

On Pilgrimage - April 1948

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Summary: Meditation on love—our need for love, God's lavish and foolish love, how hard love can be, how others will disapprove of loving the poor, even Lenin and Marx. Urges readers to come to a retreat at Newburgh for renewal and refreshment. Welcomes the Spring warmth and Peter Maurin's coming to the farm. (DDLW #467).

Whenever I groan within myself and think how hard it is to keep writing about love in these times of tension and strife which may at any moment become for us all a time of terror, I think to myself, "What else is the world interested in? What else do we all want, each one of us, except to love and be loved, in our families, in our work, in all our relationships. God is Love. Love casts out fear. Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the money changers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love, to stand in that relationship with each other of love. We want with all our hearts to love, to be loved. And not just in the family but to look upon all as our mothers, sisters, brothers, children. It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly, that we can recognize how tepid is our love for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering, of course, but joy too because it is a foretaste of heaven. I often think in relation to my love for little Beckie, Susie and Eric:"That is the way I must love every child and want to serve them, cherish them and protect them." Even that relationship which is set off from other loves by that slight change in phraseology (instead of "Loving," one is "in love") the very change in terminology, denoting a living in love, a dwelling in love at all times, being bathed in love, so that every waking thought, word, deed and suffering is permeated by that love, yes, that relationship above all should give us not only a taste of the love of God for us, but the kind of love we should have for all.

When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. God sees Christ, His Son, in us and loves us. And so we should see Christ in others, *and nothing else*, and love them. There can never be enough of it. There can never be enough thinking about it. St. John of the Cross said that where there was no love, put love and you would take out love. This sounds rather clumsy, and I would like to get the exact quotation and translation if some of our readers would send it in to me. The principle certainly works. I've seen my friend Sister Peter Claver with that warm friendliness of hers which is partly natural (she is half Jew and half Irish), but which is intensified and made enduring by grace, come into a place which is cold with tension and conflict, and warm the house with her love.

And this is not easy. Everyone will try to kill that love in you, even your nearest and dearest; at least, they will try to prune it. "Don't you know this, that and the other thing, about

this person? He or she did this. If you don't want to hear it, you must hear. It is for your good to hear it. It is my duty to tell you, and it is your duty to take recognition of it. You must stop loving, modify your loving, show your disapproval. You cannot possibly love if you pretend you do, you are a hypocrite and the truth is not in you. You are contributing to the delinquency of that person by your sentimental blindness. It is such people as you who add to the sum total of confusion and wickedness and soft appeasement and compromise and the policy of expediency in this world. You are to blame for communism, for industrial capitalism, and finally for hell on earth."

The antagonism often rises to a crescendo of vituperation, an intensification of opposition on all sides. You are quite borne down by it. And the only Christian answer is *love*, to the very end, to the laying down of your life.

To see only the good, the Christ, in others! Perhaps if we thought of how Karl Marx was called "Papa Marx" by all the children on the street, if we knew and remembered how he told fairy stories to his children, how he suffered hunger and poverty and pain, how he sat by the body of his dead child and had no money for coffin or funeral, perhaps such thoughts as these would make us love him and his followers. Dear God, for the memory of that dead child, of that faithful wife, grant his stormy spirit "a place of refreshment, light and peace."

And there was Lenin. He hungered and thirsted and at times he had no fixed abode. Mme. Krupskaya, his widow, said that he loved to go into the peace of the pine woods and hunt mushrooms like old Mrs. Dew down at Easton did, and we with her one October. He lived one time in the slums of Paris, and he lived on horse meat when he had meat, and he started schools for the poor and the workers. "He went about doing good." Is this blasphemy? How many people are dying and going to God their Father and saying sadly, "We have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And how will they hear if none preaches to them? And what kind of shepherds have many of them had? Ezekiel said in his day, "woe to the shepherds that feed themselves and not their sheep!"

And if there have been preachers, has there been love? If people will not listen, one can still love, one can still find Christ in them to love, and love is stronger than death. Dear God, may Lenin too find a place of refreshment, light and peace. Or don't we believe in retroactive prayers? There is no time with God.

Newburgh Retreat

It is an easy thing to talk about love, but it is something to be proven, to be suffered, to be learned. That's why we have that retreat house at Newburgh. Last week after my return from Berkeley Springs, I went up on a foggy day, taking a train at Grand Central because the bus which leaves at 6: 30 and passes our door at Newburgh was on strike. The train was slow, and the ferry slower. A fog which kept us floundering in the middle of the river for half an hour was so heavy that it was hard to breathe. It was a great relief from oppression to reach the high ground, where the retreat house stands, six miles inland, and to get to bed early after the oppression of the city.

It is always a terrible thing to come back to Mott street. To come back in a driving rain, to

men crouched on the stairs, huddled in doorways, without overcoats because they sold them perhaps the week before when it was warm, to satisfy hunger or thirst, who knows. Those without love would say, "It serves them right, drinking up their clothes." God help us if we got just what we deserved! It is a terrible thing to see the ugliness and poverty of the cities, to see what man has made of man. I needed those few days at Newburgh to brace myself for work. Fr. Anthony, a young Benedictine from Newton, N. J., was with us that week, giving a retreat on the sacraments and the conferences I was in time for continued what I had been pondering of the love of God for man and man for man. "From Genesis to Revelation," he said, in one conference, "it is the story of God's love for man. All the story of God's dealing with man is a love story. Some say the Old Testament tells of God's justice and the New of his love. But there is not a page but emphasizes God's folly in every forgiving and drawing man back to him." I remembered the book of Osee. the prophet and Holy Man who was commanded by God to love and marry a harlot, who had children by him, and who left him again and again, having children also by her lovers. And how Osee again and again took her back. How he must have been scorned by his generation, he a holy man, so weak and uxorious, so soft-minded that again and again, "he allured her" to him, on one occasion even buying her back from her lover, even providing her while she was with her lover, with corn and wine and oil. And God even commanded it so that down through the ages there would be this example of God's love for a faithless people, of the folly of love, a foretaste of the folly of the Cross. If we could only learn to be such fools! God give us the strength to persist in trying to learn such folly. We had three conferences a day, of an hour each, and a 15-minute period of prayer after each conference. There was silence for the week, and manual labor, in the house and out. There was rosary after lunch, and a holy hour midnight on Thursday. Every morning the day began with prime the first prayers of the Church for the day (after Matins and Lauds) and then there was a sung Mass, the first mass in the Kyriale for the festive season, and it was pure beauty that strengthened the heart to learn to love.

There was just a handful of us there, since we have not begun to send out our retreat notices for the year. We are urging our friends to study the following dates and figure out their vacations, and try to plan to spend some time with us this summer and fall. We are hoping to have two study weeks with Fr. Victor White, former editor of Blackfriars in England, and Fr. Oesterreicher of Austria. The latter week will be devoted to Scripture. I'm going to ask Fr. White to tell us about Eric Gill, his life and work, in part of his week, since Mrs. Gill wrote recently and told us he had long been an old friend of the family. His articles on psychiatry in Blackfriars have been followed with great interest by many of our group.

MAY 1 there will be a study week-end on WORK.

MEMORIAL DAY week-end there will be a retreat for men conducted by Fr. Francis Meenan. Holy Ghost Father from Norwalk.

JUNE 13-19—first study week.

JULY. 4th weekend—a basic retreat for women.

JULY 18—Fr. Veales, Josephite from Washington, D. C., will give a basic retreat for men.

August 14 there will be another study week.

LABOR DAY week-end Fr. Purcell, an Augustinian, will give a retreat for families, and there will be several girls to care for the children, who will have their own little retreat at the same time. Julia Porcelli will be one of the girls, and she will have art classes for the children over the holiday. It will be a WORK week-end for the children, emphasizing the co-creative as well as the penitential aspect of work.

There will be extra week-ends and also through the fall, to be announced later.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of these retreats and beg our readers to try to plan to come to some of them. While it is true that love sweetens all of life, and makes light of pain and suffering and brings us to the happiness we all desire, one must learn to love, and there is no place better than a retreat house to learn such lessons. We must withdraw for a time to renew our strength for the great struggle of the apostolate. Without the use of our spiritual weapon of love, which includes prayer and penance and work and poverty and suffering, our future is harsh and ugly to contemplate. Great struggles lie before us, in this era of war and revolution through which we are passing, and which we in America have not begun to suffer as yet. We must prepare, so we do beg you to come and help us. A brother helped by a brother is a strong city.

For the Poor, the Little Ones

The retreat house, of course, is not just for our readers who can afford to take train or bus and get to us for this time not only of rigor but of delight (“All the way to heaven is heaven, since He said, ‘I am the Way.’”) but it is also for the poor, the lame, the halt and the blind. So we recommend that you bring someone who could not otherwise make a retreat. We always have a few from our House of Hospitality, and come the summer, we are also going out on the highways and byways and persuade our brothers in. There is many a sick one just out of Bellevue, or off the breadline who needs “refreshment, light and peace,” here and now. The retreat house is for us all, but most especially for those who can go no place else for lack of funds or because difference in race, color and creed, has kept them from this sweet rest of a retreat. God will raise up amongst us all those he wishes to work for Him, and He will give us all the strength we need for the part we all will have to play.

The Farm

The farm of ninety-six acres, attached to the retreat house. is going to provide meat and vegetables also, for our breadline at Mott street. It was a wonderful sight to see John Filliger out there on the horizon at the end of a long field, ploughing with his team and the hound dog trailing along behind. A number of the fields are ploughed now, and the greenhouse is filled with cabbages and tomato plants, not to speak of Spring salads. Hans and Charlie and Louis Owen and a new arrival by name of Murphy are busily at work these spring days and before he left Fr. Anthony blessed the house and the fields. Our chapel has been greatly enlarged, thanks to Hans Tunneson, and the conference room floor painted, and we are ready for our friends and fellow workers.

Peter

Thanks to several of our readers, Peter Maurin is going to have the hospital bed that can be cranked up at the side, and as soon as it arrives at Newburgh, Peter will be taken up to the farm again, where for some hours every day he can sit under the crab apple tree out in front of the adobe-like house which the men and the priest share. Nothing is blooming yet, no buds show green, and the wind is still harsh. But the spring sun is warming and after the desperately hard winter on Mott street, the warmth is a touch of God's love on us all.

This issue of the paper is given over so much to arguments against Universal Military Training, Conscription, and the fog of threatened war hangs so heavy over us all, we beg the prayers of all our readers that we may hold our stand with strong love, with warm love, because without it we know that all arguments will be unavailing.