

Spring Appeal - April 1965

By Dorothy Day

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Summary:

Asks for help in “this seemingly hopeless and profligate task of feeding the poor.”

Says she is looking on the face of Christ in the poor she meets in her travels.

Keywords: war, poverty

(DDLW #824).

Dearly beloved,

And I say that with feeling considering the hospitality I have received from our readers on my recent trip.

It is hard to go around the country talking about voluntary poverty when all the talk is about the **war** on poverty. And we are against all war, even that against poverty, if the word war is going to be used in connection with it. Nowadays such a word carries with it a sense of a brutal onslaught. As long as the name of St. Francis of Assisi is associated with the word **poverty**, we don't want any war against it, we want instead to embrace it. To try to do away with destitution is another thing altogether. And voluntary poverty also is another thing altogether. Certain it is that we are not going to be able to help the poor without depriving ourselves, because the more we have the more we seem to want. (Actually, we are never going to be satisfied with less than God.) We find Him more quickly in the Word made Flesh than anywhere else, and that could mean the Bread of Life, or Christ in His poor.

Fritz Eichenberg once gave us a talk about the face of man and the face of Christ, and I feel I have been looking on the face of Christ in the Negro in the South and the Mexican in the Southwest; in the man on the skid rows of San Francisco, Oakland, and Stockton; in Tia Juana's destitute; and also on the faces of the students in all the colleges where I spoke, who have been helping and tutoring and giving their time and talents to the poor. I saw Him too in the faces of Negroes who testified at the hearings in Jackson, Mississippi, of the Federal Commission on Human Rights when they told of the beating and torture they had undergone, and how already they had received courage and hope from the work of the COFO groups. You see Christ's face there too. It is not **all** fear and despair, but learning and recreation and the rebuilding of churches.

Everywhere I saw Christ in the faces of the old and suffering; in the face of fear and hatred and love and joy. And the most important message I could bring to those working in the field of destitution was the story of the boy with the loaves and fishes and how the Lord multiplied what he gave and fed five or seven thousand.

We who believe, and those too who do not believe but work for the common good, hoping against hope, know that the seed sown must die before it bears fruit, and that he who sows sparingly, reaps sparingly.

So we go on with this seemingly hopeless and profligate task of feeding the poor, sheltering the homeless both in city and country. It's an expensive job in both places. We are so fortunately rich in space in Tivoli, New York, where our farm is, that we can carry on a house of hospitality on the land all winter (and what a heating bill!), and look forward in the summer to bringing young people up from the slums to get a taste of life together on the land. There is plenty of room for building up the campsites there and first a job of wrecking them to do it. Work in field and craft shop and library, truly Peter Maurin's synthesis of Cult, Culture and Cultivation. We are having retreats and work camps, folk school and agronomic university, whatever you choose to call it. Worker and scholar give their time and skills freely and we are begging you too, our readers, to help us keep things going. We are your servants too, as well as servants of each other. We love you for your help and for the gratitude that already warms us. We thank you in the name of the good St. Joseph, in whose month this is being written.

Yours, in Christ Who is our Peace,

Dorothy Day