

Inventory - January 1951

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Defends “the little way” and individual acts of service and martyrdom against critics who charge the CW with defeatism. (DDLW #195).

This last year, at St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality, we gave out, roughly speaking and underestimating it at that, 460,000 meals. Also 18,250 nights’ lodging. This is what the world sees and if we wished to impress the world we would multiply this by eighteen years, and the figures would be truly impressive.

But suppose a mother should say, in a plea for sympathy. “I’ve put one thousand and ninety-five meals on the table this last year. I’ve washed fifty thousand plates.”

It is easy to see how foolish it is to look at things in this light, in this **big way**. I am sure that God is not counting the meals. He is looking at Tony Aratari, Joe Monroe, Ray Taylor, turning off their alarm clocks at five every morning to go downstairs to start the coffee, cut the bread. They get no credit for being noble. They have no realization of dying to themselves, of giving up their lives. They are more often than not abused by friends and relatives for not getting jobs, using their education, “supporting themselves,” instead of living on charity. “This then is perfect joy,” as St. Francis would say.

We all wish for recognition of one kind or another. Last week when we received letters from Stringfellow Barr and Pitirim Sorokin, commending us, even that did not satisfy us! Though it is a boast, in a way, to speak of it at all. We want, these days, all of us who write and work for the revolution to reach the masses, the people, the working class groups. And yet, come to think of it, there are those letters from west coast seamen, from rural workers, from white collar workers this month. We are, after all, reaching sixty thousand subscribers and countless readers, each one an individual each one with infinite possibilities. But it is mass action people think of these days. They lose sight of the sacrament of the present moment-**of the little way**. We think of money in this way too. We spent two trillion dollars, money spent and property damaged, during the last war, plus suffering untold, unbelievable. We forget that it is our tax-money, our payment of taxes that permits this huge expenditure for war. Seventy-five per cent of our taxes goes for war.

These days Josefa Menendez’ book, **The Way of Divine Love**, is on the best seller list in all Catholic book stores, here, and even in China among Catholics there. This book contains hundreds of pages of the revelations to a little lay sister in the Sacred Heart Order in France, coming from the Sacred Heart of our Lord and appealing for love and reparation. We must, keep our eyes on the future life, on God’s majesty and power. We must remember we are living in Apocalyptic times and that “it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a

living God.” We must turn to Him, and in His mercy, He will save us from the wrath to come. He is a merciful God, and wishes our cooperation in saving the world, and every little act, every little suffering is used by Him, as He used the loaves and fishes to feed five thousand. So much emphasis is placed on enduring, on suffering that no stress at all is laid on the active work called for by the Holy Father to promote social justice, racial justice, a work that the Communists have made the oppressed masses believe they alone are promoting. We are living in this material world where a certain amount of goods is necessary to lead a good life, as St. Thomas said. In embracing poverty ourselves—it is to alleviate the hunger and misery, the homelessness, the cold of the destitute.

“There is a fight against Communism that produces no results,” Cardinal Saliege of France wrote “What really matters is to achieve, in the face of Communism, the Christian ideal of community. The characteristic of Materialism is violence; that of Christianity is love.”

We are all waiting like Lord Jim, in Conrad’s story, for great opportunities to show heroism, letting countless opportunities go by to enlarge our hearts, increase our faith, and show our love for our fellows, and so for Him. It is by little and by little we are saved, or that we fall, as St. Paul says. We are living in this world and must make choices now, choices which may mean the sacrifice of our lives, in the future, but now our goods, our reputations even, since they are a form of goods most precious to us. Our work is called futile, our stand of little worth or significance, having no influence, winning no converts, ineffective if not a form of treason. Or it is termed defeatism, appeasement, escapism, in other words, passivism.

This was the line taken against any opponents to the Hitler invasion of Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, or to the satellite countries opposing Russia. Finland is not called a satellite country even yet, because she is managing to keep up her opposition. Yet I imagine at the time of an election, that there is and was strong Communist propaganda, and great effort is made to persuade the voters that if they vote against the Communist regime, they will be voting alone, that the Communists have a majority; and that when that majority comes in, these lone objectors, these lone voters, will be made to pay by imprisonment or death, or by the imprisonment torture and death of their dear ones, for their temerity, for their futile lonely step.

So much emphasis is placed on the next life, in all the opposition to Communism, so much talk there is of prayer, of novenas, that Catholics as a whole are left with no guidance as to what **action** to take in this present life save that of going along with the world, suffering and dying, yes, and killing with the others, in an all out war against the aggressor. There is a very real humility of course on the part of the ordinary man which makes him reluctant to trust his own judgment, a fear of presumption, even a desire to be one with others in a great mass endeavor, to suffer with others, to make sacrifices, and to realize for a time, a sense of comradeship. But it is again a desire to identify oneself, even to lose oneself with the masses, to become part of a great force, to be irresponsible, to

give up one's freedom, no longer to make choices.

It is also the fear of losing what gains we personally have made, to give up our way of life, our homes, all we have worked for over the years. It is a fear of losing our material goods, which means often, and rightly so, freedom and responsibility.

What a paradox it is, this natural life and this supernatural life. We must give up our lives to gain them, we must die to live, be pruned to bear fruit. We want to be free, and we want to be free of responsibility except for our own. Am I my brother's keeper? Or can I be free when other men are enslaved? We speak in large general terms in our press, but when we talk among ourselves, we talk of our own homes, our own children.

When I speak of big sacrifices we may have to make in the future, which may result from the small sacrifices now, it is in the light of history, and to a certain extent our own experience.

In reply to a letter I wrote to the Commonweal last week, one of the editors commented on my "fine writing" and also added that with all this talk of laying down our lives, the only lives laid down so far were those of the "poor kids in Korea." The phrase is maudlin if he is speaking of the **men** in our armies but if he means children, we do not usually admit to the killing of children en masse which is the result of our obliteration bombing. He ignores the fact that Christ has died for us all in the bloody sacrifice on the Cross for Russians, Americans, Chinese; that there are untold martyrs today in concentration camps and in mines and factories throughout Russia, untold thousands of them who are laying down their lives in a long martyrdom. Are they like Stephen, who prayed for those who stoned him to death or are these prisoners like the unrepentant thief who did not recognize Christ on the Cross but saw only a futile dreamer, a soft forgiving appeaser. Recently, Ernest Hemingway in An Interview in the New Yorker commended this hard boiled thief in an unremarked blasphemy.

Ah yes, when we are being called appeasers, defeatists, we are being deprived of our dearest goods, our reputation, honor, the esteem of men and we are truly on the way to become the despised of the earth. We are beginning perhaps to be truly poor.

We are trying to spread the gospel of peace, persuade others, to extend the peace movement, to build up a mighty army of conscientious objectors, such as Archbishop McNicholas called for in the last war, though I do not think he meant it in the same way we do. And in doing this we are accounted fools, and it is the folly of the cross in the eyes of an unbelieving world which was scandalized in Him

Martyrdom is not gallantly standing before a firing squad- although come to think of it, I did see a picture of Father Pro's brother standing against a wall, nonchalant, with a cigarette as the firing squad leveled their guns at him, while photographers caught the picture.

Usually it is the losing of a job (and so the means to life) because of not taking a loyalty oath, or buying a war bond, or paying a tax. Last month we met a Quaker in Baltimore who had lost a job for refusing to take the loyalty oath required of city employees. Martyrdom is small, hidden, misunderstood. Or if it is a bloody martyrdom, is it the cry in the dark, the terror, the shame, the aloneness, nobody to hear, nobody to suffer with, let alone to save. O, the aloneness of all of us in these days, in all the great moments of our lives, this dying which we do, by little and by little, over a short space of time or over the years. One day is as a thousand in these crises. A week in jail is as a year.

But we repeat, we proclaim, that we do see results from our personal experiences and we proclaim our faith. Christ has died for us. Adam and Eve fell, and as Juliana wrote, the worst has already happened and been repaired. Christ continues to die in His martyrs all over the world, in His Mystical Body and it is this dying, not the killing in wars, which will save the world today.

Do we see results, do these methods succeed? Can we trust in them? Just as surely as we believe in “the little way” which in this last century St. Therese Martin proclaimed and restated to the world, we believe and know that this is the only success.