

Fall Appeal - November 1957

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, November 1957, 2.

Summary: Lists various answers to the question "What does the Catholic Worker mean?" Says we all need to begin with ourselves in learning to give of ourselves. Keywords: poverty, family, pacifism, anarchism (DDLW #730).

St. Joseph's House

223 Chrystie St.

New York 2, N.Y.

Dear Fellow Workers in Christ:

Out in front of the house we have a beautiful statue of St. Joseph. Joe O'Connell of Minnesota is the sculptor. Men tip their hats to it as they pass by and sometimes old Italian women curtsy and kiss their fingers, and make the sign of the cross and show other physical signs of appreciation of his friendship to our House of Hospitality. One evening last week there was a man lying on the street pavement close up against our house, his knees up to his chest, his head on his arm. He was asleep. An Italian woman who could not speak English very well seized my arm as I came up. I could scarcely understand her, but she kept pointing to the man saying in turn, "Jesus Christ . . . my son, my heart is broken." He wasn't really her son, but she knew what she was talking about. He *was* Jesus Christ, shocking as it may seem, drunk as he was. That was part of the agony in the garden, when He took our sins, and all the sins that would be committed upon Himself. People are always seeing this truth for the first time. Gandhi saw it when he read "Unto This Last" on a train ride, Ruskin's rendering of the scripted words, "unto the least of these." Salinger, the short story writer in *The New Yorker* recognized it when the young brother in his latest story chided his sister for using the Jesus prayer (famous in the Orthodox Church) for her own spiritual excitement, while she scoffed and scorned her neighbor. "Jesus," he tells her, "is the bourgeois fat lady on the porch in the rocking chair."

What does *the Catholic Worker* mean, – what is it? – people often ask. One may answer: voluntary poverty. Another says: an unjudging care for the destitute. Another says: mutual aid; still another: the family. Every House of Hospitality is a family with its faults and virtues, and above all, its love. We can all look at each other and say, "You are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," we are

all members one of another, since all are members or potential members of the Body of Christ. Even those dread words, *pacifism* and *anarchism*, when you get down to it, mean that we try always to love, rather than coerce, “to be what we want the other fellow to be,” to be the least, to have no authority over others, to begin with that microcosm *man*, or rather, with ourselves.

If we did not try conscientiously to begin with ourselves, to give ourselves, we could not send out this semi-annual appeal for your help. I write it in church, in quiet, with prayer. The printer will run it off, everyone in the house and visitors too will help send it out, the oldest and the youngest. Maybe Felicia’s eight year old boy, who was born when she was fifteen, will come in to help. They live, three children, mother and father, in a filthy, rat-ridden and crumbling tenement and we are looking for another apartment for them, as well as for two other families. We are paying eighteen dollars a week at a Bowery hotel for another family. It is expensive to be poor. No use telling them to go to a better place and pay less. They are the poor. The very sight of them is an offense, and of course they don’t behave well sometimes. But this is our family and we wish we had more room. Since we haven’t, more money to pay for rooms helps. Most of the money we get goes for heat, light, food. At least 600 meals are served each day. There are taxes to pay on the two pieces of property we own (People do not rent to such a family as ours, so we had to buy places).

We can each do so little physically. The best we can say is that it is very direct, very immediate. We keep passing on what we have as quickly as possible. We certainly can try to grow in love, and it is good practice, this giving what you’ve got, whether it is a cup of coffee or money to pay the grocery bill. We ask you in the name of St. Therese, on whose feast I write, and in the name of St. Francis, whose feast comes tomorrow. It is always a feast where love is, and where love is, God is.

In Christ, our brother,

Dorothy Day.