and migration. There was another series of eight workshops later and after each series there was a general report. When our workshop on peace got through with nine hours of discussion, there was a summing up. There were six sections on peace and world community and each of the six had a report, and they all had to be combined into one report to be delivered at the plenary session. Then later, after more meetings with members of the various national delegations, resolutions were formulated and voted upon. It will be seen that it was amazing to find as much amity and order as there was. It was all beautifully planned and worked out and everyone felt that large segments of the articulate laity certainly had been heard.

But at the close of it all, it was inevitable that there should be some dissatisfaction, and the conviction that nothing had really been settled, especially in the fields of birth control and war. (Racism was condemned unanimously.)

Priests were of course in evidence accompanying their delegations. I heard one priest say that it was surprising how many of the delegates, far more than had been expected, were against birth control. Another priest said rather coldly that it was evident that the Congress was packed with conservatives. Practically all the priests I spoke to said that the decision was to be made by the married couples themselves, according to their conscience.

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beginnings of discussion, and that a great deal of work was necessary on the part of lay people to work and study and develop a strong conscience about the problems of the day.

Towards the close of the conference, four or five young people were invited to speak. (All the speeches at the Congress were truly brief.) One complained that youth was poorly represented and that no provision for them to come had been made. Another that the rural populations of the world were not represented. Another that the Congress was not ecumenical enough, that other religions of the East, for instance, were not represented. Also that the Third World be more represented at these congresses, and that they be held at centers other than Rome. One young man was cut short, rather rudely, I felt, when he said that young people had not much relationship with the Establishment, that little opportunity or time had been given them to get together or to express themselves, and that other people of middle age were speaking for them.

On the whole the young people spoke well and clearly at this small opportunity given them in the final meeting, which took place with the Synod of Bishops present and so many cardinals that a special place had to be reserved for them.

I will continue my journal in the next issue of the **Catholic Worker**, and I am hoping to meet Danilo Dolci and to tell of his work in Sicily, and then proceed to London to be present at three PAX meetings in England.

I spoke on the ship coming over to a class of sixty seminarians on their way to the American College at Rome, and here in Rome I spoke to all the postgraduate students of the American College, who were already ordained. I spoke also, with Tom Cornell, at a meeting of Italian peace workers at the YMCA in Rome, many of the members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. I also was delighted to meet Fabrizio Fabbrini, former professor at the university here, who had been imprisoned for six months for his conscientious objection to military service. Those months he spent in an underground cell, with nine other prisoners who were there on other charges. They ate and slept and lived without work or without exercises. I consider him a modern martyr, and hope to interview him later.

I am sending back a mass of material – resolutions and speeches – to Marty Corbin for him to go over and cull from it things he thinks best. But probably the diocesan papers have carried far more complete stories than the daily press.

But I do want to share with our readers some of the delightful and more leisurely aspects of this journey.

The ship Marguerite Harris and I were travelling on was making an excursion trip and was packed to the full. Many Italian-Americans who have prospered in the States return to their country for visits and choose a long trip which will stop at many ports where they can shop and bring their purchases back to their staterooms. They do not have to pack and repack as they go from city to city and hotel to hotel, but remain on shipboard as if in a hotel for a month or more.

The **Raffaello** stopped at Madeira, then the Canaries, and after a few hours at Gibraltar we proceeded to Mallorca. Buses met us at each port and transported us up high mountains, through savage valleys, up more mountains, even on one occasion bringing us to the very tip of a volcano supposed to be extinct. Thinking of Martinique, I wondered how any householder

could bear to build a dwelling down on the flat floor in the cone. Perched as we were on what seemed to be a wave of petrified lava, surrounded too by wave after wave of barren soil, we shuddered at the sight.

Madeira and Mallorca alone seemed fertile. I was delighted in Mallorca to visit the Carthusian monastery, which after its confiscation by the state back in the eighteen-thirties, rented an apartment there to Chopin and George Sand. The three-room apartments each looked out on a fragrant herb and flower garden, always with a little fountain, and surrounded by a wall. A place to sit and read the psalms as well as to cultivate a garden—fruits and vegetables, bees perhaps for honey, and why not a chicken or rabbit or two?

Chopin's piano was there and not only the manuscript of his music, but that of George Sand's book, **Winter in Mallorca**, a piece of writing that reminded me in its bitter humor of Mary McCarthy's. George Sand had her two children with her, Maurice and Solange, fifteen and twelve years old respectively. She scandalized the islanders and they were frightened to death of Chopin's illness. Also the island was overcrowded. There was a civil war going on in Spain, and Belver Castle, built in the thirteenth century for the Mallorcan kings, was crowded with prisoners. M. Laurent, the artist, visited it and said that he saw fifty naked Carlist prisoners, some only children, "boisterous as they filled their tins with coarse boiled macaroni while the guards sat smoking cigars and knitting stockings." The story was that there were 20,000 war refugees from the mainland on the island.

No wonder George Sand wrote: "Why travel unless you must? It is not so much a question of travelling as of getting away; which of us has not some pain to lull or some yoke to cast off? ...

"I should like to envisage the human race as happier, hence calmer and more enlightened, and leading two complementary lives: a sedentary life of devotion to a happy home, work in the city, study and philosophical meditation; and an active life, of devotion not only to the honest exchange which will one day replace the shameful traffic we call commerce, but to inspirations of art, to scientific research and above all to the broadcasting of ideas.

"In a word I see the natural end of travel as a satisfaction of a need for contact, communication and the congenial exchange of ideas—pleasure should coincide with duty."

George Sand regarded the religion of the peasants as ugly superstition. She tells of a peasant awakened by his complaining pigs and reciting his rosary "in a dismal voice which, according as drowsiness came and went, died away or rose again like the distant murmur of the waves. From time to time the hogs still let loose a wild cry, whereupon the peasant would raise his voice without interrupting his prayer; and the gentle beasts, calmed by an **ora pro nobis** or an **Ava Maria**, grew calm at once."

Chopin, however, was deeply affected by the religion in the life of the people around him, and his religious attitude as well as his ill health caused him to break off their relationship.