

Spring Appeal - March 1968

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Asks for aid describing their crowded tenement, and notes the coming and going of the young as well as the needs of older long-term guests. Looks for signs of spring after a hard winter. In spite of poverty she admits how acquisitive they can be for books, time, and loving kindness. (DDLW #864).

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality

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Dear Fellow Workers in Christ:

It is a good month to send out our semi-annual appeal. The Incarnation is the most important feast in March. There was a sick seminarian who stayed with us for several years, and when this feast came around he used to go out from our little chapel at Maryfarm on that day and kneel down and kiss the earth. He said that since Christ the son of God took on our human flesh (dust we are and to dust we will return) it was fitting that he should kiss the earth which Jesus had made holy for all time for us. I have done it many times since when I have been in the country and the snow and ice were gone, but this month I am in the city, and the remains of the snow from the two bad storms we had in February. It is still cold. I will look up to heaven, from which comes my help, and see the pigeons wheeling in flight, and perhaps pick up a few pigeon feathers from the sidewalk, watch for buds on the ailanthus trees down the block and admire and rejoice in the few twigs of forsythia on the windowsill which are showing the yellow of the flowers already. Christ is still with us in the world and also in the hope which the sight of flowers brings.

Last year when we sent out the March appeal we were still in our cold apartments, women and some men on Kenmare Street, and more men on Spring Street, and Millie too in her little room; and office, mailing rooms, clothes rooms, kitchen and dining and meeting rooms on Christie Street. In many ways we were most miserable for years, with cold, stopped-up plumbing either from aged pipes or freezing weather and the smell of cold damp dirty halls.

Hatty died in one of these gloomy apartments and Scotch Mary was taken away to the hospital with a broken hip from falling on the ice when she was picking her way over to Kenmare Street, almost five blocks away. The older men did

not get the care they needed and lived in disorder. How did we stand it for so long? God knows. Now we are crowded but cozy, as one of the children on Mott Street said to us once. He was glad when two of his brothers went away to war because now there were only two in a bed instead of four or five!

Now we are together again and Oh the feeling of warmth in our rebuilt tenement; although mud and snow are tracked in with the soup line each morning (there are hundreds in and out each day) the place is easy to keep clean. We are a community of young and old, with very few middle-aged in between. It is a happy thing that we have so many young ones in the house over the winter as well as during vacation times. They swarm in and out and some of them stay, and if they hitchhike to attend trials of some of their number in Oklahoma or Chicago who are resisting the draft (not dodging it), they come back and put their shoulders to the wheel again. The wheel is cooking and serving meals and taking old men up to bed, changing their clothes, giving them their haircuts, etc.

Smoky Joe has been around the longest of any of the men in the house and we have a very special relationship. He sits behind a table taking care of the new subscriptions which come in daily. Our special relationship stems from the fact that he was in the marines at Nicaragua when they were there pursuing General Sandino through the hills. (We are still debating what land to procure for another canal like that in Panama.) He was in the marines and I was doing the publicity job for the Anti-Imperialist League. He has worked these many years now with a group dedicated to non-violence, to voluntary poverty, so that there is more to share. Ours is a functional society rather than a hierarchical one; I was going to say rather than an acquisitive one, but upon reading Trollope's *The Warden* this month I realize how acquisitive we each of us are, not only of clothes and books, radios for concerts, but of time and loving kindness.

We must do better. We are beggars for the poor who come to us, and if we are poor, for ourselves, too. So we're asking you again to come to our aid and the gratitude we feel towards you warms our hearts and your comforting helps us to comfort others, and all our readers too.

With love and gratitude,
DOROTHY DAY