

Catholic Archdiocese of Perth
**Justice, Ecology and Development
Office**



Dorothy Day

What I learned from her about justice

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Dorothy Day began a paper in the 1930's, *The Catholic Worker*. From this paper an entire movement was born, *The Catholic Worker* Movement with its houses of hospitality for people in need and for its strong stance against injustice and violence.

Jim Forest was a Catholic convert who joined Dorothy in 1961.

Justice begins on our knees

"I have never known anyone, not even in monasteries, who was more of a praying person than Dorothy Day. When I think of her, I think of her first of all on her knees praying before the Blessed Sacrament. I think of those long names she kept of people, living and dead, to pray for. I think of her at Mass, or praying the rosary, I think of her going off to Confession each Saturday evening.

"Dorothy Day said, *'We feed the hungry, yes. We try to shelter the homeless and give them clothes, but there is a strong faith at work; we pray. If an outsider who comes to visit us doesn't pay attention to our prayers and what that means, then he'll miss the whole point'*".

Justice is not just the job of the government

"The work of justice is for you and me right here and now, right where we are. Dorothy said, *'We are here to celebrate {Jesus} through the works of mercy.'*

The most radical thing you can do is to find the face of Christ in others

"And not only those we find it easy to be with, but with those who make us nervous, frighten us, alarm us, or even terrify us. Dorothy used to say, *'Those who cannot see the face of Christ in the poor are atheists indeed.'*



Dorothy's searching of faces for Christ's presence extended to those who were her *'enemies'*. She always tried to remember that they were the victims of the very structures they were in charge of."

Beauty is not just for the rich

Tom Cornell tells the story of a donor coming into the Catholic Worker and giving Dorothy a diamond ring. Dorothy thanked her for it and put it in her pocket. Later, a rather demented woman came in, one of the more irritating regulars at the house. Dorothy took the ring out of her pocket and gave it to the woman. A staff member said to Dorothy, "Wouldn't it have been better if we took the ring to the diamond exchange, sold it and paid for the woman's rent for a year?" Dorothy replied that the woman had her dignity and could do what she liked with the ring. She could sell it for the money or take a trip to the Bahamas. Or she could enjoy wearing a diamond ring on her hand like the woman who gave it away. 'Do you suppose that God created diamonds only for the rich?' asked Dorothy.

Meekness does not mean weak-kneed

There is a place for outrage as well as a place for plain speech in religious life. Dorothy once responded to someone who advised her to speak more gently, 'I hold more temper in one minute than you will in your entire life.'

Justice is walking the 'little way'

The Little Way is a phrase of Saint Therese of Lisieux. Change starts where I stand. Change begins in the ordinary actions of life, how I live minute to minute, what I notice, what I respond to, the attention with which I listen, the way in which I act.

Dorothy once put it this way, *'Paperwork, cleaning the house, dealing with innumerable visitors who come all through the day, answering the phone, keeping patience and acting intelligently – these things, too, are the works of peace and often seem like a very little.'*

What Dorothy tried to practice was 'Christ's technique', as she put it, which was not to seek out meetings with important officials but with *'obscure people, a few fishermen and farm people, a few ailing and hard-pressed men and women.'*



Justice is loving the Church

Dorothy saw the church as belonging to all people, and especially its most humble men, women and children. She used to say that the net St Peter lowered when Christ made him a fisher of men, caught *'quite a few blowfish and not a few sharks'*. Yet she did not focus on the obvious failings in every church, but rather she paid attention to what the church set its sights on.

'We're here to live the Gospel as wholeheartedly as we can and make use of all the resources the church offers us.'

Dorothy said that she did not become a Catholic in order to purify the church, *'I try to be a loyal servant of the church Jesus had founded'*. Dorothy added *'As for Catholics all over the world, they are no better than lots of their worst critics, and maybe some of us Catholics are worse than our worst critics.'*



Adapted from *Salt of the Earth* magazine

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