

Help Wanted

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Overflowing with the destitute and broke, she implores St. Joseph to move readers to help. Praises the work with the poor of The Little Brothers of Jesus. (DDLW #665).

ST. JOSEPH'S HOUSE

ST. JOSEPH'S FEAST

THE CATHOLIC WORKER MAR CH, 1954

223 CHRYSTIE ST.

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Dear fellow workers in Christ:

It is spring and crocus and snow drops are in bloom over on Staten Island, the springtide brings in more drift wood on the beach and a little sickle of a moon hangs over the cherry tree by the barn. The sun is getting warmer on the drooped backs of the men on our soup line these mid-March days. The line is growing longer because unemployment is mounting.

Here at St. Joseph's house of hospitality we are full to the doors, with men sleeping on the library floor. Peter Maurin farm is full to the eaves, and Maryfarm too.

Last week Pere Rene Voillaume, head of The Little Brothers of Jesus, whose headquarters are in France, came to speak to us and we were filled with enthusiasm for this new order which is made up of men who work for their living, and go out two and three, to all parts of the world, where they live with the poorest. They are not thinking in terms of civilization or culture, or point four programs, but simply of love and friendship. To work, to suffer, to be poor with others. They were not starting houses, clinics, schools, but were living so poor that there was nothing else to give, but just themselves. We envied them this Franciscan poverty and thought, "how much better this work than ours." And we looked around our house with its large family, much as parents look at the mouths to be fed and the bodies to be clothed and wonder how we manage with so many.

Well, it is the Lord's doing. We never intended this when we started printing Peter Maurin's ideas on hospitality. We were just a few, but there was always room for one more at the table, always enough food to share, always a place to bed down one more. (A mother and baby are sleeping in our dining room at the farm now.) Pere Voillaume showed us slides, pictures of the places where the Little Brothers and Sisters lived, among the pygmies, among the Indians, in working class districts, and indeed their houses were so small, no more than three could be crowded in.

Yes, this work is better than ours, and there are and have been many better works than ours. We all long for the freedom and the simplicity of a St. Francis. But this is the work that it seems the Lord intends us to do since He sends us the destitute in such numbers, and sends us too, our friends and readers to help us. "The poor are the first children of the Church," Bossuet wrote. Over and over again Jesus told us to feed the hungry, to feed our enemy even. He told us not to banquet our friends and relatives but to call in the poor. And the first directions St. John, the Precursor, gave was "Let him who has two coats give to him who has none."

St. Joseph, this is your month, and it is also Lent. You lived like the Little Brothers, at hard manual labor, and you surely understood concerning the needy and the poor. You were without shelter when you hunted a bed for a wife about to have a Child; you must have suffered with hunger and thirst in that journey across the desert into a strange land where you are supposed to have lived seven years. We beg you to move the hearts of our readers, so that when we tell them how broke we are, how high the bills are piled for groceries, for fuel, for light, they will be moved to help us, by their prayers and alms giving.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

DOROTHY DAY