

The Satan Bomb

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Juxtaposes images of resignation, poverty, and fear over the H-bomb tests with hopeful words from Julian of Norwich and the Mass of the dead. Says we should not fear death but judgement, and live accordingly. (DDLW #609).

P>SMOKY Joe was talking about the Hydrogen bomb. Of course, everyone has been talking about it. "Hell bomb, satan bomb, that's what I call it," he said. "The devil came up and taught Americans how to make it. For me, I've drunk lots of it on the Bowery."

"Why worry," is the attitude of the poor, the desperate, "We all have to die. Can't get out of it."

Our rooms at 115 Mott street, both in St. Joseph's house and Maryhouse can be pretty grim at times. Some women can make a bit of heaven out of some paint, curtains, soap and water, and the place looks neat and comfortable. Others accumulate trash, are dirty and verminous and it is hard to keep up with the job of order. Once a doctor who volunteered his help came to visit a sick woman and looking around the room he said, "This is worse than war or revolution. It is worse than death." Destitution is sometimes a fearful thing, so ugly, so tawdry, so heartbreaking, conducive to despair.

During the war when we read of the evacuation of Paris, we came upon the line, poignant and meaningful, "And only the very poor remain." All the city was fleeing. But nothing was worse than the destitution of the poor. Last night over the radio the last thing heard was the statement of a University of Chicago professor that a poisonous dust scattered by the H. bomb meant the death of the world. Another commentator said that if we were to make the bomb then it was necessary also to evacuate all the coastal cities, that it was impossible to defend them. The first thing in the morning the news is repeated, the world is doomed. Every morning, every hour, on the hour, all through the day, the news is repeated. People are beginning to say, "This kind can only be thrown out by prayer and fasting." Others try to recapture the war time mood of "anything is permitted, life is short." Still others become flippant, like Joe.

The best comment we can find is that of Juliana of Norwich, who wrote from her anchorhold back in the twelfth century, "All will be well, and all will be well, and all will be very well," and in another place she wrote, "The worst has already happened, and that has been repaired." And it was man's first fall that she was thinking of, the scars of which we are still wearing, and she was thinking of it in the light of the words of the Church, "O happy fault," since it meant the incarnation and redemption, the coming of our dear Lord Jesus Christ among us as man.

“It is given to men once to die, and then the judgment.” If we say, any of us, that we do not fear death, which we all must look forward to as a certainty, then we are liars. But it is not death we are supposed to fear, but the judgment, and live accordingly. Lent is the time to consider these things.

The most comforting prayer for those who fear is that preface in the Mass of the dead.

"It is truly meet and just, right and availing unto salvation that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Holy Lord, Father almighty and everlasting God; through Christ our Lord. In whom the hope of a blessed resurrection hath shone upon us, that those whom the certainty of dying afflicteth, may be consoled by the promise of future immortality. For unto Thy faithful, O Lord, life is changed, not taken away; and the abode of this earthly sojourn being dissolved, an eternal dwelling is prepared in heaven. And therefore with the angels and archangels, with thrones and dominions, and with all the heavenly hosts, we sing a hymn to Thy glory, saying without ceasing,

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest.”