

Mid-Summer Retreat At Maryfarm

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Summary: Reflects on her and other's personal interests that flower into beauty and works of mercy, as well as renewing us. Summarizes the content of a recent retreat and the notes the importance of silence. (DDLW #671).

Baron von Hugel talks of the necessity of living on several levels. My interest on the spiritual level have included the reading this month of Guardini's **Faith and the Modern Man** (Pantheon, 1952) and **The Rich and the Poor in Christian Tradition**, a copy of which was sent us by Dorothy Canfield Fisher. I was much struck in my re-reading it, on the call of Pope Pius XII to all to work on the material level for those about us and our obligation to do something about the problems which confront us.

I would say that having Puerto Rican children all summer on the Peter Maurin Farm, was an attempt to do something on that immediate level for those who are victims of our social order, and the impulse to act in that connection came as a result of the shooting in Congress in the Spring, that desperate act by young people who felt that all protest against exploitation by United States' interests had been made again and again, and that it was time for terrorist action to call the attention of the world to their plight. They were rotting away in poverty, and birth control was offered them as a solution. Their blood was thinned by starvation and disease, so they would shed, they decided, the blood of their masters. These unfortunate young people are going to spend practically the rest of their lives in prison as a result of their act, continuing to work by their suffering, for their brothers. They will remind us, if we pause to think of it, that if we do not do our Christian duty of loving and serving, the poor of the world will take by force that which is denied them by justice. The world revolution creeps nearer, and we who consider ourselves the just will be judged first. We Americans have failed in justice and in love.

All the activities of the Catholic Worker, all of the works of mercy performed throughout the country on farms and in houses of hospitality, are reparation and practices in the work of loving and the smaller the houses are and the more numerous the better. We must love humanly as well as spiritually. We must **like** as well as love people.

Usually we are too busy. There is much hard work, physical and mental. There is just the work of listening to people day in and day out, and of course, a great deal of talking. There is bearing with one another and being mindful of one another, a whole group of us living together in community. Just because we live so close together, we are apt to pull away from each other, isolate ourselves from each other, each go his own way. We do not love and

understand each other enough. We do many things we ought not to do and leave undone many things we ought to do, as the Episcopalian confiteor has it.

We all feel the need of re-creation, not in the sense of play, but in the sense of renewal, increasing our knowledge and our love, and many of our interests do this for us.

My interests,—what are they? They are all tied together of course, but listing them separately there is, aside from the Catholic Worker activities, my own family, my daughter, son-in-law and six grandchildren. Through them I am learning more and more about the family, about education, about property and poverty. I learn about material things in looking at things through the children's eyes. There is the soil, the animals, all growing things, even in the life of insects (Larry Evers has brought this close to us by his interests.) There is the life of the sea, seining to catch specimens, and the children find the smallest horse-shoe crabs, pipe-fish, killies. Hisaye introduces us to seaweed and that on our beach is of exceptional quality, she says, and would be much appreciated by Japanese people. We press some kinds of sea weed, we collect jingle shells, little whelks, snails, clam borers, boat shells, and Eric Hennessy came to me and said, one day, "Why are we collecting these shells?" (One can see the intellectual life growing in them!) I told him,—“The heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork.” There is something so good, so beautiful about these things that they make us know God and love Him more. . . Besides we are going to make up a little box of them to send to Lauren Ford, who also collects shells and gave us some. She gave us our wool from her sheep at Bethlehem to spin. And they in turn remind us of God's good provision for us always.

My conversation quite contented Eric. I read the Psalms to the children sometimes out under the mulberry trees and they all stand silent, suddenly quiet (for a moment or two.) One certainly has to take advantage of each shining moment with children. There cannot be lifeless plans, schedules. They may seem idle (these vacation days), noisy, disorganized, frustrating, destructive and so on and so on. "Children's work is to grow," Jane O'Donnell of the Grail said once. And my daughter Tamar says, "Children have their own order."

And other interests, what are they? Lee Perry has tuned the piano at Peter Maurin farm, that piano which was given to us by the sisters at Forsythe Street, the mission of the Nativity church, and carted down to us by Peter Asaro, and Lee plays Bach on it, much to our delight. From all around the country there are evidences that the integration of Peter Maurin's program of Cult, Culture and Cultivation is taking place.

Betty Lou Geenty is baking the bread, milking the cow, practicing the recorder (among many other things). Rita Corbin comes down and does a little calligraphy, copying out some verses from the missal for our bulletin board. Bill Everson, now Brother Antoninus, formerly with the Oakland House of Hospitality sends us a long article on printing and contemplation. Bill was a poet, and Brother Antoninus still is, and a printer besides, and he is now doing a job on a new psalter, the first copy of which is to go to His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. I remember with wonder how Bill printed a book of poetry, bound in vellum, in the dung hill which was the Peter Maurin House in Oakland, stark destitution there, not decent poverty, and yet from it springing this beautiful flower of work. There is the stained glass windows of Carl Paulson, now gracing so many windows of churches—not to speak of Ade Bethune's, stations of the Cross, her mosaics, her own stained glass and wood cuts.

Every now and then one reflects on our friends and their interests, their most interesting vocation, and it is good to see people self-centered in this way, so that they find their vocation, train themselves for it and then try to live it. They must concentrate on their human life of growing, procreating, living the life of the family, earning a living, and recreating and also as men play their part in restoring all things in Christ.

During the month I thought of John Cogley and his interest in public life and in politics, and Ammon Hennacy on the other hand and his interest in a stateless society and in peaceful community. The latter has had to abandon his life at hard labor and to replace that discipline of work he is fasting Fridays; during our recent retreat he fasted, and again in August for nine days he will picket and fast in reparation for Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the cruel weapons of destruction which we have made. All men are responsible, but Ammon by not paying income tax, and by penance, is doing reparation.

George Carlin who was a flyer in Japan is going to pass out leaflets about birth control and abortion in Japan,—which we are now responsible for this present day. This month a friend had to go to the hospital for psychiatric treatment, and visiting him and suffering with him over his condition made me appreciate the vocation of Dr. Karl Stern who visited us this past month. During the month I had telephone calls from two far distant parts of the country, from mentally disturbed people, and many come in to visit us, and this misery that pours out upon us in waves makes us long for more with vocations to work for the mentally ill, if only as ward attendants, and more to train for this work in hospitals, as nurses, doctors.

Retreat

Our physical, material and mental life is a full one, and this month it was wonderful to try to put all these concerns, so engrossing, the beautiful and the ugly, all aside for a time, to make a retreat at Maryfarm, Newburgh. It was Father Casey's third annual retreat with us, though he would rather call it a little school of spirituality, recalling an article of Jacques Maritain from an old Commonweal in which he pointed out a need for houses of hospitality on the land where schools of the spiritual life could be conducted for the laity.

There will be another retreat in August, from Sunday, August 8 until Friday, August 13, conducted by Fr. Brown of Louisville, and perhaps my account of Fr. Casey's retreat will make others long for it and come to make it. We never worry about numbers or reservations as God takes care of that, it seems, quite directly and we never have more than we can handle. If people are willing to endure the hardship of crowding eight in a room, for instance, and washing out of a basin for a week, and using outhouses, the rest makes up for it.

People came from St. Louis, Chicago, Akron, Pittsburgh, Wilmington, Boston and so on, for this last retreat. One girl brought her eleven year old nephew. Hisaye Yamamoto brought her six year old son. Another friend came with an eleven year old and a six year old boy. So the boys had each other to play with. Jane Judge and Lucille Lynch, Margaret and Mary, Dean and Cecilia, all had worked like Trojans, or rather like Christians, to make the place ready. All the blankets were washed, for about fifty beds, all the sheets, pillow cases, towels; dormitories cleaned, fumigated, screened, so much work done that during the days of the

retreat all the cooking and serving seemed like nothing in comparison to the work which went before.

The silence of the retreat was beautifully kept. “Cease not to put from you all creatures until you are alone with God,” St. Bernard said. Pretty hard to do of course but all the creatures around us were helps to rise to God, and we stored up enough beauty during the retreat to make up for months of ugliness and the suffering that comes upon us in the work.

Newman said that one of the first needs of a university was a grove of trees such as the ancient Greeks had. Here at Maryfarm we wander between hedges of wild cherry, making the Stations of the Cross, or out through the fields those well cultivated fields which give evidence of the hard work of John Filliger, John Stanley, and Charlie Petrillo our neighbor who rents some of the fields; or out under the ancient oaks and maples and pines. It is a pleasure even to watch the traffic speeding by which has the fascination of a stream of water.

While the retreat is going on, the work of the farm goes on, and the good smell of bread baking and canning by Joe Cotter and Mike Fitzgerald. Retreatants did dishes, cleaned their rooms, helped with the weeding. There was enough physical labor to rest the mind and soul. And how beautiful silence is. Max Picard wrote a book on the subject. Aldous Huxley once sent me a check to help the retreat house, saying, “anything to further the cause of silence.” And his wife once visited Maryfarm with her sister, and made the Stations with us down through that same wild cherry grove. To work in silence to take care of bodily needs and then to sit and listen to heavenly truths, to ponder them, to pray about them, not to read or to write except for the taking of a few notes, not to think of past or future, but to dwell in the moment, This was all a foretaste of heaven, a showing that “all the way to heaven is heaven because Christ said, ‘I am the Way.’”

And now that the retreat is over, I must go back to my work of writing because that is my particular vocation, and try to give a picture, an impression, an atmosphere—in other words to give a little of what has been given to me.

A writer gets much criticism. He sees things one way, and writes about them and others who do not see with the same eyes, read what he has written and say he is not true, that what he has written is a lie. Or one is accused of exposing one self, one’s soul, one’s ailments. Or of violating confidences which makes once examine one’s conscience and lament and try to be careful and leave the rest in the hands of God. Often a person thinks **He** is being written about when it is someone quite different. When Stanley Vishnewsky used to read the Imitation of Christ at table, many would feel that a particular chapter had been with malice directed at them; until in self defence he used mischievously to preface his reading with, “This is for Dorothy,” or “This is for Peter,” and so on.

I read this week in the psalms: “I have proclaimed thy justice in the great assembly; behold I have not restrained my lips; I have not concealed thy justice within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy help; I have not kept thy mercy and faithfulness hidden from the great assembly.” It was important, evidently, so it is repeated. On the one hand silence, on the other speech. One has to learn the one to do well the other.

Here are some of the writers or writings that Father Casey referred to during his retreat. Their juxtaposition is amusing and I hope many of our readers will read them and think of

them as we did.

The House that Jack Built, the nursery rhyme that refers everything back to Jack as we should refer everything back to God.

The Flax, by Hans Christian Anderson, which tells the story of the seed in the ground, illustrating the idea of necessity of assimilation and the suffering entailed. Pinocchio, the story of the puppet is on the same idea. In this story if the puppet, by his good acts, does not develop into a boy, he falls backward into a donkey, into something he does not wish to be. Fr. Casey referred to Cinderella and to Job, to Thomas Merton and his books, and quotes him as saying that there are very few vocations to the religious life because people are too surrounded by noise to hear them. A shocking thought.

“In the midst of a deep silence, Thy Word leaped down.”

“God has spoken only one word and that is **His** Son.” He read to us from Garrigou Lagrange, from St John of the Cross, Tissot, St Frances de Sales. He quoted Kierkegaard as saying that the mystique of worldliness turned wine into water. St. James said that true religion was to keep one’s self unspotted by the world.

Most of all Fr. Casey urged us to read Holy Scripture. The four points of the retreat all referred back to Scripture. Those four points were,

1. Man’s **elevation** by grace and what it entailed.
2. God’s Glory.
3. The folly of the Cross.
4. God’s Providence.

Here are a few notes: We must cultivate a great respect for Holy Scripture and read it habitually and with relish. St. Jerome said “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” Pope Pius XII said that ignorance of Christ is the greatest enemy of Christ. Not Communism. Nothing takes the place of Scripture, no reading, no sermons. It is God’s love letter to men. We worry about the godlessness of others, and do not worry about our own Christlessness, our secularism.

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” St. Paul said. Two loves have built two cities. The essence of the Bible is Love. The New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New (St. Augustine). The Law was pregnant with Christ. The Sermon on the Mount was the constitution of our new life. The beatitudes are its preamble. We must beware of the old mentality, of sentimentality, of pagan mentality.

When we say only to avoid sins, to stay in the state of grace, it is as though we were living in the Old Testament and we gave up the Sacrifice of the Mass and went out into the fields and sacrificed one of our goats and poured out his blood as an oblation.

The commandments are the old law. All these things I have done since my youth, the young man told Christ, and then He gave him the new law, the law of love, the counsels, which are given nowhere else but in Christ.

Christ is not a code of ethics but the living Word of God. The counsels are the continuation of the commandments. The old law says: Thou shalt not steal. This is natural justice. The new law says, Let your neighbor take your cloak too. The old law says, Do not covet your neighbor's goods. The new law says, Hold loosely to what is yours. Do not covet even your own. Natural justice would permit self defense. Moral theology permits it. But Jesus counsels non-violence, forgiving seventy times seven. Honor your father and mother; you call me Lord and Master and so I am, and then Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. He counsels obedience to every living creature.

When we get the first point of the retreat, man's elevation to the supernatural life, we can say with the blind man, "Now I see."

Pius XII said, "The state of mind traditionally considered Christian is rapidly disappearing from the world." Be imitators of God as most dear children. Imitator of the Church. We must be holy before we are apostolic. The basic rule is to know Christ and Him crucified. St. John of the Cross is called the doctor of **nada**. That is a half truth. He is also the doctor of **all**. If you wish to have everything, desire nothing. If you wish to know everything, desire to know nothing. One must empty one's self, strip one's-self to put on Christ.

First let him have a habitual desire for these things. Do not let anyone tell you St. John of the Cross is not for all of us. He is one of the doctors of the Church and there are only about fourteen of them. There are those who will tell you also not to read the Imitation of Christ, not to read the Gospel even.

Up to Galileo everyone thought the earth was the center of universe. Man was humbled by science, bitterly disillusioned to find the earth but a speck of dust, and the sun the center of the universe. (As the dwelling place of man earth has its importance.) We too must try to find a new center. Not our ego but God. We must be God-centered, not egocentric. We are native to nothingness. God created us from nothing, he sustains us. Through Christ's incarnation, He has elevated us. If we could only begin to understand this. We must read Fr. Gadeils "Gifts of the Holy Ghost" (Blackfriars) and pray constantly for these gifts.

The Cross

The Cross antedates sin. It was offered to the angels and they rejected it. They were given a trial to mortify their judgment and some of them failed. The Cross was offered to Adam and Eve. They were seduced by the use of reason. Satan offered the same thing God did.

It was an intellectual temptation.—they asked "Why?" The question, why they should not eat of the fruit was presented to their reason. Their loss was primarily of the supernatural order besides many of their natural perfections and immunities. We must always remember the two fold aspect of the cross which is not just atonement for sin, but a testing. The Law of the Cross is in Mary's life and she was immaculately conceived. Jesus is the Supreme Example of the Folly of the Cross.

Will of God

In trying to do the will of God, start at the bottom, keep the commandments. The spirit of the counsels is obligatory on all. God speaks and our response is obedience. This is the manifest will of God. The will of good pleasure is everything else and is on the passive side. It is all that happens to us. It is all the unexpected, seemingly accidental things. The unlooked for, sorrowful and joyous. Submission, surrender, acceptance,—“Here burn, here cut, but spare me forever.” Rising from nature to the supernatural, the song is never done. In the will of good pleasure, we have less responsibility. The spirit blows where it will. We put up the sails, that is our job. The wind blows us along.

Poverty

Poverty is not a virtue. It is rather the underside of a virtue. It is not a good, but an absence of good. It is removal of baggage which is holding us at the border when we are going to our heavenly home, to God. We are citizens of heaven. All Scripture shows God’s providence. In the book of Job we have the problem of evil, evil as the absence of Good. Job was stripped of everything, family, material goods, health, but he never denied God. Job’s comforters tried to make him think his troubles were because of his sins, rather than the permissive will of God. “Do all you can,” God said to Satan, “but you cannot get into his will.” And Job’s Theophany came out of this trial. In the book of Tobias, “Because he was acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation prove him.” St. Teresa said, “Let nothing fright you.” St. John of the Cross said “even if the world is crumbling under your feet.” Fr. Casey added, even if hydrogen bombs are falling around you. “You are Christ’s and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Signs and Wonders

It is an adulterous generation that seeks a sign and the only sign Christ would give is the sign of Jonas—to die in order to live, to go into the whale’s belly, to go into the ground and die and bring forth much fruit. We too often are exchanging our faith for superstition in a hunger for religious excitement. Pure dark faith is needed. Faith is the only proportionate means of union with God in this life. We believe in miracles but do not depend on them. “One Word have I spoken, my Son,” don’t look for prophecies. To ask for more is to insult Christ. Purification takes place all down the line. Faith is beyond reason.

God is a circle whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere.

All things are yours and you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s.