

Fall Appeal - October 1958

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Begs for help “with this wild adventure of the works of mercy.” Protests the state’s appropriation of private property and its “ownership of the indigent.” (DDLW #745).

Feast of the Guardian Angels. 1958

Dear fellow workers in Christ,

It is strange and wonderful how God makes us live out our ideas. He takes us at our word. Do you mean what you say? Do you love Me? Then shelter the harborless, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, visit the sick, bury the dead, visit the prisoner. You are doing it to Me. We started doing this very personally when Peter Maurin our founder used to teach us and discuss these things with us. We were getting out a paper, THE CATHOLIC WORKER, which was dedicated to the personalist and communitarian approach but we lived in poverty in a store front and on the street and people came to us very directly for their immediate needs. I remember one man coming in who wanted nothing so much as to bathe his hot tired feet and he didn’t seem much amazed when one of the editors got him a tub of water. We didn’t go so far as to bathe them, tho this too, Jesus told us to do. That might have embarrassed him. They come in the same way today, for a razor, a chance to clean up, a pair of shoes, pants, shirt. And the women with their shopping bags, out of which they seem to live! (The butcher just called for our order and it’s 25 pounds of chopped meat today.) Our bills seem enormous but then counting the coffee line and the soup line and the house and the extra ladies from the Salvation Army on Rivington street, who sleep there and eat here, we estimate about 112,500 meals have been served since we sent out our March appeal. The Holy Father says never to worry about running up bills for the poor. So this appeal is to help us catch up on the bills, and catch our breath to go on with this wild adventure of the works of mercy, in which we come in conflict with City and State who have come to believe in State ownership of the indigent. And State ownership of private property too!

The only way we can show our love for God is by our love for our brothers. It is obeying the law of God to do these things. He has blessed us with friends, our readers, who have over the years sent us enough gifts to buy this house we are

living in and repair it for the use of our big family. Almost sixty thousand dollars was put into this house. And now we find we must be upholders of the right of private property and to protest that the city and the state, all over the country, are ruthlessly confiscating, dispossessing, and driving people into worse slums and more crowded conditions. Delinquency is increased by these dislocations, old people are dying of sorrow, literally. Even the dead are disturbed. One cemetery in Westchester was ruthlessly ploughed up by a bulldozer and the bones scattered. There is no reverence for home, for the family, for the bodies of the dead. And we must protest. Our property has passed into the hands of the city. We must employ lawyers to receive payment for it.

We have no money to buy another house although our lawyer advises us we can borrow from the city at six percent interest. But they do not permit us to buy because they have put us in the class of hotel or roominghouse, with transients whereas eighty percent of the house is permanent population remaining with us some years.

We have seen several houses which we could use and repair if we could get our classification changed. We are not hopeless. Everyone who comes to us has a guardian angel and so have houses, and we firmly believe that the powers of the spirit will prevail, that God is with us and who can be against us. And this is also the month of the joyful St. Francis, and of St. Therese who thought this present life so important that she promised she would spend her heaven doing good upon earth. So in their name, we beg your help, to pay our bills and keep going.

In His love,
Dorothy Day