

They Knew Him In The Breaking of Bread

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Summary: An appeal for money to support the growing breadlines. Describes the lines, cost of feeding so many, the help they receive, and prayers to St. Joseph. Reminds readers that their gifts put them in Christian solidarity with the breadline and what is done for the men is done for Him. (DDLW #315).

Every morning now 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 our 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-of-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.

We Are Guilty

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 another host of men to be fed—over a thousand a day. Even though the strike is over, the men must be fed until they get back on the ships again. They are hungry and they must be fed. They are sleeping still, 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 better unions, for safety for those who go to sea and for those passengers who vacation or venture abroad on business. These are men who are used to dangers 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.

Must Appeal for Help

But the work at Mott Street must go on. We must continue to feed our guests and we must appeal to our readers again 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 used. We only know that right now we are with 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 Christmas 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.

You Are Doing This Work

We told him frankly:

"You must help us. Father Parsons says that the masses are being 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 Emmaeus 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—13,500 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 this 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, telling you, our readers, of our needs. You are doing this work—you are united with us in Christian solidarity. God bless you for your help last month and please go on helping us.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me."