

Day After Day - May 1935

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, May 1935, 3, 7.

Summary: Describes house cleaning in preparation for Easter. Catholic workers promulgated Catholic social principles in leaflets and speaking in Union Square at a Communist rally. Notes the work of priests with men on the bowery. (DDLW #288).

Today everyone is busy making the house clean for Easter. Larry Doyle and Walter Livermore have just finished washing all the windows on the first two floors and it is a bright sunshiny day for such work. Walter works nights in a brewery, but such is his energy that he gives his mornings to the Catholic Worker and picketing, distributing literature, doing up and delivering bundles, exhorting Newman clubs—nothing is too much for him. Window washing wasn't enough this morning, so he went on to mop up the office floor.

Teresa is home from school for her Easter vacation and she found her manual toil in bedmaking, one of the arts she has learned in school. You take off and fold up all the covers before you go to mass; turn up the mattress and hang up the clothes. Then on your return you begin from the bottom and make the bed completely—a big job for a very little girl. She can beat up omelets too (she's especially enthusiastic if they are jam omelets), but she's better at eating them.

The girls in the House of Hospitality will clean the rest of the house tomorrow—you never need to ask them to do anything. They take matters into their own hands and look around for work to do.

Just to add to the spirit of preparation for festivity, a friend brought in a huge spray of shad bush in blossom and it flaunts itself in front of a wall decoration made in carpet by one of our staff—a beautiful design of the Blessed Virgin and Child.

News of the month in the way of Catholic Worker street activities. A Communist demonstration being held in front of Home Relief headquarters in an Italian neighborhood, we got out a leaflet addressed to police. Home Relief workers and unemployed alike, bearing quotations from the early fathers and the Popes as to the distribution of created goods, and joining the unemployed in their appeal for more adequate food and clothing.

“The distribution of created goods must be brought into conformity with the demands of the common good and social justice,” the Holy Father has written, “for every sincere observer is

conscious that the vast differences between the few who hold excessive wealth and the many who live in destitution constitute a grave evil in modern society.”

St. Gregory said that “when we distribute to the poor what they need, we are not giving what belongs to us, we merely pay back their own. We are paying a debt of justice, rather than fulfilling a work of mercy.”

With these reminders we are sure that social workers and home relief officials will be more conscious of the attitude of meekness and love they should maintain in dealing with the poor who come to them.

And who knows but that this reminder reaching the poor and rebellious who gather at these demonstrations may not bring them closer to the Church who ever has the needs of her poor at heart.

One Saturday afternoon, during the latter part of last month, Dorothy Weston made her first appearance on a soap box in Union Square. It was not really a soap box but a step ladder surmounted by an American flag, and from this pitch Communists, the National Student Federation, also Communists, A. F. of L., Office Workers’ Union and various others were represented.

On account of the Catholic Worker participation in the Ohrbach strike we had been invited to speak at the demonstration being held and after consulting a priest on the advisability of appearing on a platform with Communists, we were advised to go ahead.

Accompanied by a group of Catholic Workers, Dorothy Weston took the stand and gave a brief and forceful talk on the principles of social justice as upheld by the popes and the bishops in their statement on the present crisis.

In spite of traffic noises which included a few fire engines, Dr. Weston was able to make herself heard and was listened to with interest.

Realizing the necessity of bringing Christian social teachings to the man in the street, we wish to call attention to the story, SPEAKERS WANTED, in this issue of the paper.

The Catholic Worker is penetrating farther and farther in the wildernesses of the world.

Last month a visitor came to us from the missions of Africa where he had been living in a mud hut with a tin roof for the last four years. This Irish missionary priest has been laboring among 50,000 natives of Nigeria where the temperature is 120 in the shade.

He asks us to send him the paper when he goes back to his labors next fall.

Last month we visited the Holy Name Mission on the Bowery where 1,200 men are cared for by Father Rafter and Father O’Connor.

“There are 15,000 men on the Bowery,” Father Rafter said. “We’ve been working with them for the last 22 years. We saved for a long time, trying to get a building fund together, but the depression has exhausted that long since and the building has to be deferred.”

Evidently Father Rafter believes and follows out the teaching of Bossuet that the Church’s first concern are the immediate needs of the poor.

“We have five masses on Sunday morning,” he said, “and they are all packed. These men would not go elsewhere. They are at home here with us.”

And we thought to ourselves as we went through the shabby old building, what a gigantic task these priests of God have always with them, and with what cheer they undertake it each day, using what means they have at hand to work with.

Anyone who says that city agencies are taking care of all the poor and that he cannot find any work to do ought to go see Father Rafter and see what cooperation he can give him in the way of gathering clothes for the poor, for instance.

One of our Catholic Workers found something that he could do in playing the organ at evening services three nights a week. He is an invalid himself, but he’s given his time and his strength willingly and with joy.