

On Pilgrimage - May 1951

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Writes of visits to hospitals and conscientious objectors suffering in prison. Recalls "that to love means to suffer, and who would be without love." (DDLW #233).

Last night I had a peculiar dream. Before going to bed I had gone to Benediction, and had spent an hour in the Church afterward. I was feeling troubled, beforehand, but all right when I came out. When I fell asleep I dreamed I was on a bus coming up from South Ferry on Front street. Two policemen in the car suddenly leaned over from their standing position and shouted out the window, to a passerby, "The Marina is on fire!" (The Marina was evidently a ship.) "Put in the alarm!" Then when they got off at the next stop, they had a visible conflict. They wanted to go back to the Marina, but their job was to capture two or three thugs in the terminal that we were pulling into. It was like a car barn, or like the Jersey City bus terminal. The two or three thugs came swaggering out to meet the police, dressed loudly in stripes or checks. That is all I remember of my dream.

Just before going to bed I had heard Sharkey in altercation downstairs with a well dressed man at the door who pushed his way in loudly proclaiming that he had stopped a woman from slapping her child in the park and had he done right? Was he all right in his heart, that was the problem. What if he should come in and strike Sharkey?

"No one ever tried it yet," said Sharkey, who was edging him back to the front door. Sharkey was half his size and looked like a little terrier. He got him out very tactfully and firmly. It was hard to tell by the conversation whether the well dressed visitor was drunk or mad.

As I write other things come into my mind.

Joe Monroe had been in jail in Philadelphia for the preceding week for evading the draft. That was the charge, though he had gone into draft headquarters to talk to them about his status. In the evening I was talking to Agnes about Joe Breig's article attacking me and my pacifism in an article in *The Missionary Servant*.

Joe Breig, who had written about Peter Maurin, as "Apostle on the Bum," said that in regard to my attitude toward war, I would listen to no arguments but only say, "War is heresy." When he is supposed to have asked me, "What you would do if you saw a man beating a child on the street," I only repeated, according to his story, "War is heresy."

This type of article is characteristic of attacks made on us. The idea of restraining a person without killing him or burning him alive never seems to occur to these writers. They have you say and do what they want you to, in their articles, and then write around it.

I had talked to Agnes and to Mike Harrington earlier in the day about pacifism. The lips speak what is in the heart, so this business of violence and destruction must be much in my thoughts.

The whole last two weeks have been hard. Marge Hughes' mother died and she took the two older children to Buffalo for the funeral. Jane O'Donnell stayed with the two younger over on Mott street with great willingness and joy. Anabelle and I were here at Chrystie street, Anabel taking care of the clothes, helping on the line in the afternoon and doing what she could to help.

Tuesday night I went up to Schenectady to speak, and they collected clothes which will come down later for the men and women and children in the neighborhood.

Thursday Bob and I went to the hospital to see Smoky Joe who had been transferred from the Raymond St. jail to the Psychiatric ward. Peter Carey had been to see him Tuesday and we received word that he was to be transferred to a state hospital Friday. Joe remembered that Peter had been to see him, though he did not seem to recognize him at the time. He was vague with us at first, but then recalled who we were. He did not know how he had gotten there, he said. Joe is a former marine and a gentle soul, aside from a flare-up of drink now and then. The attendants were kind and there were enough of them so that I heard one student nurse urging one melancholy patient to play cards with her. Still another was picking up a boy who had flung himself off the bench of the floor. There were sad cries from some, shrill whistles, and a burst of loud obscenity now and then from one lone fellow down the hall.

It was a place of bleak disorder and profound misery. Surely a hell on earth.

Ambrose Boyle, an old friend of Jack Thornton, was there interning, and he got us in though we were past visiting hours. He gave his cigarettes to Smoky. It was good to see him again. He said he was going on studying at Massachusetts hospital in Boston.

Joe was to be transferred to King's Park which was difficult to reach, so I begged the nurse to see if he could be sent to Manhattan State on Ward's Island which is just off 125th street and can be reached by bus. The nurse and the young doctor were most agreeable about it, and the transfer was made.

Friday I visited St. Rose's Cancer Hospital to see about a bed for a friend's brother who has not long to live. There was an atmosphere of peace and even of joy there, with the plant and flowers, and holy pictures and statues, the constant reminder of God's love. "A little house of poverty and pain," Monsignor Betowsky calls it, and it houses only a few hundred cases, a contrast to Ward's island where there are five thousand. Across the street there are trees and shrubs in the park and children playing on the swings with glad cries, and the river flows past the house and there is a glorious view of Manhattan Bridge.

A bed was available there, and after a half hour visit to the chapel on the top floor, I walked home along Pitt street to Stanton and then west to Chrystie. The streets were narrow and the buildings high and everywhere it was quiet for it was almost time for the Passover Supper and all the East side seemed hushed.

That same evening during the meeting, at which Ed Willock spoke, we received a telephone

call from Bellevue that Andy Stier, one of our cooks, is on the critical list, so Tom went up to see him.

(Since Joe got home from his seven days in jail he too has had to go to the hospital with a temperature of 102.4.)

While Ed talked of the life of the family and our recognition of a hierarchy of values, “first things come first for the priest, but second things come first for us, such as getting up with the children when they are sick at night,” and I thought of his and Dorothy’s seven and a half children as some one said, and wondered at his generosity in coming to talk to us at all, hard worked as he is at home and office.

And this week my dear Aunt Jane died and then was her funeral. May she rest in peace.

Now all this writing of hospitals and prisons sounds grim, as though we are surrounded by the dead and dying, the sick and the dispossessed. Yet each situation is a separate situation, and each individual has only what he himself must bear, and God is good and tempers the wind to the shorn lamb so that none bears more than he can bear, though it may seem so to the onlooker. I know this from long experience, from sicknesses of my own, from hospital stays. It is no use regarding things in the mass. Out of doors the buds are bursting out the trees, and the privet hedges are already green and out of the wind the sun is warm, and people here on the east side are beginning to live on the streets once more.

Tonight one of our old friends came in to see us having put his wife and three children on the train for a visit home in Iowa. The children are all under three, two and a half, one and a half and half a year. But it is only an over night trip to Chicago and the mother will meet her there to continue the trip with her.

She is a happy woman this, with strength of mind and soul and body, and three strong children and a husband who has built her a house, as yet unfinished, on enough acreage to provide the family with wood, and fuel for cooking and heating. Her sister in law is a few hundred yards away and she has three and a half children as I heard some one say tonight. They had lived together, the two families, this last year while housebuilding, and so had saved money, but it was a job. Now the children are inseparable so they are out all day playing together. There is a piped well on each property, and they pump their water into the kitchen sink. There is no electricity, no modern plumbing. As yet the houses are unfinished but they are big enough to live and move and breathe in. Both houses cost under fifteen hundred so far. The two men shared a tractor which they bought for ninety dollars with all attachments, an old one of course and with that they dug the foundations and are clearing and ploughing and harrowing for spring planting. All this in spare time since they both have jobs. One earns \$35 a week and the other slightly more. They are in debt, of course, but they will clear that off now that they have moved into their new homes and have no rent to pay, only taxes of thirty a year. They are far from New York but near enough to a town so they can get work.

To many this picture may also sound grim, a life on the land in unfinished houses with small children and no electricity and modern plumbing. But these two young couples are happy indeed, and it made me happy to hear about the progress of their work after my week of visiting the sick. There is never a week goes by that we do not hear from many a young

couple who are struggling to bring up their children and all the children God sends them, with insecurity of job, inadequate means and lack of space.

The remarkable part of the above success story is that one of the young men who accomplished all this participates in the revolution besides. The Christian revolution and the green revolution. For four years he was in one of our U. S. forced labor camps, that is he worked as a conscientious objector in a home for the feeble minded without pay, twelve hours a day six days a week and he accomplished all this with no GI bill of rights to aid him after.

Now I must think of Joe, just back from the front, the front in this case being a Philadelphia jail where he was shut in with four other prisoners for 168 hours and not allowed out for exercise even. He spent the time he said, reading the psalms, since that is the way I occupied myself when I was in solitary for seven days in Occaquan many years ago. Joe Monroe had registered in 1948, then had come to join us in our work, so when the draft board sent him notices, which were not forwarded by his family, a warrant was issued for his arrest.

He has decided these last years that he wished the classification of conscientious objector and when he went to the draft board in Philadelphia to clarify his position, and certainly this visit did not indicate any desire to dodge the issue, they called the FBI and took him to jail. He gave the warden a note to mail which was not mailed for five days, so we were not notified of his arrest until the sixth day. Then Bob Ludlow went to Philadelphia, called on our dear friend Richard McSorley, lawyer and father of fourteen children, who put up bail for him so that Joe was released. That is ransoming the prisoner indeed. Joe will be brought to trial in June. He has been accounted worthy to suffer for Christ, I comfort myself, but just the same, my heart is wrung. It is easy enough to write about these issues, and the work of clarification about modern war must go on. There are remarkably good articles in the March issue of the *Catholic World*, one by a Jesuit scholastic who is dealing with the legal aspects of the case of Larry Gara, who is imprisoned for advising a youth to follow his conscience.

If Larry Gara is guilty then I, too, am guilty because I will do everything in my power to strengthen and sustain those who are building up the case against war. Some will suffer today because of their rejection of the State's call on them, but it will come about that more and more will begin to be willing to suffer, will account it a joy to suffer for Christ our brother, and our brothers in Christ, and I pray that God will strengthen them and teach them that sweet truth that the greatest joy in this world is not to seek after pleasure, but to long for what St. Bonaventure calls that delightful, health giving dart of love that means suffering and dying for our faith rather than killing for it. It is a paradox of the supernatural life and of the natural life too, that to love means to suffer, and who would be without love. O Lord, increase in us this love.