

Spring Appeal - Mar/April 1971

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, March-April 1971, 2.

Summary: Recalls the beginnings of their food line and the comradeship in cooking and serving "sturdy soup" and bread, and the occasional dangers in their work. (DDLW #508).

St. Joseph's Day, '71

St. Joseph's House

36 East 1st St.

N.Y., N.Y. 10003

Dear and beloved friends,

Every morning at nine-thirty a crowd of men, and a few women, arrive at our doors, and once again my heart is warmed with gratitude to you who make our hospitality possible. I often quote Teresa of Avila who said she was so grateful that she could be bought with a sardine. It is much more than a sardine to have this house of hospitality and to keep it going. The waiting room for our guests is in the basement, cheerfully painted a pale yellow by the students from the Christian Brothers around the corner. Jimmy painted a black cross on one wall, slightly askew. Bob started the Beatitudes beautifully lettered on another. The room is brightly lit, there are benches for all. Upstairs the soup is served, beginning at ten, and it has taken five to make it. A good and holy soup. Plenty of bread, plenty of tea and sugar. I have mentioned that the bread bill goes up to a thousand dollars. The mailing of this appeal has gone up too! All the young volunteers who come are taught to make soup. At Tivoli they are taught to make bread. Fifty live and eat three meals a day there. Sometimes I think the Catholic Worker keeps going because food which epitomizes life, is being freely and daily and lovingly served, since 1936. We editors did not start it, nor the volunteers. It was John Griffin who had charge of the clothes and when he could not give a coat or a pair of socks, would offer coffee and bread, and so the line came about and grew and continued. It was Peter Maurin who urged upon us the making of sturdy soup, the food of the peasant he was. Now we have not only soup but yogurt, mislabeled and so discarded at the market, and fruit too, half-frozen or over-ripe, which parts can be cut away and good salads made of it. Black and white, young and old, sick and well, people arrive daily, and the miracle is, not just to have the food to serve, but that so many young people feel in their bones the validity of what we are doing and keep coming to help us. It is indeed a contact with Christ, who is our Peace, our Truth, our daily Bread. "They knew Him in the breaking of bread . . . Take, eat, this is my body . . . do this in memory of me . . . Inasmuch as you have fed one of the least of my brethren, you have fed me . . . All men are brothers."

It does not cost any money, only time, to take people to clinics, to dress their ulcerated legs; eventually it costs to bury them, and we have had half-dozen or more deaths this year. We have no salaries to pay, but we have taxes on our two hospices at First Street and Tivoli, and the heating and lighting and gas for cooking, and bread and margarine, coffee and tea, meat and staples, all must be bought. The bills pile up, and we beg your help.

The work is not without danger—this adventure of ours. We live on a warfront—class war, race war. Mental cases abound, drugged youth haunt our streets and doorsteps. We are, here at First Street, a school of nonviolence. Not a week passes when there have not been knives drawn, a fist up-raised, the naked face of hate shown and the silence of bitterness and despair shattered by the crash of breaking crockery or glass, a chair overthrown. But there are other days when suddenly there is laughter, scraps of conversation among the men, and one feels men have been wooed out of their misery for a moment by a sense of comradeship between the young people serving and those served.

God, the Father of us all must want this work, otherwise He would not prompt you to keep it going all these years. Some of the second generation Catholic Workers come to help us now. Perhaps we epitomize in a strange paradoxical way—abundance, freedom, love and joy in the midst of destitution, enslavement, hate and grief.

Of course, Spring is here, and seeds of Faith, Hope and Charity are sprouting anew within us all. So we know that you will help and you will pray for those you are helping us to care for.

With grateful love in Christ,

DOROTHY DAY