

On Pilgrimage - January 1962

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Remembers the joy that brought about her faith and is full of gratitude for the Mass. Reveling in the hustle and bustle at Tamar's house in Vermont, she recalls "God's goodness and the sacramentality of things." On a speaking trip through Pennsylvania she mentions several strikes and the problems of unemployed miners. (DDLW #789).

Dec. 25: "The brightness of your glory has made itself manifest to the eyes of our mind by the mystery of the Word made flesh, and we are drawn to the love of things unseen thru Him whom we acknowledge as God, now seen by men." From the preface in the Christmas Mass.

"What have I on earth but Thee and what do I desire in heaven beside Thee?"

It is joy that brought me to the faith, joy at the birth of my child, 35 years ago, and that joy is constantly renewed as I daily receive our Lord at Mass. At first I thought that following the prayers of the Mass would become monotonous and something for the priests to continue day after day, and that that was why people were silent and bookless. Some Quakers going to Mass with me once said, "Now I know what the Mass is,—it is a meditation." But it is an act, a sacrifice, attended by prayers, and these prayers repeated daily, of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, supplication are ever there. One or another emotion may predominate but the act performed evokes the feeling of "performing the work of our salvation."

Christmas Eve and Christmas this year I went to the 11 o'clock Mass at St. Thomas, in Pleasant Plains, and was moved to the deepest gratitude that we are in a parish which has two such good priests. That is the greatest gift the Peter Maurin farm has ever received. We were included in the greetings in the parish bulletin, as "largest family in the parish."

Dec. 26: Setting out at 8, Stanley, Mary Hughes and I drove to Vermont to see the Hennessy family. Snow was heavy on the ground, and heavy in the sky tho not yet falling. We did not get there until 5:30 tho we only stopped briefly twice.

Dec. 28. Snow is falling.

Feast of the Holy Innocents. From early morning till late at night the house is riotous—Tamar's nine and two guests, an eight year old and a 15 year old. This morning they were out sledding after a hasty breakfast and now they are in again racing up and downstairs. The furnace fire went out and Eric is downstairs struggling with it. The fire in the kitchen stove and the Franklin stove in the living room are going good. The teen agers have their radio on, Nickey and Margaret, talking loudly are playing Monopoly. There is perpetual motion and perpetual sound from Mary, Martha, Hilaire, and Louise their guest. The house is in a turmoil of caps, coats, mittens, galoshes, scarves, toys and if anything is ever found again it will be thanks to St. Anthony.

The louder the noise, the louder the canary sings. In the kitchen, a mother hen and four chicks she had hatched unseasonably, chirp contentedly in a big box. Even now and then the hen knocks the cover off and comes out into the kitchen for crumbs. There are 3 cats, beautifully furry and Rex, the dog with long ears, beautiful affectionate eyes, a combination of brown beagle and cocker spaniel. He loves everybody, and sleeps with Eric and Hilaire, his head on their pillow. He has found food for himself up in the woods, a dead deer, and yesterday he dragged a leg up the driveway.

Today we are snowed in. "What shall we feed thirteen people for dinner," Tamar muses, and then remembers the 4 lbs. of ground deer-meat, which a hunter sent her for holding his stray dog until he returned for it. There are two sacks of potatoes, plenty of squash, pumpkin, turnip, onions, bread and cake. There are two jars of hard candies, and some apples. All the home made cider has turned to vinegar.

One can only try to keep the kitchen orderly, and find a quiet corner to read, write, tease or card some wool for a comforter.

A goodly amount of spun silk, and a great deal of cotton thread for the loom had come in at Chrystie Street and Tamar wove a silk scarf, and is going to set up the loom in cotton to make some material which she can afterwards dye. Weaving is her "tranquilizer."

Knitting generally is mine, tho I never get beyond scarves. I have made socks for the children, and once in a while achieved a good pair for an adult. One monstrosity I made which would match nothing and was due to be ripped out was seized by Anne Marie as an amusing gift (together with one of her own perfect ones) for a Worker Priest. I hope by now some friendly soul has re-knit it for him.

A friend who is married to a Japanese says that in Japan, knitted sweaters and socks are un-knit, steamed and re-knit to freshen them and prolong their life. In New York, the Italians who had brought woolen mattresses and comforters from the other side, take them apart and clean and recard them before they re-cover them. Wool is a live and healthy warmth.

As I washed and teased wool for the comforter I had finished last month, during the days I had visitors at the beach house, I thought of God's goodness and the sacramentality of things.

Our pastor said in his Christmas sermon—"On the one hand, Shepherds, Sheepherders, and on the other hand, angels." (Ammon has an old sheepherder living in the Joe Hill house of hospitality in Utah.)

Reading this month, Martin Buber:

"The way is shown by God in his 'direction', the Torah. This God directs, that is, he teaches us to distinguish between the true way and the false ways. His direction, his teaching of the distinction, is given to us. But it is not enough to accept it. We must 'delight' in it, we must cling to it with passion more exalted than all the passions of the wicked. Nor is it enough to learn it passively. We must again and again 'mutter' it, we must repeat its living word after it, with our speaking we must enter into the word's spokenness, so that it is spoken anew by us in our biological situation of today—and so on and on in eternal actuality. He who is in his own activity serves the God who reveals Himself—even though he may by nature be sprung from a mean earthly realm—is transplanted by the streams of water of the Direction. Only now can his own being thrive, ripen and bring forth fruit, and the law by which seasons of greenness and seasons of withering succeed one another in the life of the living being, no longer holds for him—his sap circulates continually in undiminished freshness."

Today Tamar wove another spun silk scarf. The thread is so fine that one bobbinful of thread made 14 inches on the small loom. I teased wool and made one quarter of a comforter. (I fill 4 gauze rectangles of the wool for the comforter and combine them and then cover with cheap calico which can be removed and washed.)

Eric and Nickie got sleeping bags from Sears Roebuck for Christmas and now all the children want them in this around zero climate where they sleep in unheated rooms upstairs in their old rambling house. It is simple for the juniors, Mary, Maggie, Martha and Hilaire, but the two girls need full size ones. Every now and then sleeping bags (army surplus) "come in" and what a welcome they get.

I must get this report finished before setting out for New York on Saturday. The first week in January I must speak at Albright College in Scranton, at St. Vincent's, Latrobe; Seton Hall, Greensburgh; St. Francis, Loretto; Mt. Mercy, Pittsburgh, all in Pennsylvania, and during the second week in Chicago, at our St. Stephen's House of Hospitality, 164 W. Oak; at the Calvert Club of the University of Chicago, and at the Good Samaritan's Council meeting on January 15. Then back to New York again.

Back in New York

Arthur Lacey brought my mail down to the beach at nine-thirty after he had “paid the men in” on the Bowery. Charles Butterworth who has charge of the house in N.Y. and its finances gives him the money, and the cost is ninety cents or a dollar a night. We patronize the Salvation Army hotel, the Majestic, the Sunshine, the Cunard and Uncle Sam’s (where Peter Maurin used to stay before we had a house of hospitality). The Alabama is the only one which will take in Negroes.

The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists sent down a Puerto Rican last night who brought up to 14 the men put up. Always more than ten dollars a night, three hundred dollars a month, not to speak of our rents in apartments and furnished rooms which make up our decentralized house of hospitality.

When I count all the violations on the buildings we are occupying, I am appalled at the corruption, blindness, partiality, bureaucracy of the building department of New York.

Arthur J. Lacey, or “dear soul” as we like to call him because he once had the maddening habit of saying tenderly to those he was trying to help—“have you got a problem, dear soul?” does indeed help a great deal. He gives out men’s clothes whenever we have clothes to give, and runs innumerable errands between farm and city, and beach and city, dropping little tidbits of gossip on the way. He is the grapevine of the CW right now. I scolded him for coming out so late, but do certainly appreciate him coming out with mail and messages as he does several times a week.

Hospital Workers

As I am traveling West (right now I am in Greensburgh, Pa.) I read a story in the New York Times about one hundred pickets in front of Flower and Fifth Avenue hospitals in a labor dispute involving Local 1199 Drug and Hospital Employees Union. The union contends they were locked out of their kitchen and maintenance jobs when the work was turned over to outside contractors. The picketing began around six a.m. and at 7:40 a.m. there was a conflict between eleven police and the pickets who were trying to prevent a “scab” from entering the hospital.

The hospital workers are the poorest paid in the city. Leon Davis, president of the local, charged the police with “indiscriminately clubbing, shoving, and pushing peaceful pickets.” Police Commissioner Michael Murphy said the charges were “false and unfounded and maliciously inspired.”

Decazerville

In France, 850 coal miners have been sitting at the bottom of a coal mine since December 19, according to an almost unbelievable account in the January 5 **Times**. The pit miners with 1400 other workers are on strike because the government has decided to close the mines progressively, saying they are no longer economic to exploit. The government has promised three months pay free of trimming and a guarantee of 90% of their present wages for two years.

But the men don't trust the government, evidently, and they feel their damaged health, due to life in the mines, has unfit them for other jobs. Reporters toured the pits and found the men sitting around in the damp and gloomy corridors, "playing checkers, listening to hand-cranked phonographs, talking and singing the International and the Marseillaise."

The desperation that leads 850 men to endure such a sit-down strike is attracting, finally, the attention of the country.

Recently, I have read Orwell's "Road to Wigan Pier" which describes the conditions under which the coal miners of Wales work.

Here in Western Pennsylvania, the mines which have supported many a small town have shut down and it is an area of such misery and unemployment. Men are despised for being permanently on relief; there are no jobs open for older men, and they are oppressed by a sense of hopelessness and futility.

Our biggest domestic problem is automation and the resulting unemployment. Calling the reserves back into service and increased defense spending is an artificial and indeed a bad way to try to solve this problem.

We talked of this last night at dinner and Bill Callahan spoke of all the needed-to-be-done work found during the depression which could be found again today. Yes, this is the same William M. Callahan who used to edit **The Catholic Worker** in the late thirties and lived with us on Charles Street and Mott Street for many years. He is now editor of **Accent**, the paper of the Greensburgh diocese, which runs a column by Helene Iswolsky each week. We had dinner with him, Helene and I, last night in his home at Latrobe. He and Louise are not changed, but it is hard to realize they have four children, ages seven to seventeen.

Tonight, I speak at Seton Hall, tomorrow at Loretto, Tuesday at Mt. Mercy and Duquesne and I am hoping this clear weather will hold out until I get out of the hills of western Pennsylvania and am on my way to Chicago. It has been like spring this first week in January.