

% Dorothy Day

1939, Chapter Ten, pp. 175 - 190.

\*Summary: Expresses deep gratitude to God for the goodness of their first summer at the Easton farm. Explains why they distribute *The Catholic Worker* and Catholic literature at Communist rallies. Meditates on the phrase “Our Father” as the basis for understanding that all men are brothers. A long description of their efforts to help the striking seamen in New York. (DDLW #445).\*

## 1

THE trees are getting bare, but still it stays warm. Coming down at night from the city, the warm, sweet smell of the good earth enwraps one like a garment. There is the smell of rotting apples; of alfalfa in the barn; burning leaves; of wood fires in the house; of pickled green tomatoes and baked beans, than which there is no better smell, not even apple pies.

Now there is a warm feeling of contentment about the farm these days—the first summer is over, many people have been cared for here already—and we started out with capital of a thousand dollars to pay for the farm and nothing else at all. From day to day we did not know during the course of the summer where the next money to pay bills was coming from, but trusting to our co-operators, our readers throughout the country, we went on with the work. In spite of our collective faith, there could not help but be a feeling of strain at times when there was so much to be done and no money for tools or equipment, not even enough to pay for food. But now all our bills are paid, and there is a renewed feeling of courage on the part of all those who are doing the work, a sense of confidence that the work is progressing.

This month of thanksgiving will indeed be one of gratitude to God. For health, for work to do, for the opportunities He has given us of service; we are deeply grateful, and it is a feeling that makes the heart swell with joy.

During the summer when things were going especially hard in more ways than one, I grimly modified grace before meals: “We give Thee thanks, O Lord, for these Thy gifts, and for all our tribulations, from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen.” One could know of certain knowledge that tribulations were matters of thanksgiving; that we were indeed privileged to share in the sufferings of Our Lord. So in this month of thanksgiving, we can be thankful for the trials of the past, the blessings of the present, and be heartily ready at the same time to embrace with joy any troubles the future may bring us.

The backyard between the front house where we have two apartments and two stores, and the rear house which is St. Joseph’s House proper, has been filled with huge barrels and from early morning until late at night there has been what should be a rustic job going on. Barrels are washed out, grapes come in by the

truckload, the cellars are open to the warm fall air, the work of making wine for the whole neighborhood is under way. Some of the Italians in the front house are making barrels for this family or that in the neighborhood. And this is not a matter of scandal or extravagance. The Italians with their spaghetti and wine dine frugally and healthily, and there are few real drinkers amongst them. Some day we will bring Teresa's camera, which she won at a school raffle, into town and take pictures of pushcart-lined Mott Street, St. Joseph's House and the wine keg lined yard between the houses and publish them in the paper. Until we can afford a picture page, however, our readers must be content\*\*\*\*with word pictures.

## 2

Tonight ten of us went up to Madison Square Garden to distribute a few thousand papers before and after one of the Communist meetings which are held there every week. The Garden holds twenty thousand and is always packed to the doors. There is always a crowd who cannot get in.

"What's the idea of distributing literature to that gang of reds?" one of our friends wanted to know.

And we reply, that if one person of all those twenty thousand who throng the Garden is to the slightest degree moved by anything he finds in *The Catholic Worker*, we will have considered it a good night's work. We heard of one man who was brought back to the faith last month through *The Catholic Worker*, and that one bit of news was enough to make us intensify our efforts.

It is a little recognized fact that revolutions are started by just such seemingly insignificant acts as distributing literature. The first time Leon Trotsky was sent to jail it was because of printed leaflets urging the workers in Odessa to organize. In the history of the working class movement men have gone to jail, been put to death, have been sent into exile for running a newspaper and printing literature which the government considered subversive.

If the forces of the enemy set such store by the distribution of literature to acquaint the working masses with their theory of revolution (and Lenin said that\*\*\*\*there could be no revolution without a theory of revolution) then most assuredly we are doing the right thing by distributing *The Catholic Worker* on every possible occasion.

There are forty thousand members of the Communist party in the United States. There are twenty thousand people in the Garden at the Communist meetings. Not by any means a majority of them are Communists. Many are sympathizers. Many are good trade unionists. Certainly the great mass of workers, convinced though they may be that better conditions can only come about through violence, do not want class war. Surely the great majority if faced with the choice between good and evil, God or the devil, would not choose evil. It is on this assumption

that we are working. It is for this reason that we go out into the highways and byways, out on the street corner and the picket line with our paper.

This is being written down at the County Court where I am waiting for the commitment clerk to come down from the Bellevue psychopathic ward. The paper must go to press today, but there is a work of mercy to be done. One of our women has fallen into the hands of the state (and the state is becoming an inexorable guardian) and they have decided she is psychopathic and needs to be committed to the Manhattan Hospital. It is to rescue her that I am here—to plead to the judge to release her in our care. She had been with us six months and we had known her and helped her for some two years before that. What peculiarities she has we can cope with, but aside from any mental disorder, perhaps the\*\*\*\*result of cruel hardship and loneliness and insecurity, we are convinced that a most grave injustice is being done which we must prevent.

Right now I should be down at the printer's overseeing the makeup of the paper, because Bill Callahan, our managing editor, who of all the crowd is best at makeup, is away, and John Cort and Eddie Priest, though they can get a story and write one—though they fit in every other way into the scheme of life of *The Catholic Worker*—are not\*\*as yet at ease in writing heads and balancing the front page. Not that I am so hot myself. But I should be there, I think fretfully.

However, I shall sit and wait, and as to how things are going in the crowded print shop where three other papers are going to press at the same time—I shall just have to leave that to the Lord, and our inexperienced fellow workers. When it comes to choosing which is the most important work this morning—one human being is of greater importance than all the papers ever published—I am sure our readers agree. So when they find errors in the proof-reading or in the heads, an unbalanced job in the putting together of the paper, they will excuse us.

3

As I waited for the traffic light to change on my way to the Seamen's Defense Committee headquarters, I was idly saying my rosary which was handy in my pocket. The recitation was more or less automatic, when suddenly like a bright light, like a joyful thought, the words Our Father pierced my heart. To all those who were about me, to all the passersby, to the longshoremen idling about the corner, black and white, to the striking seamen I was going to see, I was akin, for we were all children of a common Father, all creatures of one Creator, and Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Christian, Communist or non-Communist, were bound together by this tie. We cannot escape the recognition of the fact that we are all brothers. Whether or not a man believes in Jesus Christ. His incarnation, His life here with us, His crucifixion and resurrection; whether or not a man believes in God, the fact remains that we are all the children of one Father.

Meditation on this fact makes hatred and strife between brothers the more to be opposed. The work we must do is strive for peace and concordance rather than hatred and strife.

We have opened a relief kitchen over on the water front for the striking seamen and a good part of my time I spend over there. It is a big store, and the men from strike headquarters sent over some ship's carpenters today to make benches and tables and stands for literature. The place is full from seven in the morning until midnight. Always there are two of us here from *The Catholic Worker* to keep the coffee going. We have three five-gallon coffee pots and at that we can't keep up with the consumption. Hundreds of loaves of bread a day are consumed, and the peanut butter, which we buy in 25-pound cans, disappears so that there are periods of famine. The radio goes all day and there is conversation and much reading. If the men can concentrate on reading, I guess I can concentrate on writing. I have to jump up to start more coffee, swab off the tables outside, wash out cups, answer questions, etc.

Talk about reading. You'd think that seamen, used to the quiet of the seven seas, would not be able to stand the constant coming and going around here. But they do not seem to mind it, those who want to read. Glancing around the other day at what they were reading I noticed the *Preservation of the Faith*, the *Sign*, the *Commonweal*, *The Catholic Worker* pamphlets, *The Catholic Worker*, the *Wanderer*, in various hands. One fellow sat and read Conway's *Question Box* all evening. We have many copies of the Holy Father's Encyclical on labor, many books on labor, Monsignor Ryan's, Monsignor Haas', Father Husslein's and many others.

Every four hours when the pickets are coming off watch, there is a larger rush of business. Then there are lulls when it is possible to sit at the typewriter some more.

There are about twelve thousand men on strike around the New York and Jersey waterfronts. We are on the west side of Manhattan, just around the corner from strike headquarters.

The strike has been going on for the last two months and during that time the Communists have been helping the strikers constantly. The Young Socialist League goes around from midnight on with a truck carrying hot coffee, though it isn't very hot when they reach the last piers. The Young Communist League also keeps a headquarters open where they serve coffee and have literature. They also run innumerable dances, plays, socials and meetings.

At the Christmas midnight Mass, the church down on the corner which is for all waterfront workers, was filled with both longshoremen and seamen. Joseph P. Ryan, the president of the longshoremen, who pulls down a salary of \$ 15,000 a year, and against whom there is a strong rank and file movement, was present at the altar rail. He has been keeping the longshoremen from helping the seamen with their strike, and when he went to a waterfront meeting in Baltimore last week the enraged members of his union tried to assault him and it is said they succeeded in pulling a leg off his trousers.

He is bitterly opposed to Joe Curran, the leader of the striking seamen, but the two of them were present at midnight Mass. Another instance of religion

drawing people peaceably together.

Just now there does not seem to be any possibility of the strike ending. It has been a long struggle already, and the men revolting against their corrupt union officials at the same time that they are carrying on a strike against the ship owners for union hiring halls and better pay and conditions, have had no funds to work with. They picket through rain and sleet and cold. They do with skimpy meals served at the strike kitchen. They sleep wherever they can get a bed. And they continue to hold on. They are grimly enduring, fighting for principle, for the right to be treated as men, not as chattels.

Thanks to the generous subsidies provided by the government to the merchant marine, those shipowners can afford to sail their ships without freight or without passengers. They have everything on their side. And the money provided them comes from the pockets of the American taxpayers. There has been some talk of the government taking from them the privilege of carrying the mail, and withdrawing from them the tremendously generous subsidies, but that has not been done yet.

Goodness knows how the strike will turn out. It is one of the most orderly strikes I have ever seen though so far about eight of the strikers have died, either from pneumonia or from knife or gunshot wounds from the enemy. But aside from occasional small skirmishes the strike proceeds quietly, determinedly. According to *Time*, the news weekly, this has been the costliest strike in maritime history. But the ship owners are determined to win, and the corrupt, old union officials are helping them along with it.

#### 4

I just sent someone out to see how much it would cost to rent chairs from an undertaking parlor for a meeting this evening at which we will discuss Christian associations of working men, such as the Holy Father advised the long-range program trade unions ought to have. . . . Another intermission to talk to a member of the co-operative society who is trying to keep up with our orders and help us collect food. They sent down apples and oranges, prunes and sweet rolls the other day.

. . . Another intermission, a drunken engineer, the first one under the influence of liquor that I've seen so far, comes up to the desk to tell me how much all the sailors appreciate the moral and physical support to the "guys on the firing line" . . . A sudden rush and another five gallon pot empty and needing to be replenished . . . A truck driver comes in to give us three dollars to help out in the expenses. The bill from the cooperative for the past week is ninety-eight dollars. That's from Monday to Saturday, not a full week. They are wondering where we are going to get the money. But that's for St. Joseph to worry about.

An hour later. This month I've been reading the Encyclicals of the Holy Father as I've gone about town on the subway and elevated. They are the best kind of

spiritual reading because they are directed to us now, at the present time, for our present needs. The Encyclical on labor is perhaps the best known, but they are all pertinent, deep and searching in their analysis of the present day and our conduct at this time.

Peter Maurin likes Leo XIII's on St. Francis of Assisi best of all. It calls all the faithful to the practice of voluntary poverty during this materialistic age when Catholics are tainted as well as everyone else. I like the one on St. Francis de Sales, telling how he preached against heresy even when his whole congregation walked out on him; how he distributed literature, tramping through the fields and mountains in his search for souls, sleeping in the snow and the cold, the love of God warming him all the time.

## 5

Frank Jones is the member of the Strike Strategy Committee in charge of finance, and he came over to our branch on Tenth Avenue to be interviewed on how the strike is financed and how much it costs. He is a young fellow, very serious and burdened with the care of the thousands of seamen who need to be housed and fed.

"During November it cost \$550 a day, and I hate to tell you our deficit. We don't like to make it public because it disheartens the men. The other night at the Madison Square Garden meeting the ticket sales amounted to \$1,200 and the collection \$2,200. Only a third of those attending paid admissions. The unemployed and strikers got in free. There was about \$600 in pledges, and we don't count those until we've collected them.

"We make some money on the sale of the *Pilot*, the men who are out on the streets bringing in from sixty cents to six dollars a day.

"I don't know what the food costs, or how they get it. Somebody else has charge of that. We put up about two hundred men down in the neighborhood at South Street at twenty cents a night, four hundred up around headquarters here, one hundred in Harlem and two hundred in Greenpoint. A lot of the men are staying with friends, or have some money left from their pay, although they donated to the strike fund as they came off the ship."

Since the strikers are in revolt against the corrupt union leaders who hold the money the men have been paying in for dues for years, the Strike Strategy Committee is always faced by a money shortage.

The rent of the headquarters on Eleventh Avenue, near 23rd Street, comes to \$85 a month, although they used to pay \$50. Dominick Curzio is the agent for the building and just last month he served a dispossess notice on the strategy committee. They had to pay \$300 down and sign a lease agreeing to pay \$85 a month hereafter, making all repairs themselves. When they were arranging

the details of the lease, Dominick remarked that his lawyer was also Joseph P. Ryan's lawyer.

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The days continue warm, flu weather, everybody calls it, and our doors at Tenth Avenue stand open a good part of the day. The hall is crowded all the time, all the benches occupied and many standing.

One fellow I noticed sleeping with his head on the long table in the middle of the room most of the afternoon. Later he came up to get a cup of coffee at the stand by the kitchen door and said he had a chill. I noticed that his eyes were bleary and that he looked feverish, and recommended that he sleep on one of the two beds in the back room where Bill and Joe are sleeping now (their beds are already taken at Mott Street).

One of the seamen recommended eucalyptus oil on sugar and went out to get some and we dosed him with that, but he continued to lie there shivering under heavy quilts and coughing rackingly.

I got a thermometer later and took his temperature and it was one hundred and three. The only place he had to stay was a twenty-cent lodging house in the neighborhood, so thinking a hospital the best place for him, I called a taxi and took him down to St. Vincent's. But it was filled and I had to take him to Bellevue.

All day the place is packed, the men coming and going, on and off watch, and they sit around for hours at a time too, reading the Catholic magazines, papers and pamphlets that we have around the place. Many of the books we have on hand have been borrowed. All the copies of the Pope's Encyclicals which we had have been taken and tomorrow we'll have to order a hundred more. Groups get together to discuss not only the strike and the probabilities of winning it, but the questions of nationalism, war, pacifism, economics, the machine and unemployment, and again and again the question of Faith is brought up, and how, without a supernatural outlook, unions cannot help but fail, how without a Fatherhood of God, there can be no brotherhood of man. . . .

News was just brought in of a young fellow on the picket line, ailing for days, who collapsed on the line and had to be taken over to Bellevue, where they found he had pneumonia. It is eleven o'clock at night as I write this, and there are still about a score hanging around the hall, which Bill is trying to sweep up. Word has just been brought in that a squad of terrorists patrolling the waterfront is on the loose in the neighborhood. They are the same as those who, with the assistance of guns, leaped on the running boards of trucks this morning and forced the truck drivers to drive through the picket lines to the piers. Six of the strikers were beaten up tonight with clubs. One of them has a broken shoulder.

Warning was brought from headquarters that they were liable to come in and break our place up. Such are the usual tactics in labor warfare. The testimony of the LaFollette Committee has brought this out plainly. And yet, whenever there is violence, it is usually laid at the workers' door.

## 6

Every morning about four hundred men come to Mott Street to be fed. The radio is cheerful, the smell of coffee is a good smell, the air of the morning is fresh and not too cold, but my heart bleeds as I pass the lines of\*\*\*\*men in front of the store which is our headquarters. The place is packed—not another man can get in—so they have to form in line. Always we have hated lines and now the breakfast which we serve, of cottage cheese and rye bread and coffee has brought about a line. It is an eyesore to the community. This little Italian village which is Mott Street and Hester Street, this little community within the great city, has been invaded by the Bowery, by the hosts of unemployed men, by no means derelicts, who are trying to keep body and soul together, while they look for work. It is hard to say, matter-off-factly and cheerfully, “Good morning” as we pass on our way to Mass. It was the hardest to say “Merry Christmas”, or “Happy New Year” during the holiday time, to these men with despair and patient misery written on many of their faces.

One felt more like taking their hands and saying, “Forgive us—let us forgive each other! All of us who are more comfortable, who have a place to sleep, three meals a day, work to do—we are responsible for your condition. We are guilty of each other's sins. We must bear each other's burdens. Forgive us and may God forgive us all!”

Every day at 181 Tenth Avenue there is that other host of men to be fed—over a thousand a day. Even though the strike is over, the men must be cared for until they get back on the ships again. They are hungry and must be fed. They are still sleeping three in a bed, or lying in rows up in the union hall, fifty or a hundred stretched on newspapers. These are not despairing men like the others. These are men who have been fighting for better conditions for themselves and for others, for their union, for safety for those who go to sea and for those passengers who venture abroad on business or on vacation. These are men who are used to danger and imminent death and hard work, and their unemployment is because of a labor dispute and has only lasted two or three months. To them we have brought not only food for the body, but food for the soul in the shape of Catholic literature, the Catholic teachings on all those problems which affect their day-to-day existence. The work there is a hopeful work.

But the work at Mott Street must go on. We must continue to feed our guests and we must appeal to our readers for help. We spent \$1,500 last month just for food, but it would be impossible to say how many thousand meals were served. There is no way of counting the men (ours is not turnstile charity) and we have



not yet estimated the thousands of pounds of coffee, sugar and milk and bread and cheese we use. We only know that right now we have a debt of \$1,200 not to speak of four hundred dollars for the last month's printing bill and the same for this.

The help our friends have given us moves us almost as much as the poor we serve. In addition to the help we have received in the way of money to cover the cooperative bill there has been such help as that given by one housewife from Rockville Center. Every morning she drives her husband in to work and stops at Mott Street with loaves of bread and pieces of clothing. One seaman sent us two Christians checks he received, one for \$2 and one for \$5. Frank, one of our own group, has been handing us \$2 every week or so out of his \$10-a-week salary. Pat, another of our gang, who earns \$15 a week at the Commodore, gives us \$3 a week. Two of the girls in the House of Hospitality got temporary odd jobs and gave us \$5 and \$3. In these little ways, from the poorest, money has come in to keep the work going.

We have placed our troubles, of course, in the hands of St. Joseph. I burned a candle before his altar yesterday morning and contemplated the gallant figure of the workman saint as he stood there, his head flung back, his strong arm embracing the Child, a smile on his face as he looked down at the congregation of kneeling workers at Mass. We told him frankly:

"You must help us. The Holy Father says that the masses are lost to the Church. We must reach them, we must speak to them and bring them to the love of God. The disciples didn't know our Lord on that weary walk to Emmaus until He sat down and ate with them. 'They knew Him in the breaking of bread.' And how many loaves of bread are we breaking with our hungry fellows these days—' 3,500 or so this last month. Help us to do this work, help us to know each other in the breaking of bread! In knowing each other, in knowing the least of His\*\*\*\*children, we are knowing Him."

This would be a hopeless work if it were not for the fact that we are aiming at starting these same "works of mercy stations" in other parishes throughout the country. We are breaking the trail.

We were saying last night that if we could have foreseen the hordes that were to come to us the past two months, we never would have had the courage to begin. But we can only work from day to day. We can only beg from issue to issue of the paper.