

In Peace Is My Bitterness Most Bitter

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, January 1967, 1, 2.

Summary: Expresses her anguish over the works of war in Vietnam, which are the opposite of the works of mercy. She is upset with churchmen calling for “total victory,” and notes that the Church is our Mother even though “she is a harlot at times.” Calls on each person to work on changing their hearts and attitude. (DDLW #250).

It is not just Vietnam, it is South Africa, it is Nigeria, the Congo, Indonesia, all of Latin America. It is not just the pictures of all the women and children who have been burnt alive in Vietnam, or the men who have been tortured, and died. It is not just the headless victims of the war in Colombia. It is not just the words of Cardinal Spellman and Archbishop Hannan. It is the fact that whether we like it or not, we are Americans. It is indeed our country, right or wrong, as the Cardinal said in another context. We are warm and fed and secure (aside from occasional muggings and murders amongst us). We are the nation the most powerful, the most armed and we are supplying arms and money to the rest of the world where we are not ourselves fighting. We are eating while there is famine in the world.

Scripture tells us that the picture of judgment presented to us by Jesus is of Dives sitting and feasting with his friends while Lazarus sat hungry at the gate, the dogs, the scavengers of the East, licking his sores. We are the Dives. Woe to the rich! **We** are the rich. The works of mercy are the opposite of the works of war, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, nursing the sick, visiting the prisoner. But we are destroying crops, setting fire to entire villages and to the people in them. We are not performing the works of mercy but the works of war. We cannot repeat this enough.

When the apostles wanted to call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans, the “enemies” of the Jews, Jesus said to them, “You know not of what Spirit you are.” When Peter told our Lord not to accept the way of the Cross and His own death, He said, “Get behind me, Satan. For you are not on the side of God but of men.” But He also had said, “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.” Peter denied Jesus three times at that time in history, but after the death on the cross, and the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter faced up to Church and State alike and said, “We must obey God rather than men.” Deliver us, O Lord, from the fear of our enemies, which makes cowards of us all.

Jesus Present

I can sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and wrestle for that peace in the bitterness of my soul, a bitterness which many Catholics throughout the

world feel, and I can find many things in Scripture to console me, to change my heart from hatred to love of enemy. "Our worst enemies are those of our own household," Jesus said. Picking up the Scriptures at random (as St. Francis used to do) I read about Peter, James and John who went up on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elias, transfigured before their eyes. (A hint of the life to come, Maritain said.) Jesus transfigured! He who was the despised of men, no beauty in him, spat upon, beaten, dragged to his cruel death on the way to the cross! A man so much like other men that it took the kiss of a Judas to single him out from the others when the soldiers, so closely allied to the priests, came to take him. Reading this story of the Transfiguration, the words stood out, words foolishly babbled, about the first building project of the Church, proposed by Peter. "Lord shall we make here three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elias?" And the account continues, "For he did not know what to say, he was so terrified."

Maybe they are terrified, these princes of the church, as we are often terrified at the sight of violence, which is present every now and then in our houses of hospitality, and which is always a threat in the streets of the slums. I have often thought it is a brave thing to do, these Christmas visits of Cardinal Spellman to the American troops all over the world, Europe, Korea, Vietnam. But oh, God what are all these Americans, so-called Christians doing all over the world so far from our own shores?

But what words are those he spoke – going against even the Pope, calling for victory, total victory? Words are as strong and powerful as bombs, as napalm. How much the government counts on those words, pays for those words to exalt our own way of life, to build up fear of the enemy. Deliver us, Lord, from the **fear** of the enemy. That is one of the lines in the psalms, and we are not asking God to deliver us from enemies but from the fear of them. Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love them.

There is plenty to do, for each one of us, working on our own hearts, changing our own attitudes, in our own neighborhoods. If the just man falls seven times daily, we each one of us fall more than that in thought, word and deed. Prayer and fasting, taking up our own cross daily and following Him, doing penance, these are the hard words of the Gospel.

As to the Church, where else shall we go, except to the Bride of Christ, one flesh with Christ? Though she is a harlot at times, she is our Mother. We should read the book of Hosea, which is a picture of God's steadfast love not only for the Jews, His chosen people, but for His Church, of which we are every one of us members or potential members. Since there is no time with God, we are all one, all one body, Chinese, Russians, Vietnamese, and He has commanded us to love another.

"A new commandment I give, that you love others **as I have loved you**," not to the defending of your life, but to the laying down of your life.

A hard saying.

“Love is indeed a harsh and dreadful thing” to ask of us, of each one of us, but it is the only answer.