

Day After Day - April 1937

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Describes those who deny Christ in His poor as "atheists indeed." Blames well-off "professing Christians" for repelling those with no religion. Quotes from a pamphlet given to the men in the breadline about Christ being their brother and His poverty. (DDLW #319).

There's no time now to have conversation with the men who come in for coffee and bread and cheese with us in the morning from seven to ten. The store is packed full, the line extends down the block almost to Canal street. They stand there in the rain and cold sometimes for half an hour before they can get in.

This month there was a mission over on Baxter street and we closed the store from nine to nine forty-five so that those who wished to, could go to mass. Sometimes there were seventy-five who went and sometimes only twenty. "You can't preach the Gospel to men with empty stomachs," Abbe Lugan said.

We put out a little leaflet to distribute to the men in regard to the mission. We said:

We are not running this coffee line like a mission. We have no religious services. We are just trying to give you hot coffee and something to eat every morning. We hope you all will take copies of THE CATHOLIC WORKER and read it and find out what we are trying to do here and in other cities where we have groups working.

Naturally, we would like to have you get to Mass and make the Mission, those of you who are Catholics, and those who might like to get to church for half an hour or so every morning this week. We'd like to urge those who are not Catholics to go, too.

We want you to go because Christ, our Brother, is present there in the Blessed Sacrament. Christ, Himself a Worker, while He lived here on earth. St. Joseph, in whose care He was confided while on this earth, was a poor carpenter. They always lived in poverty, and our Lord said of Himself:

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air their nests, but The Son of Man has no place to lay His head."

Our Lord has a special love for each one of you, and they say that He is always more ready to give than we are to receive. So we do feel that we should urge you to go over to the church on Baxter Street, just to be in His Presence for a little while each morning.

We want to ask you, too, to please pray for us all, and ask St. Joseph to continue his help, which makes our coffee line possible.

Conversation

Back around the first of December when the line was just beginning I remember one conversation a group of us had while we were having breakfast. It was a Sunday morning after Mass and the line had thinned down. There was a steeple jack, a sand hog, a carpenter, a restaurant worker and a mechanic talking and the subject was our industrial civilization, the machine and unemployment, the land and cooperatives. The wage system can be discussed thus with the unemployed, when you get a half dozen or so at a time. But it is hard to talk to a crowd. Still, those you do reach, go out and talk to others. One of them spoke of large scale farming. He had picked cotton in the Southwest at one cent a pound. You had to feed yourself, too. In the wheat fields it used to be seven dollars a day and board and now it is two dollars a day and feed yourself. Jobs are hard to get in the Southwest now because the Japanese and Mexican labor is exploited.

Charity

I find a little paragraph in my note book. "Michael Martin, porter, idle for five years, brought in \$2. Sent it to the G- children."

It was a thanksgiving offering, he explained, and he wanted to give it to some of our children in honor of his daughter in Ireland.

And I remembered how I spoke down in Palm Beach last month before the Four Arts Club, on the invitation of a convert. They told me, when I had finished, "you know we never pay speakers," and another woman said, with a tremor, "Miss Day, I hope you can convey to your readers and listeners, that we would give our very souls to help the poor, if we saw any constructive way of doing it." And still another told me, "The workers come to my husband's mill and beg him with tears in their eyes to save them from corrupt union leaders. I hope you don't mind my saying so, but I think you are all wrong when it comes to unions."

They all were deeply moved, they told me, at the picture of conditions in Arkansas and the steel districts and the coal mining districts, but, "You can't do anything with them, you know, these poor people. It seems to me the best remedy is birth control and sterilization."

We are told, and we try always to keep a just attitude toward the rich, but as I thought of our breakfast line, our crowded house with people sleeping on the floor, when I thought of cold tenement apartments around us, and the lean gaunt faces of the men who come to us for help, desperation in their eyes. It is impossible not to hate, with a hearty hatred and with a strong anger, the injustices of this world.

St. Thomas says that anger is not a sin, provided there go not with it an undue desire for revenge. We want no revolutions, we want the brotherhood of men. We want men to love one another. We want all men to have sufficient for their needs. But when we meet people who deny Christ in His poor, we feel, "Here are atheists indeed."

At the same time that I put down these melancholy thoughts, I am thinking of Michael Martin, porter, and the hosts of readers and friends the CATHOLIC WORKER has who have spread the work far and wide, who not only help us to keep up the coffee line going, but who on their own account are performing countless works of mercy. And my heart swells with love and gratitude to the great mass of human beings who are one with their fellows, who love our Lord and try to serve Him and show their love to His poor.

Our pastor said recently that 60 million of our 130 million here in the United States professed no religion, and I thought with grief that it was the fault of those professing Christians who repelled the others. They turned first from Christ crucified because he was a poor worker, buffeted and spat upon and beaten. And now—strange thought—the devil has so maneuvered it that the people turn from Him because those who profess Him are clothed in soft raiment and sit at well spread tables and deny the poor.