

# Death of an Apostle

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*Summary: Eulogizes Larry Heaney “the first of the Catholic Worker leaders to die.” Called a “saint” by those who knew him, she describes his love of the poor, family life, voluntary poverty, and farming practices. (DDLW #496).*

Rhineland, Mo., May 2.

Saturday morning we buried Larry Heaney, the first of the Catholic Worker leaders to die. He had headed the Holy Family House of Hospitality in Milwaukee; after his marriage he had lived with us at Maryfarm, Easton; he had been with our conscientious objector camp at Keane, N. H.; then worked in Milwaukee to save money for a farm for his increasing family, and for the last two years he had been associated with Martin Paul, another of the Catholic Worker leaders, on Holy Family Farm, Rhineland, Mo. He met Ruth Ann Boylston, from St. Mary's Ind., college, when she came to help with the work in Milwaukee; married her a few months later, and, when he died, his sixth child was two months old. This morning, on the feast of St. Athanasius we were present at the first communion of his eldest child, Mary, who is seven.

Friends and co-workers from Milwaukee, St. Louis and New York, and his and Ruth Ann's family from Milwaukee and Nebraska, three Precious Blood sisters from O'Fallon, who teach in the school and the school children and the neighbors, sang his requiem Mass. God gave Ruth Ann, his wife, the strength to sing it, too, beginning with the Psalms which met us at the meadow gate near the house, and continued through the patch of woodland, down the hill, past the shrines to our Lady, where pilgrims come all summer, and up past the stations of the Cross to the Church. The little church was full, though it was Saturday morning and this is a farm parish, and the neighbors stayed for the Psalms sung at the grave. It was the neighbors who dug the grave, as Larry himself had dug graves for two of his neighbors the year previously. And it was friends who bore the coffin the quarter of a mile through the woods. Larry died in St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis, which is seventy-five miles away from Rhineland, and his body was brought home to rest in the living room for the two days before burial. He died after an operation for an abscess on a lung, following pneumonia. Ruth Ann was with him.

All nature presents the “breasts of her consolation” to us these spring days, and the saints of the Church rejoice. Larry was buried on the feast of St. Catherine of Sienna, and in this most beautiful Easter time, in the little graveyard next to St. Martin's church, the steeple of which you can see from his farm kitchen. All around him the dogwood is in bloom, and redbirds play in the new green of trees and shrubs.

I was at Maryfarm, Newburgh, when the news came of Larry's death. Tom Sullivan telephoned me from New York, and said, "A telegram has just come; this is it," and then read it. We were all too shocked for thought. But at the same time, up there at Maryfarm, where many of us knew him well, it was the shock of awe as well as grief that we felt. It was as though we had heard that one of our number had been crowned, had been overwhelmed with high honor and glory and happiness that no earthly joy can approach. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard what the Lord hath prepared for those that love Him." We thought of that; we thought with swelling hearts of Larry in heaven before we thought with sorrow of Ruth Ann and the children on earth.

The first time I heard Larry called a Saint was when I was speaking in Chicago and cities through the midwest, and John Cogley and some of the others around St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in Chicago were talking about him.

"Larry Heaney's a saint," they said, matter of factly. "You should see the effect he has on the men he comes in contact with in the house. They'll never be the same again. Not that he makes instantaneous conversions, and so on. But he gets them. He never turns anyone away. He forgives seventy times seven. He doesn't judge." There were lots of things like that they said. I know I looked at Larry more closely the next time I met him, pondered him, and thought to myself, "How wonderful to have saints amongst us, and what a privilege it is to have been called in this work by a saint such as Peter Maurin, and to be inspired and lifted up by associates and fellow workers such as Larry. It's the kind of thought that warms the heart, and encourages and lightens the work."

We all of us have always been convinced that Sanctity is the only thing in the world worth striving for, the only quality which is of any value whatsoever to God, to us, or to the world. "He has no need of our goods." And when it comes down to it, we haven't so much to give the poor. Except love. And it takes a saint to love, to know what love means, natural love, and supernatural love. Grace builds on nature, they say, and I know you must love naturally, too, to learn what supernatural love is. All this talk of loving people but not liking them is bosh. The Little Flower knew that when she showed such natural affection towards a nun she was tempted to dislike.

When we talked about Larry being a saint, it was no light talk. One doesn't live in community all these years without knowing each other's faults. We are not deceived by one another. We know each other, we know each other "in the breaking of bread," and we have lived intimately together, sharing the same purse, the same house, the same food, the same clothing, to a very great extent. How tremendous this intimacy is. And how we know one another. Our very painful striving for sanctity can get on each other's nerves. Stanley, for instance, used to say, "There are the saints and those who live with the saints, the martyrs." One of his wisecracks, but it meant something.

Sharing the same purse! I remember how shocked everyone was when they saw Larry and his wife living up to the ideas Peter Maurin was always talking about in connection with farming communes. For instance, Peter used to say, "Eat what you raise, and raise what you eat," and when you ponder that one you see it means you don't raise tobacco, coffee, tea, cocoa, pepper, various condiments, luxuries such as oranges and lemons (apples, and tomatoes and berries take their place) and there right off the bat your grocery bill is cut down and your

luxury bill, you are beginning to practice voluntary poverty and incidentally you have more to feed your growing family with.

If you don't raise sugar, you use honey, or maple syrup, or just get along with the natural sugar which is in corn or beets or carrots or onions. So you cut down on your sugar bill, and incidentally your dentist bill, and your children don't grow up with habits of candy, chewing gum, pepsi-cola, movies, radio, etc., etc. And not to speak of the voluntary poverty, the economy of it; there is also the asceticism of it.

Larry was the consistent member of the group who very quietly cut out of his life all superfluities, attachments. Ruth Ann was telling me yesterday that she was looking around the house for something by which she could remember him, some little thing that partook of him because he loved it, "was attached to it," and there was nothing—his rosary was a cheap old one, one of a heap of rosaries. His missal even, did not have his name in it—it was indistinguishable from other missals in the house. He had no books—books belonged to the community.

He enjoyed voluntary poverty, and he suffered from involuntary poverty too, the poverty which means trying to make ends meet, saving money for the farm payments, accepting help from relatives to make a start on the land, for in addition to the money he saved from his work in a brewery in Milwaukee, he had to accept money from generous brothers-in-law, to help stock the farm and get feed to fatten them the first year.

There were no washing machines, no electricity, no bath and toilet, no kitchen sink; no radio, no coal since they burned wood—every non-essential was put to one side, was cut out of their lives. There was the hardship of night watches with teething children, of helping with the family wash, of keeping up a wood supply to heat the large kitchen - living room where the family spent its days in winter. The bedrooms of course were never heated except for an emergency.

I spent a few days a little over a year ago in that farm kitchen, and it was a winter day and too cold for the children to be out for more than a little while at a time. They would bundle up, take each others' hands, and the four of them race around, blown by the wind, trying to keep warm. Most of the day they played in the house, and I remember marvelling at how good they were. There were Mary, Ann, Therese, Joseph, and baby John then. It was advent, and they were playing Christmas already. At night after supper they would clamor for Larry and Ruth Ann to sit on the sofa with baby John in their laps, and the other four would be shepherds coming to worship, all dressed up as shepherds are in pictures, with crooks in their hands.

When they wanted to play the Three Kings, there was great embarrassment. They had one King too many, so one child had to be a King's wife. And they didn't like to ask it, but they had to have a Herod, and there was no one else there but me. Would I be Herod. None of them would. And then these babies, five, four, three and two, would kneel around their mother and father and the "baby Jesus" and say their evening prayers together, praying for all children in the world who were orphans, and who were hungry and cold.

As was said of the early Christians, how they loved one another!

That was what everyone remembered at once at Maryfarm. Ruth Ann and Larry, how they loved one another. And I know John Filliger, our farmer, was thinking of how many times he saw them coming daily down the hill at Easton, hand in hand, on their way to the Church, three miles off.

They took care of an extra baby that first year at Easton (one from Mott street without a father) and a number of single men, in addition to their own new baby.

And now there is Mary, Ann, Therese, Joseph, John and little Thomas, two months old. The first five were taken care of in the rectory of Fr. Minwegen's Church by Loretta when Thomas was born. Both Larry and Ruth Ann had to go to the hospital. Ruth Ann had had many of her children at home, but the doctors refused this time. The dangers of complications, the bad roads, and so on. Martin Paul and his wife were having a third child at the same time, so the two mothers were in a terrible predicament and no one came to help. After the first baby was born one of the friends let the school of the apostolate at Grailville know, and Bridget came from there in time to take care of the children while Martie Paul's wife had her third, and to help Ruth Ann when she came home from the hospital. It was a month's visit, and it was a godsend. If only we could persuade all young women to give a month a year to take care of situations like this, what a family apostolate could be built up!

Yes, there is suffering in such dedicated lives as these, but there are joys unutterable and love as perfect as any found on earth.

It will be said without doubt, by well meaning friends in the body Catholic throughout the country, that Larry Heaney died of hardship, of overwork, of combating our industrial system, of tilting at windmills. And they may quote T. S. Eliot, "this is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends—not with a bang, but a whimper." "This is all that comes of beating your head against a stone wall, of trying to turn the clock back, of opposing our man-made hell of industrialism which we must sanctify and use."

And we will reply in turn that unless the grain of wheat fall in the ground and die, itself remaineth alone, but if it die, it will bear much fruit. "And he who saves his life, shall lose it, and he who loses it shall gain it a hundredfold." No, we do not believe that Larry died of hardships and overwork, but because he had reached that stage of perfection pleasing to God, as his pastor said at his funeral Mass and so He took him. And we rejoice in the suffering and know it to be the gentle rain to water the crop. He is with God.