

On Pilgrimage - March 1966

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Summary: Admits “rambling” about her grandchildren, her reading habits, and books she recommends before getting to the point—“I am afraid I am a traditionalist.” She reaffirms her high regard for the liturgical movement and the Mass, objecting to an incident where a coffee cup is used for a chalice. She speaks of CW conflicts and the ongoing struggle of freedom and authority. (DDLW #249).

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This last weekend I have been visiting with my daughter Tamar and my seven grandchildren who are at home. (The oldest two are away in nursing school and at the State university.) Tamar worked Saturday, Sunday and Monday at the hospital where she is a practical nurse, so I stayed through Tuesday to have more of a visit with her. It was a holiday for the children too, since there was annual town meeting at Weathersfield, a mile up the hill. Right after breakfast Martha, Hilaire, Maggie, Mary, Ronda and Katey set out for the walk on a beautiful sunny day, along the muddy road past snowdrifts which were swelling the rivulets into brooks along the roadside.

Hilaire came back within an hour or so wet to his hips—he had fallen into a real brook with the exciting news that they were tapping the maples up the hill and that he was going to get busy himself. Hilaire is eight, and has been using a hatchet since he was three, so he went about his job with efficiency, gathering pails, spouts, hooks, augur and so on, ready to clamber again through snow and slide on tee to reach the trees. He did change his already wet clothes, though he thought it unreasonable of me to ask him to, since he was going to get wet again. The kitchen was filled with ski shoes and snow shoes and ski poles and skis and double thicknesses of socks and mittens and colorful caps, not to speak of all the other changes of clothing necessary for a family devoted to the outdoors. While I was there several teen-aged boys added to the confusion of the front rooms where Eric, Nickie and Hilaire were already sleeping. The skiers got off at dawn, leaving a half dozen children still in the house.

Whenever I start worrying about my grandchildren, who range in age from five to twenty-one (or about any of the other young ones who swarm around the, *Catholic Worker* these days), I comfort myself with the thought, “God, who is love, loves them much better than I possibly could, He holds them in the hollow of His hand.” Sally Corbin, who is three, sings: “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation” and “He holds them in His hands.” What a comfort to hear her!

Consolations of Religion

Fr. Joseph McSorley, C.S.P., my first spiritual director, gave me **Caussade's Abandonment to Divine Providence** to read many years ago. We, who are such activists, need more of this teaching. No danger of Quietism with Catholic Worker enthusiasts. A little more quiet, a little more time to read and digest might help. When I was becoming a Catholic, I had only such books as the **Confessions** of St. Augustine and the **Imitation** to begin on. There had always been Scripture, and even in childhood I almost had the feeling of partaking of a sacrament in holding it and reading. The first time I went to jail with the suffragists in Washington, at the age of eighteen, and asked for the only book I knew they would give me to read, I wept over the Psalms, wept with joy at their comfort. And at the same time felt ashamed at turning o religion when there was nothing else to turn to.

Of course, there were, and always will be, great gaps in my understanding of such questions as the problem of evil in the world and God's permission of it. I cringe still at Ivan Karamazov's portrayal of "a God that permits" the torture of children, such torture as is going on today in the burning alive of babies in Vietnam. Theologians debate situation ethics and the new morality (leaving out of account the problem of means and ends) while the screams of the flaming human torches, civilian and soldiers, rise high to heaven. The only conclusion I have ever been able to reach is that we must pray God to increase our faith, a faith without which one cannot love or hope. "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief."

The debate I read recently was published in the *Commonweal* for January 14th; it was between Dr. Joseph Fletcher, of Cambridge Theological Seminary, and Father Herbert McCabe, the English Dominican. From the conclusions of many who wrote letters about the debate Dr. Fletcher won, hands down. He did not mention morality in connection with the current war, although he has long been active in the non-religious peace movement, with which, according to a survey of the peace movement among the clergy, it is more respectable to be involved than with the religious-oriented and "extremist" Fellowship of Reconciliation or the Catholic Worker movement. It was Father McCabe who spoke of the morality of burning babies alive, among other references to the war. The articles were difficult for the nontheological layman, but it seemed to me that Father McCabe's larger vision was a far nobler, reasonable and faithful presentation. When I have four days in Vermont with the grandchildren who work and play hard and get to bed early, I read at night, go over the back issues of the **Commonweal**, and catch up on what I have missed. It has been exceptionally good lately.

The best of the weekly Catholic newspapers is of course **the National Catholic Reporter**. Among magazines, the **Critic** is always good, as are **Jubilee** and **Cross Currents**. Last month I saw my first copy of **Slant**, a bimonthly, published by a group of students in Cambridge, England, and find I have missed only the first four numbers. Adrian Cunningham has a first-rate article in the Winter, 1965 issue on Christians and Marxists and a review of the **Socialist Register**. Gordon Zahn has a striking article on "Unilateralism as a Moral and Political Commitment," which we should reprint. It is a convention of editors to shun reprintings, but we feel that our eighty-eight thousand circulation (how many readers can you count to a single paper) should have the benefit of Dr. Zahn's thinking. Peter Maurin never hesitated to repeat and repeat again his phrased essays. Good teacher that he was,

repetition meant that sooner or later an idea got across. It is like reading the Psalms each day in the Office of the Church. Over and over again sudden light shines through on what had been passed over before as obscure. The best explanations of the Psalms, especially the warlike ones, are in C. S. Lewis' book **Reflection on the Psalms**.

Most of my reading at the Catholic Worker farm is done early in the morning and since my bed is by the window, I can draw back the curtain, which keeps out the cold air that seems to come right through the panes of glass, and watch the fading stars and the emerging dawn. On a clear morning it is wonderful to see mountains across the river first touched at their tips by the light. One has the feeling then that the sun is not "coming up" but that this so solid earth is turning. The snow is gone, here in New York State, and the deep lavender glow on the mountains turns to rose and then to gold. The ice has broken up and this morning the tide was coming in and the ice floes were journeying toward Albany. (The Indians used to call the Hudson "the river which flows two ways.") It is a good time to read the Psalms, which always give one courage to face the day.

In his new book **Seasons of Celebration**, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), Thomas Merton writes: "The presence of Christ in the liturgical celebration (and reading the Office is part of it) leads to our discovery and declaration of our own secret and spiritual self. Let us above all remember and admire the discretion, the sobriety and the modesty with which the liturgy protects the personal witness of the individual Christian."

God In Russia

This column is becoming something of a book review but before I go on I must mention two other books in which I have taken great JOY and inspiration this past month. One is **With God In Russia**, by Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. with Daniel L. Flaherty, S.J. (now in Image Paperback) and it is one of the greatest adventure stories I have read. Born in the mining region of Pennsylvania of Polish parents, the boy Walter was a "tough" as he described himself, a bully, a leader of a gang, who suddenly decided in the eighth grade that he wished to be a priest. From priest to Jesuit to missionary to Russia, he stubbornly made up his mind what he wanted to do, it was in the Stalin era that this dream possessed him, and his superiors helped him each step along the way. He went to the Russian college in Rome, was sent to Poland first and was there when it was invaded by the Germans and then the Russians. It was this World War that gave him his opportunity, with several comrades, to get into Russia, as a laborer in the Urals. From there he went as prisoner, with thousands of others, through the prisons of Russia: Lubianka and the Siberian camps of Dudinka and Norilsk at the mouth of the Yenisei River, deep in the Arctic regions. There is no bitterness, no condemnation in the story. It is all taken as part of a life where war, revolution dominate men, a recognition of the times of vast social changes and struggles in which we live. The man is heroic in his endurance and in his work, into which he throws himself with a zeal as though he were fighting for his own country, his own kind. As a matter of fact, the impression all through the book is of a man who considers all men his brothers. Over and over again, whenever he gets a chance he builds up a tiny parish which grows openly until he is transferred someplace else. Even after regaining his freedom he remains in Russia, working

in Krasnoyarsk, until he finally gets in contact with his sisters in the States, and they, with the help of his order and the State Department, arrange a transfer of prisoners between the United States and the Soviet Union, which results in his being sent back to New York.

He lived through the Stalin era and through the great strikes that took place in the prison camps after the death of Stalin, which resulted in the betterment of the conditions for prisoners and workers too. It is a story of courage and endurance, and in the main of nonviolence, since there was no possibility of armed revolt. Throughout, Father Ciszek's main thought, aside from his will to survive, is to serve his people, to offer the liturgy, which he can do in the Russian rite, to give communion, to hear confessions, all under the most difficult conditions imaginable. Thank God for such men as Father Ciszek!

Another book which I am carrying about with me is Father Ernesto Balducci's **John, the Transitional Pope** (McGraw-Hill). It is a book, like the **Journal of a Soul**, which gives joy to the heart.

Father Balducci is a profound thinker, of deep insight. He was on trial and given a suspended sentence for advocating conscientious objection in Italy, where it is against the law. But this book is all about John and his teaching, about the times he lived in and how he reacted to those times. There are many excerpts from his speeches and sermons and there are Father Balducci's comments about them, which are as delightful as those of the Holy Father himself.

When burdens seem to increase and the family grows ever larger, and the news, every hour on the hour, repeated again and again, makes sad the heart, then it is good to pick up a book like this and learn again what Father Balducci calls "the law of delight," the law that presided over the work of creation, as Scripture tells us when it speaks of Wisdom, which played like a delighted child in the sight of the Almighty Father Creator, rejoicing before him always!"

Mary, cause of our Joy, pray for us. Pope John, help us all to keep our balance in this heady time of renewal.

The Unwanted

A ragged old man with a sandwich in his pocket came in and set in the back of the church this morning. One of the parishioners who had just been to communion started shooing him out. "He is smoking!" she said, shaking her head. "Don't you smoke in here," and she was like a little mother hen driving him before her.

It was raining outside and there was no park bench on which to rest. He was either sleeping in some vacant house or at the Municipal lodging house on Third street half dozen blocks away and was put out early in the morning with his sandwich. Perhaps he did not know he was in church. Peter Maurin in his last five years lost his mind and got lost himself in city and country, and even in the house of hospitality itself. Sometimes he did not even know where he was supposed to sleep. Once previously in the face of the apparent failure to reach those to whom he was talking, the young married men who wished to divide the farming commune among themselves, excluding the single except as family servants), Peter perhaps

wishing to “endorse” himself (as Recovery terms it) in the face of discouragement, said sadly, “I have never asked anything for myself.” Not even a bed. He was truly poor.

I was writing in church myself when this little incident occurred and perhaps to the purist I should have been put out. But I was trying to put down my problems of this immediate present, hoping that it would help me solve them or make a beginning. Often I have done this, only to find six months later that the problems had somehow disappeared (though sometimes only by the persons that caused them disappearing from the immediate vicinity themselves.) Perhaps this is what I secretly want, but that is really no solution. This morning radio news came that two companions of Castro in his Cuban revolution had just been arrested on charges of conspiring to assassinate him, presumably with the connivance of the CIA. The charge of plotting to assassinate in order to overthrow governments has been brought so often against “a United States agency” that one wonders. Were Bonhoeffer and his companions in their plot to assassinate Hitler aided by such an agency? Assassinations, by whomsoever they are attempted or perpetrated, are murders and do not solve the problems, which are always deep-seated, going back into the past. Cut off the head of one tyrant and half a dozen others spring into place. Nor do removals by any other means solve problems which will always be with us. The need is to change the minds and hearts of men. Which is part of the tactics of guerrilla war too, but unfortunately it is neutralized, wiped out by the violence and terror which accompanies it all.

St John Chrysostom says in regard to our Lord’s sending us out as sheep among wolves, that if we become wolves ourselves, He is no longer with us.

But to try to face up to some of my problems: The incident of the man smoking in church leads me to one of the problems but perhaps a most basic one, the lack of the reverence and respect that we should have for holy things, and for all men as creatures of God. God, the Father, created us and all the universe, so all things are holy. One may laugh for joy, but not in derision.

The Liturgical movement has meant everything to the Catholic Worker from its very beginning. The Mass was the center of our lives and indeed I was convinced that the Catholic Worker had come about because I was going to daily Mass, daily receiving Holy Communion and happy though I was, kept sighing out, “Lord, what would you have me to do? Lord, here I am.” And I kept hearing his call, as Samuel did, but I did not know what he wanted me to do.

And then Peter Maurin came. A group formed around us, including a young girl from Manhattanville and a young man who had tried his vocation with the Franciscans and was still, as a layman, interested in the Divine Office. So there was added to our lives within the first few months, the recitation of some of the Hours, sometimes Vespers, always Compline. Never Prime, because most of the young people liked to stay up late at night and sleep late into the day. I myself had done the same at their age. It was their turn now. Usually they missed Mass, unless they could get to the noonday one, as Peter did. Older people usually become early risers, and it is always said that they do not need as much sleep as young people.

So we became familiar with the Office, and the four-volume translation of the entire Office in

Latin and English soon fell into our hands, gifts of generous friends. Now there is the Short Breviary put out by St. John's at Collegeville, Minn. Then there were the pamphlet editions of Prime and Compline. So we got to know Psalms. We used the missal because we wanted to pray with the understanding and we were ardent supporters of the vernacular movement and were delighted that one of the former heads of the South Bend House of Hospitality, Julian Pleasants, wrote for their publication, Amen.

We had our communion procession and even the altar facing the people, as far back as 1937–summer Fr. Joseph Woods, O.S.B. came to spend his vacation with us, sweating in the fields (we still have a picture of him in the beanfield).

I myself got into trouble over that move, because the activists who were working on the farm that summer, when asked by Father Joseph to help rearrange the farm chapel for the Mass, passed the buck by saying “Let's wait till Miss Day gets back,” whereupon he informed them it was his business, and he informed me on my return from the city that I must be a tyrant indeed if they had to await my permission before they could assist at rearranging the altar. He was not very observant, living at the Catholic Worker where the motto was, “Love God and do as you will.” St. Augustine said that.

I suppose I am rambling because I hate to get to the point, and that point is that I am afraid I am a traditionalist, in that I do not like to see Mass offered with a large coffee cup as a chalice. I suppose I am romantic too, since I loved the Arthur legend as a child and revered the Holy Grail and the search for it. I feel with Newman that my faith is founded on a creed, as Rev. Louis Bouyer wrote of Newman in that magnificent biography of his.

“I believe in God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. And of all things visible and invisible, and in His Only Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

I believe too that when the priest offers Mass at the altar, and says the solemn words, “This is my body, this is my blood,” that the bread and the wine truly become the body and blood of Christ, Son of God, one of the Three Divine persons. I believe in a personal God. I believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. And intimate, oh how most closely intimate we may desire to be, I believe we must render most reverent homage to Him who created us and stilled the sea and told the winds to be calm, and multiplied the loaves and fishes. He is transcendent and He is immanent. He is closer than the air we breathe and just as vital to us. I speak impetuously, from my heart, and if I err theologically in my expression, I beg forgiveness.

Peter Maurin's synthesis of cult, culture and cultivation, painted by Rita Corbin on the dining room wall at the farm at Tivoli, constantly calls to mind the struggle. Cult was ever surrounded by beauty and glory and majesty of stone and stained glass, precious incense, tapestry, music, all the exterior and interior senses of man responding to the needs to worship, praise, and render thanks to God. Friends of the Catholic Worker family earn their living by contributing to this beauty—Carl Paulson of Upton with his stained glass and Michael Humphrey with his chalices (as his father before him) Ade Bethune with her crucifixes and pictured saints and stained glass, not to speak of entire churches to her credit; Graham Carey, silversmith, calligrapher, woodcarver, etc.

We begin the Mass by the confession of sins, admitting our creatureliness, and all the

beginnings of disorder that there are in us, and part of our thanksgiving is because of the forgiveness of sin and we do not dwell on falls and failures but go swiftly on to the prayers of praise and adoration and thanksgiving.

To me the Mass, high or low, is glorious and I feel that though we know we are but dust, at the same time we know too, and most surely through the Mass that we are little less than the angels, that indeed it is now not I but Christ in me worshipping, and in Him I can do all things, though without Him I am nothing. I would not dare write or speak or try to follow the vocation God has given me to work for the poor and for peace, if I did not have this constant reassurance of the Mass, the confidence the Mass gives. (The very word confidence means “with faith.”)

It is one thing for a Father Cizek to offer Mass, to consecrate the wine in a coffee cup in the prison camps of Siberia. It is quite another thing to have this happen in New York. And yet—and yet—perhaps it happened to remind us that the power of God did not rest on all these appurtenances with which we surround it. That all over the world, in the jungles of South America and Vietnam and Africa—all the troubled, indeed anguished spots of the world—there Christ is with the poor, the suffering, even in the cup we share together, in the bread we eat. “They knew Him in the breaking of bread.”

When I spoke to the priest about the coffee-cup incident afterward, (I was not there when this happened though twenty of the family of the Catholic Workers were there), he said, “I was just doing as I was told.” There was another great controversy at the Catholic Worker some ten years ago when Fr. Faley referred to his Mass, and some of the all-out young people, with a terrible lack of charity, railed at him, proclaiming that it was our Mass. They had been well trained in the liturgical movement, but oh the cruelty in the way in which they made their assertions!

Sometimes it seems to me that every kind of warfare is carried on around the Catholic Worker. There is the war between young and old, colored and white, and class war, between the haves and have nots. Only this morning, on hearing that I was going to New England for a week, one of the poor women staying with us said bitterly, “it costs a lot of money to travel around the way you do.” (Since this charge has been made by some of our readers, I must explain that we are paid for most of the talks we are asked to give.) But what resentment between those who have no money in their pockets and those who have—between the worker and the scholar, in other words.

Peter Maurin was well acquainted with these conflicts and lifted them all to a higher level, and I suppose I should put this conflict over the way the Mass should be said under the heading of the authority and freedom conflict. The priest has the authority and in this case he did not exercise it. He wanted, I suppose as St. Paul said, “To be subject to every living creature,” as Jesus was in His crucifixion.

We went to press on February 16th last month, and that same day I went with Ruth Collins to see a house on the East Side which is just what we need for our House of Hospitality. The cost is thirty-five thousand dollars, a modest sum when one considers the cost of houses today for a family alone. Our family is an oversized one, and this house will mean two large apartments for men, one for women, offices for the work and the usual dining room and

kitchen. We have ten thousand dollars, which we can use as a down payment but the rest will have to be mortgages, including repairs to conform to the Building Code. If we can raise what seems to us to be an enormous sum of money, we can pay it off each year in payments which will be less than what we are paying now for the rents of Chrystie Street and the ten apartments, not to speak of the heating of five apartments and of the loft building at Chrystie Street. We have already paid enough in the last five years to have bought the house as it is, that is without repairs. St. Joseph, pray for us. In these inflationary times it is no longer possible to live as we did at the beginning of the Catholic Worker. To try to be poor in an affluent society is hard indeed.

This month I spoke in Worcester, Boston, Kingston (Rhode Island) and now I go to D.C., invited by Bishop John J. Wright, of Pittsburgh, to attend an interfaith peace conference. April 13th I must go to the Mid-west: to the University of Minnesota.