

We are a listening church

Being inspired by Christ as we hear the Bible speak in its historical context

Our focus this week

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) dropped out of college to write for pacifist newspapers. In 1917 she was arrested at the White House, protesting that women could not vote. Seeking a more practical way to serve, she trained as a nurse. Having had an abortion, when she was pregnant again she insisted on having the child, though the father was uninterested in marrying her. Day had been raised without any connection to a church. Now she joined the Catholic Church and had her daughter baptized.

Shortly afterwards, she met Peter Maurin, a man dedicated to a Franciscan way of poverty, and they founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. It first involved a newspaper, which quickly grew from an initial printing of 3,000 copies to a circulation of over 100,000. Subscriptions to the Catholic Worker newspaper rapidly declined again when it refused to give up its pacifist perspective as the United States was supplying weapons to militants in the Spanish Civil War during the late 1930s.

Dorothy Day then focused on creating "Houses of Hospitality". These were a model of Christian community in which people practicing voluntary poverty, and people who would otherwise be homeless, would live together in community. As Day put it, the goal was "living together in city and country with the poor and the wounded in spirit." In the deepest part of the Great Depression all the way through the end of her life in 1980, Dorothy Day was inspired by Christ to love and serve with all people—especially those without a home or a community to speak of.

Quotes for the week

We let Dorothy Day speak in her own words, in the following quotes:

- "For those who are sitting on park benches in the warm spring sunlight. For those who are huddling in shelters trying to escape the rain. For those who are walking the streets in the all but futile search for work. For those who think that there is no hope for the future, no recognition of their plight—this little paper is addressed...to let [you] know that there are people of God who are working not only for your spiritual but for your material welfare."
(The Catholic Worker, Issue #1)
- "It is when we love the most intensely and most humanly that we can recognize how tepid our love is for others. The keenness and intensity of love brings with it suffering...but joy too, because it is a foretaste of heaven."

- "The editors who live in Catholic Worker houses receive no salaries, but room, board, and clothing...many have been in prison for participating in demonstrations, for their conscientious objection to war...The number of houses of hospitality vary in size and character...according to the young people who run them. In general, every house has a resemblance to a large and disorderly but loving family."
- "When you love people, you see all the good in them, all the Christ in them. We should see Christ in others, *and nothing else*, and love them. There can never be enough of it. And this is not easy. Everyone will try to kill that love in you, even your nearest and dearest. 'Don't you know this, that, and the other thing about this person? You must stop loving, modify your loving, show your disapproval. You cannot possibly love...' And the only Christian answer is *love*, to the very end, to the laying down of your life."
- "Poverty means nonparticipation. It means 'regional living'. This means fasting from tea, coffee, cocoa, grapefruit, pineapple, etc., from things not grown in the region in which one lives. One day last winter we bought broccoli which had the label on it of a corporation in Arizona or Texas, where we had seen men, women, and children working at two o'clock in the morning with miners' lamps on their foreheads, in order to avoid the terrible heat of the day, which often reached 125 degrees. These were homeless migrants...we ought not to eat food produced under such conditions."
(from On Pilgrimage, 1972)
- "The most significant thing about the Catholic Worker is poverty, some say. The most significant thing is community, others way. We are not alone anymore. But the final word is love. At times it has been a harsh and dreadful thing, and our very faith in love has been tried through fire. We cannot love God unless we love each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. We have all know the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love, and that love comes with community."

Question for reflection

What connections do you see between the scriptures this week and Dorothy Day's work to build communities in which Christians could live alongside the poor and wounded in spirit from all walks of life?

Scriptures

For the week of February 28, 2010



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First reading: Isaiah 56: 1-2, 6-8

From: The Message

God's Message: "Guard my common good:
Do what's right and do it in the right way,
For salvation is just around the corner,
my setting-things-right is about to go into action.
How blessed are you who enter into these things,
you men and women who embrace them,
Who keep Sabbath and don't defile it,
who watch your step and don't do anything evil!
Make sure no outsider who now follows God
ever has occasion to say, 'God put me in second-class.
I don't really belong.'

"And as for the outsiders who now follow me,
working for me, loving my name,
and wanting to be my servants—
All who keep Sabbath and don't defile it,
holding fast to my covenant—
I'll bring them to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
They'll be welcome to worship the same as the 'insiders,'
to bring burnt offerings and sacrifices to my altar.
Oh yes, my house of worship
will be known as a house of prayer for all people."
The Decree of the Master, God himself,
who gathers in the exiles of Israel:
"I will gather others also,
gather them in with those already gathered."

Gospel: Luke 5:29-32

From: The Message

Levi gave a large dinner at his home for Jesus. Everybody was there, tax men and other disreputable characters as guests at the dinner. The Pharisees and their religion scholars came to his disciples greatly offended. "What is he doing eating and drinking with crooks and 'sinners'?"

Jesus heard about it and spoke up, "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders—an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out."