

Love and Justice

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Asserts that action for social and racial justice must flow from reverence for those in need and the precept of love. Says “. If we are afraid, we must pray not to be afraid, to be fools for Christ.” (DDLW #635).

There has been a steel strike for over a month, and Ritas Ham went over to Harrison, N.J., to draw pictures of steel mills and closed gates and pickets. The sketches were as good as Goya or Louisa Lozowick. She draws men and women sitting around the library, with compassion and truth. Victims of an industrial system.

Bob Ludlow, Michael Harrington and Roger and Dick and Martin have been out on picket lines to call attention to the regime of repression and injustice which still endures in Spain. There have been meetings, talk, study. A vast program of civil disobedience has been set going in South Africa, and our sympathy, and aid in any from we can give it, must be with these African brothers of ours.

And friends write to remind us, thinking we forget, that but one thing is necessary, love, and “seek ye first the kingdom of heaven.”

All action springs from love. That was what Dante said. “Our God is a consuming fire,” St. Paul said. One is driven, when one loves, to ways of expressing that love, to physical expressions of love, to a desire for union with others, and this love may find its expression in picket lines, in articles and speeches, crying out against injustice, destitution and violence. It is a work of mercy to rebuke the sinner, to comfort the afflicted, to enlighten the ignorant. We must choose what means we can, and they must be pure means.

St. Paul wrote, “Know ye not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall god destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are.” What reverence we must have for our brothers, for the bodies of our brothers, and what consuming care we should have that they receive what is needful, that they not be exploited.

As for ourselves, yes, we must be meek, bear injustice, malice, rash judgment. We must turn the other cheek, give up our cloak, go a second mile.

A recent Communist pamphlet says, “Religion has not ceased to be a harmful and reactionary ideology since it attempts to inculcate contemptuous attitudes towards all that is earthly, and by token distracts from the building of Communism. . . The preaching of the life beyond the grave and the summons to take thought only for the saving of one’s soul are radically hostile to Soviet concepts. Faith in life beyond the grave vitiates the believer ideologically, develops in him a feeling of extreme individualism and paralyzes his will in the struggle for Communism.”

We are afraid this is often true in the struggle for social and racial justice. The old I.W.W. song, "You'll get pie in the sky when you die," is too often the comfort of the Christian. We hug to ourselves, "After all, God will make it up to them, 'He will throw down the mighty from their seats and the rich he will send empty away. . . He will fill the hungry with good things.' And we do nothing, or do little, and leave the rest up to God.

But the crisis is urgent. The Holy father cries out to rouse Christians from their lethargy. There are stirring calls from the Australian and French hierarchy, to name but a few pastoral letters.

We know that we can do little, but we must resolve to do all. To give ourselves completely, without reserve, to offer ourselves, to be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers. We must pray to want to. We must pray to become men of desires, and those desires will overflow into action.

It is not a counsel of perfection—this call to love. "A new precept I give unto you, to the laying down of one's life for his friend." This was a physical fact in Christ's life and should be a physical fact in our own. If we are afraid, we must pray not to be afraid, to be fools for Christ. Love includes justice.