

On Pilgrimage - May 1963

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Summary: On a peace pilgrimage to Rome during Vatican Council II, she describes their accommodations, a bus tour, fellow pilgrims, visits to friends, and an audience with Pope John XXIII. (DDLW #803).

Low Sunday, Rome, Italy

What are we here for, why did we come, we fifty or more women from all countries, of all religious affiliations, and many without a particular belief, of many nationalities? It is a pilgrimage of course, a true pilgrimage, to the Holy City of Rome, to the head of the Church, and for us Catholics, to the representative of Christ on Earth, to present ourselves as though a first fruits of his great encyclical **Pacem in terris**, to thank him, to pledge ourselves to work for peace, and to ask too, a more radical condemnation of the instruments of modern warfare. We are to be part of a large general audience on Wednesday, a meeting of groups and of single pilgrimage.

Someone wrote in, "Might not the money for pilgrim fares have been better spent to serve the poor." But that was the question asked our Lord when he was anointed by Mary Magdalene just before he was betrayed.

My passage was paid for one way by a friend in Chicago and my return by another in Connecticut and in some places living in Rome is cheap. A Yale student I met last night said he was paying sixty cents a night for his bed in a hospice for pilgrims. Vincent MacAloon who runs the Notre Dame Club at Margot Brancaccio 82, is the one to get in touch with if you are going to Rome. Another Notre Dame student said Vincent had been a guardian angel to many.

We women are staying at the Pacis Domus, two miles from the Vatican, a great hospice on a slight hill, many buildings set up in a delightful garden full of singing birds. One tall cage has mourning doves crooning to each other, and also some very active turtles. There are pines and palms and primroses, beds of flowers in bloom and many trees just coming into leaf. Wisteria is in bloom and the air is fragrant. In San Sebastian House Marguerite Harris and I share a narrow little room with two beds, a wardrobe and a washbowl. There is not room for two to dress at the same time. But there are meeting rooms, and I am working in a room over the chapel, with French windows wide open on the fading light of evening.

Our breakfast is coffee with milk, and a roll and jam. Supper is soup, salad and bread and an apple. The menu has not varied. It is pilgrim's fare and it costs three dollars a day for room and meals. The hospice is filled with students from schools in England, France, Germany, and one table near us was labeled Louvain. Young men, boys with priests, young women and girls with nuns, the students in uniform and with busses to take them to see the wonders of Rome. But now Easter week is over and they all leave tomorrow morning and the place will be very quiet. Even conventions of men use the place, and they make just as much noise. There is a bar, where both drinks and coffee can be purchased and if you do not want the tiny cup of coffee with sugar, bitter and strong, you ask for Capuccino and get it with foaming milk, very good. Only the coffee bar is not always open. It has been closed all afternoon.

Friends

As usual with a diary, one works backward. David Kirk who is studying a Beda College met us at the boat in Naples and we had supper together in Santa Lucia. It was cool and grey yet clear, and it was beautiful to sit by the sea and eat spaghetti and return to the hotel by swaying street car. David left us to take the boat to Ischia where he was joining some other seminarians for their Easter holiday, living with some fishermen, and Marguerite and I went to the Church of Santa Brigitta named for St. Brigid of Sweden. There were many people in the church, and after praying at the shrine of the saint, we went to see the miraculous crucifix which had changed in the night from the crucified Christ to the glorified Christ the King resplendent in robes and beautiful and serene of countenance. I prayed for our Lucille at the shrine of St. Lucy of course, and I am praying daily for all of the readers and writers of the Catholic Worker, and all who eat with us at our tables, all whom we encounter daily.

Mrs. Vacarro, our land lady on Kenmare street will be pleased to know that I went to Mass at the Cathedral of San Gennaro, in a little chapel to the right of the main altar (if one is facing it) where everything was beautiful, stones, walls, altar with its sculptures and carvings. Is as though no one in Italy were unemployed, as though all they did was decorate everything with a keen sense of beauty and dedication.

Bus Travel

When we bought our bus tickets next morning we thought we were going to travel on a regular bus. They say no one travels by bus in Italy, the trains are so cheap. But we found ourselves on a tour with some of the boat passengers, with a scheduled two hour stop at Monte Cassino. It is a most terrifying trip with many hair pin turns up a narrow highway, so close to the mountain's edge that I could not bear to look down at the vast valley below, every inch cultivated. The monastery, destroyed by Saracens, Lombards, earthquake and the Americans in the second world war, has been completely rebuilt. Nothing is ever as we have pictured it in our minds. I had expected an isolation like that of Mt. Athos or Sinai. Instead, the mountains are crowned with stone villages ever so many miles apart and where the guide told of their destruction, she pointed out the completely new rebuilt town at the foot of the

mountain on the plain. Even on Monte Cassino there are villas and gardens, terraced with olive trees and vineyards at the foot of the mountain, the rebuilt part of Cassino.

What impressed me most was the people. It is spring, and there has been a hard winter and today the sun shone and everyone worked in the fields. They worked in groups, in little knots of three or four, not scattered over the field as we do. It was as though they held each other up, bore each other's fatigue, sustained each other. While oxen drew the ploughs, men and women dug around the fruit trees, the grape vines, and every twig and stem and pruning was garnered, and every blade of grass clipped for the cattle. Great round bolls of twigs were nested in the trees, off the ground, and women carried great loads of fresh cut grass on their heads.

Domus Pacis

We arrived at Rome at the end of the day, having avoided the Throughway all day, and settled ourselves at the **Domus Pacis**. The next day Hildegard Goss Mayr and her husband Jean Goss arrived. They had been speaking in Milan and Turin and had been all night on the train, which was crowded, due to the elections coming at the end of this week. They said that as in the times of Joseph and Mary, people had to go to their hometowns to vote, and the government paid their fare. Which meant crowded coaches. It is interesting to see the freedom of Italy, compared to our own country. When we landed in Naples, we saw a delegation of students with placards marching around the municipal square and distributing leaflets and shouting slogans. They were Communists. The Socialist billboards also displayed the hammer and sickle. There are any number of parties, eight perhaps, and at the Galleria in Naples, candidates were listed one after another on the bill boards with all their slogans.

While the Gosses rested, Marguerite and I went to the center of Rome, she to her dear Brigitta nuns and I to see our Catholic Worker friend and writer, Jim Douglas who lives with his wife on Gian Battista Belzoi street, up one flight, windows of the four room apartment looking out east and west over the city. There is a balcony where their two children, Billy and Peter can play. We had supper, and a Yale student came in who had worked in Mexico for the last two years. He is studying at Freiburg and will return for another year at Notre Dame.

I talked over the phone with Patrick O'Reilly Persechetti, a brilliant young pacifist anarchist, who, with Jim had prepared sheets of quotations from the Popes on war, translated into German, Italian and English, thirty of each so that our women on pilgrimage, who are not Catholic can be briefed on the Papacy's efforts for peace and also the Catholic teaching on a conditions for a just war. This pilgrimage is both pacifist and ecumenical.

Persechetti has translated Peter Maurin's essays into Italian and is going to do the same in Gaelic when he has the time. He is manager of the Goldoni theater and we are going to have a meeting there, one for the women to show Peace films and later one for me, so I can speak to the American seminarians in Rome. Already I have received requests for meetings from students of the Divine Word Seminary, Holy Cross Seminary, and the American College. I had not thought I would be speaking in Rome.

I have had many requests from friends to visit other countries on this trip abroad, but I wish to remain in Italy a month and then return to my much loved little Italy in New York, stopping perhaps only at Lourdes on the way.

It is Monday, April 22, and we women have had preliminary meetings to get acquainted. There are two women from South America and I can practice my Spanish with them. There is a beautiful young woman, from Hiroshima, and women from Canada, England, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and the United States. There are two colored women, one from Jackson, Mississippi, active in civil rights and in Church work, and one from New Jersey who was brought up a Muslim and is now working with evangelists, for and with adolescents among them many delinquents.

Virginia Naeve sparked the trip with the aid of Mary Pollard of New Hampshire and Hermine Evans of Chicago.

Postscript

Today the Mothers for Peace, a group made up of Catholic Workers, members of Pax, Women Strike for Peace, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and others, women from Hiroshima, South America (Peru and Colombia), the United States (the majority), Austria, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Holland, France, and Italy! We were all received by the Holy Father in one of those vast audiences in St. Peter's together with groups from schools from many countries. We were at first disappointed (especially the non-Catholics) that we did not have an opportunity each one to speak to Pope John, but it was a perfect setting for the message he delivered on Peace, addressing us women, thanking us for our Peace Pilgrimage and message, and saying it brought comfort to his heart and blessing us, to return home to our labor for Peace. The speech was translated into French, German, Spanish and English at once, before he left the papal throne.

What an atmosphere of fatherly love and serenity he makes around him. And what a joyful pilgrimage this has been! I prayed again at Saint Peter's tomb, where I was fortunate enough to have a complete view of the entire scene, and there, sitting between a young scholarship student of voice from Nicaragua and a young Roman girl, a restorer of paintings, I prayed for you all, and received the Pope's blessing, which he said was for all our dear ones, and you are that to me, fortunate pilgrim that I am.

Continued next month.