

Funds Needed To Carry On Work in N. Y.

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1939, 1, 4.

Summary: Meditates on the virtues of voluntary poverty and the difference between decent poverty and destitution. Describes their poor circumstances and appeals for money to carry on the work. Also notes that life on Mott Street provides diversion and, sometimes, real joy. (DDLW #346).

Yesterday I spoke at the Pax Romana Congress and in the afternoon a number of delegates came down with several priests to visit our headquarters. The office and dining room were so crowded that they had to bring benches down into the back yard and sit there under the overhanging clothes lines, laden with diapers—there are several new babies in the tenement—and listen to Peter make a speech. He is in his element in the yard. It is a better meeting place than the store. His voice resounds down in the canyon-like courtyard and our neighbors lean out of their windows and listen.

There was talk of voluntary poverty. So many see no use in it, no meaning to it. “God never meant anyone to be poor,” one person said. And we recall St. Antoninus who said that poverty is not a good in itself, that it only incidentally led to good. We have always pointed out that poverty is with us a means to an end, not an end in itself. Also we distinguish between decent poverty and destitution.

Often of course our poverty is not decent. Tenements are dirty, people throw their garbage out the windows, it is heaped in the streets, there are smells of faulty drainage, there is slime under foot. This is the most congested section of the city. Many of the houses have had to comply with fire laws and have been improved somewhat, but the fact remains that whole families are living in two or four rooms, dark, badly ventilated. Next door there is a seven-story tenement that has been vacated because it violates fire laws. Only the two stores and the basements are rented. The basement is a restaurant and fumes of cooking, sometimes savory, and sometimes just smoky, rise up into the court yard. Trash accumulates around a deserted building. It shuts out light and air. We pray that it will be torn down to let in sun and sky.

Our poverty is not a stark and dreary poverty, because we have the security which living together brings. But it is that very living together that is often hard. Beds crowded together, much coming and going, people sleeping on the

floor, no bathing facilities, only cold water. These are the hardships. Poverty means lack of paint, it means bedbugs, cockroaches and rats and the constant war against these. Poverty means body lice. A man fainted on the coffee line some months ago and just holding his head to pour some coffee between his drawn lips meant picking up a few bugs. Poverty means lack of soap and lysol and cleansing powders. (How to provide soap, for instance, for two hundred and fifty men, such as the Pittsburgh house takes care of? Or even of the forty-five or so we have here?)

But how are we going to do the work without poverty? How are we going to reach the unemployed, the organized and unorganized workers, and the destitute, with the teachings of the Gospel, the social teachings of the Church? How are we going to have money to pay for printing the paper, to buy bread, sugar, coffee, milk, for a thousand hungry people daily, unless we do without salaries, live together in a donated tenement?

We are using the means always used by the Church in missionary work. It is true that it was generally religious orders which used these means.

But Pope Pius XI called for a lay apostolate. It is the work of our time which every Catholic must be engaged in as much as he can. There is no one who could not make more sacrifices to feed the poor, to clothe the naked. To follow Christ we have got to aim to be poor as He was.

So we are asking you again to help us. It is better to send out a letter of appeal. But we cannot wait and we have no money for stamps or paper. Our printing bill is \$1,009 and with this issue it will be \$1,600. We have no money to mail it either, which means many will get their copies late.

The only money to look forward to is a royalty check for the second edition of "From Union Square to Rome" and five dollars Julia Porcell is earning this week taking care of children. We need much more and we know you want to help so won't you please remember us? If everyone sent a little then we could pay off our food bills and the money from the papers would pay the printing bill.

A Light Note

Reading over the above, the picture seems dark, and that's not fair at all. Together with the smells of Mott Street there are our heaped-up colorful push carts, our singing hucksters, our curbs lined with baby carriages, and the prettiest babies in all New York. Since we have to live in the city, our work ties us to it, we would all rather live on Mott Street rather than in any glorified tenement on Park Avenue. Here we have color, life and joy. There is friendship and neighborliness.

There were two festas in the month of August and another will start next week for St. Januarius. The streets are decorated, there is the happy music of brass bands. Hating military music as we do, we can join wholeheartedly in following

the band through the streets, join in the procession, a march of peace and love rather than of hate.

Troubadours

This year there were three troubadours going the rounds during the festa. They received no money but plenty of wine and they reeled and their music reeled through the streets day and night.

Our Jimmy, general handy man, joined the dancing in the street with the others. He made a great hit one night doing a solo in front of St. Joseph's House.

When the burdens pile high and the weight of all the responsibilities we have undertaken bows us down, when there are never enough beds to go around and never enough food on the table,—then it is good to sit out in the cool of the evening with all our neighbors and exchange talk about babies and watch the adventurous life of the street.

The world is bowed down with grief, and in many ways God tries to bring us joy, and peace. They may seem at first to be little ways but if our hearts are right they color all our days and dispel the gray of the sadness of the times.