

Day After Day - Thoughts On Breadlines And On The War

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Summary: Recommends daily Mass and Communion as a necessary means of bringing relief to those suffering in war and on the breadlines. Announces the formation of a "Non-Participation League"—refusing to buy from or support unjust companies as a training in voluntary poverty and non-violent resistance. (DDLW #361).

The alarm goes off at six thirty. If you turn the radio on at once you get five minutes of devastating news of the mass slaughter in Flanders, the attempts of the troops to get over to England. The retreat of Napoleon's army from Moscow is the only thing comparable to it in human misery. For a long time there was a careful avoidance of mention of the blood and anguish of war. One would think war went on mechanically with little loss in human lives. A mechanized war. But the mechanization of war, like the mechanization of agriculture in this country, means mass misery and death.

If a Catholic, one's first thought at that hour of the morning is Mass. The one immediate step to be taken towards peace. Daily Mass and Communion are so necessary now that it is though we were neglecting to save our brothers, reach them a helping hand in their agony, when we omit going. Perhaps you are a member of the Union of Prayer for Peace, whose secretary in the United States is Father Edward Hughes, O.P., 1421 West Warren Ave, Detroit. Praying in unison with others, corporate prayer, ascending before the throne of God, is one great means we have in our power to bring relief.

Breadlines

This last month of heavy rains means untold misery to our men on the breadlines, and all those who are sleeping on as though on the battlefields of our present industrial system. They are wrecks of men, many of them, gaunt and suffering. And there is so little we can do to share their suffering, their destitution, no matter how we may burrow down into the slums. We have the security which comes with communal living. We have companionship, we have a roof over our heads and meals, of stark simplicity but regular. We have got to look for sacrifices we can make, we have to examine our consciences for self-indulgences each day, we have got to feel more and more the absolute necessity for daily Mass and Communion offered up for our brothers in agony.

And we must keep our own hearts in peace, a hard thing to do. But Pope Pius XII warns against that “sense of hopelessness which agitates the souls of men.” We can quote with the Psalmist, “In peace was our bitterness most bitter.” We can say, with St. Paul, describing our Lord, “Against hope he believed in hope.”

Non-Participation League

There is another call to action we wish to make this month. On my way back from the west coast I talked with many of our groups about the formation of a Non-Participation League which each House of Hospitality can start with as many of its members as possible.

There are various reasons for the formation of this league. It is a training towards voluntary poverty, denying oneself in order to help others. It is a refusal to contribute to the unjust social order by participating in injustice, racial and economic. It is a training towards non-violent resistance in the event of war. It is enabling many thousands to join together to do something about such problems as those of the migratory workers in far off California.

Months of thought and prayer have gone into this decision to start this league. It is being written about in the Day After Day Column, because we wish to present it informally, not in a special story. We want to launch it with simplicity, with child-like faith. We know that it will be hard to put into effect, and that it will be hard to be consistent in our policy. Often it has been remarked that if we were perfectly consistent in refusing to buy goods made under unjust conditions, we would go hungry and naked and homeless. But we can in some way, to some extent, make our protest felt.

Our refusal to buy National Biscuit Company products during their strike in New York some years ago, led to thousands of students in the city announcing their decision also to their local groceries and delicatessens, a move which galvanized the employers into protest. When we took a stand against the Borden Milk company on another occasion, they felt it worth while to pay for space to advertise against us. These last two instances indicate the importance which the manufacturers and industrialists place on such a move.

For instance, to protest against the conditions of the migratory workers in California, we can refuse to use Sun Maid raisins, or buy Del Monte products. We can continue our boycott of Standard Oil for their unjust labor practices.

Fools for Christ

One of the members of one of our groups remarked that we would be laughed at for our pains. It is then another occasion when we will be fools for Christ's sake. It will not be an occasion of laughter however to industrialists as it has not in the past. This month we will start sending out leaflets to each of the groups with the request that they mimeograph at least one thousand and distribute them, in schools, colleges, in front of their parish churches. With thirty-two houses, this will mean at least thirty thousand leaflets which will be issued each month. Perhaps we might start practicing our non-participation with Sear Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. The former we mentioned last month as having prohibited their workers

from joining a union of their own choosing by signing them up with Beck's union in Seattle. We see by their catalogues that both sell contraceptives. This was called to our attention by a priest a few months ago.

This is a movement in which all Catholics can join. Perhaps in some instances they will not agree with us in the stand we take in regard to unions. In a paper with so large a circulation as ours, it is not to be thought that all our readers agree with all points of view expressed in the paper. But they can most certainly agree in a great deal of the work of the Non-Participation League. This is a movement in which readers of all faiths can participate.

If you wish to send in your name to us for future material, write to Stanley Vishnewsky, Secretary, Non-Participation League, 115 Mott St., New York.

Home Again

It is good to be home again. I arrived in time for the Golden Jubilee of my godmother, Sister Aloysia, who is a Sister of Charity stationed at St. Joseph's by the Sea, Huguenot, Staten Island. On the day we went to her Solemn High Mass, we spent the afternoon at Princes Bay where we are going to put up a little camp of our usual children who have been coming to us every summer. Three of the men of the Catholic Union of Unemployed are getting busy at it with the Master builder, Haig Hergeman giving directions.

Meetings

Our meetings are over now for the year, but I was home in time for the last one, at which Jacques Maritain spoke on a European Federation. It was before the horror of the withdrawal from Belgium began, but nevertheless, it was a sorrowful evening, with French, English, Belgian, three German refugees, and Italian priest besides our usual American audience.