

On Pilgrimage - March/April 1975

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Summary: Says the Catholic Worker is a school where volunteers can learn their vocation and to overcome fear. Notes prisoners of conscience, being jailed eleven times, visiting prisoners, and the witness of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Keywords: prison (DDLW #548).

Buddhists teach that a man's life is divided into three parts: the first part for education and growing up; the second for continued learning, of course, through marriage and, raising a family, involvement with the life of the senses, the mind and spirit; and the third period, the time of withdrawal from responsibility, letting go of the things of life, letting God take over. This is a fragmentary view of the profound teaching of the East. The old saying that man works from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done is a very true one. St. Teresa wrote of the three interior senses, the memory, the understanding and the will, so even if one withdraws, as I am trying to do from active work, these senses remain active.

I am, however, leaving everything to our generous crowd of young people who do the editing and getting out of the **Catholic Worker**, seeing visitors, doing the work of the houses of hospitality and performing in truth all the works of mercy. Day and evening, and even nights are filled with "unprogrammed" work. One never knows what crisis is going to arise, what emergency is coming up next. Living in our slums is like living in a war-torn area.

And here I am living on the beach, writing, answering some letters, and trying to grow in the life of the spirit. I feel that I am but a beginner. I am convinced that the life of prayer, to pray without ceasing, is one of prime importance. Years ago, Fr. Wendell, a wonderful Dominican priest in St. Vincent Ferrer's parish in New York, came to us one summer every Wednesday night and talked to us about Prayer. One simple sentence he pointed out has remained in my memory these last twenty-five years. Something for beginners, he said, and God knows we are always, each morning beginning again! "Remember the word ACTS," he said, "and that those initials stand for Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication, and you will have a very simple method of praying."

I look at my bedside shelf of books—and there are the psalms, scripture readings, and right now, Fr. Rene Voillaume's **Christian Vocation** (Dimension Books), a paperback, which is nourishing my mental and spiritual life.

Imprisoned for Conscience

I remember a young woman who came to help us years ago, who, after her first, early enthusiasm had worn away, used to sigh wearily and say—"What's it all about?" I am sure many of our friends and readers also pose, more seriously, the same question. For instance, what are Ernest and Marion Bromley all about? Why is this frail, elderly man in jail right now for "disorderly conduct," that is, for distributing leaflets about the nefarious workings of the Internal Revenue Service and their ways of penalizing people for advocating tax refusal. Remember, it is the Federal taxes paid by each of us that supply arms that are keeping wars going, I cannot go into the important discussion of Tax Refusal now. (Subscribe for **The Peacemaker**, 1225 Paddock Hills Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45229 or write to War Tax Resistance, 339 Lafayette St., New York, N.Y. 10012.)

What I want to bring out is how a pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. And each one of our thoughts, words and deeds are like that. Going to jail, as Ernest Bromley has done, short though his stay may be, causes a ripple of conscience among us all. And of remembrance too.

Did they search him and list every item contained in every pocket? Did they strip him and search every nook and cranny of his body, as they did the young women arrested during the protests against air raids drills (psychological warfare) in the 50's? As they are doing now to Martin Sostre in Dannemora prison even after every visit from friends or lawyers. What sadistic impulse is it that causes guards to continue these searches?

Ernest Bromley is sharing, in his (we hope) brief jail encounter, the sufferings of the world. And we hope, like the apostles, he rejoices in having been accounted "worthy to suffer."

To Overcome Fear

"What is it all about—the Catholic Worker Movement?" It is, in a way, a school, a work camp, to which large-hearted, socially-conscious, young people come to find their vocation. After some months or years, know most definitely what they want to do with their lives. Some go into medicine, nursing, law, teaching, farming, writing and publishing.

They learn not only to love, with compassion, but to overcome fear, that dangerous emotion that precipitates violence. They may go on feeling fear, but they know the means, they have grown in faith, to overcome it. "Lord, deliver us from the **fear** of our enemies." Not from our enemies, but from the fear of them. In jail, too, there is a very real sense of fear. When Dean Mowrer and I were in the House of Detention after one of the air raid drills one year, some inmates set fire to their mattresses on one of the floors, to call attention to some intolerable condition.

Once, when I was visiting a prisoner in California, San Quentin, at the request of one of our lawyer friends, I was locked in a little room with him for the visit. He was on "Death Row" for the murder of his mistress and her child. He was a man who became insane in his drink. The lawyer told me he gave the man one of my books and every prisoner in Death Row had read it. How far our thoughts, and prayers too, can reach out.

I visited another prisoner in Philadelphia, who had, in a fit of insanity, murdered another man, and stuffed his body in a trunk and checked it at a railroad station. He had written to offer us his library and to beg visits. When I visited, I was ushered into a small room, where, at the most, a score of men sat behind bars and screens and their wives and children sat on stools, as at a counter.

When Ammon Hennacy went to see this same man, he was locked in a little, dungeon-like room with him, he said.

To be a prisoner, whether for a weekend, or a month, as many of us have, is never again to forget those walls, those bars those brothers and sisters of ours behind them.

The Peacemaker, every issue, has a list of those imprisoned for conscientious objection to war. I was happy to see that Martha Tranquilli was due for release March 3.

Little Brothers and Sisters

When I mention Fr. Rene Voillaume's books, I am remembering how, when I was in jail for 20 days in the fifties, I received a letter from a friend who told me at the time how two of the "Little Sisters of Jesus," one of the several orders Fr. Voillaume has founded, got permission to share the life of the prisoners in Brazil, and that this permission had been granted in Belgium or Switzerland also, I am not sure which. I do not think this can be done now, the world has worsened, has grown harsher. Christianity is beginning to be recognized, perhaps, as subversive.

In the early days of the Catholic Worker in the thirties, Peter Maurin found me a copy of Rene Basin's **Life of Charles de Foucauld**, containing many of his letters and notes, and how all his life in the desert he dreamed of starting groups the of Little Brother's of Jesus, to live with the poorest. Brother Charles died in the first world war, at the hands of his friends, the Tuargs. "Unless the grain of wheat fall onto the ground and die, it remains alone."

There are Little Brothers and Sisters now, in the desert and forests, in Africa, on the Aleutian Islands, in Vietnam, and I have visited the mother house of the Sisters in Rome, and the Little Sisters in Australia and in the States in desert and city.

Two Little Brothers of the gospel lived across the street from us on First St. and transformed a slum apartment into a little gem of beauty, by their hard labor and ability to repair and build. Now they are on Fourth St. and I shared a meal there with them and the Little Sisters who live in upper Manhattan. We encounter them regularly at Holy Mass in our parish Church on Second Ave., and in addition to menial jobs by which they have managed to build a little place in the country where they can get away to pray and keep silence. We daily feel their warmth and love surrounding us.

More Deaths

There are more deaths to report this month: Father Joseph Woods, Millie Seale, and Cela Sanchez. Fr. Joseph was a Benedictine of Portsmouth Priory where he is buried. He spent a few summers with us on our Easton farm as a newly ordained priest, and I can see him still, perched on a rock on a hillside, hearing my own daughter's first confession as she knelt beside him, followed by that of the other children. We adults used the confessional which Fr. Roy had built in one corner of our barn chapel. He was an invalid most of his life and served on the missions in different parts of the country.

Millie had been a member of our family since the early fifties, but her ill health made a quiet, furnished room nearby a necessity for her, and she lived next to an Italian Family who were unfailingly kind to her. She died in her sleep, and is buried in Mt. Holiness cemetery in New Jersey, where many of our fellow workers rest.

Cela was a young woman who came to us off and on these last years—a tragic figure, whom Sister Francis Regis of the College of St. Rose helped very much when she had a leave of absence to live and work with us some years ago. We beg the Sisters to remember Cela in their prayers. May Millie and Fr. Joseph and Cela, companions in death, rest in peace. Book Note: If there is one book that our readers should select for their library shelves (it includes so much of the history of these times), it is Daniel Berrigan's "Selected & New Poems," reviewed in this issue of the CW.