

Dan Berrigan In Rochester

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Summary: Reflects on the sufferings of imprisonment, citing the witness of Fr. Daniel Berrigan. Explains why the Catholic Worker doesn't support protests involving destruction of property. Keywords: Dostoevsky, jail (DDLW #505).

Crying out in behalf of the jail population of this country which is by and large made up of blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, poor black and poor white, in other words the poorest of the poor, Fr. Dan Berrigan has been heard from during this last month when he was called as a witness for one of the Rochester group, who are the latest to destroy draft files in government offices. This group is one of the first to refuse lawyers (who must be paid sooner or later) except for one defendant who engaged only one – we presume, in order to call as character witness Fr. Berrigan from his prison cell in Danbury, Connecticut, where he is serving a long sentence with his brother Phil Berrigan, Josephite Father (dedicated to work among the blacks).

Fr. Berrigan was brought in chains to this upper New York State city where he was a character witness for Joe Gilchrist, one of the group. For some reason it took three days to transport him from Connecticut to New York State! He complained of the brutal and inhuman treatment he had received in transit. He testified also for all the prison poor in his protest.

The other defendants are remarkable in a number of ways. Two of them, Suzie Williams and DeCourcy Squires, refused bail and spent their time in prison awaiting

trial. The others all showed up, not jumping bail and failing to appear as did some of those who have taken part in these actions of destruction of property.

In general the Catholic Worker takes the position of the War Resisters, Quakers and Fellowship of Reconciliation peace groups in not taking part in these actions, on the principle that, although it was only property which suffered destruction, we ourselves have suffered violence, vandalism by hostile right-wing groups, the beating of individuals, the destruction of mailing lists and records, the burning of houses and barns, etc. So we repeat the golden rule, “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you,” and its contrary, “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

But we take this opportunity to tell the Fathers Berrigan, and all those who are suffering imprisonment now, that not a day goes by that we do not think of them, and hold them in our prayers together with all prisoners, who are the poor, at Compline and Rosary at the Tivoli Farm, and at First Street, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality.

Our love goes out to them, and love, like wisdom, is the most active of all active things, according to the Book of Wisdom. You have chosen suffering for your lot, dear friends, suffering and bitterness and depression and hopelessness, which must in many ways be comparable to that which is suffered in Vietnam and in all those parts of our struggling world (where the United States has military installations and personnel—in 48 of the countries of the world).

Dostoevsky in his **House of the Dead**, telling of his prison life in Siberia, says that once he thought that the suffering of the intellectual could not be equal to that of the poor, but he had learned that all men suffered alike. God help them in their bitterness and despair. And I do pray that they learn the reverse of the coin, that strange happiness and joy which following one's conscience brings. I hope someone sends them **The First Circle**, that book of the great Alexander Solzenitsyn, who himself spent fifteen years in Stalin's prison camps. "Happiness," he wrote, and I quote from memory, "can be a crust of bread and a bowl of thin soup and conversation with a comrade."