

Day by Day - January 1935

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, January 1935, 3, 6.

Summary: An account of their work: visitors, helping neighbors, selling copies of the paper. Is grateful for the donations that seem to appear at the most needed times, both money and services. Says they were smote by a flea infestation. (DDLW #284).

Teresa was home for the holidays, perched like a little sparrow right at my elbow as I typed on stories for this issue of the paper. She got a microscope set for Christmas and the best place to be engaging in scientific pursuits was usually right at the typewriter table by my side.

“Perhaps,” she would murmur to herself, “There’ll be bugs in the ice-box water . . . Here is a slide with some of Tom’s blood on it . . . It’s not much good . . . Don’t you want to look at a butterfly scale? And don’t forget to write in the paper that I went picketing with you on December 31 . . . That’s a hot one! Why don’t you want me to say ‘That’s a hot one.’ I like to say it . . . You won’t let me say ‘Come over and see me some time.’ So I’m going to say ‘that’s a hot one.’”

* * *

Going on the ferry over to Staten Island to take Teresa back to St. Patrick’s where she is going to school, the gulls stood out white against the grey sky. They swept and glided, swooping down into the water now and then after a fish. Their cries and the sound of the water as the boat churned through it were the only sounds in the winter stillness. Then there was the walk with Teresa up the country road, past a thicket of birches with the blue green twilight sky behind them. To one side of the ground was a field of yellow grass, bent by a soft wind. Across one of the fields alongside a path through the cold-baked fields, there was a little brook gurgling cheerfully beneath the ice that caked it. There are still green things showing under the stubble of the fields, bits of wild carrot, the green of vines, even some wild geranium. And as the earth lost its color and darkened, there was still the radiance of a sunset flushing the sky.

* * *

The work continues back in the office until late in the evening. Visitors from Chicago, from Maryland, from New Hampshire, from Buffalo. A worker from one of the chain stores who tells us about his long day—he gets up at five-thirty to assist at early mass, and he is never through with his work until seven-thirty in the evening. He wants to help us by distributing the paper on Sundays . . . A man comes in from East Eleventh Street to tell us how the paper has reinforced his faith, and to bring us some clothes for those that are poorer than he, and he is poor enough . . . All day there are the unemployed, starting at eight-thirty. They want underwear, shoes, coats, information about home relief . . . Or they just want to talk to us. There are the unemployed all day, and in the evening there are those who work and have no other time to come. So if the paper is rather disjointed and unfinished in its writing, it is because there is so much to do for twelve hours, and only a few of the left over hours to write about the work and the thought behind the work.

* * *

As for our immediate assistants and co-workers—they continue faithfully in their voluntary cooperation. Two or three are always picketing, running errands, addressing envelopes, going to the post office, paying calls in the neighborhood, taking care of the needs of those that come in. The girls from the House of Hospitality helped us picket on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and when they came in that morning to go with us to the high mass which started the day's work, they told us how four of them said the rosary aloud together the night before for our persecuted fellow-workers in Mexico City.

During the month there was a call of distress from a man whose wife had just gone to the hospital to have her sixth child. His mother was to have taken care of the other five children, but the very next day she fell off a chair and broke her arm, so the little ones were left to the care of the nine-year-old girl. The father found it impossible to get any help so an appeal was made to the Catholic Worker. One of the girls co-operating with us volunteered for the job and took charge of the little household. It meant ten days of good hard work, what with one of the little ones, two years old, being sick. There was washing and ironing and cleaning to do, besides the marketing and cooking. A few of the afternoons some of the boys from the office went up to take care of the kids while she did the shopping. One of those who volunteered for this work was a seminarian on his vacation. He will make a good Franciscan, that boy. The girl had gone out on the job as an errand of mercy, not expecting any pay, but both the man and his wife insisted that she be paid and paid generously. She had been jobless for some time, so it came in handy. He had been out of work for quite a time, too, and money was hard-earned in that big family, but it is the poor who are the most generous and the most appreciative. "I had not been able to find anyone

to help us for love nor money,” he told us.

* * *

The young man who is studying to be a Franciscan came in almost every day to get papers to sell in Union Square and he disposed of about a hundred and fifty a day. Other volunteers who help in the office also sold papers every day during the Christmas rush, and one of them got rid of as many as four hundred an afternoon and evening.

Let us say here that any unemployed men or girls, either, for that matter (for one of the girls from the co-operative apartment sold a good many), who wish to sell the Catholic Worker may call at the office for copies.

* * *

In case any of those kind friends who were good Samaritans and sent in clothes were not thanked this month, lay it to the fact that the need was so great that the packages were opened, the contents distributed and the wrappings disposed of by zealous workers before the editors had a chance to grab the return address in order to write letters of thanksgiving. We are very sorry, indeed, at our seeming negligence, but believe us that we are not ungrateful, and from the bottom of our hearts we beg God to bless those kind and thoughtful ones who are helping us so much.

* * *

Someone wrote to us that they were always interested in hearing how the printing bill got paid—how we made out during the month. Well, it was a good month and we look back to last Christmas when we were so poor that we had to skip our January edition, and we praise the Lord and all His saints for the abundance this year. Christmas cards came to us enclosing money and little by little the bills were paid. The telephone was almost shut off, but wasn't, the electric man came around to deprive us of light, but didn't (there had been an offering through the mail), there were a few meals of beans, and then a basket of food came in; and we were preparing to put off the January edition until late in the month when a generous check came in from a priest whom we would name except that we are afraid he would get sore, and so that bill was paid off and there was still twenty-five dollars in the bank.

This morning our dentist who has been taking care of everybody for nothing the last year called up and said that the marshal was on his door step, and miraculously enough there was twenty dollars for him. He had pulled a dozen teeth and filled another dozen and still he said his bill was only fifteen. We

gave him what we had, however, and we are sure that somehow or other there will be enough money to pay for the mailing of the paper. It's true that only seventy-five cents came in today, but we have absolute faith in God's bounty. He scatters his gifts so lavishly that He will supply our wants, we know.

We're so sure of it in fact that this is not even being written in the form of an appeal, but just by way of comment as to how we're making out. If we were behind hand, and we felt we had to be importunate (as our Lord bids us to be when there is need), we would put this in ten point type and run it at the top of the editorial page. As it is, this is only a modest accounting, and a thanksgiving.

Having been given a bottle of perfume for Christmas and thus indulged one of our senses, which is accustomed to being mortified, we predicted that we would be tormented in other fashions, the devil being busy around these parts in many little ways. Not because there are any idle hands but because the Lord's work goes on so busily.

Sure enough, an epidemic of fleas smote us (we hasten to assure our visitors that they are gone now) and mortification abounded.

A Spanish friend who delights in St. Teresa brought us, for our solace, a poem written by the great saint for her sisters to sing in such afflictions. We hope it helped them as much as it helped us. Please excuse the rough translation.

Daughters who take up the cross

Have valor,

And of Jesus, who is your light,

Ask for help.

He will be your defender in such a pass.

Refrain:

Free from the evil tribe

This robe.

These bad cattle disquiet

In prayer,

The soul badly grounded

In devotion,

But keep your heart set

On God.

Refrain:

Free from the evil tribe

This robe.

As you are born to die
Do not dismay,
And for such uncivil ones
Have no fear.
A help in God you will find
In so great an evil.

Refrain:

Free from this evil tribe
This robe.
Since you gave us a new gown,
Celestial King,
Free from the evil tribe
This robe.