

Day After Day - September 1942

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, September 1942, 1, 4.

Summary: A St. Joseph Day bequest provides an opportunity to explain why The Catholic Worker has never incorporated and the nature of its organizational philosophy favoring smallness. As he had promised, Tony Pereiro brings spindles, similar to those used by Gandhi, as souvenirs from his trip to India which are viewed as “revolutionary implements,” symbols of another way of life. eywords: industrialism, philosophy of the Catholic Worker (DDLW #385).

None of the Catholic Workers has any news sense. They are not journalists, thank God—they are revolutionists. They don't see a feature story in the fact that someone in Boston contributes a tree to the House of Hospitality there. And the overwhelming fact that the Catholic Worker office in England was bombed was dealt with in the following sentence in a letter from W. H. Power to Ossie Bondy, former head of the Windsor house of hospitality who is with the Canadian Army in England.

“We are in a horrible muddle on account of raid damage, so I cannot reply fully to your letter now. We had a couple of rooms decently cleared of all the muck and I was hoping to get on to the orders for the May C.W. this morning, but last evening a building surveyor from the corporation came round to inspect the houses and he ordered part of our chimney stack to be taken down. This the men proceeded to do at once and our beautiful clean rooms were smothered with soot, and rubble coming down the chimneys. But enough of our troubles.”

St. Joseph!

Another news event not recorded, probably because we were waiting to see what would happen was the fact the St. Joseph played a strange trick on us.

It began on his feast day, March 19. Every now and then someone came in and said, “Did St. Joseph send you a present yet?” And then later in the day came the telephone call from a lawyer, saying that someone had just died and left us around \$500 in a will.

We were overjoyed. St. Joseph had behaved as we expected him to do on his feast day. We were broke and that five hundred dollars could have gone to the printer, to the coffee man, to the breadman or for an installment on the farm mortgage.

We went around beaming for days. Only twice before had we been willed anything. An auto worker in Hamtranck had willed us five dollars, and a Finn miner in Minnesota had told his mother when he was dying to send us five dollars. And here was another legacy!

Not Incorporated!

And then this situation arose. We were unincorporated and we did not wish to be incorporated. Nor did we intend to be, either for five hundred or five thousand dollars. It is hard for our friends and readers to get the point of this. It is difficult to explain, too. It is one of those ephemeral things, felt rather than understood, even on our part.

The way we feel about it is this. No one asked us to do this work. The mayor of the city did not come along and ask us to run a bread line or a hospice to supplement the municipal lodging house. Nor did the Bishop or Cardinal ask that we help out the Catholic Charities in their endeavor to help the poor. No one asked us to start an agency or an institution of any kind. On our responsibility, because we are our brother's keeper, because of a sense of personal responsibility, we began to try and see Christ in each one that came to us. If a man came in hungry, there was always something in the ice box. If he needed a bed—and we were crowded, there was always a quarter around to buy a bed on the Bowery. If he needed clothes, there were our friends to be appealed to, after we had taken the extra coat out of the closet first, of course. It might be someone else's coat but that was all right too.

Clarification

Our Houses of Hospitality are scarcely the kind of houses that Peter Maurin has envisioned in his plan for a new social order. He recognizes that himself, and thinks in terms of the future to accomplish true centers of Catholic Action and rural centers such as he speaks of in his column this month.

Our houses grew up around us. Our bread lines came about by accident, our roundtable discussions are unplanned, spontaneous affairs. The smaller the house, the smaller the group, the better. If we could get it down to **Christian families**, we would be content. Ever to become smaller—that is the aim. And to talk about incorporating is somehow to miss the point of the whole movement.

So all right, St. Joseph, if you have brought about clarification of thought by your little joke on your feast day, all right, we are grateful to you. Meanwhile there is that printing bill of \$1,100 that needs to be paid. We are only hinting at you about this, because St. Francis de Sales is the special patron of writers and journalists. Maybe we had better ask him.

From India

In the February issue of the paper we told how Tony Pereiro, seaman, dropped into the office just before shipping out to India and promised to bring us a spindle such as Ghandi used.

It brought us great joy this month to see him walk into the office, safe and sound after his hazardous trip. We were so glad to see him that we forgot all about the spindles. But he hadn't. He had a good story to tell.

"I looked all over Bombay, I told everyone what you wanted, and then I went back on the boat discouraged," he said. "I talked then to the wireless operator, Sparks we call him, but his name is William Orien. He said he know you well, that he had visited here and the farm at Easton. He is a great big fellow and a Lithuanian and he talks a lot.

"He went all over Bombay too, and when we couldn't find any there, he went to Karachi, and there he found three spindles. We didn't know which one you wanted, so we brought back all three!"

Simple Things

What a gift! Chiang Kai Chek had nothing on us. Ghandi gave him a spindle, a symbol of simplicity, and labor and one of the peaceful works of mercy. A symbol of another way of life, a life opposed to the industrialism of the present day which has brought about such a gigantic slaughter.

With the spindles came some carded cotton, and also a little slip of material woven from the spun thread. Now it will be up to Teresa who has learned to spin flax and wool, to learn how to spin cotton. She will bring these latest tools to the school conducted by Ade Bethune in Newport which she is joining this November.

Meanwhile, as we carried these implements in a suitcase through the station on our way to the bus to go down to the Easton farm last Sunday, we thought to ourselves,

"Here we have with us truly revolutionary implements in this suitcase. Here is dynamite to change the face of the world."