

Fall Appeal - 1956

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reminds readers that love is an exchange of gifts and that helping the poor reveals God and leads to a better social order. Speaks of the continuing struggle to remove segregation. (DDLW #712).

Dear Fellow Workers:

In the beginnings of Christianity, when his troubled listeners asked St. John the Baptist what they were to do, he told them simply, "Let him who has two coats give to him who has none." The answer is always the same: love is an exchange of gifts. To show our love for God, we must show our love for our brother. We feel grateful to all of you who are helping us, you yourselves showing your love for your brother by sending us what you can to help keep the work going. I've been reading a very stimulating book recently, **God The Unknown** by Father Victor White, and while you are lifted to great heights of awe and worship, contemplating God the unknown, all that He is not, you are suddenly overwhelmed with thankfulness that He is Love; that, "invisible in His own nature, He becomes visible in ours; incomprehensible, He chose to be comprehended; existing before time began, He begins to exist in time"; that, in very truth, Jesus is the "image of God" and He speaks to us. And His words are, "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and the prisoner, bury the dead." Doing these things is a way of serving God, of showing our love for Him. If we do these things, all else follows. There will be peace, there will be a better social order, there will not be the misery of the needy and the groaning of the poor that one hears throughout the world. It takes naked faith to believe this, because one doesn't see results. God will bring these about.

This month I have been travelling through the South, through Memphis where Helen and Jesse Riley live down an alley in a slum with poor all around them, and where Helen has for five years run a little nursery for the colored of her neighborhood. She is married and having a baby herself now, but she will always be taking in others. There is always a Christ room in their house. I have visited the Blessed Martin de Porres Center in Greenwood, Mississippi, which is a center for the works of mercy, and there too I visited the homes of Negroes living in dire poverty, who, though they've raised and picked the cotton, have neither sheets nor towels nor the clothes they need, in the largest cotton producing state in the country.

The legal battle against segregation is won, but the community battle goes on. "It's as much as a man's life is worth to speak out," one Negro said. I saw the crater-like scar in the windshield of one man's car where he had been shot at for writing a ballad about the death of Emmet Till. I talked to a Negro priest and people, to leader and students, and they are standing firm through the poverty and persecution they endure to serve their people. The work the missions are doing is magnificent. But still fifty thousand people a year are leaving Mississippi, to come to the North, to the slums and unemployment of our cities, to swell the ranks of our breadlines.

And what shall we do? If we have two cloaks we can give to him who has none. This is easy to see. We can change our own minds and hearts and put on the mind and heart of Christ. And Oh! The task for the Negro is a bitter hard one. He must forgive. It is only Jesus Christ Himself who could ask such a thing of a people so oppressed. He is asking them to be saints. Already they are closer to Him because they are poor. "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

This is our semi-annual appeal, reminding you of the poverty, reminding you of your brother and our brother, of Christ in our brother who is with us always. Will you help us multiply our loaves and fishes?

Gratefully in Christ,

Dorothy Day.