

On Pilgrimage - January 1948

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes a happy Christmas at the Newburgh farm—snow, good food, worship, but uneven heat. Peter Maurin can't stay warm, receives the affectionate care of children, and needs a doctor. Urges all to keep the ideal of going "villageward." (DDLW #462).

Around Newburgh, New York, five miles outside of which Maryfarm is located, we had more snow than sleet so we did not have the jeweled fairyland display of the countryside closer to New York. The wind blew the snow in drifts waist high and Father Becker of Georgetown, who was our guest over Christmas had plenty of manual labor helping Hans, John, Joe and Frank get paths shoveled to and from the barns, the men's house, the road, etc. For two days the mail did not get through, though some bold truckmen kept the road open from Middletown to Newburgh.

New Year's Day, the feast of the Circumcision, we did not have a priest but we were able to get to the nearest church before the second storm broke. Right after the nine o'clock Mass we ran into sleet for a while and Walter, who was driving had to get out and clean the windshield with his pen knife three times in the five miles.

Food Situation

I hate to talk about our abundance in the face of such an article as Doris Ann Doran's. But the peasant who has not been displaced from the land can tell the same story as we—the story of food put away for the winter. John and Frank are busy smoking eighty pounds of bacon, ten hams and ten shoulders of pork, keeping the fire in the smoke house going with applewood. We have an ancient orchard so old that it has to be uprooted and replanted so we have plenty of wood. We have a barn full of apples, thanks to a neighbor, plenty of potatoes, thanks to Fr. Meenan of Norwalk, and still some of our own cabbage and turnips, besides a few thousand cans, thanks to Dave Mason and Joe Cotter.

Our good cook Charlie, who has had a wide experience with railroad gangs and institutions kept us supplied with pies and that topped the holiday meals,

and neither Maureen, Marie Therese nor I could hold a candle to him in the kitchen. I did the bread-baking, four pound-loaves a day and it was the delicious unknaded bread of Sir Albert Howard's recommendation. Marie Therese said that she had made it before without success, but it was because she did not have her dough stiff enough. One should be able to pick it up, flouring one's hands, form it into loaves. Neighbors brought us fruit, coffee, cookies and in spite of the storm we had visitors, Eileen Egan, John O'Donnell, Dave Mason, Dick Roland (of Brooklyn Catholic Action) Stanley and Walter Vishnewski. Jane O'Donnell was home for the holiday and we all missed her, especially her godchild Hans.

It was a happy Christmas time with everyone receiving Communion together. It was good to have Fr. Becker's informal talks every evening, in addition to homilies at Mass and discussions during the day. It was good to get to bed early, and read Dickens and listen to the snow hit against the window panes in the attic which is the warmest part of the house.

Downstairs it was cold in spite of the furnace (our first use of coal this winter). The walls and ceilings are unfinished and so the wind whistles through. The kitchen is warm, but one has to keep coats on in the dining room. Peter Maurin, what with being so inactive, found it hard to keep warm in spite of woolens, sweaters, stocking cap, and a blanket over his knees. His cough got worse, so when I suggested a visit to Mott street his face lit up. He can be in my room, next to Marjorie, and Joe Hughes, and the children can run in and out and Peter will love that.

Johannah likes to boss him, and she softens her bossiness by putting her pink cheek against his and hugging him. "Peter, you are just an old man and you've got to drink your orange juice." (My daughter used to say when she was a little girl, 'When you get little and I get big, I'll take care of you!') Peter is 'little' to Johannah now.

We had to call the doctor for Peter when he came in because his excitement at the change of scene led him to overdo it. The doctor diagnosed his cough as cardiac asthma and said otherwise all was well. So he is not trying to venture out for any walks in this weather. Kay Martin and the baby Joe are in the back room and their stove is so roaring hot that Peter's bedroom is well heated too. And Hazen and Joe and Dave and Mike have dropped in to see him for a little conversation.

There is a skeleton staff at the farm now that the Christmas holidays are over. The next retreat will be Easter week, for women, but we hope also before then to have some Lenten retreat at the beginning of the season.

I left the farm at 8:10 in the morning, catching the bus which goes right by the door straight in to New York. That same bus goes back up to the farm at 6:30 every night (the driver will put you off at the Catholic Worker Farm, opposite Sunnybrook Farms), but you had better notify people you are coming as the crowd retires at nine at night.

At this point I had intended to start telling about the rest of my trip through the west, but I shall make a separate article of that for the next issue, especially as I wish to deal at some length with Catholic Action as I saw it beginning in the west.

Unfortunately this month I fell victim to the cold and fever which seems to be laying everyone low and the week before going to press finds me in bed, unable to answer letters, thank our good friends for all their help over the holy days, or help with the paper, which is very ably handled, after all, by Jack English, Tom Sullivan and Irene Mary Naughton.

I must remember to bring out the point that in describing the comfort of our Christmas on the farm, I do it to contrast the city and the country. If we who are tied to the city, cannot go villageward at once we can begin to hold it as an ideal for our children and begin to educate them towards it.