

Fall Appeal - October 1964

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Focuses on the joy of their work—"It is a joyful experience, to serve the poor, and to be poor ourselves." Quotes St. Vincent de Paul on serving the poor and how it contributes to a growth in faith. (DDLW #819).

Beloved, Joy be with you always!

"Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God," wrote Leon Bloy. And we have had our share of joy in these last months. The expansion of our work with the new Farm in Tivoli and temporary relief from the pressing burden of debts which followed the sale of our Peter Maurin Farm have given us a sense of exhilaration, of re-birth and great hope for the future. We did not mail out our semi-annual appeal last spring because we were not in pressing need. But now, as we face the winter, our joy is still with us, and we live more closely with "Lady Poverty," as St. Francis called her. Our bank account is low and the normal state of affairs at the Catholic Worker again prevails: living from one day to the next, trusting in God's Providence evidenced so long for us by the love and almsgiving of our readers and friends.

Our family has grown. We now have about forty residents at the Farm and about sixty people at Chrystie Street, and the daily soup line grows longer, now that winter is coming. Rents for the Center and for the ten apartments on Kenmare and Spring Streets cost us over one thousand dollars a month, altogether. We are laying in a supply of winter overcoats to be distributed as soon as the weather turns. And by the time you read this message, we shall literally depend upon your charity for our day to day existence. "Love is an exchange of gifts," St. Ignatius said, and we certainly feel a sense of love and gratitude to you when you answer our appeals. St. Teresa said she was so grateful a person that she could be bought with a sardine. All small gifts add up and we surely need them.

To help the poor! This is a great and fearful work. It is through the poor that we achieve our salvation; Jesus Christ Himself has said it in His picture of the Last Judgment. It is through the poor that we can exercise faith and learn to love Him. It is a great relief to read the lives of such saints as St. Vincent de Paul when doing this kind of work. An article some years ago said that he had contact with refugees, convicts, thieves, assassins and bandits, as well as with professional beggars, swindlers, prostitutes. "He saw quite clearly, and sometimes said, that many of these poor people were filthy, physically repulsive and suffering from loathsome diseases, that sometimes they were dishonest, drunken, hypocritical and ungrateful; but to use his own phrase, that is only one side of the medal. Turn it, and with the eyes of faith you see that each is stamped with the image of God and is a brother of Jesus Christ." . . .

“The poor are your masters, he said, and thank God you are allowed to serve them.” We too see in ourselves our measure of sin and decay of mind and body, but the more we can look at the good side of the coin, the better off we are ourselves, finding Christ. Our faith will grow through such an exercise of love.

It is a joyful experience, to serve the poor, and to be poor ourselves. As our family sits down at the second floor of St. Joseph’s House here on Chrystie Street, folding, labeling and mailing the paper, or as they scrape vegetables on the first floor for our evening meal, each is giving something, sharing with his fellows, no matter how humble his gift. There is therapy in work, and joy in sharing, a sense of belonging for those who are the outcasts of our society. There is also the gay exuberance of our young volunteers, students taking time off from their studies to work with us, to learn the problems of poverty and the social order. At the close of our day, when we gather to sing Compline, the night prayer of the Church, we are reminded each evening to remember our benefactors, and so we do, begging God’s joy for all of you.

With love and gratitude,

Dorothy Day