

Day After Day - September 1941

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Summary: Describes the Catholic Worker silent retreat at the farm in Easton, Pennsylvania. Says the retreat is “a course of instruction in basic principles and tactics”—a time “to gird up the loins and strengthen oneself for the strong combat.” (DDLW #374).

Come the Revolution!

For two weeks we had been preparing for retreat, and on retreat. For at least a week we had not looked at the daily paper, nor listened to the radio (and this is not an editorial “we” but means the whole CW crowd here in New York and on the farm). Then the other night, Teresa and Marjorie and I were preparing for bed.

“What’s happening in the world,” we wondered idly, and asked Teresa to turn on the radio.

“... free our noble comrade, Earl Browder... war for democracy... war for religion... traitors like John L. Lewis, the isolationist...” etc., etc., etc. And, then to cap the climax, “This is WXYZ, Jersey City”—Frank Hague’s domain!

The revolution is indeed upon us, and we had better prepare to go underground. There are a few good wine cellars in this house, odorous and clean. Down at the farm we have a root cellar, very damp, which we can convert into a priest’s hole.

Quiet and Peaceful

But most of our Mott Street neighbors don’t know about it as yet. Katie goes on selling plums and pears and finocchi, zucchini and escarole. Next door the men out in front sit and play cards. The Chinese go on selling shrimp two doors down, and the good spaghetti in the basement restaurant next door bears witness to a placid and untroubled mind. The church bells still ring, beginning at six and going on at intervals during the days until seven-thirty for night prayers; there are still holy pictures painted on the wall of the butcher shop around the corner. September 19th will be the Feast of San Gennaro, and we will look and feel like a stage setting for *Cavalleria Rusticana*, rather than *Ten Days That Shook the World*. Strange, the revolution is really going on, just as we really are in a state of war, and it behooves us to continue our revolution within the revolution with a renewed vigor.

Retreat

The great news of the month is the retreat (not a retreat from revolution), held as usual the last week in August at the Catholic Worker farming commune at Easton. For the benefit of our non-Catholic readers, a retreat is a retreat from the world, for a little space only—a retiring to a desert place to renew oneself, to meditate and to pray, and to listen to conferences.

Father John J. Hugo, of Pittsburgh, who is starting another series of articles with this issue, was the retreat master. Our readers may remember his articles on the farm page of the CW some years ago.

This event is the most important work in our lives during the year, since it gives us strength and energy and light for the coming year. It is a week of complete silence and prayer, and most of the retreatants kept the silence. No reading is permitted save the New Testament, and there are five conferences a day, of one hour each, followed by fifteen minutes of mental prayer. The day began with a sung Mass, and, thanks to the leadership of Mary Louise Probst, we all did very well. We had comfortable chairs, at least more comfortable than the backless benches we had had the two previous years; and these were the loan of Father Holahan, our pastor, to whom we also go for many other needs. Sister Peter Claver and Father Magee from the little Syrian parish in Easton also helped with the materials needs for the Mass for sixty-five people all through the week.

Food for the Body

Everyone brought food, from cases of milk, meat, bread, rice, hot dogs, etc., and the garden supplied the rest. Father Joseph Woods says Lent is the proper time for retreat (and what a long one that is) but then we would not have the vegetables from the garden, the facilities for putting people up. Representatives from most of our houses were there, but, of course, the west coast could not make the trip. Perhaps on my next visit there we can arrange a retreat, say at Sacramento, to which our fellow workers in Seattle, Portland, Spokane, San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles can come.

This year we had an abundance of tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, onions, and John Filliger as chief cook (he is usually chief farmer) excelled in putting them together in soups and stews. Julia and I helped, Bill Evans pinch-hit (he is cook in town now, but interrupted his retreat to help out), and somehow all went smoothly and happily. The days were hot; there was but one brief shower. One day the wind blew and one night it was cold. The farm was silent except for the barking of McTavish every time the bell rang for meals or conferences, and the shuttling of freight trains from the valley below.

We were on a high hill, overlooking a flowing river; but down below we could see the smoke and grime of Easton and Phillipsburg. It is a constant reminder to us of our fellow workers—a reminder that God will say to us when we approach Him: “Where are the others?”

And so retreats are never retreats in the modern sense of the word, but a time to gird up the loins and strengthen oneself for the strong combat.

To be specific, this retreat was a course of instruction in basic principles and tactics which we have accepted and by which we shall live and work, shunning the natural motive, working for the love of God. God bless Father LaCouture and his fellow priests who have made such retreats possible.

Broadcasting

And then it is a hard thing, getting out into the world and speaking from the standpoint of the supernatural, as I had to do at the Williamstown Institution of Human Relations. You are at such times, a fool for Christ, as St. Paul so aptly puts it. People look upon you indulgently, “a necessary contribution to the forum,” “we must be mindful of these things,” but after all, “Miss Day is speaking of Heaven and not of things of this earth.”

This failure is one’s own, of course, not to be able to do a good job of correlating the material and the spiritual.

However, the real work of speaking at such a time, is the praying put into it before and after, and the more ineffectual we feel ourselves to be, the more praying we are going to do.

Galilee

The other day we drove Fr. Catich’s little car down to the Fulton market for a hundred pounds of fish and were delighted to find a **Galilee** fish company there. One of our neighbors, Jimmy Dee works with the company next door and he helps us get left over fish for our bread line. It is good to come upon these constant reminders of Jesus Christ. There are the men working there, fishermen and those marketing fish, all of the men like Peter and James and John, all of them men to whom Christ is speaking today as he spoke yesterday—the same men to whom he will speak tomorrow. It is because of Him that they are our brothers and it is to Him that Jimmie Dee gives the fish, one hundred pounds for a dollar.