

Day After Day - September 1943

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Explains why she is leaving The Catholic Worker for a year of “solitude and silence” to practice the “weapons of the Spirit.” Notes all those who will carry on the work and says she will continue to write and says her Christian pacifist stance hasn’t changed. (DDLW #395).

This explanation is almost as hard to write as the story of my conversion. There are as many explanations that could be given, natural and supernatural, for the step which I am about to take, there are as many obvious explanations as to how I came to this decision.

A couple of months ago I was listening to a conference by Father Vernon Moore at the Cenacle in which he was explaining to some of us Oblates the Rule of St. Benedict. The Fifth Degree of Humility, he said, was to be open with one’s superiors about all things, and this applied, too, to the attitude one ought to take with one’s family, with one’s associates, whether in office or school. And a discussion proceeded as to whether one could speak openly to one’s family, or business associates about things that were so close to the soul. There was a good bit of Anglo-Saxon reticence evident, a reluctance that most expressed to talk of these matters so sacred.

Gratitude

But a convert feels somewhat differently. One is always having to pay one’s debt of gratitude – to give a reason for the Faith that is in her. So I am regarding it as a duty to try to explain to our friends and readers just why I am leaving THE CATHOLIC WORKER.

It will be noticed that on the masthead this month there is the name of Arthur Sheehan. He is the new editor and publisher of THE CATHOLIC WORKER, and he will follow faithfully Peter Maurin’s program of the Personalist and Communitarian Movement. Peter Maurin, of course, will be right here, the official agitator. Working with them will be Father Clarence Duffy, with whose writings our readers are familiar, and who has a leave of absence from his Diocese in Ireland to write and work along these lines. David Mason, formerly one of the leaders of our Philadelphia House of Hospitality, will be in charge of St. Joseph’s

House of Hospitality here at 115 Mott street, as well as of the make-up of the paper. And we will still be having the faithful cooperation of Charles O'Rourke, who has been coming in ever since Fifteenth street days, not only to help us as he is doing, right now in our circulation department, but to help out in times of emergency, such as the Seamen's strike when he, John Cort and Joseph Hughes helped feed the seamen at the Waterfront Branch of THE CATHOLIC WORKER for three months in 1937. There is also Michael Domanski who, like Dave Mason, helps in kitchen or office irrespectively.

Good Helpers

We have never had a good kitchen force with Chu, Joe Cotter and Shorty Smith, and Bill Wilson to help out: with Slim Born and Bill Duffy helping with the breadlines in the morning and Joe Motyka helping in the circulation office, Dwight Larrowe, assistant director of the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors, and one of the leads of THE CATHOLIC WORKER also these last three years, is the only remaining member of our community here subject to the draft. He probably will be taken from us within the next month or so.

And yet with all the comings and goings, things have never run so smoothly. Strangely enough, when so many of the other houses have collapsed due to the war and removal of vital workers, always extra helpers have come in to keep us going on Mott street. Where we have had 32 houses we now have 16. There are still almost a dozen farms associated in some way together in trying to work out Peter Maurin's Personalist and Communitarian Revolution.

Leaders Needed

What is most needed, one might say, in view of the times ahead, when the Post-War World will face unemployment and a most stupendous job of reconstruction, what is most needed will be more leaders to build up new Houses of Hospitality and new Farming Communes all over the country.

Our Lord told us how to find helpers. He said "Pray ye, therefore, that laborers be found for the harvest." We talk constantly of the weapons of the spirit and our whole lives are filled with such tremendous activity that we are in danger of not using these same weapons. Always the heresy of Good Works is to be guarded against. Always we must remember that St. Bernard spoke of "these accursed occupations." Always we must remember how St. Thomas said "action should be something added to the life of Prayer, not something taken from it."

Retreat Houses

And where are we going to learn to pray? Where are we going to learn to use these spiritual weapons? The only answer that we can see is in retreat houses,

where we can spend eight days every year and monthly days besides, in silence and in receiving instruction. It is certainly a dream for the future – a retreat house by the sea. The immensity of the sea will lead us so naturally to worship and adore the greatness of God. A retreat house with a farming commune attached where food can be raised for all the retreatants, who will be workers and poor people from our breadlines, mothers from the slums. There would almost have to be a nursery attached where these mothers could receive such instruction as that which is given by the Ladies of the Grail at their courses in Wheeling, Illinois.

And where are the priests and where are the teachers to give these retreats for the integrated Christian life? God certainly will send them to us.

Second Novitiate

Every ten years I understand the Marist Fathers go away for a “second novitiate.” There is also the Jesuit Tertianship.

For the last few years I’ve been thinking a great deal of putting aside the responsibility of THE CATHOLIC WORKER and its manifold activities at 115 Mott Street, but every time the idea came to me I put it aside as a temptation. It was during my retreat this summer that the conviction came to me that I should take this step . it was after one of the conferences when I was kneeling before a statue of the Blessed Mother that suddenly I began to think of how beautifully hidden and quite a life was hers.

In this day of WACS and WAVES, of women in war plants and babies in nurseries, in this most peculiar time when women have abandoned the home and the family; at this time when women are so prominent in public life, and there is talk even of registering them for conscription, just as men are conscripted, for WACS and WAVES, as well as for industry, it is a wonderful thing to sit and think how completely hidden a life was that of the Blessed Mother. St. Bonaventure writes so beautifully of that hidden life at Nazareth. Father Vincent McNabb writes of Nazareth or Social Chaos in one of his best-loved books. And while I thought of these things I thought with an overwhelming conviction: Certainly the Blessed Mother would approve of this decision of mine, and I suddenly knew that I had indeed made a decision.

Do you remember how St. Francis, in looking for a Rule, opened at random three separate times the New Testament and found therein three simple texts by which he decided he and his followers would live? Many times in my very busy life a text will run in my head for an entire day or even for several days at a time. And for some days before the retreat the text that had been flashing into my brain now and again with great vividness was this startling one: “Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?” Certainly not a very happy text to be flashed upon the screen of your mind. And then after this decision had come to me I realized that when a move such as this one became necessary – to cling to

a job or work against the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would indeed be vanity and lying.

A second text which came to mind after I had made my decision was, “Be still and know that I am God.” And I thought to myself: That is what I should do: go away for a year and live in solitude and quiet; neither see nor write to friends, nor do anything else but practice the use of these Weapons of the Spirit about which we have been talking and writing so much these past years.

Not that we have not been using them, of course. Certainly in our movement the insistence upon daily Mass and Communion, prayer in common, the practice of the Spiritual as well as the Corporal Works of Mercy and the practice of Voluntary Poverty in order to be able to perform the Corporal Works of Mercy, all these means have been used. But I, as the leader in a movement, had the greater obligation – the obligation to be always seeking the lesser place, to be a servant to others, to be giving up constantly responsibilities so that others could undertake more, and could use the capacities and abilities and talents that God had given them.

To Put on Christ

The third text that came to me with great consolation was, “Fear not, little flock, for I have reserved to you a Kingdom,” and I thought with much happiness and joy that God indeed loves this little flock made up of Catholic Workers, not only here in the United States, but all over the world, and that he is going to prepare us more and more for the work He wants us to do. “The Kingdom of God is at hand. The Kingdom of God is within you.” We are not thinking of “pie in the sky,” but of the Heaven that should begin for each one of us here and now at this moment, because we see Christ in our fellows. Because we are striving to put on Christ.

It is not, of course, that we of our own efforts can do anything. As St. Teresa said: “Teresa and three ducats can do nothing, but God and Teresa and three ducats can do everything.” The Holy Father in his most recent encyclical on the Mystical Body tells us that we should not underestimate the part that we ourselves have to play in working for salvation. “We can do all things in Christ Who strengthens us.”

The Peter Book

I must go on writing, of course, so there will be occasional *Day by Day* column in THE CATHOLIC WORKER. I will write articles, of course, too, because I will have to support myself. I will go on with the *Peter* book, which has been so long promised and so far so sketchily done.

I am not making this move without the advice of a Spiritual Director, and, of course, too, I have acquainted Bishop McIntyre of the New York Chancery Office (to whom I have always gone with our problems) with this latest move.

One thing, of course, I wish to stress, and that is that there is no change in my convictions in regard to War and Peace and the means to attain it. I have been and still am a Christian Pacifist, opposing class war, race war, civil war, and international war. As I have declared in January, if conscription comes for women, I will not register, and if this breaking of the law means still further retirement, of course, I shall consider myself privileged to go to jail, where one can be quite sure of not doing one's own will. Plenty of opportunity for the exercising of selfless love there. I will take it as another way of "making my year." (I certainly hope it would not be longer.)

Not Dissociated

I shall, of course (and Bishop McIntyre urged this), not be dissociated from the Movement. But I am not longer owner and publisher, no longer editor of THE CATHOLIC WORKER, no longer connected with *St. Joseph's House on Mott Street*, and no longer trustee of the *Easton Farming Commune*, no longer on any committees, no longer lecturing, no longer traveling, no longer writing letters.

These last three years when we have been making our six-day retreat in silence, it has been wonderful how intimate and close all those who have made the retreat have grown. When you live with others in such silence you get to see people as God sees them.

This year of solitude and silence is going to bring me, I am sure, even closer to all our Catholic Workers and readers and fellow workers. And as for what will follow in October, 1944, that is in the Hands of God.