

And There Remained Only the Very Poor

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Summary: "Those of you who read this, those of you who have helped us before, help us." A thousand poor people come for food each day—" . . .they are Christ appearing to you." In spite of their dire straits, war and preparation for war, she calls for rejoicing in nature and for what they have and God sends. (DDLW #364).

Those were the words contained in a news account of the evacuation of Paris. But it applies to New York in summer. The poor cannot get away. There is always a residue of the destitute which remains in the city like mud in a drained pond. You see them in the parks, you see them lying on the sidewalk in broad daylight along the Bowery, that street of forgotten men. You see them drifting about the city, from one end to the other. One gets to know some of them. There is Mary, for instance, a little middle-aged woman who comes in every morning at seven for coffee. She speaks very little English and it is hard to know what nationality she is. Her hair is cropped short and she wears a wool cap even in summer. Her cotton dress is clean. There are flat slippers on her feet. She always carries bundles. If she sees me in Church (she is liable to be any place) she taps me on the shoulder and demands a nickel. I have run across her down in City Hall park, down on lower Broadway, up in the Twenties.

There is John who has been coming to us for a year. He goes to Mass every morning. He was thrown out of one church by an over-zealous sexton because he used to sleep through four Masses every morning in the back of the church after a night on the streets. Finally at another church he met a woman who gives him a quarter every day for his bed on the Bowery. They come to us in droves. Eight hundred every morning on the coffee line. One hundred and twenty-five for lunch, again for supper. It is an informal crowd at noon. They start gathering in the yard, men who have passed the word along to other transients, homeless ones, that perhaps there is food to be had. Many days the soup runs short and then there is only coffee and cake. There is cake, thanks to Macy's, who give us their left-overs every morning.

So there are a thousand to be fed every day. There are seventy men, women and children as all-year-round members of the CW group in New York. There are the visitors and God bless them, they leave a dollar here and a dollar there to keep things going. One student from Denver left a quarter on the table last night after having a cup of coffee with us.

Many days go by with no money coming in at all. Right now our telephone is shut off but the man in the candy store next door calls us to his phone for messages.

Gas and Electric Next

Today we expect the gas and electricity to go. What to do? We can borrow a few oil stoves and continue to cook and feed those who come. Vegetables are contributed, soup bones, fish. But we must buy the coffee, sugar and milk and bread. As long as we are trusted, the bills continue to mount. Even the printer is letting us go to press with \$995 owing this summer.

And there is the children's camp on Staten Island, donated by a friend. It holds eight children, forty can be cared for during the summer, and they can spend their days on the beach and they can sleep to the rustle of wind in the maples around the camp. The most beautiful sound in the world is the sound of little waves on a hot beach. And the sweetest smell is sweet clover on a hot, still July day. And the sweetest sight is Viola, aged four, who lives on Grand street, six flights, walk-up, one of eight children, who is playing in the sand and waves on the beach these days. Or perhaps it is Rosemary and Barbara, Italian and Negro, with their arms around each other's necks as they pose for a picture on the shore. One friend (the one who gives us the use of the house on Mott street) helps us with the children.

There is poverty and hunger and war in the world. And we prepare for more war. There is desperate suffering with no prospect of relief. But we would be contributing to the misery and desperation of the world if we failed to rejoice in the sun, the moon and the stars, in the rivers which surround this island on which we live, on the cool breezes of the bay, on what food we have and in the benefactors God sends.

They Remember Winter's Cold

The heat wave which is a misery to some is to us a joy. We remember the bitter cold of the winter and those who have to sleep under the stars nestle into the warmth of the hot pavements.

Our greatest misery is our poverty which gnaws at our vitals, which is an agony to the families in our midst. And the only thing we can do about it is to appeal to you, our readers, begging your help. And how many of our readers are away or who have extra responsibilities in summer! Those of you who read this, those of you who have helped us before, please help us. We are stewards, and we probably manage very badly in trying to take care of all those who come, the desperate, the dispossessed. Like Peter, they say, "To whom else shall we go?" and they are our brothers in Christ. They are more than that, they are Christ appearing to you.

So please help us to keep going. Help these suffering members of the sorrowing Body of Christ.