

Look On The Face Of Thy Christ

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Summary: Reflects on the plight of the men on the breadline and the “natural cheerfulness of the moment.” Asks readers to help their work of feeding those who represent Christ. (DDLW #328).

The long line of men begins every morning at five thirty. I can hear them coughing and talking under my window as I wake up, and see the reflection of the flames cast on the walls of my room from the fire they build in the gutter to keep warm. Many of the men bring boxes and bits of wood to cast on it, and as the line moves up, the men get a chance to warm themselves. Many of the men have no overcoats or sweaters. It is good to see that fire as I go down to Transfiguration Church to Mass. The flames are brilliant against the dark street and the sky is purple in contrast. There is never so much color during the day.

We are using now fifty large loaves or 150 small loaves of bread a day, twenty pounds of sugar, twenty cans of evaporated milk, and about 75 gallons of coffee. The coffee line has been going for a year this month, from six thirty to nine o'clock every morning. The staff takes turns at getting up to serve the line and it takes three to run it.

Which reminds me of a comment made by a friend in Los Angeles about the three hundred people a day we were feeding at our headquarters out there. He said,

“But suppose you can’t keep it up? What then? Aren’t you afraid of bitterness and resentment on the part of the men if you have to stop?”

I told him that I believed most certainly that if public relief stopped, there would be bread riots in the streets. But the men see our own poverty. They know we eat the same breakfast they do. So if we had to stop, they would come, that sad morning, and receiving the tragic message, would go their way, dejected, cold and empty of body and soul. . . . But patient, with the unbearably pathetic patience of the poor. There would be sadness in the thought of no more cheerful fires, no more moments of keen appetite and expectancy. For strangely enough, you do sense that the line is cheerful with that perfectly natural cheerfulness of the moment, that comes with the thought of hot coffee. Even the heavy dull rains of November could not kill that small glow of human comfort that they

feel at the knowledge that in a short time, as the line moved along, there would be the keen joy of hunger momentarily assuaged and a trembling body warmed.

I write these lines because it is you, our readers, I am asking for help. Our Lord said that when you have a feast, do not invite your friends and neighbors who have plenty, but go out and bring in the destitute. If you cannot feed the hungry yourselves, give us the aid that will help us to do it for you. Our Lord will love you for it, for after all, we must remember that each of these seven hundred men or so, represents Christ to us. The dignity they still possess is theirs because Christ by sharing our human nature has dignified and ennobled it.

I do not believe for one minute that we will have to stop our line. How can we lack faith when we can say each morning after Mass, "Look on the face of Thy Christ," – Christ presents in us in His humanity and Divinity at that moment, and is present in the least of His children.

"Feed my Sheep," He told St. Peter.

And when Our Lord talked about feeding, He meant feeding their bodies as well as their souls. Remember that story of our Lord, told so tenderly?

In the eyes of the disciples, our Lord had died, and they had not yet truly found Him in the Paraclete. Simon Peter, who must have been sad of heart, said:

I go a-fishing.

The others say to him: We also come with thee.

(Probably they thought they would comfort their lonely hearts in their usual homely occupation, spending the night, vast in its darkness of sky and water, out on the sea.)

And that night, they caught nothing.

But when morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore: yet the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

Jesus therefore said to them: Children, have you any meat?

They answered him, No. . . .

As soon then as they came to land, they saw hot coals lying, and a fish laid thereon, and bread.

Jesus saith to them, Come and dine.

How often is our Lord's love shown in these little ways? I thought of that story as I passed our line before dawn this morning. And I thought of you who are reading this now. Please, won't you show your love for our Lord in your love for these His least children, and keep on helping us feed them?

St. Ignatius said that love is an exchange of gifts, so please now, at Christmas time, give to our Lord this way.