

Day After Day - More Houses of Hospitality Are Needed

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Summary: Calls for every parish to have a Works of Mercy Center and for courage in doing the little immediate jobs of feeding the hungry and giving out literature. (Notes St. Therese's "little way.") Encourages discussion groups and round table discussions for the clarification of thought. (DDLW #331).

Sitting up in the Chicago Cisca (Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action) offices, writing my copy for the March issue of the paper. Being just one day out of the hospital I still feel rather vague and floating. Some speaking engagements brought me out from New York, engagements I was not able to keep, and the visits I intended making to Milwaukee and Detroit to our centers there must be postponed until April, God willing that I keep another speaking engagement the first part of that month. It is very hard to make plans in this uncertain life.

Thanks to John Bowers and Dr. Arthur Falls, of the Chicago Catholic Worker group, I was in good hands during my week's illness. John got me ensconced in the Little Company of Mary Hospital out in Evergreen Park where we made four new friends, Fr. Commins, Sister Dorothea, Sister Solace and Miss Gardner, my nurse; and Dr. Falls visited me daily and operated on my abscessed throat. I had a solid week when I was unable to read, speak, or think even,—only to endure what Fr. Martindale calls "that mystery (of pain) which no philosophy, yes, and no religion, has adequately explained."

New Plans

Al Reser and Ed Marciniac are opening a House of Hospitality near Hull House to feed the hungry and shelter a few of the harborless. . . . The important work of caring for children and families continues at the Taylor Street headquarters. John has charge of this work and of the Maritain group which has been meeting Monday evenings now for the past two years. Antoinette covers labor and Communist meetings with literature, and a group are selling at the Cathedral (at the invitation of Monsignor Morrison), every Sunday, and also at St. Peter's.

Pittsburgh

Passing through Pittsburgh on my way out here, I made my first visit to the House of Hospitality there, which had opened since my last call there. 901 Wylie is up a hill from the railroad station and is maintained by a staff of six, recruited from the men themselves who dropped by. Bunks are piled in one corner and statues of St. Anne, St. Anthony and St. Joseph are in the two windows which look out on a dingy, slum street. Around the corner there is an Italian Franciscan parish on Fernando Street, and the Epiphany parish is down the block on Washington Street.

Little Way

It was a grey, cold day, the morning I arrived, just in time to have coffee with the first of the line that was forming outside. A huge pot of soup made of beef stock, with plenty of vegetables and rice, was boiling on the stove; the serving took from ten until noon. The men come in and sit down to their meal and knowing that others are waiting, they are quick and do not take time for conversation. I could only sit there on the window sill, out of the way, and pray God to bless these men who were coming to our Catholic Worker centers in Milwaukee, St. Louis, Detroit, Boston and New York, for those bare essentials to keep life in them. There is always so little we can do. There is always the complaint—"but we are only feeding them!" from some members of the groups in different parts of the country. It is right never to be satisfied with the little we can do, but we must remember the "little way" of St. Therese, —we must remember the importance of giving even a drink of cold water in the name of Christ.

Cardinal Manning wrote in a letter to a friend, "The existence of hunger, nakedness, misery, death from insufficient food, even of starvation, is certain, and as yet no agency reaches it. How can any man discourage the giving of food or help?"

We must live from day to day, and continue with courage to do the little immediate jobs of feeding the hungry and giving out Catholic literature. Let us forget all this talk of the "opiate of the people." Let us give out leaflets, the **Catholic Worker**, to all those we come in contact with.

A good proportion of those being fed in Pittsburgh are Negroes, and it was good to see the colored and the white sitting down together, breaking bread together. Most of the men were purplish with the cold, and some were ghastly pale. A few were without overcoats but some were hanging on to creased trousers, even to gloves! Many were old and looked beaten by life, and I thought of our farming commune and Mr. O'Connell, seventy years old, clambering around on top of the chicken coop as he was the day I left, hearty and active and full of fight.

Every Parish

Every parish should have its Works of Mercy Center, where the poor are fed daily, without question, in the name of Jesus Christ who Himself was hungry and homeless at times on this earth.

Proceeding with faith, and with simplicity, we will be able to continue, if we do not question and recognize that it is Christ in us who is doing the work, and not we ourselves. Of course, we do not know where the money is coming from or who will support it. Let Divine Providence take care of that.

In Pittsburgh, Miss Burns and other women from the Catholic Forum contribute the food every Thursday, coming themselves to the center to do the work as an exemplification of personal responsibility.

Meat shops contribute scraps and soup bones and daily donations come in to continue the work.

In the evening before I caught my train to Chicago there was a debate between some students from Mt. Mercy and from the John Carroll University of Cleveland on compulsory arbitration. Discussion groups, round table discussions, also have a great part to play in our work, and are indeed part of a Works of Mercy program. "There can be no revolution without a theory of revolution," Lenin said, and to understand the personalist revolution we need to work for clarification of thought. Conflict of ideas, endless discussions, which seem to lead nowhere,—truly lead to development of a program and an understanding of the part each can play in the Catholic revolution in which we are taking part. We learn to take from each other what we can get in the way of cooperation, we learn the art of human contacts, we learn to "be what we want the other fellow to be," as Peter Maurin puts it.