

On Pilgrimage - September 1955

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Visits and visitors fill her days and conferences and talks fill many evenings. Praises Ammon Hennacy's annual fast and picketing for America's dropping of the atom bomb. Says handicrafts provide relaxation and create beauty—"the rhythm of life which overflows in work of hand and brain." (DDLW #691).

Last month we went to press, July 27. The next day I took the train up to Maryknoll to visit the cloistered Sisters who have long been a very present help in time of trouble. Sister M. Theodore, Superior, greets you with folded hands as they do in the East and I wondered afterward if she had been there. It is funny, I go there to talk about the work, to beg prayers, and to be in the little chapel for Office and the Mass. And I forget to ask them questions about themselves even if our long and dear friendship would make it permissible. Sister Mary Irene (her name means peace) is one of those sturdy friends who cheerfully listens to one's troubles and one feels immediately helped by her prayers. It was a joy to see Sister M. Xavier, who used to head the social service department in Stockton, California, and who is responsible for several little houses of hospitality out there. Carroll McCool, who formerly headed St. Colette's house in Oakland, is now starting one in Stockton. Sister M. Xavier is going to South Carolina in the fall. It will be interesting to visit her there later on another pilgrimage. Sister Joan Marie who has a magnificent article on what is happening in China in a recent issue of *The Catholic World* visited with me too, and I felt very humble, thinking how she has been accounted worthy to suffer, what with her two years or so in a Chinese prison, her only food rice gruel, and solitary confinement her lot a good part of the time. She minimizes her heroism of course, but not the grace of God which enables one to live through such an experience.

Baptisms

My visit was just for the night and the day, because Friday we had two church baptisms at our parish church in Staten Island, our dear Fr. McGrath churching the women and consecrating the infants to the Blessed Mother. It was perfect weather, one of a long series of hot days, perfect for vacationers, but miserable for farmers who were seeing their crops wither away. (Now as I write in mid August, the rain is pouring down, and the lean-to room I occupy at Peter Maurin Farm is like a house boat with a stream of water running under it. In the middle of one field there is a pond these last two weeks that is being constantly replenished.)

Fr. Lambert, Dominican from Ottawa who is studying Russian at Fordham spent a weekend with us and gave us a Sunday afternoon conference. Helen Iswolsky has been with us every week end and we hope will spend more time at the farm now that summer school is over. We are looking forward to a Sunday lecture on Turgenev next month, at Peter Maurin Farm.

August 2-3 I visited my old friends Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon Tate at Princeton. Both are in Rome now, but when Allen comes back on his way to University of Minnesota where he is professor in the English Department, he promises us a talk at Chrystie Street. While at Princeton I was privileged to hear him read his poetry at the home of the head the English Department there.

August 5, which was a Friday, members of the CW group had a poster walk, together with members of the War Resisters, and Fellowship of Reconciliation, and A.J. Muste and I presented a letter to the Japanese people, on this tenth anniversary of the dropping of the Atom Bomb on Hiroshima. That night Bishop Fernandez of India spoke at Chrystie Street and it was heart-warming to hear him speak of Gandhi with such love, even with tenderness, calling him Gandhiji as his followers did. Fr. Pinto was there too, and had the happiness of seeing and talking to a native Goan girl who is studying in this country and looks so American that one would not have believed her Indian. Both priests were unmistakably Indian in spite of their Portuguese names.

Fasting

Ammon Hennacy's fast began at four that afternoon, and he tried to keep a silence too, but it lasted only that one evening. He felt afterward that as a propagandist it was only courteous to answer people's questions as to what he was doing and why. This year his fast was for ten days since it was ten years ago that America dropped the atom bomb. His picketing was only for the week days, Monday to Friday and then the following Monday, and of those days two of them were rainy, so he did not picket.

August 6 and 7th, another weekend, brought us a Quaker Work camp of twelve young people who slept out in the field in tents and in their Volkswagon, and spent Saturday in cutting fence posts in the woods, and the weeds along the edges of the fields. We had good discussions Saturday night and Sunday morning, the latter in my room where we teased wool and carded it and tried to do some spinning.

After the work camp left on Sunday, Larry Doyle and his wife and children and Hans Furth and his two Madeleine's arrived and we had music and singing and talk and supper and it was a very full day indeed. (We need a piano tuner badly).

August 8, Monday morning, I went into New York to picket with Ammon, or rather to help give out papers, and stayed from eleven to two. Robert Steed from Memphis, Tennessee, had arrived the Friday before and offered to be on the job all week to give out papers and to be on hand in case Ammon fainted on the way. I had been expressing great objections to the combination of picketing and fasting, feeling that Gandhi had emphasized rest (with bath and massage in his case) but as the week went on, I could see that walking slowly up and down was quieting to the nerves and was an aid to the continuing of the fast. The place of

demonstration was in front of the customs house, which was in the shade, until later in the afternoon, and across the street was Battery Park with its drinking fountain and benches where Ammon could sit and rest for five minute intervals every hour. Rita Corbin painted Ammon's sign for him, and I was astonished to see that there was no mention of his fasting on the placard. The sign read of course that he was doing penance for the dropping of the bomb, but the people who passed might have felt it was the picketing that was the penance. Indeed for me any demonstration is a penance, feeling as I do that I'd rather be playing my role of grandmother than propagandist or journalist. But Ammon is a prophet, as Peter Maurin was a prophet, and as such is impelled to go out into the highways and byways to cry out against the gigantic evil of war. Peter had, and Ammon also has, a consciousness of a mission, which means 24 hours a day, eating and sleeping and talking Peace and Justice, and our personal responsibility to achieve a measure of these goods.

It was very still and cloudy on Tuesday and Wednesday, but by Thursday Hurricane Connie had brought us a reminder of the storm which was proclaiming the power of God further south along the coast, and there was no picketing, though the fasting went on.

Fr. Lorrigan

Friday night Fr. Lorrigan of New Zealand spent the evening with us, and spoke of his country and socialism and decentralism, telling us how New Zealand had led the way in the welfare state idea, and how it was incomparably easier to socialize than to de-socialize an economy. His point was that of Chesterton and Belloc, —small holdings, small cooperatives, credit unions, which would mean ownership by the ordinary run of men rather than by the few at the top.

Saturday, Dorothy Gauchat and I drove down to the island to spend Sunday, and part of Monday, which was our Lady's feast of the Assumption. The bay was very rough and all the drive down we saw evidences of uprooted trees and broken branches and in some cases wires down and roads cut off. There was no light on many a street for weeks after, and the traffic lights are still not working on many a crossing. We visited the Callanan's in their beach cottage which I envy them, and had lunch there.

Dorothy has six children of her own and two infants she is caring for on their farm, named for Our Lady of the Wayside, in Avon, Ohio. The House of Hospitality has closed in Cleveland, and now the farm has become a hospice too, and since Bill Gauchat, who represents the CW in Cleveland, works every day, the farming has become gardening for fruits and vegetables. Tamar was delighted to see Dorothy (they had both been apprentices of Ade Bethune at Newport) and they talked arts and crafts and homes and babies together, joined on Sunday by Jack and Colette Connor and their children. Sunday afternoons are always busy.

August 19th, and we have as guests two seminarians who are helping Jim Finn and the rest of the household prepare for a day of recollection Sunday, with Fr. Meyer, Maryknoller. Beth Rogers has two of her nephews with her, and with Paul Yamamoto and Angelo and Joey and Beatrice Scarpulli, there is a din of children. The two babies, Clare and Dylan occasionally lift their voices too. Yesterday with Becky, Susie, Eric, Nickie, Mary, Margaret and Martha

also visiting at the farm, Tamar and I ran off to the library and to shop for Susie's birthday which is on the feast of St. Louis. Tamar only gets to go shopping one day a month, what with seven children, so she thoroughly enjoys those days. Yesterday it was paint, and new shoes, and money orders at the post office to pay bills and Louisa M. Alcott at the library and a wonderful book on New England handicrafts.

Handicrafts

What with washing wool, carding, spinning, weaving, knitting afghans, hooked rugs, a small printing press, bakery, we begin to have some crafts. We are always beginning. Our trouble is that we are also running a house of hospitality, a farm, an inn by the side of the road. We do this handiwork for our own recreation and relaxation and joy, achieving some sense of the beauty of God's creation, the beauty of work, the rhythm of life which overflows in work of hand and brain. All work is repetitive and in a way monotonous but by that very fact may also be soothing and relaxing.

Labor Day Weekend

And now we are looking forward to our labor day weekend which will go off well if we have decent weather but which will be hard indeed if this constant rain keeps up. However, crowded conditions never seem to hinder discussion, though it may hinder work, and it is always more fun to be doing some work in between discussions whether it is work in the garden, the woods, or the house. We are going to turn the dining room and bakery, as well as every corner of the barn, into sleeping quarters, and people will camp out on mattresses. Morning discussions will be in the grove of trees or woodlot in the morning, and in the house in the afternoon when house work is done for the day. Our speakers include Helene Isvolsky, Martin Corbin, Edmund Egan, Ammon Hennacy, and if Robert Ludlow is not paying his annual visit to the Whalens out at Easthampton, maybe he can induced to come to speak too.

After Labor day, September 14, there will come the trial for our civil disobedience in City Hall park June 15. And who knows what will come of that?