

On Pilgrimage - April 1952

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Celebrates the feast of the Annunciation with frolicking grand children, kissing the springtime earth. Complains of fatigue and morning stiffness. Laments her inefficiency but recommends relaxing prayer, even in the midst of the disorder of happy children. (DDLW #926).

On Pilgrimage

Suddenly the children were all well again, Susie had gotten over her mumps and Becky her fever, and it was the feast of the Incarnation.

The day before the rain had come down in sheets all day, driving against the windows, and the wind howled around the house. But today the sun shone and south wind was mild and the grass brightened into a fresh green underneath the yellow weeds and the daffodil buds were about ready to burst out.

Just as it was growing dusk, I remembered something Allan Bates had said to us on that same feast at Maryfarm a year or two ago.

“On this day, when Christ took on our humanity, – on this day of the incarnation, we should go out and kiss the earth His feet trod and made holy again.”

“Let’s do that,” I told the children. “This is a most important day and we should remember it. Nine months from now it will be Christmas; but the baby Jesus was conceived on this very spring day in the womb of the Virgin Mary. On this very day He began to dwell among us. It’s the beginning of Christmas now. Who wants to go out and kiss the ground?”

“I do,” Susie said. “Me too,” Nickie shouted. He always wants to be in on everything. Eric is more silent and considering. “I’m not going to do it,” Beckie sniffed as though she thought it silly and I remembered the Little Flower who refused to kiss the ground for a penny. Becky too would not bow her haughty little head.

“I’ll come out too,” Tamar said, and added practically, “The Sun is going down and we have to take the clothes down besides.” So we took the clothes smelling of sunlight and fresh air down from the lines and brought them in the house.

The grassy place under the mulberry trees was a good spot for afternoon tea, for mud pies, for picnics, so we all knelt down on the soft sod and kissed the earth, and as we did so all the children, Becky, Susie, Eric and Nicholas began turning somersaults and there was a wild confusion of legs and curls and we all ended up laughing.

It had been a lovely day. In town visitors had started coming to the office at ten, Bob Boshart from the Chicago house of Hospitality, Mr. Gaffney whom Tom had met at Holy Ghost Abbey in Conyers last month and others and Beth and I had alternately typed, answered letters, talked to visitors and answered the telephone. Tom and Bob were running the addressograph downstairs.

After two p.m. I went down to Staten Island, stopping in at Tamar's before going over to the Peter Maurin Farm. It had been one of those quick trips where N.Y. bus, ferry and S.I. bus all synchronized and I got there in an hour and a half. There were dishes to do, while Tamar saw the electrician about some repairs and then we went out to have coffee under the trees. Becky was just coming in from school when we started to read the story of St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio. Becky knew all about it already and had a picture in her school bag illustrating the story I was reading from **The Little Flowers of St. Francis**.

That was for the children's enjoyment, and when I went on to the story of Brother Juniper and how he cut off the pig's foot for a sick brother, Tamar and I almost collapsed laughing. It was so much like the things Catholic Workers are always doing, with the best will in the world.

First Things First

For the last month I have been almost collapsing with fatigue, however, and with groanings, what with trying to work in town, and in the country (and at two places there.) At night I crawl into bed with an aching back wondering how I can ever get out of it in the morning, my eyes too heavy even to read, my brain unable to think. And in the morning, the first hour is an agony of stiffness, aches and pains, until after the comforting morning coffee and good whole wheat bread.

"I just don't know how to relax while working," I thought as I helped Tamar over a tub of clothes or dishes. When there are five children there is no end to both. "Relax," I kept saying to myself, thinking enviously of such people as Julia Porcelli, Helen Dolan, Alice Zarrella and Kay Brinkworth who have efficiency in everything they do and what they do seems to be without effort.

But it is hard to start learning how to relax or how to be efficient at housework at the age of fifty-four. The one thing one can keep starting over again to do, is to put first things first. To remember the primacy of the spiritual. To let the house go and just sit out under the sky and breathe deeply for a while and pray one word, over and over. "Short prayer pierceth heaven," the author of **The Cloud** writes. "Take thee but a little word of one syllable; . . . such a word is this word GOD or this word LOVE . . . And fasten this word to thy heart, so that it never go thence for anything that befallerth . . . This word shall be thy shield and thy spear . . . with this word thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee. With this word thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the cloud of forgetting. Inasmuch that if any thought press upon thee to ask thee what thou wouldst have, answer them with no more words but this one word."

For those who have much to do, or think they have, Mother Stuart's words are interesting.

“One may progress in prayer just as much in the high pressure of full work as in the low pressure of less absorbing duties, for if they are allowed to, they expand like gas and tend to fill all the space available.”

While I am writing these things I am thinking of all the families around the country in the Catholic Worker movement who are so completely absorbed with the cares of a large and growing family. (In a number of them there are already nine children). Not many of us are efficient.

And is it efficient, to worry about the disorder attendant on a household of happy children? “Children have their own order,” Tamar says, as she goes about tending her potted plants and disregarding the bedlam about her. “Children’s work is to grow,” Jane O’Donnell said once as she watched the antics of four small children she was caring for in their mother’s absence. I think of that when I watch the perpetual motion of a two, four, five and six year old running from one end to the other, climbing chairs, taking flying leaps from a couch out into the middle of the floor.

There can be silence, prayer, peace in the midst of it all. If you practice at it.

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