

# Day by Day - March 1934

Dorothy Day

*The Catholic Worker*, March 1934, 5.

*Summary: Writes of efforts to improve race relations and that the “paper is not a paper for black or white, but for the Catholic Worker.” Describes examples of hospitality, suffering from cold, and the food they eat. (DDLW #311).*

Tonight the editors of the CATHOLIC WORKER were invited to Greenwich House by Mrs. Simcovitch to tell the household there about the aims and purposes of the paper. The CATHOLIC WORKER had been brought to the attention of Mrs. Simcovitch by the minister of St. Luke's Chapel. She had also spoken of it to Father Moore, who assured her, she said, that it was “all right.” We discussed the difference between welfare work as a palliative and as social reconstruction and her ideas of working through neighborhoods were much the same as ours of working through parishes. Mrs. Simcovitch spoke, too, rather wistfully of the effectiveness of new, enthusiastic ventures, before they become too business-like and efficient. While we surveyed wistfully her large domain, the halls, meeting rooms, theater, living quarters, dining room and kitchen and speculated on the possibilities of anyone offering us a community house for our activities.

\* \* \*

Later in the evening we went up to the meeting at the Hotel Pennsylvania, where Father J. Elliot Ross, Rabbi Lazon and a minister finished up a good-will tour and told of their experiences. They traveled by plane from city to city and covered vast stretches of territory. The fault we had to find with the meeting was that it reached just those people who did not need to be reached, who were already free from religious prejudice. Whenever they mentioned the Ku Klux Klan I thought of race prejudice instead of religious prejudice and wished they had a negro on the platform with them. . . As for traveling by plane on a well-planned tour, it seemed to me that a long leisurely auto trip over the country reaching outlying districts where most prejudice exists, small towns and areas where things travel by word of mouth even more than through the press, would have been a feat indeed. . . One of the things which rather spoiled our enjoyment of the evening was the fact that on that very morning we had received a long, three-page, single-spaced letter from a mid-westerner, which was full of carefully-reasoned religious prejudice, which made us feel rather pessimistic about attitudes of Gentile to Jew.

A long day full of difficulties. A priest called up and said he was sending over a young woman who had threatened to kill herself. She had already made one attempt, he said she told him,

and she was without work and without shelter, having been put out of her room early that morning. We talked to her, gave her breakfast, some clothes and sent her up to the House of Hospitality. . . . Then a poor neighbor came in with a letter about her nephew who was being released from a school of correction and a request for clothes for him. The school, which was shipping him home wrote and informed her of what clothes he needed and asked her to pay his fare. But the poor soul is on Home Relief, and had no money for these things. Nor had we, so we told her to write a letter explaining her position. She also needed a bed, bedding and blankets for the boy who had been away for several years. We offered sheets and a blanket, if she could supply the bed. The another telephone call came from a friend down on Eleventh street, who was ill and needed a doctor, so we called Dr. Koiransky of Willard Parker, who has volunteered his services for the poor of the neighborhood, and he assured us of his immediate attention. We went down there ourselves and the job from then on was one of feeding the baby, changing him (and he squirmed like an eel), shopping, cooking, washing diapers and such like duties until 5 o'clock came, when someone else could take a turn at caring for the sick girl, who could not move from her bed, but was not sick enough to go to the hospital. Two editors demonstrated their willingness to be both workers and scholars at this job, but it took almost more dexterity than they possessed to change the kid. If Peter Maurin had been in town we would have turned over to him the job of putting the kid to sleep with his little poems.

\* \* \*

This morning I had an appointment with Mr. Hunton, of the Cardinal Gibbons Institute, to go and see Mr. Carter, the editor of Opportunity, a magazine for the negro. Mr. Carter spoke a good deal about his ideas of housing in Harlem, and the necessity for getting the slum out of the negro as well as the negro out of the slum. Also the desirability of having the negro architect, mechanic, plumber, electrician, in on all these plans for a newer and better city for himself. For Harlem is a city in itself, having 250,000 in population. He also spoke of the many difficulties in the way of achieving better housing conditions in Harlem and of the constant struggle to combat these influences.

We told him of our work (Mr. Carter is not a Catholic and the paper has just been brought to his attention this last month) and our desire to have THE CATHOLIC WORKER not only for the white but for the negro. To have negro writers growing up with the magazine, writing not only on race problems but on social justice in general. . . . We pointed out the little child's sketch on the back page of the February CATHOLIC WORKER and called to his attention the fact that the child, though she was drawing a picture of negro convicts in Florida, had not made them black, but white. That she did not see the color, but only the stripes. That it was the prisoner she was looking at, not the color of the men. And this is the general attitude of children before race prejudice is instilled into them by others. Our idea, we told him, was to have negro artists and writers helping us to get out the paper so that by the time we have reached two hundred thousand circulation and are well established, the fact will be well established in the minds of Catholic America that the paper is not a paper for black or white, but for the Catholic Worker.

\* \* \*

Going through an old book dated 1926, I come across this item: "Saw Eugene O'Neill's version of *The Ancient Mariner* last night. O'Neill has made an intense religious thing of the play, save for the concluding lines and the silver masks of the cherubic figures. Rather another *En Retour* in mood, and very moving."

So "Days, Without End" is not the only piece of religious writing that O'Neill has done.

\* \* \*

Mr. John Erit, who spoke at the third meeting of the Workers' School came in this evening at supper time and showed us how to make Italian spaghetti. There are many kinds of spaghetti but this was the simplest kind, called Castle of San Angelo, because when the soldiers were being besieged there they lived for weeks on it.

Our guest chef worked under disabilities. The pots were not big enough, the fire was slow, but as usual around THE CATHOLIC WORKER office, a little miracle was performed in that twelve people were fed with neatness and dispatch.

\* \* \*

On fast days, the Catholic Worker staff is fed on Jewish cooking. Mrs. Gottlieb around the corner makes up a pile of potato pancakes or fish and her co-operation saves the editors a great deal of time and effort.

A Spanish friend threatens to bring in some stewed octopus with ink sauce, but the diners are not very enthusiastic about the prospect.

\* \* \*

And speaking of food, Peter Maurin arrived in from the country after an absence of four weeks. Discussing economics, he displayed his grocery and newspaper bills for the month, \$9.

Peter is in favor of a big pot on the stove and a continual supply of vegetable soup, constantly renewed from day to day. And an idea shared by both Don Bosco and the I.W.W.'s.

After supper we went out to the pushcart market and bought a large pot for 79 cents, a ten-quart one, and while the workers' school is in session, we shall dine on soup.

A rather monotonous diet, but at the writing, Mr. John Brnini of the Commonweal staff offers to come down soon and cook up a meal.

The CATHOLIC WORKER office en masse journeyed over to Labor Guild headquarters, 80 A Smith street, to be the guest of Mike Gunn for the evening.

Some of the members of the CATHOLIC WORKER staff had been there before, but I had not, and the place was indicative of the boundless energy and cheerful hopefulness in the face of difficulties that is characteristic of Mr. Gunn.

It was a bitter cold night, and like the CATHOLIC WORKER headquarters, coal stoves have to be used to heat it. Mike had been without coal for a few days because funds were low, but now coal was in and he was building up ones of the fires as we arrived.

The place is large, rambling and hard to heat, and it was not until after supper that we really thawed out. I thought as I sat at the long supper table with my feet frozen to the knees, that few people realize the constant hardship and self-sacrifice such leaders as Mike Gunn have to put up with. Running what is practically a House of Hospitality at the Labor Guild, up late every night at Round Table Discussions, up early for mass, he is never heard to complain about the hardships of his life or lack of response met with.

Indeed, he is always both thankful and serene. I am reminded again of my favorite St. Theresa of Avila who said, "I am so simple that I am grateful even for a sardine."

This is the spirit, to recognize the significance of every small advance, and to be grateful for it. To be satisfied to work from the ground up. That is literally what Mike is doing. For the floor being of cement and the winter cold, Mike and his friends had to cover it with layer after layer of newspapers, old linoleum, old carpets, boards, anything, in fact, that would mitigate the cold.

The supper served us was a splendid one. For a friend of Mike's, Mrs. Thompson, who lives in the neighborhood and in her zeal reminds me of those early Christian women who helped spread Christianity, came in and made up a feast of chili con carne, hot with peppers, and just what we needed to warm our innards, hot biscuits, and large pots of coffee.