

Spring Appeal - April 1958

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Appeals for money, telling how they often pay poor peoples rent. Mentions the saints of the week and reminds us we are called to be saints—"to be a lover, ready to leave all, to give all." We progress on this path by beginning over again each day. (DDLW #738).

St. Joseph's House
The Catholic Worker
223 Chrystie Street
New York 2, N.Y.

Dear Fellow Workers in Christ:

May Day is our twenty-fifth anniversary and once again we must report that we are dispossessed because a subway is going under our house which renders it unsafe. This is only our fourth home in twenty-five years so we have been blessed with comparative stability. As usual I sit in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament to write this appeal. I do not think I would dare write otherwise to ask for money, which is, as Leon Bloy says, the blood of the poor, since there are so many who help us out of their meager earnings, in spite of the cost of living going up and unemployment rising. Yesterday, Kieran, who has charge of the money, told me how he was called upon Saturday night to pay the week's rent for two Puerto Rican families who would otherwise be dispossessed before they could get city relief. A room for a family in a slum tenement rents for fourteen dollars a week, a fearful exploitation. Last week Felicia finally got word she could get rooms in a "project" but she needed a deposit. We give half fearfully, wondering how we will get our bills paid, and yet yesterday a doctor came in and gave us fifty dollars! It is as though the dear God took a modern Habbakuk by the hair of his head and transported him from his field of labor into our lion's den of need, to bring the means to eat, to live. Blessed be God!

It is the feast of St. Patrick today and in the new Maryknoll missal he is listed as a "pigherd" when he first lived in Ireland We've had quite a few pigherds in our midst, men who have worked cleaning out the pens of the swine over in Secaucus, New Jersey. One man working there came to us to die and was laid out in our chapel at Maryfarm, Easton, while we recited the psalms of the office of the dead for him. St. Patrick, the pigherd, the saint and the scholar;

St. Joseph, the carpenter and the saint; St. Benedict (“work and pray”) and St. Isadore, the farm laborer, member of the world proletariat—their feasts are all this week. They were followers of Christ and the Church raises them to the rank of canonised saint for our imitation.

We are called to be saints, St. Paul said, and Peter Maurin called on us to make that kind of society where it was easier for men to be saints. Nothing less will work. Nothing less is powerful enough to combat war and the all-encroaching state.

To be a saint is to be a lover, ready to leave all, to give all. Dostoievsky said that love in practice was a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams, but if “we see only Jesus” in all who come to us; the lame, the halt and the blind, who come to help and to ask for help, then it is easier.

Father Faber says we are progressing if we begin over again each day in these resolutions.

Will you begin again, though you have helped us many times before, and help us again to keep going even in this new crisis? The city is trying to eliminate slums, which is good. But they create worse slums by the overcrowding of the dispossessed. While there are slums we will be living in them, and we must expect these uprootings periodically. But our confidence is in our Lord and in St. Joseph, His foster father, and also in you, our friends, new and old. You can be assured that what you give will come back to you a hundred-fold, in this world too, and in ways you need it the most.

With loving gratitude,
in Christ, our brother,

DOROTHY DAY