

On Pilgrimage - June 1974

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Summary: Focuses on fasting, how hard it is for her, and the call to be holy, to become whole persons—spiritually, mentally, and physically. Lists the many speaking s tops and visits with friends and workers in a trip through the Midwest. Keyword: saints (DDLW #541).

When the Canadian Broadcasting Co. invited me to be on their “Man Alive” program last month and the subject they wanted me to talk about was Saints (and what it felt like to be on occasion termed a Saint), I groaned at first, reacted rudely, and then consented. Because I really do have plenty to say on the subject, and because of an omission in the last issue of the **CW** of the name of Dick Gregory in our story on men and women who fast in protest against war and violence and the injustices and corruption of our times. Gandhi, of course was listed and Cesar Chavez and Fr. Ed Guinan and our former editor Ammon Hennacy. But Bob Steed, also a former editor, once fasted for 40 days against capital punishment (the Chessman Case), and Marge Swann, and so many others it would be hard to list them all.

And now there is Dick Gregory, a writer, a brave and courageous spirit who could be called certainly either a one-man revolution, a label Ammon loved, or a saint of our times.

We are sustained by the food we eat as truly as by the air we breathe. We know each other in the breaking of bread. Christ ate with His disciples on their wanderings, and at the paschal meal He left Himself in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

So it has always seemed to me that giving up food, fasting, is in a way, offering your life for others, for one’s brothers. And Dick Gregory has been doing just that for a long time.

I think people learn more by listening nowadays than by reading. One reaches more students through talking at all these Commencements I’ve spoken at than by a flimsy 8-page paper that crumbles into dust or is, hopefully, recycled. So I was glad of the chance to speak on “Man Alive.”

Aspiring to Wholeness

As for me, Ammon would call me a pipsqueak—I find it so hard to fast. Deane Mowrer and the Marshalls are the best fasters among us right now. Deane always does it for a particular person or project. And alone. But ah me! I cannot fast alone. With a group in jail, with 18 valiant women in a Roman convent for the Vatican Council, but not alone.

As for saints, in the old translation of Scripture St. Paul greeted people in his letters as “called to be saints.” And wrote also that we should put off “the old man” and “put on Christ.” “Be ye therefore holy.” In other words “whole men,” developing all our faculties—spiritual, mental and physical. When I think how men have walked on the moon—their courage, their faith—how highly developed their mental and physical capacities, I feel we are woefully undeveloped spiritually.

And yet, there is always some aspect of saintliness in the folks around the CW. So many young people getting down to the essentials of life, pruning away the non-essentials, learning to meditate, to contemplate. They are on a quest, a search for wholeness, holiness.

The Quakers have a saying, “There is that which is of God in everyman.” In other words, seeing Christ in each other, as He told us to do. “Whatever you did for one of my least brethren, you have done for men.” We so often apply these words to the works of mercy—feeding, clothing and sheltering others—but those in trouble who come to the Catholic Worker do the same for us and each other. The “little” saints like Hans who taught everyone to bake bread, and Mike who was so knowledgeable about furnaces and water heaters, and Tom Likely who set tables, cut bread, mixed powdered milk, kept kettles hot, served up tea and coffee to the disconsolate; and now, our latest “departed” friend, Bob Stewart, who chauffeured for us so many years, so uncomplaining in those last months of emphysema.

And all those other quiet men who drop by “off the road” who help in so many little ways. If I’m not careful I’ll sound like the Irish who see sanctity everywhere. What a variety of people “called to be saints,” crotchety, giddy, cranky ones, bibulous ones. It is no mean ambition—to aspire to holiness—to wholeness.

I always liked to read about saints. In all bad times of luxury and corruption in the Church, there was always a St. Francis, a St. Anthony, a St. Benedict, a Vincent de Paul, a Teresa and a Therese on the scene to enliven history. George Bernanos, who wrote **The Diary of a Country Priest**, wrote also that famous line—“There is only one sadness, not to be a saint.” Pope John XXIII wrote to his family, “The worst malady of all is sadness.”

So let us all, with St. Paul, “rejoice in the Lord always,” remembering Christ’s beatitudes, and call on the Name of the Lord—recalling too St. Bernard’s words—“Jesus is honey in the mouth, music to the ear, and shout of gladness in the heard,” because Christ, our Incarnate God, is present in His Name as in His Word, even as He was in the cloud which went before the Israelites.

When I write like this, it is for myself, too, that I write, because this last month, after returning from my pilgrimage, my heart was heavy with the sufferings of little babies undergoing major operations that is hardest for me to bear.

So let us pray for each other and “rejoice” because we share in some way the sufferings of others, and in some mysterious way lighten our own as we pray that the sufferings of others be lightened.

Visits and Talks

April was a month of meetings for me, up to New England to speak, and visits to Detroit and Avon, Ohio, to visit sick friends: Louis Murphy who headed the Detroit Catholic Worker houses for many years, and William Gauchat long-time leader of the Cleveland Catholic Worker, both the old Martin de Porres House and the farm at Avon, where there was many a summer meeting lead by Peter Maurin. Bill Gauchat’s archives are of great value, Dr. William Miller who wrote **A Harsh and Dreadful Love** tells me, and I hope we can get photostat copies of all of it, including Bill Gauchat’s journals, for the archives at Marquette University Library which house the Catholic Worker papers, letters and much unprinted material—not all of it, of course, open to the public.

Bill’s illness is terminal, and we beg prayers for him. He is suffering greatly but is capably nursed at home by his loving family at their little hospital, “Our Lady of the Wayside.” We pray that God will bring him to Himself, that he will know “the joy of man’s desiring.”

Since writing last I have spoken at the Catholic Center at the State University at Vermillion, South Dakota, and met again our friend Gerald Lange from Madison, South Dakota (another state university), teacher and farmer and interested in land trusts. Visited Sioux Falls where some of the Indians from Wounded Knee were being tried in a State Court. Trouble here and financial help is needed for defense funds. They can be sent to Wounded Knee Legal Defense/Offense Committee, P.O. Box 255, Sioux Falls, S.D. 57101. Proceeded to the Kansas City, Mo. House of Hospitality and War Tax Resisters’ Center in adjoining buildings and run by Bob and Angela Calvert who are gardening every inch of the land in their front and back yards. It is much to the edification of the city block families and we hope their imitation.

Proceeded to Bethel College, Mennonite, and found many friends there. Then to Dodge City, Our Lady of the Plains College, where I stayed with Prof. Philip Kaplow and his wife. I wish he’d photostat for me those pages he showed me about Eugene V. Debs in (was it?) the attorney general’s memoirs. Such an encomium of Debs I have never seen before.

Then on to Leavenworth, unhappy city of four prisons, State and Federal and Army, for men and women where I spoke at a great convent and college where I hope prayers and study will intensify to do away with these barbarous prison

structures—our jails are filled with Blacks, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Indians and the poor. I have heard of the good works of the American Civil Liberties lawyers out there.

On to Chicago—a long bus ride on a “through bus” which indeed went through every little town of Missouri and Illinois and stopped at them all. I enjoyed the long ride and the silence and the aloneness, looking out over those vast fields. But I could not help but realize that the grains grown and filling to overflowing every station along the railroads were for cattle mostly, not starving humans.

May found me in Chicago visiting with our scattered CW’s the Bredines, now living in Wisconsin on the farms leased them (or given?) by the Franciscans. Bro. Paul LaChance met me in Chicago and I spent several nights with the Beacon Street Franciscans, and Mass there too. Spent a Sunday afternoon with Karl Meyer and Jean and their three beautiful children, and all happy in the life of voluntary poverty where he receives an income low enough to be untaxable and so will not anticipate any more jail terms. His work is with the retarded in sheltered workshops.

Slept several nights with the Gospel Community (Polish Franciscans) living in apartments in a worse slum than the Armitage Center. There were police cars on the street and shootings in the night.

I was in Chicago to speak with a panel of De Paul University which included all our Catholic Workers, Tom LaPointe and his wife, Karl Meyer, Leonard Cizewski, Kristine Pierie and several others not associated with the CW including Sid Lenz.

Coming back to N.Y., I spoke at St. John’s University in Jamaica, in No. Windham, Maine at St. Joseph’s College, then to Philadelphia to Rosemont College, a few days later back to Boston to Newton College.

Bob Stewart

When I returned to N.Y. from Boston I got news from my granddaughter Sue, and went at once to the farm at Tivoli. While at Tivoli, Bob Stewart, who was two rooms down the hall from me, died quietly and peacefully. Joe Goodding had been watching over him. Slim had slept in the same room with Bob, and I had been looking in on him as I went to and from my room. He told me firmly he would not go to a hospital, he was not suffering, he was 75 and knew he was dying, and just wanted peace and quiet and no fuss. A few mornings later when I went in—it was early morning—it was obvious he had just breathed his last. His hands were still warm, he had not coughed or struggled for air as I have seen many do who had emphysema, but lay in quiet repose, as though asleep.

Fr. Tony Equale anointed him and Kathleen, who is nursing Emily, sat with me and we read together part of that beautiful Little Office of the Dead. May he rest in peace.