

Day After Day - February 1941

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes her busy speaking schedule and laments that there's so much to do. Advises sowing time to reap time. Attends meetings in Baltimore and a dinner with Sigrid Undset. (DDLW #371).

Sowing Time

This last month I spoke at Baltimore, Philadelphia and Scranton and Norwood, Mass. This coming month my schedule takes me to Amherst on Feb. 12, St. Joseph's Acadmey, Portland, Feb. 13; Boston House of Hospitality, Feb. 14; Worcester, Mass., Feb. 15. Feb. 26 I shall be at Albertus Magnus College, New Haven.

The months seem so crowded and speed by so fast. There is so much to be done with writing and speaking, not to speak of household activities around Mott Street with a family of fifty and a hungry horde of 1,400 coming in every day. There are sick ones, and the well ones that get into trouble. There are the personal problems, not due to the economic system and there are the problems that have to do with war and unemployment and poverty. There are two books I am writing; and a pamphlet John Cogley, editor of the Chicago paper, wishes me to send in as a starter for a series.

Unless the Wheat

"The only way to have more time," says Father Lacouture, "is to sow time." In other words, to throw it away. Just as one throws wheat into the ground, to get more wheat. It must have seemed madness to throw that first wheat away—but more wheat sprang up a hundred fold.

So each day, to start out by saying, there is plenty of time. And so to discard time, to throw it to the winds, to disregard all the work there is to do, and go sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour, to divest one's self of these accursed occupations—all in order to recap time, for those things which are necessary. Press day is a very good day for that.

Baltimore

When, as a board member, I went to the meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at Baltimore, I took advantage of the occasion to visit the Baltimore House. It looked clean and comfortable and homelike. Jon and I had a walk down along the wharves which have been teeming with war trade. There were four English freighters in. It was mild out, but the melting snow and refuse in the streets gave everything an ugly look. The meeting of the WIL was held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, and I walked up to the Cathedral and to the Chancery office and saw a section of the town I had not visited before. All our contacts in the big cities are in slums, and I thought as I remembered the letter of the lady from Iowa, that not only to the small town Midwesterners must our Mott Street seem strange, but also to all our friends in our own big cities.

Meetings

At the House I had coffee, visited a sick Negro, who was in very bad condition, had a round-table discussion with a gang of men whose bedroom I had to pass through to reach the Negro guest, and then I had dinner with Father Roy and Smitty, who afterwards took me back to the hotel for the evening sessions. Came back home by midnight bus, and a drunken policeman got on in Philadelphia and tried to direct the driver for some miles out of the city. The bus was crowded, there were two wisecrackers who kept everyone awake, and the odor was stale and sour. A deadly night, but I met Sister Peter Claver quite by accident on Thirty-fourth Street just as she was meeting her brother for 7 a.m. Mass at Holy Innocents before he took the Clipper for Lisbon on a mission to England for the President. Slept some of the day, and then to Vespers at St. Peter's with Bill Gauchat, head of the Cleveland House, here on midwinter visit, and Dorothy Smith, down from Newport where she is an apprentice with Ade Bethune.

January 28 I had lunch with some of the Commonweal editors at an Armenian restaurant, and Harriet Kennedy, one of the Buffalo group, was there, too.

Sigrid Undset

January 29, dinner at the Rambusch home with Sigrid Undset. Father LaFarge, Mr. O'Loughlin, Dr. Sullivan from Fordham were there besides the family. She is a tall, deep-chested, long-limbed woman with a look of great health and vigor. She has a broad forehead, large, exceptionally beautiful and clear eyes, set flat in the head. It is hard to remember what people talked about. American literature, Scandinavian. Life on a hill farm when she was writing "The Master of Hestviken," working until three in the morning, helping milk the twenty-five cows. They stayed up on this summer farm until late October and there were three snowstorms and the animals could not go out. They had to be fed and watered, and Madame Undset helped all day and did no writing. "But we drank a lot of coffee and ate much cake."

She had been lecturing on my book, "From Union Square to Rome," and on "The Good Pagan's Failure," a few nights before the invasion of the Germans.

So many of our own women in the movement, as well as so many of our readers have been strengthened and enlightened by Madame Undset's books that I cannot forebear giving this personal little glimpse of her. She is coming to see us, she said, and I warned the household that there would be great scrubbing and cleaning for a week beforehand.