

On Pilgrimage - April 1955

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Fr. Daniel Lord, who recently died, is remembered for his work with youth in the fields of Catholic Action and contentious objection. Describes her time at the farm attending conferences and caring for her grandchildren. Ruminates about human freedom in relation to involuntary poverty. Keyword: pacifism (DDLW #686).

Father Lord died in January, and in this issue we are reprinting one of Peter Maurin's letters to him, another Master Agitator. We all loved Fr. Daniel Lord for the way he was bringing Christ to the youth of the country. He gave all his great gifts to popularizing and re-stating the great movements of the church in terms that high school and college young people could understand.

The first Catholic Action school I attended was back in 1934 at St. Francis Xavier High School, and it was there I first heard of cooperatives and credit unions and of the liturgy and it was there, too, that I first saw enthusiasm. It was like a revival in a way, but it was not emotional, but of the mind. Good food for the mind and heart was dispensed with ready generosity, and one could not help but respond. It was there I was first persuaded to speak, and I was so petrified with fear that I sat in the chapel (too weak to kneel) saying the **Memorare** over and over again until one o'clock when my time came, and lo and behold, I've been doing it ever since, though always with qualms. But if you love your brother, you want to talk to him, to convey to him, too, some of your enthusiasm. (I still have not read Fr. Knox's book on the subject of Enthusiasm!)

It was here, too, that I was first introduced to the Sodality of Our Lady, and heard conferences on prayer and meditation, and later, too, with Fr. Carrabine of Chicago, I saw the sodalists in action during the year at their Saturday meetings, where they discussed what was happening in the world today, and always the primacy of the spiritual was emphasized.

It was Fr. Lord's sodalists who used to give out the Catholic Worker on May Day during the parade in many of the big cities of the country. The controversial nature of the discussion of war and peace which the Catholic Worker has undertaken more and more (what with class war, race war, the Ethiopian war, the Spanish civil war, the Japanese-Chinese war, the Second World War, the Korean war, the Indo China war and now the Formosa crisis) has made young people who have to face these issues hesitate to commit themselves on the pacifism which the Catholic Worker has never ceased to express. God bless their honesty, and thank God, too, that many continue to support us by their help, in spite of differences of opinion and the agonized doubts which we placed in their minds. Some priests complained

that like the pharisees we placed on them burdens too heavy for them to bear, and did not bear them ourselves, and in many cases that was true. We admit our failure, over and over again to live like true peace lovers.

Fr. Lord dealt with the problem of war in several pamphlets, one entitled, "So, you won't fight?" which favored the position of the conscientious objector. Later when war was upon us, and the youth of the country was conscripted, he tried to reach them with other pamphlets which did not handle the problem of conscientious objection but tried to deal with them where they were, with daily problems. (How far a man can obey his commanding officer, in this day of total war, is dealt with by Fr. Drinkwater in an article in the **Commonweal** last month.) The discussion is beginning to take hold, the movement to question war as a means to achieve peace, is beginning, and let us hope it will not be a slow evolution, but like a fire will take hold of men's hearts.

How many have cause to be grateful to Fr. Lord! He died of cancer, and worked right up to the last month of his life. May he enjoy refreshment, light and peace from his labors. And may he pray for us, still toiling in the vineyard.

Another Jesuit

A highlight of the month was the day of recollection given by Fr. James McCoy S.J., who is at St. Ignatius Church, New York. He had given us one Friday night talk, and came to Staten Island to give us three conferences at Peter Maurin Farm. It was a day of high winds (he was well acquainted with the wind from his years on Welfare Island where he ministered to the poor in the hospitals there) and it was very cold besides. I was wishing he could wear a skull cap like a Jewish rabbi as he sat in the chapel in his overcoat and scarf. The wind howled overhead and the oil heater didn't work too well and roared ominously from the down draft.

The three conferences were on faith, and each one of them could have been expanded into a book. There were about fifteen attending from the city and twenty home folks at Peter Maurin Farm. During the afternoon a family from Brooklyn with five children dropped in and the parents attended one conference while the three oldest boys wandered around the farm and looked at the goats, chickens and rabbits, threw stones in the winter pond (that dries up in summer) and their two youngest sisters sat with Ann and Paul, and my six grandchildren, and played and listened to Stanley Vishnewsky tell stories about the girl and the miser, and the king and the nightingale and Oswald the hungry lion, of course.

It was a most absorbing week end for me. Tamar and Dave went to the Glen Gardner community to visit the Dellingers (The Libertarian Press) and left me with the children, three baby goats and two nannies, and the chickens and geese, and a furnace and kitchen fire to take care of. No pressing of buttons around that house, to heat the place. But Hans came over to help too and Becky helped him with the milking and feeding and staking out of the goats, and Susie helped Eric. The wind was so high that Eric could not get the chicken coop door shut and in one gust he was blown half across the chicken yard. He had done a good job of watering and feeding the fowl and taking out the garbage, but towards the end he felt the elements were too much for him and he came in on the verge of tears. (He is only seven).

“Hans is helping Becky,” he said, “but no one is helping me.” That was when Susie came to the rescue. All the children bottle-fed the three-day old kids who stayed in the house with us in a pen covered with straw made in one of the closets. Little Maggie, one and a half, kept bringing them toast, apples, glasses of milk, and trying to butt heads with them.

After Mass on Sunday we all went to Peter Maurin farm for the conferences. How terribly attached I am to the Hennessy family, all of them. I pray to St. Ann to help me in being a proper grandmother and not too attached. The Little Flower stated many times that the love of family should grow with the love of God. But she practiced detachment to a great degree, even to the extent of hurting her sisters in the convent when she gave what free time she had in recreation to some of the least attractive of the sisters at Carmel.

Besides the prayers of the saints, it is helpful to consider a little family like Felicia’s just a few blocks away, and remember that Felicia, too, should be as a daughter, and her children my grandchildren, since we are all so bound together in the Mystical Body of Christ.

Freedom of the Poor

I have written before about the freedom of voluntary poverty, but I was thinking this noon as we were saying the rosary in the library about two old women, the involuntary poor, who have their freedom too which they jealously guard. They had rather be free to roam the streets, to take what food comes on our bread lines, to sleep where they can, at the Pioneer, a hotel on the Bowery where Holy Mother the city puts up penniless women, or at the Salvation Army, where they pay their thirty-five cents a night and are asked no questions, than take shelter on Welfare Island, or the Farm Colony on Staten Island where there is food, shelter and warmth these cold spring days.

Who does not know that keen desire for freedom, that love of freedom which God has implanted in the human heart. As Harold Robbins wrote, “Freedom is the primary and supreme reason for the existence of mankind. That He should be freely loved and served seems, so far as our thought can penetrate, to have been God’s chief reason for calling us into being.”

To be free to come and go, to walk the streets, to sit on the park benches, to breathe, to talk aloud, to have space to stretch, and get away from people when they are too much for you—yes you see a lot of this desire for freedom on the east side. Anna is a Russian Jew and they came to this country to have freedom.

There was an old man of eighty-four who used to leave Welfare Island to go on a drunk over on the Bowery every now and then, and we would find him stretched out on the doorsteps in the morning as we went to Mass. And I used to think indignantly, “Why don’t they take better care of him?” meaning his family, or the city, or anybody else but us. After all, we were filled up, packed to the doors. There is always this instinct for anger, that something isn’t done by some body. And yet never before has so much been done by State, city, welfare agencies, and they never take into consideration man’s great and terrible and boundless-to-sinfulness-desire for freedom. It is only love that can penetrate to the roots of the problem and lead men to surrender that freedom to God.

There is no time with God, so while we suffer over the death of our friends, and the deportation of Francisco, and the continued suffering of Father Judge, in the sanitarium at Nanuet, New York, at the same time, we are rejoicing in our faith in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting which Our Lord brings to us so intensely at this time. It was wonderful to be reading Guardini's closing chapters of THE LORD at this time.

Ten of us from Peter Maurin Farm attended the Easter vigil at the Marist novitiate in Princes Bay, where I worked in the summer of 1929. The services were of unutterable beauty, beginning with the kindling of the new fire, the lighting of our candles, priests, novices, Marist Sisters and Handmaids of Jesus and Mary and then us. Inside the dark sprang into life, and outside the moon shone with tranquility on the water. Our consciousness of new life was increased by the fact that Marian Shindell, one of Father Duffy's catechumens, had been baptised that very day. Weather, and the peace and joy in all three houses, Maryfarm, Peter Maurin Farm, and Chrystie Street, made this one of our happiest Easters.