

On Pilgrimage - July/August 1950

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Summary: Describes the work, inconvenience, and grateful anticipation of their move to a new house on Christie Street. Includes an account of an all-night pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Mt. Carmel. (DDLW #612).

The last issue of the Catholic Worker came out a long time ago—June 1. Since then the story of the new headquarters of the Catholic Worker pales into insignificance, in view of the world situation. It is heartbreaking once again to see casualty lists in the New York Times and feel the lack of peace in all hearts as fear grows of more widespread conflict. Once again we must reiterate our absolute pacifist position. We believe that not only atomic weapons must be outlawed, but all war, and that the social order must be restored in Christ, so that we may have true peace, “tranquillity in order.” Robert Ludlow is writing our position in this same issue, so I will write no further on the subject, but fulfill my delightful obligation to report on the new house for our 63,000 readers.

Still at 115

First of all, we are still at 115 Mott street, and all mail, calls, visitors should come here and not to the new house at 221-223 Chrystie street. There are only 200 Koreans in New York City, and, strangely enough, we bought our house from a Korean family who were living with their married children and grandchildren. They are still living there, and it is oppressive enough that we are forcing them to move, and we do not wish them to be bothered with our visitors. The contract to sell the house was signed and money paid over only a few days before the war broke out in Korea and changed the plans of the head of the family, who had intended to return. Now they are hunting for a new home, and, having finished praying for a new home for ourselves and making our thanksgiving, we now must start praying for them. We ask our readers, too, to pray in this particular instance for a new home or homes for these three families whom we are displacing. Of course, they are well-off people and cannot be considered in the light of dispossessed people, but still the trials and anguish they are going through must touch our hearts and make us anxious to put up with the inconveniences we are also suffering at not having immediate occupancy such as we had agreed on. It seems wars are always touching us very closely. We had Japanese and Chinese in the house in the last war, Russian and German, Irish and English. Always there are the seeds of conflict right with us, and we are forced over and over again to consider immediate people, immediate issues, our own passions and contentions, suspicions, anger and lack of brotherly love.

Christianity is never easy. The problem of love is to believe in love, to believe in the possibility of loving others in spite of the sin and disease which are so present all around us that it is hard to find Christ in others.

Again Trees

Years ago I wrote a short story, entitled "She could sit under a tree," the story of a tenement mother and what it meant to her to sit with her baby carriage under a tree in a city park. Right across the street from us on Chrystie street is the beginning of Sara Delano Roosevelt Park, which stretches from Houston street to Manhattan Bridge. There are long groves of plane trees, and under them are benches where we can sit and watch the children in the playground on the swings. The plane tree has been compared to the Blessed Mother in Scripture, and Irene and I have delighted on a number of evenings this month in sitting on one of these benches and saying our rosary while we contemplated our home-to-be. It was no distraction from our prayers to sit there and look at it ecstatically. It was a help to thanksgiving.

We are going to have things "nice," we decided. A sitting room for the women and the two dormitory rooms not too crowded, so that there would be peace and quiet. (And how one woman alone can shatter the peace and how we can begin to torment ourselves with the problem of charity and the common good, of forgiving seventy times seven, and contributing to delinquency!) Nothing is easy in the Christian life, and it doesn't get any easier with this wound of Christianity inflicted on one, as Kirkegaard calls it. "Pierce, I beseech thee, O Lord Jesus, the inmost marrow of my soul with the tender and life-living [sic] wound of they love." We ask for it in these terms, little knowing what we ask!

We both groan, Irene and I, but still we are exulting in our new home, with its space and light and sun, the laundry in the sub-basement, the big back yard, four times as big as the one we have now, where we can have meetings in the evening, where all the high and glorious and lofty things of this life and the next can be discussed, regardless of ash cans and cats and the blare of juke boxes and the shoutings of neighbors.

We have had good meetings this summer, with Alan Crite, the Negro artist; Ed Willock and Carol Jackson, editors of Integrity; Bill Martin, of the Sun-Herald; Gary Davis, the world citizen, and others. Now we have stopped the meetings, due to the moving that is going on, and will continue to go on all summer.

We paid \$30,000 for the house, and that money came in small donations for the most part from our readers all over the country and from the most unlikely sources. Four thousand dollars was loaned to us by readers, without interest. A soldier in Tokyo, who may be in Korea now, sent a donation and thanked God for the work for peace we were doing. A merchant marine dropped into the office between trips and left \$40. A hundred dollars came from a sick woman in a hospital. Another reader gave a station wagon, a 1939 Ford, which has been doing valiant work making numberless trips back and forth with loads to the new house.

Joe Cuellar, our Mexican fellow worker who gave us the last six months of good hard work,

finished packing all the back issues in the cellar and cleaning it out before he took off for a retreat at Gethsemane. On his way to the Trappists of Kentucky he and his companion went to sleep in a parked car and were arrested and given ten days for disturbing the peace,—what a charge!—and so missed out on their retreat.

A heroic job has been done by Roger O’Neil of Boston who has managed the work of evacuating the entire rear house and packing in the men in two apartments in the front house. We women are also tucked tightly into the top floor with scarcely space to turn or breathe. The kitchen goes on functioning, serving some six hundred meals a day, and though they may be only bowls of soup and cups of coffee and bread, those gallons of soup for hundreds heat the kitchen and tempers to the boiling point. Nevertheless, Fred and Wynn set out good meals for the family, even adding fringes with their whole wheat biscuits and bread for the breakfast. Roger, though he is the youngest member of the group, has shown an ability which has amazed everyone. He has collected sandwiches from summer schools in Brooklyn, sometimes late, much to the distress of the good Sisters, and he has kept at the evacuation day and night. He painted Marjorie Hughes’ new apartment; moved her and Cecilia Curran. Tonight he is going up to the farm with a load of furniture for a woman whose husband is hospitalized with t.b. and who has a family of children and little furniture. We have some dressers and tables to spare. The driving has been done by Charles McCormick and Tony Aratari and Joe Monroe have assisted the moving, and they all keep going in the heat in unfailing good humor and readiness. Thank God for this steady help. Hans Suter arrived for a visit from Pendle Hill before his return to Switzerland and is painting the dining room and kitchen at Chrystie street. Peter Carey is doing electrical work, Jane Pate from Louisville has been staying a month with us doing everything that came up, an invaluable assistant.

Such help has come, in money and in labor that we have a renewed sense of the need to work hard as good servants of the poor, with no grumblings and complainings about heat and crowdings, loss of sleep and lack of time for what we consider necessary in the way of study and writing. People are more important than anything else. We can only show our love of God by our love of our fellows. Besides in this life, in this time of war and fear, we might as well get used to the idea of doing our thinking and praying, our study and writing on park benches and in snatches. Not that I think Harper Brothers are going to be satisfied with the book I am finishing up for them and since they have already invested a thousand dollars in it, I have an obligation to get the job done to the best of my ability. What I would like, of course, would be to go off to the seashore someplace and with the smell of seaweed and salt air, enjoy the writing that I still have to do. But that’s heaven I’m thinking about, not this life. It is wanting too much. Harper and Brothers will just have to be content with the journalistic and epistolary style, which is the only one I am capable of.

Pilgrimage

Jane Pate, in between washing windows and dusting on this hot Saturday afternoon, asks me not to forget to tell of our pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Mt. Carmel which took place on a Saturday night two weeks ago. We set out at eleven thirty and walked from our place, which is ten blocks below First Street, to One Hundred and Sixteenth street and First

Avenue. Many Italians in this neighborhood have made that pilgrimage every year for fifteen years in their bare feet. There were eight of us walking and the night was not too hot, and we prayed the rosary as we walked and did some singing. Joe Monroe had the best voice among us. There was Hans, Bob Considine, Tony, Joe, Roger, Cyril and Jane and I and when I saw the festa lights at one-thirty we were exulting prematurely. We still had to wait until four a.m. to get in to Mass. The police have a long night of it, roping off the thousands who come on the pilgrimage, a line which extends all around the block, ten deep. The wait was complicated by the fact that showers began to come down, soaking all the devout who held their ground and continued the wait under newspapers and cardboard and hastily contrived rain capes. The rain was intermittent, and we kept moving ahead, so that one time we found shelter in doorways, another under the leaking awnings of venders of candles and holy images. We met others from our own neighborhood, from Mulberry and Baxter streets who had also walked. Thousands received communion. It was a pilgrimage of the poor, and it was garish and tawdry, perhaps, to the unseeing eye, a mortification of the exterior and interior senses in many ways. Next year, we decided, we would gather together a choir such as we have on Christmas eve when we go carolling around Mott street and with the help of some strong voices we will sing to pass the time and to engage in praise while we wait. It would be far easier waiting while we lighten this heavy flesh with song. There is always a natural and a supernatural reason for doing everything, it seems.

To all of us who live here in the slums, such a pilgrimage is a joy indeed. There were no solemn or dour faces there, in this exercise of doing honor to God and our Lady. People were gay and chatty and there was no putting off natural joy to put on a fake piety.

Our God is indeed a **personal** God to whom it is fit and proper that we bring our praise and petitions. He has first called us and He has first loved us, and we have a duty and a joy to repay love with love. We have asked bread of Him these last months in the way of a place to live and He has given us our hearts desire and our body's need. We are grateful indeed.