

Day by Day - January 1936

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Contrasts the destitution of winter and the spiritual needs for beauty and contemplation. Comments on social organization, strikes, the destitution of winter cold, the thousands fed by the city. Notes the beauty of trees in winter and an art exhibit. Quotes Maritain on beauty and contemplation and appreciates an opera on the radio in spite of truck noise and ringing phones. (DDLW #297).

Land Movement

Two reasons for opposition to land settlement schemes were mentioned in an article entitled "Peasants or Paupers" in *The Catholic Herald* recently.

One is that the monetary interests look with disfavor on any diversion of productive energy into activities in which money plays only a small part and there is little interest to be earned.

Second, there is a widespread popular opposition because the demand of the majority in every highly industrialized country is for more and more of the products of industrialism, mechanization and mass production for the sake of what is falsely called a higher standard of living.

Bede Jarrett called "social organization and land system two of the perpetual problems of mankind."

Winter****

The grey, heavy cold of winter has closed us in. Some bitter days the streets are deserted early in the evening and people scurry along, blown by or facing the wind, seeking shelter.

Every morning from eight o'clock on, men come to the office seeking clothes, pinched and blue with the cold. Small shoes cut here and there to make them bigger, trousers patched or pleated where they are not patched, shrunken and stained by the weather. Once a man told me that the only way he could get clean was to wash out his underwear in the public baths and after wringing it out as dry as possible, put it on again to dry on his skin. This to me conveys the extreme of bitter destitution.

Someone is sending us a big bag of oatmeal which means that we can continue to feed those who come to us—warm their insides at least, if we cannot warm their outsides with an additional garment. Coffee, oatmeal, sugar and canned milk—these are always welcome gifts, and God loves those that think of these things.

Trees

Walking over to the east side to pay a weekly visit to the Church of Our Lady, Help of Christians, where there is a shrine to St. John Bosco (the sociologist saint, someone called him recently), I was struck with the beauty of the trees of Tompkins Square after the wet filth and slime of the garbage filled streets. What is so beautiful as the pure bare outline of trees in winter? I have always loved them and the heavy, shadowed sky beyond, tinged with purple. A sassafras tree in winter is shaped like a Japanese umbrella and little sassafras trees look like candelabra. Another tree which is beautiful in winter is the plane tree, or the buttonwood tree as some call it. The parks in New York are full of them, with their mottled olive green from shedding.

Lodging House

Christmas day ten from the office of The Catholic Worker took bundles of papers down to the Municipal Lodging House at South Ferry where 12,000 men were being fed Christmas dinners. Up at the 25th Street Lodging House 5,000 more were being provided with Christmas dinners and cigarets. We were not given permission to give out the papers in the dining room, but we stood outside the entrance and went along South Street distributing. It was a bright sunshiny day, down there by Battery Park. Dinner was not to be until six (and we thank Cathedral High School heartily for the baskets they sent) and we worked up good appetites out in the wind and sun.

The reception accorded the papers was heartening. Many of the workers knew it and had been reading it. One ex-miner from Pennsylvania, who had come up to New York to try for work along the waterfront, condemned whole heartedly the leadership of the Longshoremen's union. "I'm no Communist," he said, "I'm a Catholic, but what I say is that the unions need cleaning up."

We stood there on a cold street corner discussing the Catholic teaching on organization of workers and the friendly interview ended with his inviting me to partake of lunch with him. "I'm not broke yet," he said (though he was coatless), and I could buy my Christmas dinner meself. If you won't have a bite to eat—here, take a dime for the papers . . ." And we couldn't refuse him, for he knew, as we did, that every little bit helps.

Art Exhibit****

Constance Mary Rowe, one of whose pictures we are running in this issue, is having an exhibit at the Delphic Studios, 724 Fifth Ave. She is a winner of the Prix de Rome and she is going to spend some time with us this summer on our farming commune. We were talking about the land movement this morning and she agreed with Peter Maurin that culture must spring from agriculture and that arty and handicraft movements were getting off on the wrong foot. (I'm paraphrasing what she was saying, of course.) People must first take care of

their physical needs, such as food, clothing, shelter. "Then when a man putting up beams in the barn has minutes to spare, and the impulse, he starts carving that beam . . ."

Some truly beautiful Catholic art, full of the mystical and the suffering, are up there at the Delphic Studios, and we advise all our New York readers to go up and see it. It is one of the most delicately [a word is missing from the published article here. "wrought"? "painted"? "drawn"? The "head" is a painting or a drawing, definitely not a sculpture, per my research. JHT] of young saints: a head of Martin de Porres.

Miss Rowe quotes the words of Maritain in the program of her exhibit:

"Art is a fundamental necessity in the human state. 'No man,' says St. Thomas following Aristotle, 'can live without pleasure. Therefore, a man deprived of the pleasures of the spirit goes over to the pleasures of the flesh.' Art teaches men the pleasures of the spirit and because it is itself sensitive and adapted to their nature, it is better able to lead them to what is nobler than itself. So in natural life it plays the same part as the 'sensible graces' in the spiritual life; and from afar off, without thinking, it prepares the human race for contemplation (the contemplation of the Saints) the spiritual joy of which surpasses every other joy and seems to be the end of all human activities.

For what useful purpose do servile work and trade serve, except to provide the body with the necessities of life so that it may be in a state fit for contemplation? What is the use of the moral virtues and prudence if not to procure that tranquillity of the passions and interior peace which contemplation needs? To what end the whole government of civil life, if not to assure the exterior peace necessary for contemplation? "So that, properly considered, all the activities of human life seem to be for the service of those engaged in the contemplation of Truth."

J. Maritain, *Art & Scholasticism*: pub. By Charles Scribners Sons, N.Y.C.

Grand Opera

Saturdays are our opera afternoons, a dozen or so of us gathering in the dining room to listen to the broadcasts. Out in the kitchen Margaret is browning flour and lard for onion soup and we are quite choked with the fumes. But the soup is good, with a few cans of beans thrown in for good measure. So far most of our bills are paid but the rents, God be praised, and may He bless those who took care of them for us. We are even left with that most inestimable of gifts, Holy Poverty. The feasting of the holiday season is past, and we are back on short rations again, which is good for body and soul.

The opera this afternoon is *Götterdämmerung*, if that is the way you spell it, and fountains of sound are bathing us in peace and refreshment. Once or twice a winter some of us get up to the Metropolitan for standing room up in the peanut

gallery where there is none of the interference of trucks passing and telephone bells ringing and visitors in the middle of an aria.