

On Pilgrimage - June 1959

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Summary: Struggles with “the dumps”, finding new quarters and car troubles on her way to Vermont to visit Tamar and her family. Graphic description of life at their farm. Ponders how to promote religious expression in a busy family. (DDLW #752).

The last issue of the *Catholic Worker*, the April-May issue, came out while Deane Mowrer and I were in the Woman’s House of Detention. She covers the story in this issue of the paper, and I shall write more on it later. Looking over my diary in which there are large gaps I find that part of the time since my last *On Pilgrimage*, was taken up by sickness, an attack of the flu, the kind that leaves one very melancholy, dull-witted and down in the dumps. My mother used to say that the best cure for melancholy was to clean house, take a bath, get dressed up and go buy a new hat. St. Teresa of Avila is supposed to have fed her nuns steak when they were weakened by melancholy. My cure in this case was Dickens. I reread “David Copperfield.” My confusion of mind might have been increased by reading Charles Williams’ “The Greater Trumps.” But there was a splendid quotation which helped me greatly, on page 143.

“... When her brother had remarked that she seemed mopey she had been shocked... by a sense of her own disloyalty since she believed enjoyment to be a debt which every man owes to his fellows, partly for its own sake, partly lest he at all diminish their own precarious hold on it. She attempted dutifully to enjoy and failed, but while she attempted it the true gift was delivered into her hands.”

Joy in this sense is used as C.S. Lewis uses it in “Surprised by Joy,” and as Bernanos meant it in his novel *Joy*.

My own gloom was caused not only by illness but also by the impending air raid drill. Making the Stations of the Cross overcame that. Abbot Marmion says one gets an increase of fortitude while making the stations. I prayed for fortitude and joy.

My prayers were answered all right because I had a perfectly happy time in jail. The Image Book, **Teresa of Avila**, helped in this. Monsignor McCafferty brought me a copy of this and it was so good and exciting that Deane and I took turns reading it.

The Line

We have been looking for other quarters and spent much time and thought on one building on the Bowery, which turned out to be too small to take care of our office and kitchen both, and would mean increased expense; and then on another building on Houston Street which is being torn up and widened at that point. When we asked city officials if there was any prospect of the building coming down soon, they replied that “as of this **moment**” there are plans for that side of the street. But by a consensus of opinion those stores and apartments which made up the building were considered unsuitable by our group, so we will content ourselves with St. Joseph’s Loft on Spring Street until we are forced out. The problem is the **line** and the hostility of the neighbors which is not yet overcome. Right now we are only feeding the “house.” Our windows have been broken, some panes in every window and one can only think of that story of St. Francis, “**This then is perfect joy.**” We are still housing people in scattered apartments and at the Jeanne d’Arc Residence. My mention of that brought me a delightful letter from a woman who came many years ago from Europe and stayed with the Sisters there for some years, and wanted very much to join their order but was rejected, much to her disappointment. She was very happy there she said, as those of us who stayed there have been happy.

Staten Island

We are settled, as much as we can be settled anywhere, on Staten Island, and we are making plans to build there if we can get a permit. But the latest news is that our neighborhood is zoned and we can build only one or two family houses. If we decide to do this we will build a two-family house with bedrooms for twelve children! What are we coming to when there are so many restrictions laid down. We keep trying to work things out as a voluntary association of people, a group living together and trying to perform the works of mercy.

Visit to Tamar

Early this month I had an engagement at Bard College which is almost a hundred miles from Staten Island. It is on the way to Vermont, and since I wanted to bring Tamar some boxes of clothes for the children I borrowed the farm car and drove up the West shore of the Hudson to Kingston and then across the river to the school which is a hundred years old and is now termed by some a “progressive” college, and described by another as like St. John’s at Annapolis except that they went in opposite directions. I do not know what they mean, but I learned that there are about 250 students, it is coeducational, there is one faculty member for every seven students, that they study by the seminar plan and the students love the place. It is very expensive. It costs about \$2300 a year to go there.

I stayed the night at the home of the professor of sociology, Dr. de Gre, went to Mass the next morning, Ascension Day, at Barrytown and then set out on route nine to meet route 23 into Great Barrington. Route seven brought me to Manchester, Vermont, and then over Bromley mountain, where the car boiled over and made whistling noises like a teakettle. We rested for a time on the mountain side while I said the rosary, and then fortified with Hail Mary's I got to the top of the hill where a kindly man cooled off the car for me with a hose and advised me to have the thermostat checked. I learned much by all the disasters that happen to our cars. I have had the battery drop out to the ground, the old style clutch come off in my hand, the gas pedal go down through the floor and many other such breakdowns, but ever since seeing the movie, **Grapes of Wrath**, which showed migrants in their old trucks crossing deserts and mountains, I have never worried.

I got lost on the back roads around Perkinsville because the power company was working on the lines on Weathersfield Road which leads up to the Hennessey farm. But I got there by supper time. It was a good time to arrive because a neighbor had just finished ploughing, spreading manure and harrowing the garden patch, with David and the children assisting and the joy and excitement had been intense. It was truly spring, and the weather from then on for the four day weekend was hot and still.

They had a full day, that Ascension day—up for a six-thirty Mass in Springfield where the parish church is, then on to Chester to buy feed and get the 25 baby chicks offered with every hundred pounds. They had a full load coming back, eight children, 75 chicks, and feed, but “they made it,” as Nickie says jubilantly, and the five older children were dropped off at the four-room schoolhouse in Perkinsville and the rest brought home to settle the chicks in the room over the barn. All during the day Martha kept going around clutching one of the tiny black roosters to her breast. Little chicks always seem to live through these adventures.

Hilaire had howled when his mother and father went to communion. The family had to go in two batches to the communion rail. Not much chance for feelings of devotion with a squirming, restless 20-month-old baby but what an act of faith, what will to offer worship to God, what real desire to receive Him!

Tamar will fatten the cockerels to a certain age and then they will be put in the deep freeze. Her hens are giving plenty of eggs, so many that she sells some. There is an abundance of home made butter too, some of which she sells.

I slept in Becky's room and she moved into the attic room next to it and the sun poured in and we were awakened early, she to do her lessons and me to read the Psalms in the little oblate manual which is so handy to travel with.

During the next two days there was some planting done, onion sets, peas and potatoes, and we took a walk up a steep mountain road alongside of which a brook ran merrily. I brought home an apron full of the shoots of fiddle back ferns to be cooked for supper. They taste like fresh asparagus. The only difficulty was

that half the heavy fuzz which protects the tender shoot got left on and tasted like bits of cotton! We had fried parsnips for supper too, dug fresh out of the garden after they had been left in the ground all winter. The kale which they hoped to have in the spring had been eaten by wild things about.

Saturday morning Tamar took the five oldest to catechism which lasts all morning, and David and I sat out in the sun talking about books and publishers—city talk. But in the oven in the house a big ham from the family pig was roasting for Sunday dinner, and for lunch there had been pancakes made with milk, eggs and butter, with maple sugar from their own trees. It was a bad sap year, he said, and they had made only six gallons, but for each six gallons, thirty gallons of sap had to be gathered from the woods, and it had been a job, sliding down icy paths and much of it being spilled.

The boys were fishing every spare moment, and I had a good pan of brook trout before I left. Nickie is always telling of the dozen he caught, all of which were too small and had to be thrown back. But Eric and he always bring fish home.

By the side of the kitchen door the crimson tulips, narcissus, daffodils, pansies and grape hyacinths were in bloom and in the woods red trillium, little yellow lilies and many varieties of violet are in bloom. The fold upon fold of hills are many shades of blue, violet and green above the sky is the clearest blue. The only sounds are the stream coming down from Weathersfield Center and the wind in the trees and the cow bells on the hillside, the clucking of a dozen or so brown hens, and the occasional song of a bird.

I fed the little ones their applesauce and peanut butter sandwiches on the porch, and tried to describe all the beauties around us to the children in terms of God the creator.

“Isn’t God good to give us all these things?” I said from my own deep sense of thankfulness, and little Maggie said firmly, “I like God,” and Martha echoed, “I like God, too!”

Remembering how often the comment is made that one must love one’s neighbor but not necessarily “like” him, I was well satisfied with their comment.

When Tamar was growing up I used to lament the passing of each year, each stage, “Now she is no longer an infant, now she is no longer a two-year-old.” But with the big family, there is the fascination of all the ages.

And how beautiful young mothers are and how more relaxed the mother of the large family who knows more or less what to expect of each year. During the month I spoke at Easthampton where our friends the Whalens and the Konceliks live on a pinewooded hill overlooking a bay. They each have nine children and there too one finds that wonderful sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Religion in the home

The problem of religious expression in the home is one that bothers many parents of large families. St. Benedict's rule, short prayers but frequently, is a good one. When it comes time to recitation of the rosary, it certainly seems to me better to recite a decade reverently rather than five in a mad and distracted race, a babbling with one eye on the littlest ones climbing in and out of bed. The morning offering, grace at meals, remembrance of saint's days, the liturgical season, – the atmosphere of faith, these are the necessary things. And most of all, to pray one's self, in season and out of season, without ceasing.

The older I get the more I realize how little we can do without backing up teaching by such prayer. The peace and calm of knowing that our Lord can change people and the course of events in the twinkling of an eye certainly saves one a lot of discouragement and worry.

This last issue of *Worship* has an article on Confirmation which should be reprinted and given for study to every parent. There was a quotation which I copied in my diary which filled me with hope and joy.

“We must never forget that grace follows its own laws—different from those of natural psychology; and that even in natural life, spiritual maturity does not coincide with physical maturity. As St. Thomas says it would all be a dangerous materialization of grace to submit the Holy Spirit to the laws of the body, Child saints are the most beautiful proof of this.” The article is by Boniface X. Luykx, O. Praem.