

On Pilgrimage - October 1954

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Summary: Comments on a potpourri of events—Halloween costumes of the saints, hurricane Carol, pacifist conference, and irritations while saying the community rosary. (DDLW #238).

It is only in the middle of September and the children are already talking of Hallowe'en and already the "five and dime" are selling punkin pie. "Hallowe'en," we explained to them, "is really Hallowed Evening because it is the night before All Saints' Day. So if you wish to dress up this year, you must all take some saint and dress up like that saint and we can get busy collecting the costumes now."

"I want to be Saint Joseph," Paul Anthony Yamamoto said, ignoring the two great saints after whom he is named.

We decided that would call for a carpenter's apron with fascinating pockets for hammer and saw and nails. "And a beard," Sue said. "I want to wear a beard too," Beckie insisted. "I want to be a man saint." The beard could be made out of wool from Lauren Ford's sheep from Bethlehem, Connecticut.

Sue decided on St. Catherine, from whom St. Catherine's wheels are named, and since the wheel was the instrument of her martyrdom, we will applique beautiful wheels front and back on a long full skirt, and perhaps we can find a few fire works. Mary, we decided, should be St. Macrina, since she is at the grimy age. St. Macrina never washed as a mortification to herself and others. We'd dress her in a flour bag, or a handsome burlap bag as a dress. It is none too soon to figure out the saints the children want to impersonate, and the dress and distinctive badge each should wear. Nickie will be St. Nicholas and Eric wants to be St. Patrick. (On later thought, Beckie decided on Kateri Tekawitha.)

Weather

One is always conscious of the weather in the country, the wet days and the dry days, the high winds, and the lovely calms. We like to say, "The wind is rising, a storm is brewing, let's go down on the beach and collect drift wood."

Twice this last month high winds rose, hurricanes which were named Carol and Edna and aside from wind and rain and a few branches down, no harm came to the island. The year before, abnormally high tides made hundreds of families homeless, but this year terror came over the radio, every hour on the hour, a warning to batten down the hatches, expect winds at one hundred miles an hour, and we dutifully went around making everything secure, and then not even a high sea rewarded our expectations. The Cape and Connecticut and Massachusetts got the brunt of the storm, electric wires were down, pumps for water no longer worked, refrigeration failed and food was spoiled, those who had electric stoves could no longer cook. If the weather had been cold, and oil burner furnaces which also depend on electricity for the beginning and distribution of heat had failed, the suffering would have been greater.

At Maryfarm, Newburgh, we have been through these crises, but there are wells and wood and coal stoves and no need to worry about spoilage. We still stick to the old ways of canning. Here at Peter Maurin Farm, there is a wood and coal stove and a well out in a field, and if lights fail we can use candles and go to bed earlier.

Visitors

The day the last batch of children rolled away in a borrowed car, Hurricane Carol came with its rain and the collapse of the tents on the hill. The weather no sooner cleared when another truck drove up with Mary Widman and five other helpers who looked like another bunch of children in the back of her car! Mary also has been running a camp for colored children mostly since there is where her Blessed Martha center is located on Chicago's west side, bringing them out to her beautiful farm for two weeks' vacation as we did. The same day Mrs. Hanley and Veronica Dugan, Irene and Leda Johnson also came. They hadn't built up Carol on the radio, so none worried about being out in a storm.

Conference

By the time our annual pacifist conference began on Friday night three days later, the weather was again clear and hot, and we were able to hold all the sessions out in the back yard at 223 Chrystie Street. All the evening conferences were well attended but the place was too hot and sunny for all but a few in the afternoon. The Tuesday after I spoke at Fr. Monahan's parish at Midland Beach, to the Holy Name society. He has been a friend of the Catholic Worker since we started in 1933. The next day, a picnic on the beach with Mary Herman and her son who came all the way across the country from San Diego to visit relatives in Boston and dropped by to see us on Staten Island. On Thursday, September 9th the Cardinal blessed the Sisters' new convent at Mt. Loretto and we went to the celebration at four in the afternoon. That noon we had had Fr. Charles Sala, one of the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, Helene Tsvolsky and Winifred

Neville to lunch, and the evening after the Cardinal's sermon we had the honor of Tom Sullivan's presence for supper. He had accompanied his father to Mt. Loretto for the festivities there. We had soup for supper, he had had soup for lunch. We have always had trouble synchronizing our meals between St. Joseph's house and Peter Maurin Farm, and it is especially hard during Lent. If you have lunch in the city, you have more lunch in the country, and if you keep up this commuting you have a lean time of it Ember days and Lent. Charlie McCormick and Pete Asaro and their bread collecting and transporting of visitors back and forth have to take this into account.

Meditation on the Rosary

Last week while we all knelt in the library at Chrystie Street saying the rosary for peace, which Jack English, now Brother Charles at Our Lady of the Holy Ghost, Conyers, started us on three years ago. I was filled with distractions, and most sensitive and irritated by a number of small incidents. (I could only comfort myself by thinking of the Little Flower and her nervous agony at the rattling of rosary beads behind her back in the chapel.) The period of prayer had started with an incident. An overly pious member of our community had snatched a cigarette from the mouth of one of the old men who were sitting around the room, and the prayerful one and the unprayerful were almost involved in a fistfight. Then a woman with a number of packages wrapped up in very noisy paper began wrapping and unwrapping them all the while we prayed. The prayers that day were led by an old Irishman with a strong brogue who began each decade with a leisurely meditation. We were used to the brisker prayers of Michael Kovelak. I was still seething with my own irritation, and could sense the irritation of others who seemed to be trying to hurry up the prayers. Some came out way ahead of the others. Oh, the mortification of the senses, all the senses, interior and exterior, on these occasions. It is like being put to death with pinpricks.

And then, on other occasions, one is so filled with a feeling of love and joy and gratitude and consolation in the midst of religious exercises that one is fearful that life is too joyful. This month a recent convert said to me, "There may be plenty of suffering ahead, but just the same I know that I will never be really unhappy again."