

Dorothy Day Writes From Jail

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Serving a month-long sentence for protesting civil defense drills her letters describe conditions in jail. Says there protest was a refusal to participate in psychological warfare and a way of showing responsibility for the common good. (DDLW #725).

Monday Night.

Charles McCormack,
223 Chrystie Street,
New York City 2,

No envelopes and so I must address you thus formally. It was so good to get your letter and to see Fr. McCoy and Fr. McCaffrey the same day. The young F.O.R. girl who was arrested with her husband the same day at Times Square got 30 days too. She came today, sentenced by a different judge. She is only 22. I put you and Della on my visiting list but only one visit every 2 weeks. Telephone Della and tell her I'm fine – the time passes quickly. Fritz is at Martha's Vineyard for the month. Go ahead with the paper. That short 2 page poem of Deane's beginning "Welcome" can go in. Anne Marie has a copy. Also put a box in that I will write C. Oddivak's obituary for September. No one else knew her so well. We have Mary Boyd's poem anyway. We have plenty of copy for the paper and you and Bob can manage perfectly. Roland is a good help. There is a good library here so we need nothing. I am put in the laundry, ironing; Deane cleans part of the roof recreation rooms and Judith the main floor, a lively spot with much coming and going which she likes. She cried all last night but is better tonight. Deane is a bit gloomy but our healths are good. Two in a cell but there are 4 of us so we are together but in different corridors. Meals much like the C.W., hard boiled eggs today, meatballs yesterday. Stewed figs, raisins, prunes, apricots. Tell Larry and Roy the sandwiches were delicious. We ate them at 155th St. jail. It was wonderful to see Anne Marie there. How did she get up - find out we were there? A faithful friend. Lights go out at 9 p.m. We get out of our cells at 6:30. Good showers night and morning. Work from 8-11 and 1-3. Recreation on the roof so we get fresh air. Not much inside. I'll have prison pallor when I come out. Hope you can read all this. Give my love to Veronica and all the other women and yourself and all the men. I pray for you all daily. Got to Mass Sunday, of course. Twenty-five there. I wrote Tamar. Allotted space and time are up. Love in Christ,

Dorothy
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No limit to incoming mail

Dear Charlie,

I had written you before but the letter was returned to me. Only 2 a week are allowed and I wrote Tamar twice. Do call and see if she got the letters. Now it seems we can only write to those we list as we come in and I listed you and my sister, because I did not want Tamar to be coming all the way to town and waiting around and this her last month. So many rules. But the time is flying – we have passed the halfway mark. Ammon needed the rest after his strenuous trip. I hope Kerran is not sick. He was the day he went in – had a sore throat. All are well here – Judith is on “diet” and gets an egg and orange and milk for breakfast, etc. She is vegetarian. Yesterday I had another x-ray and cardiograph. They sure take good care of you. I was told not to eat starch! Neither Judith nor Joan have heard from their husbands. But the warden came to see us yesterday and he said he will see what he can do. He seems a very fine person – a Hungarian and a Catholic so he feels the Russian situation keenly. He cannot of course understand our position but showed us the utmost patience and courtesy.

It is very hard to make it clear that we do not want to harass people who are only doing their duty and that although we break one law in order to make our point clear about our refusal to cooperate with psychological warfare, we bend over backward to show our respect for the desire for the common good which most laws are for. Certainly our very works of mercy are to show our sense of responsibility for our brothers and our desire to do our share and more than our share in a realm where the State is not supposed to function except in cases of crisis. Certainly Holy Mother City tries to do right by everyone here, – our physical exams, abundant food, clean cells and linen. Tonight even we are having a show, put on by the girls – song and dance, for which they have been practicing some time. Thank God the heat is past. We can sleep again. It must have been hard for all of you there, you in your tiny airless room, sunny, noisy. I’m glad Veronica could be in my room. She works so hard in that clothes room. Give Roy and Larry and all in the kitchen my special love, and Mike and John Pohl and Smoky and Frank, Hatty and Molly and Milly and Mary and Margaret and Anabelle, and Norbert, Tony, etc., etc., No room on the page for more. Thank Roland and Ed and Bob and my love to each.

In Christ–Dorothy