

Worship at A North-Woods Shrine

REV. CLAUDE W. WARREN
410 Lawrence Avenue
Rothschild, Wisconsin

By CLAUDE W. WARREN
Minister, Community Church, Land o'Lakes, Wisconsin.

EMERSON was once asked the question, "Who is the happiest man?" He replied, "The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship." Another great nature lover, John Burroughs, once testified that the most beautiful sight he saw in England was a little country church surrounded by noble trees and approached by a shaded lane. "Indeed," said he, "I think it would be tantamount to an astonishing revival of religion if the people would all walk to church on Sunday and walk home again. They would walk away from their worldly cares."

Those of us who live in the North Woods and are in love with the beauty of pine forests have taken these words of Emerson and Burroughs to heart. There is something about the magic and mystery of the pines that lays a spell upon mind and heart of those who roam forest trails in search of the Divine Presence. In imagination, the readers of the *International Journal of Religious Education* are asked to go with us to a shrine in the North Woods, walking through a pine grove in the company of spiritual descendants of the great nature lovers.

We will park our cars along the highway and follow the brown trail that leads to the shrine. How soft the trail is that winds through the grove of jack pine and poplar! It is made of sawdust and broken pieces of rotted logs. We are 1900 feet above sea level, near the watershed where tiny streams divide, some flowing south to the Wisconsin



River on their way to the Gulf of Mexico, while others turn northward through upper Michigan to the Ontonagon River and Lake Superior.

In late April or early May the first warm rain washes away the last vestige of frost from the bosom of the earth. Mingled with the sweet breath of the pines is the exquisite perfume of the trailing arbutus, first and sweetest of the spring flowers of the North Woods.

A walk along the brown trail that winds through the pines brings us to a white birch cross erected on an old Norway pine stump with a green background of sturdy balsam and spruce trees. At the foot of the cross is a bed of trailing arbutus. In the foreground lie old pine logs which provide seats for worshippers. At the right of the cross is a blackened pine stump, tragic reminder of a recent forest fire, which serves as an outdoor pulpit.

As we take our seats on a log we hear the familiar strains of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," coming from a small organ concealed by the trees back of the cross. As we look at the rustic cross it seems to call us away from the tumult of the world to the "peace which passeth all understanding." Deep is calling unto deep. There is no need to remind us that the Lord is in his holy temple.

At the close of the organ prelude the children's choir, in white surplices, appears through an opening in the trees back of the cross, singing, "Fair are the meadows, fairer still the wood-

(Continued on page 40)

