

On Pilgrimage - January 1955

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, January 1955, 2, 6.

Summary: Visits friends and workers throughout the Midwest noting how each lives out the practice of the works of mercy and "Catholic activities." Suggests that if we don't face social issues as they come up we will gradually lose out freedom, "this great gift of God." (DDLW #681).

I haven't the memory of an Ammon so I'll probably leave out innumerable incidents, and visits with people on this long trip which I am making around the coasts of the United States. One way of doing this is to start with the present and work back.

Christmas is over and gone but it sure looks like Christmas here in Davenport where I am writing in the offices of the Catholic Messenger. This paper has become of national interest for the way news and books and papal statements are handled. The Christmas issue is an example, with its excerpts from all the papal peace messages as a special feature. All who are interested in peace and papal pronouncements should subscribe to this paper (three dollars a year) and just writing to 410 Brady Street, Davenport, Iowa will bring you the best diocesan weekly in the country. (Come to think of it, the Free Press of Worcester, Mass., Bishop Wright's paper is another!)

Last night I was a guest at the McDonald house, and after the Christmas rush with five little children and relatives, that was true hospitality, taking in the stranger. Virginia radiates peace and the children reflect it. Donald and I visited Msgr. Hauber and Fr. Catich, both of whom are on the faculty of St. Ambrose" College where both Peter and I had spoken in the past. Fr. Catich gave me twelve sheets of instruction in calligraphy (issued by the Catfish press) some of which I have had before, pointing out that it is in writing that every man can be most truly an artist, since we all write and we might as well do it well. He also gave me two booklets, one on the making of chalices and the other on the Stations of the Cross. His talk was like a retreat. It was good just before going to bed to relax and listen to some beautiful recordings, while ten-months old Teresa sat in the middle of the living room beaming at us and quietly scattering the evening paper.

I am on my way now to Sinsinawa, Appleton, de Pere and then again to St. Paul where I can be reached during the month at Maryhouse, Little Canada, St. Paul 6, Minn.

Holiday

Still working back, I had a delightful visit in St. Louis, staying in Monsignor Hellriegel's parish for the Christmas novena and services. I have never had so good and thorough a Christmas, what with the services every evening, the high Masses in the mornings, and then the midnight mass, and three others in the late morning, and a children's service at the crib in the afternoon and vespers in the evening.. It was all solemn, holy and beautiful, a gentle holiday as it should be, with no anti-climax of surfeit. What saint was it who said that heavenly feastings just brought you an increasing hunger, an appetite one can delight in, and material feastings brought fatigue and distaste for earthly food.

Monsignor Hellriegel is untiring in his service of God, a great teacher, devoted to the children in his school. One act of pure love of God is more potent than all the active works one is engaged in, St. John of the Cross says and if growing in the knowledge of God increases our love of God, how great and sublime a work this great priest is doing.

I had a fine visit with David Dunne and Mignon McMenamy of the Pio Decimo Press at Baden, St. Louis 15. (Send for their catalogue of books and cards, medals, crucifixes, etc.) One day I visited Rhineland where Ruth Ann Heaney and her five children, and Marty and Gertrude Paul and their four children are living these last seven years. The drought has been bad these past two years, and crops and gardens have been a failure, so the families are hard put to it to feed their stock. Marty had been sending eggs into St., Louis but you can buy three dozen for a dollar now and he could not afford the feed to keep the chickens laying, at that price. Thanks to Frank Lakey who is working as an engineer in St. Louis some extra machinery and a farm truck have been acquired so Marty helps neighbors with bailing and other jobs. They tried to sell Christmas trees but there is no market for Cedars which is all the crop they have. I saw Jack Woltjen and Fran and Judy and spent a good evening after a meeting at the Center which is the meeting place for all the old friends of the Catholic Worker. Meetings are held, as well as classes several nights in the week and Evelyn Gibson is helping run the place.

I had dinner with Luke Lanvenmeyer and family and it was interesting to see the second generation growing up and demanding the right to venture forth into Catholic activities. The argument at the moment in Luke's family was as to whether Valerie junior could go down to work among the rural slums of southern Missouri with the two women who have a settlement under the name of the Rural Workers of Christ the King. There is great unemployment among the miners in that section. Here among little towns with such names as Bottom Diggins, and Fertile these women have worked for the past five years, with the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Their address, for any one in the St. Louis area who wishes to learn about them, is Cadet, Missouri.

I visited also with Boland Carter and his family and their lovely semi rural home in East St. Louis is a dispenser of hospitality to the people from Holy Family Farm at Rhineland Missouri, as well as to visitors from the Chicago Peter Maurin House.

While in St. Louis I went to a Christmas concert of the St. Louis symphony orchestra, and Luke Lanmer Meyer pointed out to me a beautiful girl who reminded me of Gerta Blumenthal from the distance, just the way she held her head, and sat there expectantly. This girl,

Dorothy Ziegler, went to the St. Louis State Hospital to help the mental patients with musical therapy. She is a part-time worker, Luke said, and that gives some idea of the caliber of the professional participation. They have added dance therapy to the work there. Luke himself has chosen as his special work of mercy the showing of films to the shut-ins and invalids, through the Volunteer Film Association. And one of the places they visit is a psychiatric home for mentally disturbed children. In another nursing home out in the country caring for feeble-minded, mongolian idiots and so on, they came across the sad case of a young girl, dying of a fatal disease, bed ridden, too weak to hold a pencil even, and yet mentally alert, and hopeful, she said. "I was sick and ye visited me," this is what Luke and his wife are thinking of, as they added this duty to the many they have as parents. It is so good to see these original Catholic Workers around the country still strong on hospitality and the works of mercy.

Before I got to St. Louis, I visited the Grail and saw our friends there at Gabriel House in Cincinnati, at Loveland and at Foster. It was a beautiful and refreshing visit. I spoke also at the Anglican School, Margaret Hall, run by the nuns of the order of St. Helena's, and before that I was at Louisville, laid low with a cold at the home of my friend Alice Kathryn. We visited Gesthemene, however, and stayed overnight, and Fr. Prior offered Mass for us at five thirty the next morning.

Part Two

Now I am at Maryhouse in Little Canada, St. Paul, and moored to the typewriter for a while to do some writing on my book. I had a good visit with Sister Thomas Aquinas at Sinsinawa on my way up from Davenport, and got caught in the snow too. At Appleton, I spent the day with Mary Durnin and her children, and she expecting another one very soon. Her husband was working until afternoon, but after he came home, guests came in and we had a most pleasant evening until nine. We had known Mary and Emmett in New York for many years.

In de Pere where I arrived New Year's Eve, Francis Coyle met me and drove me out to the farm, ten miles away where he has been working for the past two years. He lives there with his wife, Marguerite (formerly of the Grail and Monica House) and their little ten-months-old baby, Eve Marie, and downstairs there are the Hohlmillers and their children. On New Year's afternoon we had a buffet supper with a number of the families who came in with their children. There were three new-born ones, up to a few months old, and much rejoicing among all the parents. We started to discuss community and got on to Ammon's adventures in freedom on the streets of New York, which fascinated them all. The discussion of freedom in the modern world which is the title of one of Maritain's masterpieces, led us to realize our great responsibility in holding fast to this great gift of God in this day, when people, not meeting issues as they come up, fall little by little into an acceptance and the loss of it. Ammon, as Fritz said once, is a simple soul, and meets each issue head on. Wherever I go, they want him to come by too on his next pilgrimage around the country. It is like a relay race, these journeyings, of ours, as we carry the message of freedom and responsibility about the country.