

On Pilgrimage - May 1961

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Summary: Amidst the turmoil of world happenings and the immediate demands of people, all the apostolic works must go on—picketing, going to jail, visiting the sick and the prisoner, speaking, writing, praying, cleaning, cooking. . . . (DDLW #782).

To try to write, to continue to write the account of my travels, once having come home is all but impossible. It is like sitting down to meditate in the middle of Times Square. Everyone is talking about Cuba, about the invasion which failed, about the picket line and fast which is taking place in Washington before the Central Intelligence Agency building and because of which Robert Steed is now spending ten days in jail in Washington with David Dellinger and others. Their hunger strike is continuing and is a protest against the activities of the CIA.

So many things are happening in the world and we are brought so close to them by newsprint and radio and television (ours does not work) that one feels crushed, submerged by events. The Eichmann trial goes on and crushes us with its horror and one realizes that mankind, as Cardinal Newman writes, is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity.

It was a comfort to come across a quotation of Luther (from a Catholic article), “If I knew the world were coming to an end tomorrow, I would still go out and plant my three apple trees today.”

Thinking of this, it is good to see the work of St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality go on in New York, to come home to find Millie washing the windows of the store front, behind which a stray cat sleeps by the statue of St. Joseph and the bouquet of forsythia, a bright yellow promise of warmth to come. To see Mike going after bread and fish, and Dianne and Stuart in the kitchen between all their other chores, preparing the evening chowder. To see the clothes being given out, and the old and the sick, the lame, the halt and the blind, in all senses of the word thronging our as usual miserably inadequate house which is now at 175 Christie Street.

I got back in time for the air raid drill, which took place with City Hall Park thronged, with thousands put under arrest and only fifty taken away (more than ever before). Those of us from the Catholic Worker were not taken except Philip, a friend of Ned O’Gorman’s who is working with us for a time. The eight women of the fifty, mostly from the American Friend’s Service Committee, were tried, and four accepted three day jail sentences and the others paid a fifteen dollar fine. The rest await trial.

So each are planting their apple trees, – whether it is taking care of children, cooking meals, going to jail (offering up one’s life for one’s brother by this voluntary suffering).

As for me, my speaking trip is not yet over, as I must go back to Detroit for four days and then to my daughter in Vermont. She has been ill with flu and some miserable side effects and I shall stay for a week. When I called long distance, which costs sixty cents from New York, I heard from Becky, who is now sixteen, that Tamar had gone with Nickie to confession (he is being confirmed tonight) and that Hilaire had cut his foot very badly in the barn and that it had required many stitches and I suppose a tetanus shot, all of which meant extra trips in the 1949 car which used to belong to Judith Gregory and which now does the Hennessy errands. With nine children, husband working away from home for the time being, and a 25-acre farm, Tamar does not have time to think of world events. The world in microcosm is right there with her. David is clerking in a hotel in Bellow Falls, 35 miles away, and gets home two days a week. The children are all well and in spite of this latest mishap, there are only the usual colds and cuts to worry about. The children of course have been of great help. Even Hilaire, age four, is "such a little man," his mother says, "that he can manage the cow all by himself." I suppose that means taking the cow and heifer out to the pasture and watering and feeding them. I have seen how he carts in armloads of wood until the kitchen floor is covered, strutting with chest pushed out in his manliness. The kitchen range and the Franklin stove in the living room are well provided for.

As for mail

Mail is piled up both in suitcase, as yet unpacked, and here in the office and I beg the indulgence of our friends and readers. Some mail needs only to be acknowledged but many letters need much longer replies, and I will get at them later. I have the promise of help from a friend who knows shorthand and is an expert secretary, and we will start to diminish the pile. We owe our deep gratitude to all those who answered our appeal for help which we always send out in March, and we must thank **Jubilee**, too, for reprinting it. I owe them an article on Christian Anarchism and am looking forward to a quiet time on the beach when I can catch up with writing. Because after all, writing is the equivalent of three apple trees.

Traveling

Since the book I am writing is a kind of travelogue, I can give a brief resume of my trip. I drove from Tucson to Yuma to El Centro and to San Diego. The material I gathered about the agricultural workers and the early spring lettuce strike, in the Imperial Valley, I will use in a later article. I spoke in San Diego at the home of friends, and later in San Bernardino. I drove to Fresno where I saw the unbound copies of Peter Maurin's book, **The Green Revolution**, and as soon as the hundred copies we ordered arrive, we will send out the copies our friends have asked for. I drove on to Stockton and to Tracy where I stayed with dear friends, the Orbin Brickey's. I did not see Fr. McCullough because he had been transferred to St. Mary's in Oakland, and Fr. Burke was taking his place. I had a good visit with Fr. McDonald in San Jose and attended a conference with him of union people and growers and others interested in the agricultural situation in California. I spoke at San Jose State College and Leland Stanford University and at the University of California at Berkeley

and to other groups too numerous to mention. I went at four a.m. to Skid Row in Stockton to the shapeup of agricultural workers where there is evidence of a manufactured shortage of labor in order that the growers may continue importing agricultural labor from Mexico. I spoke to the students' committee on Agriculture who came out to the Christo Rey center at Tracy to go out on the shapeup and spend a day in the fields. I met other students who worked long hours and spent the summer at this work, showing that it can be done by local labor, provided the pay is enough to support life and family.

St. Andrew's Priory

I spent the latter part of Holy Week at St. Andrew's priory and met some old friends there. Fr. Joseph Woods, our old friend from Portsmouth Priory, who is now in North Carolina, had lived in Southern California and is responsible in a way for the founding of this Benedictine Center which is in its beginning but is growing rapidly to fill the great need for such a center in Southern California.

During Holy Week I read some of **Son of the Church** by Louis Lechet, Fides, '56, on the apostolate. "The more we went on, the more apparent it became to us that apostolic action, to keep its balance, without ending in exhaustion or becoming lost in incoherence, needs all the reflection of theologians, the whole light of revelation, the entire movement of grace, the labor of all others, the prayer of all the saints, and finally the life of the whole church." I sat out in the desert and read, too, from **Seeds of the Desert**, by Father Voillaume, his wonderful chapters on Prayers. He quotes "Listen to these wise words of Gandhi's: 'Whether you wet your hands in the water basin, fan the fire with the bamboo bellows, set down endless columns of figures at a desk, labor in the rice field with your head in the burning sun and your feet in the mud, or stand at work before the smelting furnace, so long as you do not do all this with just the same religiousness as if you were monks praying in a monastery, the world will never be saved.'"

I visited a prisoner on Death Row in San Quentin, the client of one of our old friends who had had no visitors since his imprisonment two years ago, who has been brought to the verge of death several times only to have the execution stayed at the last minute. He told me they are locked in their cells twenty hours out of the twenty-four, and released for four hours of exercises around the corridor, that there is no Mass for the prisoners on death row, but that they can receive the Sacrament every Saturday. He receives, "But I miss Mass," he said. We ask your prayers for Charles Brubaker who may be dead by the time you read this.

There is much more to write, but I must go to the hospital to visit a dying friend and back to the office to speak at our usual Friday night meeting, in a place which is as poor as any place I visited. We are swamped by the demands made to us and overwhelmed by the thought that with all the human needs, of housing and clothing and medical care and education and spiritual care to be provided, there should be any unemployment today.

Well, as Peter Maurin would say, in the face of the joblessness, "fire the bosses, there is plenty of work, and God will provide our sustenance." Let us get out and plant our apple trees.