

# An Appeal to Women

Dorothy Day

*The Catholic Worker*, November 1945, 1.

*Summary: Encourages the “personal” application of Christian principles. Gives practical approaches to this task and advocates “the little way.” (DDLW #153).*

In this issue of the CATHOLIC WORKER we are especially stressing the writing of women and are carrying articles by Irene Naughton, Ade Bethune, Julia Porcelli, Josephine Drabek and Mary Frecon. These articles have to do with our present industrial system, with work, with building, with art. They deal with the Church and with the home. They deal with work as it is in the world today, and with the works of mercy.

It seems to me that they illustrate some of the things which our Holy Father, “our dear sweet Christ on earth,” as St. Catherine of Sienna called him, has to say in his message to women which we are printing in its entirety in this issue.

This is a tremendous and historic message. It comes at the end of a terrible war, and during a time when more war threatens, and it speaks to women frankly of the situation which they must face. They have not the vocation to be nuns, and there are not enough men for them to find husbands. Their fate is to go through life single, without a mate and without a home. From the natural and the worldly point of view, their plight is a sad one.

We are reminded of the words of Isaias: “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying: we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, take away our reproach.”

The great need of the human heart is for love, and especially do women’s lives seem empty if they are deprived of their own to love. Indeed, we know that the first commandment is to love, and we show our love, as St. Teresa said, for our God by our love for our fellows. And that is why a great emphasis must be placed on the works of mercy.

There is misery of one kind or another all about us. Volunteers are needed in the hospitals to be nurses’ aides to help nurse the sick. One of our friends on Welfare Island says that there is great need over there for help. Thousands of patients in mental hospitals sit out their sad and dreary lives with no help. Visiting the prisoner is almost a forgotten work of mercy. Fr. Duffy points out in his article this month the need for more and more parish houses of hospitality.

Youth demands the heroic, Paul Claudel says, and here is a chance to give one’s self to starting and operating these centers to practice the works of mercy.

One of our readers, and a most dear friend, has been carrying on the work of sending packages to cold and hungry Europe. She realizes most keenly that the only answer to our present agony is the *personal* application of Christian principles. It is necessary to do the thing one's self. If people are hungry, how can we eat? If they are cold, how can we go clothed and sheltered? It is easy to see why the saints espoused voluntary poverty. "The coat that hangs in our closet belongs to the poor," one of the early fathers said.

Women most especially need to mortify themselves in regard to dress. If they have a few serviceable and well-made clothes, they will not be always shopping for the multitude of dresses and coats and sweaters which seem necessary to them now to keep up with the well-dressed girl in the office. Clothes should be regarded not only from the standpoint of beauty but of function.

Europe and Asia are cold and hungry. What can we do about it? We may say that there is nothing that we can do, but that is not true. We can send clothes, *personally*; food, *personally*. There is a simple way to reach individuals in Europe, and that is through the great Catholic sisterhoods who have houses all over the world. There are nuns all around us of every nationality, and if you go to them and ask for the addresses of orphanages and hospitals and convents in Italy, France, Belgium, Holland and many other countries, you can send bundles up to eleven pounds. Down here in this Italian neighborhood, the barber next door has sent seventy packages, containing food and clothing. Through his relatives here, he is helping his relatives there. They are working in *the little way*; that way for our time; that way recommended and taught and practiced by the Little Flower. (That was her great message to us today.)

We should rejoice that there is work for us today, that we can put forth our hands to strong things.

In these days of sore distress our happiness and our love will be in doing these things, and in doing these things we will find God and find happiness. As St. Augustine says:

**"It is with no doubtful knowledge, Lord, but with utter certainty that I love you. You have stricken my heart with Your word, and I have loved You. And indeed heaven and earth and all that is in them tell me wherever I look that I should love You. Not the beauty of any bodily thing, nor the order of the seasons; not the brightness of light that rejoices the eye, nor the sweet melodies of all songs, nor the sweet fragrance of flowers and ointment and spices, not manna, nor honey, not the limbs that carnal love embraces. None of these things do I love in loving my God. Yet in a sense I do love light and melody and fragrance and food and embrace when I love God—the light and the voice and the fragrance and the food, and embrace in the soul, when that shines upon my soul which no place can contain, that voice sounds which no tongue can take from me, I breathe that fragrance which no wind scatters. I eat the food which is not lessened by eating, and I lie in that embrace which satiety never comes to sunder. That is that I love, when I love my God."**