

On Pilgrimage - December 1954

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Summary: Diary-like account of talks and visits to friends in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Chicago, and Milwaukee. Relishes reporting on the apostolates of lay and clergy alike. Notes her attraction to the Abbey of St. Procopius. (DDLW #679).

When one is travelling it is often only possible to write a chronicle like a Pepys diary and there is not much room for comment. So here is the bare bones of my trip during this last month in the way of a letter to our readers, which, thanks to Ammon Hennacy's street selling campaign, is increased by some thousands.

Nov. 1 – Visited Mary Benson and Frances Mazet at Rehoboth, Mass.

Nov. 2 – Upton, Mass. The over 100 acre farm which was originally called St. Benedict's Farming Commune, and which has provided a home for four families and their many children for many years now. The farm is now divided. The Roche family with fifty acres and their own and the old community house, because Bill was originally a farmer in Ireland and hopes to be able to get back to it some day. The Paulson and O'Donnell families have less—I do not know the exact figures but each family took what they needed. The Ericson family have moved away and there is another family building on the farm. There may not be communal property but there is what Julian Pleasants calls "Community of place." It is again the world in microcosm as any community is, whether it is a family, a street, a parish, a neighborhood. To me, whenever I visit Upton, it seems family life at its most beautiful.

No one knew I was coming, and it was so good to come into a warm kitchen to find Mary lying with her children on a rug before the open oven door, resting, and Carl and Frank engaged in the big studio making stained glass windows picturing the mysteries of the rosary. I had coffee later with the Roches, and one of the older girls showed me how to make cord rosaries with a five yard piece of fishing tackle and a hairpin.

Mary Paulson has the four-H Club meeting at her house and teaches the children many things. Recently Rita and Martie Corbin spent their honeymoon with the Paulsons and Rita learned how staining glass windows are made.

Cult, culture and cultivation! There is certainly more than a suggestion of Peter Maurin's synthesis here.

Nov. 3 – I spoke in Cambridge at the Radcliffe Catholic Club, to which the Harvard Catholic Club had been invited. I had dinner at the Friends' Center in Cambridge before hand. Spent the night at John Cort's, a family which I dearly love but I begin to wonder if he does not do

us a great deal of injury in accusing us so many times of going against the popes just because we do not espouse his own pet ideas of reformation of the social order.

Nov. 5 – Spoke at Yone Stafford’s in Springfield to a mixed group and was delighted to see old friends the Greeley’s from Holyoke and Mary Newland, whose book, **We and Our Children** has just been published by Sheed and Ward. Yone is the Japanese daughter of a Tokio exporter whose life as a child was spent between Tokio and New York, and though she is not a Catholic, she spent her Tokio years in the Sacred Heart Academy there. She has long been a dear friend of the work. Her husband heads a paper factory and is a lover of music and first editions.

Nov. 7 – Direct to St. Paul, Minn., stopping over Sunday morning for Mass at St. Patrick’s in Chicago. Staying at Maryhouse, in Little Canada and on Monday and Tuesday wrote another chapter on THERESE.

Nov. 11 – Spoke at Mendota for Father Muellerleile’s group. His church is on the river and he has had many Cana conferences on Sunday, a delightful spot for families. His display of Distributist Books, and back issues of the Catholic Worker cheered me mightily.

Nov. 12 – Spoke at The House of Charity in St. Paul, which is run by a group of young men who are members of the Third Order of St. Francis and are hoping to form another order. They receive help from the community and from the state, provide nights lodgings for seventeen men and food for many hundreds every day.

Nov. 13 – Father Durand is the pastor at St. John’s at Little Canada and I spoke to a group in the basement of the parish school.

Nov. 14 and 15 – Spoke both evenings at the home of the Humphries in St. Cloud and visited with Leonard and Betty Doyle, Carlos and Mary Katherine Cotton, Jim and Elizabeth Powers.

Nov. 16 – At 4:30 a.m. (the meeting lasted the night before until two) I took a most comfortable train for Chicago where I arrived in most unseasonably warm weather, at three o’clock. I always spend my time in Chicago with Nina Polcyn who has charge of the St. Benet Library and Book Shop on Wabash and Congress, which is the meeting place for people from all over the world, actually. In addition to being a contact center, Nina provides hospitality for visiting lay apostles in her little three room apartment which she shares with Betty Yunker, who is secretary for Fr. Egan who runs the Cana and pre-Cana conferences in the Chicago area.

I spoke at St. Procopius on Wednesday and Fr. Claude who is novice master and has charge of the oblates (there is a group meeting in New York too) told me about the special mission of St. Procopius, which is to work towards reunion. Due to my own interest in THE THIRD HOUR and the articles Robert Ludlow has written on the Eastern rites and reunion, and the Catholic Worker apostolate of peace in general, I am very strongly attracted to this abbey. Our dear friend Fr. Chrysostom teaches there and offers up the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and it was my joy and privilege to be present at five the next morning after my talk the night before.

Fr. Chrysostom’s strong interest is to work for peace too, and of course this monastery it is

also a microcosm of the world, and there are strong differences of opinion about pacifism and the morality of nuclear weapons and war in general as a means of saving the faith. I had a good meeting with the women oblates who live next to the monastery and work in the cannery and printing office. They were building a new center for mailing and they have already increased the size of their house for days of recollection. They make their own cement blocks and do their own building, pointing out that labor costs are two-thirds of the cost of building. One of the women was bitten by a black widow spider last summer and is still suffering from the effects.

The Benedictine nuns who have their mother house and an academy adjoining St. Procopius made me most comfortable in their guest wing, which used to be one long dormitory and now is divided into little rooms. When I am travelling it is good to see the slow improvements made in our own and religious houses, seeing too, how successful a philosophy of poverty (not destitution) and manual labor is.

In Chicago I lunched with all the workers at 21 W. Superior, which houses Fides Press, Cana Conference, Work for the Blind, WORK and spoke to them all after lunch. Aside from the Young Christian Workers this is the headquarters for most of the lay apostolic work in Chicago.

St. Thomas the Apostle, on the South Side and Nazareth Academy in LaGrange, which is a suburb on the West Side, were the two high schools that invited me to speak and I found the young people as attentive and interested as ever. I always think of Claudel's statement, "Youth demands the heroic," when I speak to such groups. They seemed well prepared to listen.

I met John Doebele and Lucian Lupinski both of whom were in the Alexian Brothers hospital during the war as conscientious objectors, and they showed me a film, "**The Works of Peace**," which showed the ravages of war and the attempts made by the Bishops' relief committee to bring some aid to the stricken people. The next morning I went to Mass with the Lay Auxiliaries of the Missions near Chicago university and met many Vietnamese students. Fr. Jacques is their chaplain and Yvonne Poncelet their founder who showed films of her recent visit to Indo-China. I had dinner with Bill and Ruth O'Meara. (he teaches at Chicago and she at Loyola) and met Michael Akpan, a Nigerian student. Professors certainly can do a lot to help the Lay Auxiliaries of the Missions in their work of reaching foreign students.

How to list all the families I have visited since I left New York! At Notre Dame there were the Nuttings, the Pleasants, the Storeys, Fr. Mullaly and Brother John Chrysostom at a meeting at Terry and Ruth McKiernan's home in Hudson Lake. Terry and Ruth run **The House of Bread** in South Bend, "an honorable occupation." Terry will write, I hope, an entire article on this later. Outside of South Bend on 80 acres there are eight families living. The rain and snow that November afternoon kept me from visiting more than three of them. The Governs (he teaches in Niles, Michigan); the Ryans (both of them famous for their books on education) and the Pleasants with whom I had dinner. There are from four to eight children in each family. Julian talked a great deal about what obedience means in the life of the layman, material which had been left out of his recent article on masculine spirituality in TODAY and I am salvaging some of this with his permission for The Catholic Worker January issue.

As I left South Bend later after a meeting in the basement of a little Negro Church, Terry and Julian gave me **In Quest of Community** by Nisbet of the University of Berkeley, Oxford University Press, and I find it is a book being read by many priests right now. Here is a quote from it:

“If there is any single origin of the institutional State it is in the circumstances and relationship of war. The connection between kinship and family, between religion and Church is no closer than that between war and the state in history. . . The war chief and his band are the earliest form of State, an aggressor on the province of the clan.”

Two other wonderful books: *Where Nests the Water Hen*, and *the Tin Flute*, one of the country and the other of the city, both by B. Gabrielle Roy, a Canadian writer.

After South Bend, I visited Milwaukee and spoke to a journalism class at Marquette, and lunched with David Host and Nina and others of the faculty. The night before Don Gallagher met with us at Nina’s house and told us of his family’s two years in Louvain and Paris. Margaret Blazer, Florence Weinfurter and Betty Cuda Van Nels were there.

Betty is suffering with leukemia and we beg prayers from her many friends in the **Catholic Worker** movement who remember her at Ade Bethune’s, at St. Benedict Farm at Upton, at **The Catholic Worker** in New York.

We also ask prayers for Fr. Paul Judge who has given us retreats at Maryfarm who has been under treatment at Rochester Hospital in Minnesota.

My last two meetings in Chicago were at Wilmette, in the basement of the rectory of St. Joseph’s church of John Mella’s promotion, and with a group of young anarchists led, if they can be said to be led, by Joffre Stewart, in the vicinity of the University of Chicago.

And now I am visiting at Joe and Alice Zarrella’s in Tell City, Indiana, where he is working in a furniture factory and happy indeed with his beautiful family. There are four fascinating daughters, Kate, Paula, Mary Alice and Mary Joe, the latter two having extra names of Francis (de Sales) and Chantal. The weather is mild and a holy season atmosphere is already in the air as it is in every home where there are children. Alice is frying chicken and making lemon meringue and cherry pies for dinner for Fr. Rabin and Mr. Mattingly from nearby St. Meinrad’s, and we in turn are going there for the conventual Mass and dinner after. I am to speak to the whole community, a high honor, on Sunday morning. The impetus which Peter Maurin gave us in this life of wandering drives me on. If it were not for Peter’s mission which he is carrying on even after his death, I would be mightily missing my own grandchildren, and all my family in the east where I am torn between Maryfarm, Peter Maurin Farm, Chrystie street and my daughter’s home on the Island. As it is, it is a happy thing to have but one job, a travelling apostolate, for these winter months.