

Dorothy Day: Driven by Love
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This summer, we've been working our way through people who consciously and courageously put their faith into action. Today's person is Dorothy Day. When lifting up these amazing people, what we don't want to do is simply come away discouraged, unable to live up to their standards; more depleted because they seem so grand; more indifferent because they lived as 'saints'. It is good to discover that while Dorothy Day lived faithfully she was quite ordinary in many ways, and we can be inspired to live more like her every day.

Dorothy Day was born in 1897 in New York City, but grew up in California and Chicago. She was raised Protestant but didn't really attend church until she was 10, when she began attending an Episcopal Church every Sunday and got baptized and confirmed. At age 16, she won a scholarship to attend University of Illinois to study journalism. While writing pieces for a local paper, she observed the disparity between the lives of rich and poor people. She began to reject organized religion because she perceived that it did nothing to alleviate the plight of desperate people. In her autobiography she wrote, "There was a great question in my mind. Why was so much done in remedying social evils instead of avoiding them in the first place? . . . Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves but to do away with slavery?" (Long Loneliness, p. 45). I actually very much agree with her on this point... giving food to the homeless is a wonderful thing, but we also need to work on preventing homelessness in the first place—it's the difference between charity and justice.

At age 18, Dorothy left school and moved to New York and took her first job as a journalist with a socialist newspaper. Her reporter colleagues were socialists, communists, and labor organizers. She reported on protests against the high cost of living, strikes, unemployment, and the many forms of human misery. The disparity between the classes and a critique of the present system formed the common thread in her reports. She even participated in a protest at the White House for women's suffrage, and was arrested and put in jail. While in jail, Dorothy joined a hunger

strike which succeeded. She says her time in jail moved her from observation to participation, from being a passionate idealist to action. Her identification with the masses became real.

After a few years, she responded to her spiritual longing by connecting with the Catholic faith. While personally meaningful to her, she realized there were not many who tied together her convictions about an unjust social order and the life of faith. Most of the political activists she knew were atheists, while practically all Catholics she knew seemed to think very little about social injustice and what they should do about it. While writing an article about a hunger march in Washington, D.C. to combat unemployment, establish pensions, and provide relief for mothers and children, Dorothy was disheartened that religious leadership was not involved and felt called to do something about that.

Soon after, she met Peter Maurin, a French immigrant in New York. He also felt called to change the social order. Peter was determined to popularize the social doctrines of the Catholic church. When Peter met Dorothy, he introduced her to a whole new set of ideas and a historical vision of the Catholic church. They both believed that all people share a common humanity: each of us becomes who we are meant to be by assuming personal responsibility for our brothers and sisters in need. Specifically, Peter's vision was to start roundtable discussions about social issues, houses of hospitality, and farming communities. He wanted to popularize this vision by publishing a newspaper, which Dorothy readily agreed to do. On May 1, 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression, The Catholic Worker newspaper made its debut with twenty-five hundred copies sold for one penny each.

The Catholic Worker succeeded immediately, and circulation jumped to 100,000 by the end of the first year. Soon volunteers arrived to help with the work. Donations of food, clothing, and money came in to support them. A community grew quickly to feed the homeless and unemployed people who streamed to them, and the first house of hospitality opened. These houses had 3 different aims- to be a group of people living in community and worship; to be a center that provided assistance to the poor; and to be public voices which protested unjust social policies and situations. And if you remember my sermon on Shane Claiborne, this is exactly what he modeled the Simple Way after. Shane was extremely influenced by Dorothy Day.

With this, the Catholic Worker Movement had begun. Dorothy wrote about the conditions of poor people, especially about the conditions of workers and the labor movement. She sought to share Catholic social teaching in such a way that it would inspire volunteers, clergy, even bishops. Within a few years thirty-three Catholic Worker houses and farms dotted the country. Some of the farms thrived and became rural havens for poor families, places of convalescence for the ill, and getaways for slum children. Although publishing the newspaper, offering hospitality at the houses, and assisting people through the works of mercy composed the chief work of the communities, Catholic Workers also joined street protests and labor pickets, helped with the housing and feeding of strikers, and called for boycotts of stores where low wages or poor working conditions existed.

The Catholic Worker Movement eventually met resistance due to Dorothy's opposition to war. She was one of the few Catholic voices opposing World War II, as she had all previous wars, and not all those in the movement agreed with Dorothy's total pacifism. Until she died in 1980, she continued to dedicate her life toward social issues-- the atomic age, civil rights, and pacifism again during the Vietnam War—and was put in jail 4 more times, once for a month. She sacrificed much for her unwavering belief that no one is to be excluded from love. She was absolutely driven by love and determined to follow love to its limit

The movement she created continues to thrive to this day with roughly 200 communities across the United States and more than 20 communities abroad. Untold millions of people have been aided, untold thousands of people have devoted a portion of or their entire lives to serving the poor

There are many ways to think about how Dorothy Day and this movement connect to us here in 2013. I am going to share three lessons we can take from her life to help us in our lives.

First.... We can begin by doing **small acts of hospitality and mercy**. It's the little things that strangers do that can often make us the happiest. A friendly smile from someone you walk past; a stranger who holds a door open for you. These small things are what inspire us to perform kind

acts for others. Maybe if you return your shopping cart, it will inspire the person who is benefited by it to do something kind for someone else. We can create a spiral effect of kindness. Smile at a stranger. Speak kind words to a cashier or waitress. Let someone cut in front of you in line. Help someone cross the street. Use your turn signal. Make a meal for a family in need. And see the kindness paid forward time and time again. On the mission trip this summer, we experienced kindness paid forward. We went to New Jersey to help rebuild homes from Hurricane Sandy. Our kindness inspired the home owners, neighbors, and even strangers to show kindness.... One neighbor opened up her pool to let us use after a hot day of dry walling. Another neighbor let us use her bathroom because the house we were working in did not yet have plumbing. One homeowner, who had just lost his job, bought us water bottles and popsicles. It was a beautiful and special thing to both share and experience kindness--- it was a glimpse of the kingdom of God on earth that we are all called to bring about!

Second...You don't have to be perfect... Dorothy could be irritable, and confessed her own short temper and other shortcomings. Her personal life was wrought with conflict. But she believed in grace precisely because she knew her own mistakes and her own brokenness. Like Dorothy Day, we are not perfect. Like her, we are broken and aware of our own shortcomings, our divided attention, our struggle to be all that we want to be. We are not perfect, nor will we ever be perfect. But small steps of hospitality and mercy not only bring goodness and beauty to the world, but can transform us into people of faith and hope and love. We are called to be our best selves – a people seeking to live with kindness and an eye for justice; a people willing to sacrifice the creature comforts of life so that others might have the bare necessities. Dorothy wrote, "...What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do... there is nothing that we can do but love, so we pray to God to enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend." We will make mistakes, we won't always be loving, we will not be perfect. But with God's grace, we can be healed and forgiven and get back on the right path of love. Just because we are not perfect does not mean that we can give up and stop trying. If we get angry and impatient with a cashier, we can't just stop trying. Next time, we can try to love more.

Third...You can never do enough. Dorothy often said that you love God just as much as the one you love the least. You can never do enough to keep loving the least. There is so much hatred and evil and sadness and anger and brokenness in this world... we can never love enough. We can never say that we are all done loving our neighbors. Loving never ends. Loving lasts a lifetime. Let's be inspired by Dorothy Day and all of the other amazing saints we've learned about this summer, and do what we can to give grace, mercy, and kindness to others. Dorothy believed that we all share in the abundant love of God and that all of us are called to be saints. Dorothy tried so hard to change the world... and she really did. Many more Catholics now live based on the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching and work hard to help those in need. But we have to keep it going, to let her vision live on in us. And it's as simple as this... "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart . . . and Love your neighbor as yourself."