

On Pilgrimage

Dorothy Day

May

Summary: Praises God for May, the month of Mary and full of beauty. Recalls the Catholic Worker began in May sixteen years ago and summarizes their program and the many allied movements of the lay apostolate. Says their pacifism and distributism distinguishes them from other movements. Focuses on voluntary poverty as exemplified in Peter Maurin's life, especially since he became ill. Reflects on holiness and the call to all to become saints. Includes quotations from her winter's reading. Keywords: Gandhi, machine, philosophy of work (DDLW #480).

May 1

“WITH WHAT praises to extol thee we know not, for He whom the heavens could not contain rested in thy bosom.”

Mother of fair love, it is hard to write about you, who have given us God. I can only write very personally in thanksgiving for bringing me to the Faith through motherhood, for sending me sweet reminders even through Communist friends (a gift of a rosary on one occasion and a little statue on another).

“The feast of our life is often sad,” the Hungarian Bishop Prohaszka writes. “There is much heavy food which science and politics provide, but our wine is missing, which should refresh the soul and fill it with pure noble joy of life. Oh, our Mother, intercede with thy Son in our behalf. Show Him our need. Tell Him with trust, ‘They have no wine.’ He will provide for us.

“Sweet wine, fiery wine, the Lord Jesus gives to our bridal soul; He warms and heats our hearts. Oh, sweet is the wine of the first fiery love, of the first elating zeal!”

White goats leaping in the violets,
Goats with their wattles,
Ducks with their waddles,
Black crows feasting on brown ploughed earth,
Walking in line by the green wheat field.

This is a poem written for my grandchild Rebecca, who was made a child of God May 6. So I always remember this day as well as her birthday. Some days we think of ourselves as mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Other days we feel like shouting, “All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord! Praise Him, adore Him, above all forever!”

Spring in the country, with its countless duties of ploughing, planting, and the care of new creatures! One of the greatest joys in life is bathing a new baby who stretches and yawns and opens its mouth like a little bird for provender. "Give us this day our daily bread!"

Thank God for everything. Thank God that in other countries peasants are ploughing and planting and tending new things – all of them samples of heaven, all of them portents of that new heaven and earth wherein justice dwelleth.

Leaving out of account Divine Providence, there is chaos and destruction ahead, and injustices breeding new wars. But we cannot leave out of account Divine Providence, so we can live in hope and faith and charity, and rejoice and continue to pray and do penance to avert another war.

We must rejoice this month of May and let our glance of joy rest on beauty around us. It would be thankless to do otherwise.

If there are such keen joys and beauty in such times as these, how heaven will shine forth. I like to think of Father Faber's writings on life and death. He quotes at the conclusion of one of these sermons, " 'My beloved to me and I to Him, who feedeth among the lilies till the day break and the shadows retire.' " And then he repeats with joy, "Till the day break, and the shadows retire. Till the day break and the shadows retire. Till the day break and the shadows retire!" If these joys are shadows, what can such bliss be?

It is May Day again, and we will begin our sixteenth year. *The Catholic Worker* has finished fifteen years in the lay apostolate. People look at our masthead and say, "Yes, but it says Vol. XV, No. 3. What does that mean?" It just means that we have skipped an issue now and again, and it means that we come out eleven times a year, not twelve, but according to some regulation of the post office department, you have to number a journal in that way.

Last year I tried, taking the whole issue of the paper to do it in, to write a general article on what we were trying to do, summing up what our program meant. But a thing like that is most unsatisfactory. One is always leaving out the most vital things. Peter Maurin's program of action was for round-table discussions for the clarification of thought; houses of hospitality for the practice of the works of mercy, for the study of Catholic Action; farming communes or agronomic universities where the unemployed could learn to raise food, build shelters, make clothes, and where unemployed college graduates could do the same, where the worker could become a scholar and the scholar a worker.

And who are those with whom we have cooperated through the years, and whom we admire and love in the lay apostolate, in spite of differences?

There is first of all the N.C.W.C. labor action groups, with whom we first came in contact back in 1933 and who were pioneers in the field. Peter used to go to all their meetings, not only to hear but to be heard.

There was the *Commonweal* group of scholars, who were by their writings and thought studying the "theory of revolution." George Shuster, now president of Hunter College and then an editor of *Commonweal*, sent Peter Maurin to me and so started off the Catholic Worker movement.

There were the Friendship House groups, first in Canada and then in the United States, who worked so steadily in the interracial field, among the poor, performing works of mercy and having centers of meetings and study, days of recollection and retreats.

There is the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, with their papers throughout the country, and the papers they have influenced, and the priests who have entered the field of trade unionism and gone on picket lines, into the factories, into the homes of workers, and into strike headquarters. There is *Work* in Chicago, edited by Ed Marciniak, one of the founders of the Chicago House of Hospitality, which is no more, and there are the ACTU publications, *The Wage Earner* in Detroit and *Labor Leader* in New York.

There is the Grail at Loveland, Ohio, and there is the Center for Christ the King [at] Herman, Pennsylvania, schools of the apostolate for women and for men, centers of study not connected by any close ties.

There are such publications as *Today* in Chicago and *Integrity* in New York, animated by much the same spirit, and to whom we owe much, as they owe much to us. There is official Catholic Action, not recognized yet in many a diocese, but making a beginning here and there about the country and stimulating and arousing the laity. Fides publications at South Bend, which recently published Cardinal Suhard's *Growth or Decline? Concord*, the student publication gotten out by the Young Christian Students, *The Catholic Lawyer*, published also from Notre Dame – all these are evidences of specialized Catholic Action, of the apostolate of like to like.

There are the retreat movements, and we refer especially to our own because it is a basic retreat open for both colored and white, Catholic and non-Catholic, men and women, young and old, for the poorest of the poor from the Bowery as well as for the young seminarian or student.

There are the Cana conferences for the family, started in St. Louis by Father Dowling and spreading throughout the country.

And we are part of it all, part of this whole movement throughout the country, but of course we have our own particular talent, our own particular contribution to make to the sum total of the apostolate. And we think of it as so important that we are apt to fight and wrangle among ourselves on account of it, and we are all sensitive to the accusation that we are accenting, emphasizing one aspect of the truth at the expense of another. A heresy overemphasizes one aspect of the truth.

But our unity, if it is not unity of thought in regard to temporal matters, is a unity at the altar rail. We are all members of the Mystical Body of Christ, and so we are closer to each other, by the tie of grace, than any blood brothers are. All these books about discrimination are thinking in terms of human brotherhood, of our responsibility one for another. We are our brother's keeper, and all men are our brothers whether they be Catholic or not. But of course the tie that binds Catholics is closer, the tie of grace. We partake of the same food, Christ. We put off the old man and put on Christ. The same blood flows through our veins, Christ's. We are the same flesh, Christ's. But all men are members or potential members, as St. Augustine says, and there is no time with God, so who are we to know the degree of separation between us and the Communist, the unbaptized, the God-hater, who

may tomorrow, like St. Paul, love Christ.

This past month or so we have all been reading such books as *The Worker Priest in Germany*, translated by Rosemary Sheed; *France Alive* by Claire Bishop; *Growth or Decline?* by Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard; *Souls at Stake* by Rev. Francis Ripley and F. S. Mitchel, with a foreword by Archbishop Bitter.

Chesterton used to start off writing in answer to things he had been reading, or because he was stimulated by what he was reading, and I am sure that all of us on *The Catholic Worker* this month are doing just that. One of the books I have been reading by a non-Catholic, Richard Gregg, about the work of Gandhi along economic lines, led me to think of just how the Catholic Worker movement is distinguished from all these other movements, just what it is we emphasize, just what position we take which is not taken by them. Not that we wish to be different. God forbid. We wish that they all felt as we do, that we had that basic unity which would make us agree on *Pacifism* and *Distributism*.

We feel that the two go together. We feel that the great cause of wars [is] maldistribution, not only of goods but of population. Peter used to talk about a *philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty*. Both are needed in order to change things as they are, to do away with the causes of war. The bravery to face voluntary poverty is needed if we wish to marry, to live, to produce children, to work for life instead of for death, to reject war.

A philosophy of work is essential if we would be whole men, holy men, healthy men, joyous men. A certain amount of goods is necessary for a man to lead a good life, and we have to make that kind of society where it is easier for men to be good. These are all things Peter Maurin wrote about. (He is not writing anymore; we are just reprinting what has appeared by him in *The Catholic Worker* over and over again for many years. The fact that people think Peter is still writing is an evidence of the freshness of all his ideas. They strike people as new. They see all things new, as St. John said.)

A philosophy of work and a philosophy of poverty are necessary if we would share with all men what we have, if we would each try to be the least, if we would wash the feet of our brothers. It is necessary if we would so choose to love our brother, live for him, and die for him, rather than kill him in war. We would need to reject the work in steel mills, mines, [and] factories which contributed to war. We would be willing to go on general strike, and we intend to keep talking about general strikes in order to familiarize each other, ourselves, [and] our fellow workers with the phrase, so that they will begin to ponder and try to understand what a different way of working, different jobs, a different attitude to work would mean in the lives of all. (There is plenty of other work besides factory work. Not all workers are factory workers. There are the service jobs, the jobs that have to do with food, clothing, and shelter. There are the village jobs. Not all would have to be farmers. We are not shouting for all to rush to the land. There is the village economy. A destruction of cities may force us to consider it in the future.)

The Catholic Worker movement is distinguished from other movements in its attitude to our *industrial civilization*, to *the machine*, and to *war*.

To make a study of the machine, it would be good for our readers to send to India and get this book of Richard Gregg's called *The Economics of Khaddar* (hand-spun and handwoven

cloth). It is published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai, Navajivan Press, Kalupur Ahmedabad, India. “The symbol of the unity given to all Christians by Christ himself was food, bread and wine; so the symbol of unity of all India given by Gandhi was means to food – the spinning wheel.”

Gandhi was concerned with the poor and with unemployment. So was Peter Maurin. He started his movement in 1933, when unemployment reached the peak of 11,000,000. It was war which put all these men back to work, and it is recovering from war which is keeping them at work, though unemployment is again setting in. Peter did not believe in the use of force any more than Gandhi did to settle disputes between men or nations. He was inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, as was Gandhi, and there was no talk in that of war. It was turning the other cheek, giving up your cloak, walking the second mile. It was feeding and clothing your enemy. It was dying for him on the Cross. It was the liberty of Christ that St. Paul talked of. Christ constrained no one. He lived in an occupied country all his years, and he made no move to join a movement to throw off the yoke. He thought not in terms of the temporal kingdom of the Jews.

The problem of the machine is the problem of unemployment. Or rather, the problem of *power*. “The right use of power is the important thing; the machine is only an incident.” A spinning wheel is a machine; so is a typewriter, a churn, a loom, a plow. These machines use the available mechanical energy of men, women, and children, young and old. The old man (anyone over forty-five in our industrial era) can use any of these machines. Mechanical energy is derived from food eaten by the person. Not from gasoline and water-power or electricity or coal. Men have to eat, employed or unemployed. The efficient thing to do is to use the available energy, human energy, to combat unemployment. Then we would not have to fight about oil and such like raw materials.

There have been many tributes paid to Gandhi for his nonviolent resistance, his pacifism in a world at war. But little to the “economic validity of his program.” That is what this book is about. And I would wholeheartedly recommend it to all missionaries who have been sending us their desperate appeals these last years. We must continue to help them of course, but the works of mercy are not enough. Men need work as well as bread to be co-creator with God, as He meant them to be, in taking raw materials and ennobling them.

Richard Gregg synopsisized his book as follows (paraphrasing mine):

In addition to being a consideration of the economic validity of Mr. Gandhi’s programme, and of one aspect of the Indian renaissance,

it may be regarded as a discussion of a special instance of the economic validity of all handicraft work versus power-machine industry;

or as a discussion of a special method of unemployment prevention and relief; or as a new attack on the problem of poverty; or as an indigenous Indian form of cooperation; or as illustrating one phase of the relations between Orient and Occident; or between Western capitalism and some other forms of industrial organization; or as a fragmentary and tentative investigation of part of the problem of the limitation or balance of use of power and machinery in order to secure a fine and enduring civilization; or as a partial discussion of the beginning of a development of a sounder organization of human life.

If India will develop her three great resources, (1) the inherited manual sensitiveness and skill of her people; (2) the wasted time of the millions of unemployed; (3) a larger portion of the radiant energy of the sun, and if she will distribute the resulting wealth equably among all her people, by the wide use of the spinning wheel and the hand loom, she can win to her economic goal.

“You have to take a position on our contemporary civilization, to judge, condemn, or correct it,” Cardinal Suhard says. “You must draw up an objective evaluation of our urban civilization today with its gigantic concentrations and its continual growth, inhuman production, unjust distribution, exhausting form of entertainment . . . make a gigantic synthesis of the world to come. . . . Do not be timid. . . . Cooperate with all those believers and unbelievers who are wholeheartedly searching for the truth. You alone will be completely humanist. Be the leaven and the bread will rise. *But it must be bread, not factitious matter.*”

That is why we rebel against all talk of sanctifying one’s surroundings. It is not bread in the first place. It is not worth working with. We must think of these things, even if we can take only first steps out of the morass. We may be caught in the toils of the machine, but we do not have to think of it for our children. We do not just think in terms of changing the ownership of the machine, though some machines will remain and undoubtedly will have to be controlled municipally or regionally.

Peter Maurin’s vision of the city of God included Pacifism and Distributism. And that is what distinguishes us from much of the lay apostolate today. It is the talent Christ has given us, and we cannot bury it. The April issue of *The Catholic Worker* has devoted its space to pacifism, and that was the issue distributed on May Day through the streets of New York. These May Day notes are again a recapitulation.

May 7

ALL OUR talks about peace and the weapons of the spirit are meaningless unless we try in every way to embrace *voluntary poverty* and not work in any position, any job that contributes to war, not to take any job whose pay comes from the fear of war, of the atom bomb. We must give up our place in this world, sacrifice children, family, wife, mother, and embrace poverty, and then we will be laying down life itself.

And we will be considered *fools for Christ*. Our folly will be esteemed madness, and we will be lucky if we escape finally the psychopathic ward. We know – we have seen this judgment in ourselves and in others. The well-dressed man comes into the office, and he is given respect. The ragged, ill-clad, homeless one is the hobo, the bum. “Get in line there. Coffee line forms at six-thirty. Nothing to eat until four. No clothes today.”

Peter Maurin, visiting our Buffalo house one time, showed his face inside the door and was so greeted. “Come back at five and have soup with the rest of the stiffes.” And then the comment, “One of those New York bums came in this afternoon, said he was from the New York house.”

One of the friends of the work, in laughing at the incident that evening, said, “Where did you go, Peter?” “I went to see *Grapes of Wrath*.” Peter was always meek, obedient to all. His speech with everyone when he was not indoctrinating was always Yea, yea, nay, nay. Another story told of him was that when he went to see a professor’s wife at Columbia, the wife thought he was the plumber and ushered him into the cellar. He followed her confusedly,

wondering why she was entertaining in the cellar. If he knew or thought of such things as rumpus rooms or basement bars, he might have thought he was being ushered into one of them.

Another tale told is of his going to speak at a Midwest college where the door brother was known for his great charity. At the very sight of Peter, the brother ushered him down into the kitchen and sat him down before a good meal, which Peter gratefully ate. As the time for the lecture drew near, the harassed fathers were telephoning and hunting all over the college, finally finding him in the cook's domain, having a discussion there.

Another case I know of, of my own knowledge, is a time he went up to Rye, or New Rochelle, or some Westchester town to make a morning address to a women's club. He always went where he was asked. An hour or so later, we received frantic calls. "Where is Peter?" People always called him Peter. Sometimes they were even more familiar and called him "Pete." Since I had put him on the train myself, I told them that he had left on the train designated, that he must be in the station.

"There is only an old tramp sitting on one of the benches, asleep," was the reply. We knew it was Peter, and it turned out to be so.

We have seen many an occasion when he was silenced at a meeting by a cautious chairman before he had even gotten underway. More courteous chairmen allowed him so many minutes to "make his point" and without listening sat him down or called him to order. I have seen Father La Farge and Bishop Boyle come to his rescue and explain who he was, what he was trying to say.

Bishop Boyle likes to speak of the time he had an all-day discussion with Peter after one of these encounters in the lecture hall. "I had to get up and tell them what he was trying to say," the bishop beamed. And it was not just the case of an accent, for Peter, even after forty years in this country, has an accent. If the accent goes with the well-groomed appearance, people make an attempt to understand it. Coming from a ragged old apostle, people make no attempt to listen.

"People will not listen," Peter used to say sadly. Or else, more directly, he would rebuke, "You are listening with one ear, making your answers before you have heard what I have said. You do not want to learn, you want to teach, you want to tell me." He knew he was a man with a message.

And now Peter is more than ever in absolute poverty. He has achieved the ultimate in poverty. This last chapter is necessary for a complete picture of Peter as he is today. It is hard to make our readers understand it. They read or half-read the articles that we run month after month, and no matter how many times we explain that they are reprinted from much earlier issues and that Peter has not written for four years, they write enthusiastically and tell us how they profited by his last essays. "His mind is as keen as ever," they say enthusiastically.

But something has happened to his mind. We must say it again because it is of tremendous significance. It reveals more than anything else his utter selflessness, his giving of himself. He has given everything, even his mind. He has nothing left; he is in utter and absolute poverty. The only thing he really enjoyed, exulted in, was his ability to think. When he said sadly, "I cannot think," it was because that had been taken from him, literally. His mind would no

longer work. He sits on the porch, a huge old hulk. His shoulders were always broad and bowed. He looks gnome-like, as though he came from under the earth. He shambles about one-sidedly, as though he had had a stroke. His head hangs wearily, as though he could not hold it up. His mouth, often twisted as though with pain, hangs open in an effort to understand what is going on around him. Most of the time he is in a lethargy; he does not try to listen or to understand. Doctors say that it is a hardening of the arteries of the brain. Some talk of cardiac asthma to explain his racking cough. He has a rupture which gives him pain. Sometimes he has headaches. We only know when we ask him, and he says yes or no.

“I have never asked anything for myself,” he said once, and he made every conscious effort to give all he had, to give the best he had, all of himself, to the cause of his brother. The only thing he had left in his utter poverty which made Skid Row his home and the horse market his eating place and the old clothes room his haberdasher was his brilliant mind. Father McSorley considered him a genius. Father Parsons said that he was the best-read man he ever met. Now he remembers nothing. “I cannot remember.” “I cannot think.”

One time we acted charades before him at the retreat house at Easton. Irene Naughton arranged three scenes in which the men acted out . . . three essays, “When the Irish Were Irish a Thousand Years Ago,” “When a Greek Met a Greek,” [and] “When a Jew Met a Jew.” The contrast was that of the teachings of the fathers of Israel and the Fathers of the Church with the present. The men dressed in sheets and angora goats’ hair to give them a venerable appearance and did a delightful job of it. Afterwards we asked Peter what were the essays which the charades exemplified. He did not know. We read aloud his essays to him, and he did recognize them as he had written them, but as they were acted and spoken in the charade, he “could not remember.”

John Cort, of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and one of the editors of the *Commonweal*, who spent a few years with us on Mott Street, said once that he thought the most significant message we had for the world today was poverty.

All the world admires and talks of the poor man of Assisi. Christ is honored even by the unbeliever, the hater of churches, as the poor man who washed the feet of His disciples and had no place to lay His head. Poverty is praised and sung of in song and story. But its reality is little known.

It is a garden enclosed, a secret beauty. It is to be learned by faith, not by reason or by sense. It is not just *simplicity*, which can be a very expensive proposition indeed.

Peter’s poverty might have been thought to be that of an old peasant who was used to nothing better. “After all, he never had anything – he was one of twenty-three children. They lived like animals; their manure pile was their greatest possession.” I have heard just such remarks as these.

And of course there is truth in the fact that he was not used to soft garments nor the homes of comfort. He was always in good trim to practice the life of poverty.

One of Newman’s Lenten sermons talks of our endeavors to multiply comforts and get rid of daily inconveniences and distresses of life.

“Cold and hunger and hard lodging, humble offices and mean appearance are considered

serious evils,” he writes. “All things harsh and austere are carefully put aside. We shrink from the rude lap of earth and embrace of the elements, and we build ourselves houses in which the flesh may enjoy its lust and the eye its pride.”

Cold and hunger and hard lodging and all things that affront the senses were well known to Peter. But what of the interior senses, the memory and the understanding and the will? These last years we have seen all these mortified in him. Much of his memory and his understanding are gone, and his will is fixed on God. When we wake him in the morning, all we have to say is “Mass, Peter,” and he is struggling and puffing and panting to get out of bed. At night it is the same for Compline and rosary unless we forbid him to get up and make him lie still.

There is a dear priest who used to talk to us about being *victims*. I could write a book about him, so great was his love of God and of souls, but this is about Peter. He too became a victim. What he loved most, after his spiritual work, was to do active work for souls – build houses, work his electric saw, make things for the chapel, travel about to talk of the things of God. He was known for his activity. Then, at the age of fifty-seven, paralysis and loss of memory set in. Incontinent and bedridden, he has spent the last two years away from all those he loved, far from the activities he craved. I asked him if he had offered himself as a victim, and he said wryly, “One doesn’t realize what one is saying often. We offer God so much, and maybe we think we mean it. And then God takes us at our word!”

Peter gave himself, he offered himself to a life of poverty, and he has been able to prove his poverty. It is not just something he was used to or was attracted to in a superficial way. His poverty, his self-abnegation was complete.

And now he is dying (if not already dead) to the things of the world. “His life is hid with Christ in God.” He is not even appreciated for the saint he is. (And understand that I use this term as one uses it for one not passed upon formally by the Church. A rector of a seminary once said to his students, “I want you all to be saints, but not canonized ones. It costs too much.”)

Father Faber describes what Peter’s actual death may be like in one of his spiritual conferences on death entitled “Precious in the Sight of the Lord”:

Let us speak of one more death, and then close our list. Let it be the death of saintly indifference. This is a death so obscurely veiled in its own simplicity that we can hardly discern its beauty. We must take it upon faith. It is the death of those who for long have been reposing in sublimest solitude of soul in the will of God. All complications have disappeared from their inward life. There is a bare unity about it, which to our unseeing eyes is barren as well as bare. All devotions are molten in one. All wishes have disappeared, so that men look cold, and hard, and senseless. There is no glow about them when they die. They die in colorless light. They make no demonstration when they go. There is no pathos in their end, but a look – it is only a look – of stoical hardness. They generally speak but little, and then it is not edifying, but rather on commonplace subjects, such as the details of the sick room or news about relatives; and they speak of these things as if they were neither interested in them nor trying to take an interest. Their death, from the very excess of its spirituality, looks almost animal. They lie down to die like beasts, such is the appearance of it, independently

as if they needed none of us to help them, and uncomplainingly, as if fatalism put them above complaining. They often die alone when none are by, when the nurses are gone away for a while. They seem almost as if they watched [for] the opportunity to die alone. As they have lived like eagles, they mostly die high up, without witnesses, and in the night. This death is too beautiful for us to see its beauty. It rather scares us by something about it which seems inhuman. More of human will would make it more lovely to us; for what is there to be seen when the will of the saint has been absorbed long since in the will of God? Like the overflow of some desert wells, the waters of life sink into the sand, without a tinkling sound to soothe the ear, without a marge of green to rest the eye.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

May 10

NATURALLY SPEAKING, people are filled with repulsion at the idea of holiness. We have so many sad examples of Pecksniffs in our midst. But now we are filled with encouragement these days to find that it is not only the Catholic Worker lay movement but writers like Ignazio Silone, Aldous Huxley, and Arthur Koestler who are also crying aloud for a synthesis – the saint-revolutionist who would impel others to holiness by his example. And recognizing the difficulty of the aim, Silone has drawn pictures of touching fellowship with the lowly, the revolutionist living in voluntary poverty, in hunger and cold, in the stable, and depending on “personalist action” to move the world. *Bread and Wine* and *The Seed Beneath the Snow* are filled with this message.

According to St. Thomas, “The perfection of divine love is a matter of precept for all without exception, so that even the perfection of heaven is not excepted from this precept, since it is the end to which one must tend.”

We are either on the road to heaven or hell. “All the way to heaven is heaven, for He said, ‘I am the Way,’ ” St. Catherine of Siena tells us. And likewise all the way to hell is hell. We have some pretty good visions of hell around us these days and these last years. Dante wrote his great vision of hell. St. Teresa of Ávila has a picture of hell in her autobiography. The latest vision of hell is Aldous Huxley’s in *Time Must Have a Stop*. One night last winter I went to Tannhauser and realized then that Venusburg was another vision of hell, to which, in the old Christian legend, Tannhauser is condemned at the end, to repeat his senseless and cloying pleasures for all eternity. Bernanos wrote that hell was “not to love anymore.” After the last war, everyone was talking about the lost generation. After this war, thank God, they are talking more about saints. A few years ago there was a book review in the *New York Times* about Greek and Christian tragedy and *Moby Dick* as an allegorical novel. In that review it is pointed out that unlike Greek tragedy, where one’s fate is written, where it is only up to the hero to play the heroic part, the Christian has a *choice*, and each and every lowly Christian is forced to make that choice. W. H. Auden was the author of the review in the *Times*, and he writes,

There is the possibility of each becoming exceptional and good; this ultimate possibility for hero and chorus alike is stated in Father Mapple’s sermon, and it is to become a saint, i.e., the individual through his own free will surrenders his will to the will of God. In this surrender he does not become the ventriloquist’s doll, for the God who acts through him can

only do so by his consent; there always remain two wills, and the saint therefore never ceases to be tempted to obey his own desires.

The saint does not ask to become one, he is called to become one and assents to the call. The outward sign that Ahab is so called is the suffering which is suddenly intruded into his life. He is called to give up hunting whales – “the normal, cannibalistic life of this world.”

Archbishop Robichaud, in his book *Holiness for All* (New Man Press), emphasizes the fact that the choice is not between good and evil for Christians – that it is not in this way that one proves his love. The very fact of baptism, of becoming the son of God, presupposes development as a son of God. C. S. Lewis, the author of *Screwtape Letters*, points out that the child in the mother’s womb perhaps would refuse to be born if given the choice, but it does not have that choice. It has to be born. The egg has to develop into the chicken with wings. Otherwise it becomes a rotten egg. It is not between good and evil, we repeat, that the choice lies, but between good and better. In other words, we must give up over and over again even the good things of this world to choose God. Mortal sin is a turning from God and a turning to created things – created things that are good.

It is so tremendous an idea that it is hard for people to see its implications. Our whole literature, our culture, is built on ethics, the choice between good and evil. The drama of the ages is on this theme. We are still living in the Old Testament, with commandments as to the natural law. We have not begun to live as good Jews, let alone as good Christians. We do not tithe ourselves; there is no year of jubilee; we do not keep the Sabbath; we have lost the concept of hospitality. It is dog eat dog. We are all hunting whales. We devour each other in love and in hate; we are cannibals.

In all secular literature it has been so difficult to portray the good man, the saint, that a Don Quixote is a fool; the Prince Myshkin is an epileptic in order to arouse the sympathy of the reader, appalled by unrelieved goodness. There are, of course, the lives of the saints, but they are too often written as though they were not in this world. We have seldom been given the saints as they really were, as they affected the lives of their times. We get them generally, only in their own writings. But instead of that strong meat we are too generally given the pap of hagiographical writing.

Too little has been stressed the idea that *all* are called. Too little attention has been placed on the idea of mass conversions. We have sinned against the virtue of hope. There have been in these days mass conversions to Nazism, fascism, and communism. Where are our saints to call the masses to God? Personalists first, we must put the question to ourselves. Communitarians, we will find Christ in our brothers.

May 12

HERE ARE some quotations from my winter’s reading:

Travels in Arabia Deserta by Doughty makes good background reading for one’s study of the Bible. “Cheerful is the bare Arabic livelihood in the common air, which has sufficiency in a few things snatched incuriously as on a journey; so it is a life little full of superfluous cares; their ignorance is not brutish, their poverty is not baseness.”

In another part he writes, “There is a winter proverb of the poor in Europe, ‘Fire is half

bread.' ” I thought of this many times when we were cold during January and February.

“Attend to reading,” St. Paul said to Timothy. St. Jerome writes to Eustochium, “Let sleep creep over you holding a book, and let the sacred page receive your drooping face.” St. Augustine said, “Do you know how we should read Holy Scripture? As when a person reads letters that have come from his native country, to see what news we have of heaven.” Rodriguez says that reading is sister and companion to meditation. St. Jerome wrote, “Where is this fire [of the love of God]? Doubtless in the holy Scriptures, by the reading whereof the soul is set on fire with God and purified from all vices.” St. John 6:63: “The words that I have given you are spirit and life.”

Thoughts on holy silence: St. Gregory kept silence during Lent.

Holy Abbot Agatho for three years carried a pebble in his mouth to gain the virtue of silence.

Abbot Deicoola always had a smile on his face, and when asked why he was so happy, he said, “Be what may be and come what may come, no one can take God from me.”

Newman’s picture of a Christian character: free from excitement or effort, full of repose, still, equable. “Act then as persons who are in a dwelling not their own. . . . What matters it what we eat, what we drink, wherewith we are clothed, what is thought of us, what becomes of us, etc.”

On the other hand, there is the sacramental attitude toward life: “Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Isaiah 32:17-18: “The work of the righteous shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation and in sure dwellings and quiet resting places.”

To think nothing of ourselves and always to judge well and highly of others is great wisdom and high perfection. – The Imitation of Christ

Prayer is what breath is to the body. Prayer is the hand of the body, waits on it, feeds it, washes it, tends it – as the hands do everything, so prayer. “If Stephen had not prayed,” writes St. Augu Buddha says that community life is like sword grass in one’s hand.

St. Apollo formed a community of 500 monks near Hermapolis, who received daily Communion and listened to a daily homily. “In these he often insisted on the evils of melancholy and sadness, saying that cheerfulness of heart is necessary amidst our tears of penance as being the fruit of charity, and requisite to maintain the spirit of fervor. He himself was known to strangers by the joy of his countenance.”

“The grace of the Holy Ghost, like a good mother, has put aloes on the breasts of the world that that might become bitter to me which before was sweet, and sweetest honey on the things of virtue and religion in order to make that tasty and sweet to me which before seemed bitter and disagreeable.” – Rodriguez

“It was a rule among the Jews that all their children should learn some handicraft in the course of their studies, were it but to avoid idleness and exercise the body, as well as the mind, in some sensible pursuit.” – Butler

Charles de Foucauld wrote, “Manual labor is necessarily put into the second place, to make room for studies, at present, because you and I are in the period of infancy; we are not yet old enough to work with St. Joseph; we are still with Jesus, the little child at the Virgin’s knee, learning to read. But later on, humble, vile, despised manual labor will again take its great place, and then Holy Communion, the lives of the saints, prayer, the humble work of our hands, humiliation and suffering!”