

On Pilgrimage - May 1949

Dorothy Day

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Summary: May is Mary's month. She prays for a growth in love. Contrasts the teaming city with the peace of the farm at Newburgh where planting, repairs and visiting the sick go on. Lists the summer retreat schedule. (DDLW #261).

There is not much around Mott Street to remind one of cedars, rose plants and cinnamon, aromatic balm and myrrh. In fact, there is not much sweetness of odor around us here. But there are plane trees over on Second avenue, and tubs of olive, if not olive trees, and sweet herbs and fig trees for sale on the curb. And these are reminders of the Blessed Mother, whose month this is.

She is also the Mother of fair love, of fear and of knowledge and of holy hope. How fair is love in the city streets? It is fair no matter where it is, no matter how perverse and distorted, no matter how dark and tortured there is still in all love a suggestion, a hint of this love of God. Mother of fair love, teach us to love, make us grow in love, help us to develop these spiritual forces which will be strong as death, and will enable us to overcome the hatred in the world today.

It is one of those hot spring days and I have just returned from the farm at Newburgh. The city seems more than usually oppressive, with its noise and sleeplessness and tensions. The house is full of visitors and all day long during the Easter week seminarians and priests are dropping in. The children are vociferous in the playground across the street, and the young men roam the streets all night. The hot sun pours down, the pavements burn the feet, the congestion of people and cars is unbelievable.

By contrast the farm is peace. The other night John Filliger was ploughing until twilight what last summer was the old potato field and what this summer will be a field of oats. After the oats are harvested there will be timothy and clover in that field, which is just back of the chapel and dormitory windows, and I can smell it now, as it will be this summer, newly-cut and drying in the sun.

Charlie, our cook, who found us a new green, the young shoots of milkweed, informed us last week that we should salt down a crock of dandelion greens for next winter. But we have been eating them as we picked them, wooden bowls of them on every table. Holy Thursday we had a feast of lamb, wild greens in, and wine. While we ate, Michael read aloud from St. John, the story of the last supper.

Hans has been working on the barn, putting six new windows in, the frames of which he made himself. The finished windows were priced at eighteen dollars at the lumber company, but we bought four dollar sashes and lumber, and made the frames, and now the barn, for mothers and children, will be bright and sunny. Next he has to work on screens for all these new windows and for the house, which had only meager slide screens last year. The carriage house has been partitioned off into cubicles so that for the permanent stall there will be some measure of privacy. The retreatants accept as part of the “putting off of the old man” the living in dormitory, but it is hard to be always sharing your room, living, dressing, writing, praying, under the eyes of others.

Hospital visiting has been a large part of the work at the farm this last month while Jane O'Donnell, who is in charge of Maryfarm has been at the Grail. There have been two of our number to go to clinics several days a week, and old Mr. Sandford has been at St. Luke's in Newburgh, and Kay B. in Cornwall hospital to be operated on for a broken spine. Mr. Sandford has been a migrant worker who wandered in some months ago, quite old to be sleeping out as he traveled from farm to farm. He had worked for some years in the fruit regions around Marlboro, and originally he came from Virgin Islands, Virginia, if there is such a place. His heart is bad, and his blood pressure is high, and he looks very feeble as he lies, with rosary around his neck, dressed in his white gown, in the big hospital bed. He looks like the pictures of Gandhi, withered, little, the same features and shaped head and ears. Only it was a Gandhi smoking cigarettes and enjoying very much the ice cream we brought him. He cannot read or write, but he came to prime and compline and Mass at the farm, and when the leader would intone, “I believe in God,” he would repeat after him, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty.”

All winter long the farm has been like a convalescent home. Now the retreat season is starting and the following is the schedule for the coming summer:

May 1 weekend – A work group.

May 8 – Puerto Rican group.

May 28-31 – Retreat.

June 12 week – Friendship House Retreat.

July 1-5 – Fr. Brown, Louisville, Ky.

July 17-23 – Fr. Chrysostom Tarasovich.

Aug. 1-6 – Fr. Judge, New Ulm, Minn.

Aug. 16-22 – Fr. Casey, Regal, Minn.

Sept. 2-6 – Discussion week, Helene Isvolsky.

Sept. 18-24 – Fr. Meenan, Norwalk, Conn.