

Day After Day - May 1943

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, May 1943, 4.

Summary: Description of their Mott Street neighborhood where in the midst of poverty there is real joy. Recalls the beauty of Holy Week services and the Catholic Worker's international network of friends and correspondents. Appeals for sheets and household items. (DDLW #389).

It has been the second warm day when it was possible to go out without a coat. Mott street is alive tonight with the noise of many children, jumping rope, screaming with the joy of life, racing and tearing through the crowds standing on the sidewalks.

There are pictures on these pages drawn by a conscientious objector—Arthur Sappe. There is a picture of a woman emptying her garbage; perhaps it is a janitor's wife, putting the cans in front of the house. Late every night Old Bill puts out our cans—three of them—and there they stand in front of our window, where there is a most beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, flanked by two geraniums. They stand there only at night, and are emptied first thing in the morning, and let us hope her eyes are closed.

That dark canyon of a street you see in one of the pictures is Mott street, viewed from Canal. There is a clothing store on the corner. Across the street there is another, and upstairs many Chinese clubs. Evenings and Sundays you hear the monotonous beat of drums and the skirling of pipes. Or is that Scotch? Anyway, the music to western ears sounds wild. On either side for a bit are many small factories in lofts. There is a big laundry, a furniture warehouse, a brass factory, a lumber yard in back of an old three-story house. There is a Chinese Communist newspaper four doors down from us, and then a row of tenements, Chinese as well as Italians living in them. On one side of our house is a barber shop; on the other side a little shoe shop, and past that a restaurant, where they sell roasted sheeps' heads, down in a basement cave of an abandoned tenement six stories high. Next to that is a famous restaurant, where shrimp and beer are sold. Gypsies come to eat in these restaurants. When we are late for dinner at night and we have friends and guests with us, we sometimes go there to buy spaghetti for thirty cents.

There is only one remaining elevated railroad in New York—the Third Avenue—and the other picture is of the Canal street station. That picture was drawn

from a little park at the approach of Manhattan bridge, where unemployed and unemployable men can sit on park benches and sun themselves, now that the weather is warmer. There are comfort stations there for men and women, and wide spaces where children can play ball. The Bridge begins there to lift its massive height up over the East Side. Flying high over block after block of tall tenements, flinging itself over a tug and barge-filled river and casting itself on the Brooklyn shore over tenements again, over still greater poverty, reaching into the depths of Brooklyn there. A long walk over that bridge! Joe and Gerry and Teresa and I made it one Sunday afternoon in summer and came on an Italian fiesta in honor of some saint or other. It was like going to another village, from Mott street. New York and Brooklyn are like that, made up of many villages.

Our readers will think the pictures are a gloomy sight of drab, dark slums; but in spite of poverty, dirt, smells and overcrowding, the sun shines, there are lots of children, there is family life, there are all those joys you find where love is. "Where peace and unity are, there God is." "The love of God hath gathered us into one"; and "it is indeed good for us to be here." If we *have* to live in the cities, let us be in the slums. If our brothers are here, let us be here with them.

Retreat

Next weekend we are going to have a retreat: two days of prayer at St. Joseph's House. The retreat will be given by Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald, and will be during Saturday and Sunday, May 15 and 16. Sometimes he will be talking to two hundred in the backyard, and sometimes to a dozen in the dining room. It's a hard job to try to reach such a shifting crowd, and we are very grateful to Fr. Fitzgerald for coming.

Holy Week

Most beautiful Holy Days at Portsmouth Priory, where Mrs. de Bethune, Ade, Teresa, Julia, Miss Chippendale of the Boston House, and Miss Delaney of Sheepfold, Conn., attended the services from Holy Thursday through Holy Saturday. We all lifted up our voices, singing the Mass on Holy Thursday. We were present at Tenebrae; we rejoiced in the kindling of the new fire on Holy Saturday. The prayers of the Psalms sang in our hearts those days. The weather was cold and clear. Out on the Priory lawn the sheep grazed, and the little lambs all but danced like the white caps on the bay.

There were some good discussions Saturday afternoon with Fr. Joseph, and I left with a book of Gerald Vann to read on the train back to New York.

Country to City

These transitions from the beauty of the fields to the city again are sometimes hard, but there is comfort in the thought that in the Catholic Worker movement our workers are from one end of the world to the other these days, reaching out, indeed, into fields, factories and workshops, into the desert of Africa, the tropical islands in the Solomons, in England, in conscientious objector camps all over the country, in hospitals caring for the sick. Indeed, this issue of the paper contains stories of two of our friends and fellow workers in jail—Harold Keane and John Power.

Bedding

As I conclude, some of our gang begin trailing off to bed, as it is nearing ten o'clock. One old fellow, whom we call Pop, is seventy years old, suffering severely with asthma, and yet is up each morning to help in the breadline, and then sits the rest of the day helping in whatever way he can in the office.

As he left just now he had a shirt and a couple of pairs of socks. A big box just came in that provided a shirt and socks for every man in the house. It was express prepaid, in a Wanamaker box, and we do not know whom to thank for it.

That is how our needs are taken care of—through the kindness of our readers. So I'm asking here if there are any old sheets, pillow cases and towels around that they could spare. We need curtains, too. Most of us are sleeping between blankets for want of sheets. We need dishes, bowls, towels—general replenishing. It's a big household we have, and they are your brothers, too, so please help.