

DOROTHY DAY : THE CATHOLIC WORKER

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) lived in New York at a time when many people could not find jobs, food or places to live. They were so poor that they were actually living on the streets. Dorothy desperately wanted to help them. The tears ran down her face as she knelt in church one day, asking God to show her what she could do. When she got home she found a strange visitor. Poor and homeless himself, Peter was bursting with ideas about how put the world to rights. "You're a journalist," he said, "We should start a newspaper for the poor." So they did, and in May 1933 the first issue of The Catholic Worker was sold on the streets of New York for a penny a copy.

Soon Dorothy realised that some of those who came to help with the newspaper were also homeless. She and Peter felt it was up to every Christian to take personal responsibility for feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger, as Jesus had asked. So Dorothy took her last \$5 and rented a flat for six homeless women. It became the first of many "Houses of Hospitality." Every day Catholic Workers gave out hot coffee, soup and bread to hundreds of poor people who queued up outside. "We felt respect for the poor and destitute," she said, "as those nearest to God, as those chosen by Christ for his compassion."

Giving to those in need wasn't just a matter of charity. Dorothy and her friends also stood up for justice. They supported the rights of workers to fair wages and safe conditions in the factories, dockyards and farms of America. Even some of her supporters thought that she was going too far when she said that war was always wrong. "Thou shalt not kill" meant exactly that.

Dorothy put her beliefs into practice. Whenever the money ran out to print the newspaper, buy vegetables for the soup, or pay the rent, she would ask God for what was needed and her prayers were always answered. In other cities people were inspired by her example and today Catholic Workers are still busy feeding the hungry, finding shelter for the homeless, and taking the side of the poor. In Britain there are Catholic Worker Houses in Oxford and Liverpool.

