

The Living and the Dead

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Tales of three guests—a reconciled death, a desperate mother, and a hijacked worker. (DDLW #713).

This should be part of **On Pilgrimage** but I have already written that, about my travels in Mississippi and besides Bob Steed will be writing an On Christie St. column. But he has been here all month, and will not have felt that terrific impact of the East Side that I did after one day home at St. Joseph's house.

The first news I heard was of a death, and Arthur Lacey told me the story. Frederick Cogley had been in the house for a few weeks, and before he came to us he had been sleeping out as so many men do in the summer rather than go to the Municipal Lodging House where it is crowded and hot with the hundreds of the destitute to come for a night's lodging. Roger being busy with helping the Puerto Rican strikers, Arthur was taking care of the clothes room, and so he got well acquainted with the men in the house and those who came in. The man came to him with great urgency one day and told him he was very ill that he was dying and needed to get to the hospital. Arthur took him at once to the emergency ward at Bellevue and from there they sent him to the xray room.

The man was so weak he could scarcely stand, so Arthur got a wheel chair. The technician, hard-pressed kept urging him to stand up, and Arthur kept trying to hold him in the standing position for xrays, and the man kept toppling over. Finally they laid him on a table to make the xrays.

His weakness increasing, when he returned to the emergency section, Arthur and a friendly nurse got him a stretcher to lie on so that he would not have to continue sitting up on a hard bench. Surrounded by the usual rush all about, Arthur was able to talk to him about praying. "Do you know the **confiteor**," he asked him, "do you know the act of contrition," and he helped the man say them. "Do you want a priest?" and the man eagerly asserted, and thank God the priest was near at hand and came at once. He was anointed, given absolution, and it was not more than an hour after that that he died.

When we consider the power of the Sacrament, the infinite value of the Precious Blood shed for this man in the Redemption, and remember too the story of the good thief and the promise of Christ, we can rejoice that this man is in Heaven.

Sometimes we can only realize the grandeur of our human destiny, our divinization through baptism, when we hear the strains of some great music like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or the Eroica, or Strauss' Death and Transfiguration, the very title of which inspires. It is hard to realize the worth of human life surrounded as we are by the Bowery and the lower East side, and that section of it which is more than ever crowded due to the tearing down of so many homes to eliminate slums.

Thank God for His mercy, His love for each human soul.

“May the angels lead thee into paradise: may the martyrs receive thee at thy coming, and lead thee into the holy city of Jerusalem. May the choir of angels receive thee, and mayest thou have eternal rest with Lazarus, who once was poor.”

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I had heard this story when Annabelle told me still another one at lunch-time. One of the young women who came in to get clothes had been deserted by her husband, and had been left with a fifteen months old baby, and nine months old one, and there was another one coming. There was no food in the house and the husband had been gone for weeks. She had gone to the domestic relations court to try to set the machinery in motion to find him, and as yet she had had no relief. Her case was still pending.

Annabelle went with her to her bare little home, for which she paid fifteen dollars a month down near the river, and told me how bare the cupboard was—literally nothing to eat in the house. She went with her to the relief office which is across the street from our own office and there she was able to prevail upon the workers to give the girl an emergency voucher until her first check came. Her relief investigator was ill, they told her, and so there was a longer delay than usual, in a process always marked by delays anyway.

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The third story concerns a little and ancient colored man who came in weeping. He had been picked up in North Carolina, in Fayetteville, with a truck load of workers and brought up to Long Island to work in the potato crop. A Negro contractor had probably been paid so much **a head**, for the **“hands”** he was providing. When the poor little old man proved utterly incapable of working (he was nearly seventy) he was given a ticket into New York, and no money, and sent on his way. He was staying at the Municipal Lodging House on Third Street and there received two meals a day and a bed. Some one told him to come to **The Catholic Worker** for help, and he had come for clothes and had cried, “if he could only go home! He only wanted to go home!”

The ticket cost only fourteen dollars on the bus, so it was a simple enough matter to pack him a lunch, put him on the bus at three thirty that very afternoon. He will be home telling the story of his adventures in twenty four hours.