

Day After Day - March 1939

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, March 1939, 1, 4.

Summary: Describes a mission being preached in a nearby Church. Feels love for the poor ones in attendance seeing them as brothers of Christ. Explains why she prays for those who have committed suicide. Makes an appeal for funds. (DDLW #341).

We rejoice to announce the opening of four new houses this month, in Akron, Cleveland, Toledo and Hamilton, Ontario. We want many more, little ones. They should all be small in order that there may be a semblance of family life. Our model after all is the holy Family at Nazareth.

Mission

They are having a mission at Transfiguration on Mott Street. It began last week, a Jesuit Fr. McGrath conducting it. He is very good, preaching in popular fashion yet dealing with profound truths. One night it was the desire we all have for life, knowledge and love. Another night, mortal sin. And so on.

The men from the Bowery were there on one side of the church. They cling close to the statues of the saints. They were ragged, dirty, jobless, most of them, — longshore workers, teamsters, gaudy dancers, sand hogs, restaurant workers, men who had led hard lives. There were Irish, Italian, Poles, Hungarians, Slavs. There were young and old, men and women, single and married.

Last night I sat next to some of the Bowery men, living on relief in lodging houses or sleeping in doorways. They were as poor, as destitute, as down and out as a man can get. How close they are to our Lord!

Christ was a man so much like other men that it took the kiss of a Judas to single Him out, Mauriac wrote.

He was like that man in the pew beside me. He was as like him as his brother. He was His brother. And I felt Christ in that man beside me and loved him.

Every morning I break my fast with the men on the breadline. Some of them speak to me, many do not. But they know me and I know them. And there is a sense of comradeship there. We “know each other in the breaking of bread.” It is good to see some of the men making the mission.

Preaching the Word

St. Teresa said she so loved to hear the word of God preached that she could listen with enjoyment to the poorest preacher. I know what she meant. Just as long as it is the word of God, and not politics, finances and labor discussions from the altar. On the first Sunday in Lent our Italian priest spoke to us on “too much eatings, too much drinkings,” and how we should make our souls strong. He was very simple and very good.

And this mission priest is good and the congregation love him. When he gives them his blessing at the close of every evening, and says good-night, they all answer from the pews, “good-night.”

I have a very bad habit of conversing with the preacher in my mind as I listen to him and sometimes contradicting him. Tonight for instance, he told a story of sudden death to a person in mortal sin, and the hopelessness of the loved one left behind. And I remembered suddenly a young boy I knew who had committed suicide. I had asked a priest afterward as to praying for a suicide, and he said, “There is no time with God, and perhaps He foresees the prayers you will say and so gave him time to turn to Him at that last moment with love and longing and repentance.”

That has comforted me much in thinking of old friends and associates in the radical movement who have died, who have been put to death, who have committed suicide. It makes me pray daily for Sacco and Vanzetti, for Alexander Berkman, for others who died as far as we know, estranged from God.

I thought that night as I listened, “The mothers in this congregation know that hope in the mercy of God. Some of them perhaps have sons who have met sudden violent death. There have been two murders that we know of on this street in the past year. And there was that longshoreman who was crushed to death last month by a ton of falling iron. There was our old janitor who died of gas poisoning last week. Their mothers and their loved ones know that God will hear their prayers. He knows we must bear one another’s burdens. This strong hope, this boundless faith no loving God can withstand.”

Appeal

Last month we had a large appeal, three columns of it on the front page and running over into the back. We still owe \$1200 on the printing bill and a thousand more in bread and grocery bills for the Work of Mercy. The printer is being of great faith in letting us go on with this March issue. We have shortened the bread line so that it stops at eight instead of at nine, running now for only two and a half hours in the morning. We have cut down the number of diners in the house so that forty are sitting down to table instead of seventy. But still our bills are there and we are hard put to keep up the work. So this is a “still small voice” of an appeal. Just a little whisper, a prayer, at the end of the column,

that St. Joseph will remind you of us here at Mott Street. Our rosary novena to the Blessed mother that Teresa and I have been saying has resulted in many new workers not only in our own but in the four new groups. She had to leave the finances to St. Joseph, so we too must “go to Joseph.”

I suddenly remembered too, that I myself was holding out in regard to money. I was saving my royalty check from the book, “From Union Square to Rome,” for the mortgage on the farm which is not due for several months. So I too was being of little faith. We are recklessly handing it over to our debtors so now we are completely in St. Joseph’s hands. There is nothing in the bank but we are not worrying. He has never failed us yet, so he won’t now.