

Love Is The Measure

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: In the face of a world in turmoil—atom bomb tests, food shortages, impending strikes, destitution—an exhortation to “love as Christ loved, to the extent of laying down our lives for our brothers.” Tells of a priest whose work made him “a perfect fool for Christ.” Says “we confess to being fools and wish we were more so.” (DDLW #425).

We confess to being fools and wish that we were more so. In the face of the approaching atom bomb test (and discussion of widespread radioactivity is giving people more and more of an excuse to get away from the philosophy of personalism and the doctrine of free will); in the face of an approaching maritime strike; in the face of bread shortages and housing shortages; in the face of the passing of the draft extension, teen-agers included, we face the situation that there is nothing we can do for people except to love them. If the maritime strike goes on there will be no shipping of food or medicine or clothes to Europe or the far east, so there is nothing to do again but to love. We continue in our fourteenth year of feeding our brother and clothing him and sheltering him and the more we do it the more we realize that the most important thing is to love. There are several families with us, destitute families, destitute to an unbelievable extent and there, too, is nothing to do but to love. What I mean is that there is no chance of rehabilitation, no chance, so far as we see, of changing them; certainly no chance of adjusting them to this abominable world about them, and who wants them adjusted anyway?

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor in other words, we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We can give away an onion.

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.

This is the month of the Sacred Heart, the symbol of Christ’s love for man. We are supposed to love as Christ loved, to the extent of laying down our lives for our brothers. That was the New commandment. To love to the extent of laying down our lives, dying to ourselves. To accept the least place, to sit back, to ask nothing for ourselves, to serve each other, to lay down our lives for our brothers, this is the strange upside-down teaching of the Gospel.

We knew a priest once, a most lovable soul, and a perfect fool for Christ. Many of his fellow priests laughed at him and said, "Why, he lines up even the insane and baptizes them. He has no judgment!" He used to visit the Negro hospital in St. Louis, and night and day found him wandering through the wards. One old Negro said to me, "Whenever I opens my eyes, there is Father!" He was forever hovering over his children to dispense the sacraments. It was all he had to give. He couldn't change the rickety old hospital, he couldn't provide them with decent housing, he could not see that they got better jobs. He couldn't even seem to do much about making them give up liquor and women and gambling—but he could love them, and love them all, he did. And he gave them Everything he had. He gave them Christ. Some of his friends used to add, "whether they wanted Him or not!" But assuredly they wanted his love and they saw Christ in him when they saw his love for them. Many times I have been reminded of this old priest of St. Louis, this old Jesuit, when I have visited prisons and hospitals for the insane. It's hard to visit the chaplains and ask their help very often. They have thousands to take care of, and too often they take the view that "it's no use." "What's the use of going to that ward—or to that jail? They won't listen to you."

If one loves enough one is importunate, one repeats his love as he repeats his Hail Marys on his rosary.

Yes, we go on talking about love. St. Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians 13. In *The Following of Christ* there is a chapter in Book III, Chapter Five. And there are Father Zossima's unforgettable words in *The Brothers Karamazov*—"Love in practice is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." What does the modern world know of love, with its divorces, with its light touching of the surface of love. It has never reached down into the depths, to the misery and pain and glory of love which endures to death and beyond it. We have not yet begun to learn about love. Now is the time to begin, to start afresh, to use this divine weapon.