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Anne Klejment

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Dorothy Day's Socially Engaged Devotion to St. Joseph

Anne Klejment

Crediting Teresa of Avila, Dorothy Day developed a special devotion to St. Joseph, who would serve as her personal protector and provider and later as patron of the Catholic Worker community. During the Depression, she initiated creative devotions to the saint, including picketing prayer, stressing his identities as father figure, worker in solidarity with all workers, and protector of and provider for the poor. Joseph's largess represented radical inclusivity to Day since he extended help to all and not exclusively to the pious or the "worthy" poor. During and after World War II, she continued to depend on Joseph but increasingly emphasized the more robust spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi to address the era's existential issues. To encourage deeper reflection on the Gospel values of the Catholic Worker, she elevated Francis to co-patron.

Keywords: Day, Dorothy; Catholic Worker; devotionalism; St. Joseph; St. Francis of Assisi; communion of saints; Mystical Body theology; liturgical renewal; Great Depression; labor movement; communism; postwar era

Dorothy Day's devotion to St. Joseph appears to have begun in a most unusual way. Preceding her December 1927 conversion, she read philosopher William James's classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a bracing study that stimulated her interest in the lives and spirituality of saints such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. The agnostic James's compelling account of Teresa impelled her to read the works of the Carmelite reformer, who became one of her most influential spiritual guides. Teresa's trust in St. Joseph's efficacy and Day's trust in St. Teresa's spirituality convinced her to follow the indomitable Carmelite in praying to this holy man for his help.¹ So influential was Teresa's example that she named her daughter

1. Dorothy Day complimented William James for introducing her to Teresa and John of the Cross in *From Union Square to Rome* (Silver Spring, MD: Preservation of the Faith Press,

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Tamar Teresa after the saint.² During the Depression years, Day reinterpreted St. Joseph's meaning for Catholics and non-Catholics, created new devotions honoring him as a saintly protector of workers, the poor, and activists, and held him up as a model for the dignity of ordinary persons.

Husband of Mary and foster father to Jesus, Joseph received slight, yet significant, attention in Matthew and Luke's gospels.³ These succinct accounts portrayed him as a righteous person of faith, listening for and obedient to God. Within these sketchy scriptural sources, she found an invaluable saintly intercessor whose qualities endeared him to her.

Reluctantly separated from Forster Batterham at the time of her conversion, due to his adamant refusal to marry, Day turned to St. Joseph. His sacred presence in prayer provided reassuring comfort and hope and helped satisfy her need for a male spiritual companion and protector and her daughter's need for a father figure.⁴ As a single mother, Day depended on seasonal work and writing to supplement Batterham's erratic financial support. In 1931, she obtained work with the Staten Island *Advance*. With her first column published on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph, she may have regarded it as a sign that he answered her prayers for their welfare.⁵

1938), 136. In "Saint John of the Cross" (*Commonweal*, July 14, 1933), she shared Teresa's irresistible characterization of Joseph as her banker, reprinted in Patrick Jordan, ed., *Dorothy Day: Writings from Commonweal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 53, and mentioned the saint's dependence on St. Joseph "to look after her houses [Carmelite convents]" in [Day], "Co-operative apartment for Unemployed Women Has Its Start in Parish," *The Catholic Worker* (December 1933), 1. Writing that "St. Teresa of Avila said that she never asked anything of St. Joseph that was not granted," Day concluded with an appeal for help in paying grocery bills, "St. Joseph's House (Chrystie Street)," *The Catholic Worker* (September 1955), 8.

2. Naming her daughter in honor of Teresa of Avila strongly suggests that Day read James's book prior to giving birth on March 4, 1926.

3. Reared in a nominal Protestant family, Day read the Bible from childhood and had greater familiarity with the *New Testament* than most Catholics of her generation (Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 20). She reminisced that: "The Bible has always meant much to me. . . . It was the Word, and so was *Christ* to me." Robert Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 514.

4. After separating and failing to convince Batterham to marry, she abandoned her futile efforts in December 1932. During her visit to St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal in 1935, Day asked Joseph to take care of her and to put the *Catholic Worker* "in [his] hands" (Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight*, 15). For help with parenting, she prayed that the Blessed Virgin would help care for Tamar. See "About Mary," published by *Commonweal* in 1943 and reprinted in Jordan, ed., *Dorothy Day: Writings from Commonweal*, 86. Later she wrote of praying to Mary and Joseph for her daughter (Day, in Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight*, 246).

5. Perhaps coincidentally, Day's "True Story *Fictionalized*" column in the Staten Island *Advance* first appeared on the feast of St. Joseph, as noted in Anne Klejment, "Staten Island Spirituality: Dorothy Day's 'True Story' Columns," *Commonweal* (June 14, 2019), 9. The *Advance* commissioned her shortly afterwards to write a garden column.

She publicly acknowledged her devotion to St. Joseph in an article published a few months before she launched her paper, *The Catholic Worker*. Writing for *Commonweal* in March 1933,⁶ she told of joining her friend Maria in hunting for an affordable rental. The pair walked “up one street and down another,” scouring the neighborhood for “a likely place,” inexpensive yet in decent repair. Confident, because she “placed the whole matter in the hands of Saint Joseph,” Day assured Maria that the saint “is a fine one to find a home for you.”

The story could seem trite and forgettable; however, Maria was a communist. Day’s friendship with and support for Maria transgressed the era’s common Catholic mentality that eyed communists with suspicion and even hatred. Viewed by Catholics and others as atheists and revolutionaries, communists were considered dangerous subversives, bent on undermining freedom, democracy, and religion. Their labor organizers were considered enemies of capitalism and private property, who corrupted workers under their sway. Furthermore, communists rallied to support African American civil rights in a Jim Crow society where too few white Catholic consciences were disturbed by racial inequality and injustice.⁷

Why this unusual friendship? Before her conversion, Day identified with various secular radical movements, recognizing workers’ humanity and aiming to assist them in building solidarity amid their struggle for dignity and against the predatory practices of the powerful.⁸ Her outlook broadened after her conversion. If all persons are created in God’s image, and if all persons are one’s neighbor, how could she disavow her radical friends and continue to despise the rich? Consequently, she expected that St. Joseph embraced Catholic teaching on the dignity of all persons and would seek God’s favor for the communist family—they, too, having been created in God’s image, “creatures of God, . . . our [sisters and] brothers.”⁹ The Catholic convert of little more than five years modeled a most inclusive definition of neighbor.¹⁰ Day’s solicitousness, extending emotional and spiritual

6. Day, “For the Truly Poor,” March 15, 1933, reprinted in Jordan, ed., *Dorothy Day: Writings*, 47–51.

7. Richard Gid Powers, “American Catholics and Catholic Americans: The Rise and Fall of Catholic Anticommunism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (Fall 2004), 17–23; Cecilia A. Moore, “Catholics, Communism, and African Americans,” in Margaret M. McGuinness and James T. Fisher, eds., *Roman Catholicism in the United States: A Thematic History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 240–263.

8. Day, “The Diabolic Plot,” *America* (April 29, 1933), 82.

9. Her words suggest the influence of the catechism and the Gospel. Day to New York Police Commissioner, July 1935, in Robert Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 76.

10. Anne Klejment explored Day’s inclusive understanding of neighbor in “No More ‘Pious Pap’: Dorothy Day’s Spirituality of Radical Inclusivity,” delivered at the spring meeting

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support to a communist, suggested a deeply Gospel-drenched understanding of neighbor, and her friendship with Maria showed respect for the humanity of one whose beliefs challenged conventional politics and religious belief. She realized that treating all persons as worthy of dignity could unleash tremendous potential for evangelizing the religiously lukewarm and those outside the Church.

Because St. Joseph was experienced at seeking shelter for Mary and Jesus under the most trying circumstances, Day believed he understood Maria's situation and would help, viewing her modest wants as reasonable. Ultimately, Day's faith in the saint's aid prevailed as communist Maria located an appropriate apartment during the wanderings with her prayerful Catholic friend. In this remarkable story, Day revealed her deep faith in a common religious practice, intercessory prayer. Prayers of petition conveyed hope and empowerment in times of need.¹¹

Day suggested in the *Commonweal* article that St. Joseph also helped to spread the radical inclusivity of Jesus's core message of love. She believed that God's grace knew no bounds and that divine largesse was available to anyone. Joseph's intercession manifested God's mercy and validated Jesus's unconditional love. Just as Jesus shocked many of his contemporaries by accepting the humanity of Samaritans, Roman occupiers, tax collectors, adulterers, widows, and others on the fringes of respectable Jewish society, Day, in the presence of St. Joseph, jolted many Catholic contemporaries by upholding the dignity of all.¹²

One may argue that perhaps Day exaggerated the saint's role in Maria's apartment quest and that her devotionism revealed spiritual innocence, but she continually called upon him, shared her experiences of his efficacy, and promoted devotion to him. After encountering a St. Joseph devotion at the Catholic Worker (CW), a non-Catholic scorned it as evidence of superstition, but Day insisted, "No, it is faith."¹³

of the American Catholic Historical Association, Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, Maryland, April 13, 2018.

11. Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) offers an outstanding historical analysis of gendered devotionism. For an overview of devotionism, see Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 221–241.

12. Day's alter ego in *The Eleventh Virgin* (New York: Boni, 1924), chapter 3, mentioned Bible reading as a child and adolescent. Day recalled from childhood a "sense of holiness in holding the book [Bible] in my hands" (Day, *The Long Loneliness* [New York: Harper, 1952], 20). After abandoning organized religion, she still believed in God and "continued to read the *New Testament* regularly" (Day, *From Union Square to Rome*, 36); for her early Bible reading, 19; for her critique of lukewarm Christianity, 48.

13. Day, "The Catholic Worker," *Rosary* (November 1933), 11.

Catholic Worker Patron

Unsurprisingly, Day's trust in St. Joseph led her unilaterally to appoint him patron of the fledgling Catholic Worker community during its first year. The Catholic Worker movement's co-founder, Peter Maurin, however, preferred to hold up Francis of Assisi and Benedict of Nursia as models of sanctity for those aiming to create "a new world in the shell of the old."¹⁴ Although Day greatly appreciated Maurin's spiritual guides, she remained faithful to her favored intercessor. By the fall of 1933, the Catholic Worker office on East 15th Street displayed a statue of St. Joseph.¹⁵ (Statues and images of other saints appeared later.) And, shortly afterward, in December, a partnership between the CW and Immaculate Conception parish opened the aptly named Teresa Joseph Co-operative, a precursor to the houses of hospitality, which sheltered ten homeless women.¹⁶

As the Depression descended upon the United States, Day identified the qualities in St. Joseph that made him a suitable patron for the Catholic Worker community. She understood that even minimally observant Catholics were familiar with the saint as the Holy Family's protector and provider. Since Catholics were encouraged to emulate saintly virtues, Day's portrayal of Joseph's steadfast faith and action made him an ideal male role model.

Obedient to God in unique and exceptionally trying situations, Joseph was not a learned doctor of theology, a high-ranking cleric, or a wealthy scion. Considerate, poor, and ordinary, he is a most approachable saint. Catholic Worker guests and volunteers, slum neighbors, and the paper's readers could identify with the humble carpenter whose struggles resembled theirs. Husband and father, protector and provider, manual laborer of humble means and an exile in a foreign land, Joseph met social, economic, and spiritual challenges in his life like those faced by many Americans during the thirties. When considering Joseph and the Holy Family's trials, Day thought of the plight of migrant laborers escaping the Dust Bowl and others in dire circumstances. His example, she thought, could sustain faith and hope among the down and out.¹⁷

14. Maurin did not promote devotion to St. Joseph. The saint's name does not appear in the index of the definitive collection of his "Easy Essays," Lincoln Rice, ed., *The Forgotten Radical Peter Maurin: Easy Essays from the Catholic Worker* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

15. Day, "The Catholic Worker," 11.

16. [Day], "Co-operative Apartment for Unemployed Women," 1; Day, "A Parish Cooperative Apartment for Homeless Women," *Catholic Mind* (January 8, 1934), 17–19.

17. Day, "Letter to the Unemployed," *The Catholic Worker* (December 1937), 3; "Thank You!" *The Catholic Worker* (May 1934), 4.

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St. Joseph was also worthy of devotion in Day's mind for his proven responsiveness to need. With the founding of the Catholic Worker movement and its houses of hospitality, Joseph's role now included caring for the entire community. On one level, the saint could be seen assisting charitable activity and works of mercy—providing for essential meals and shelter—but the Catholic Worker also envisioned laying a foundation for a radical Christian social experiment.

When Day regarded St. Joseph as “our special protector in [Jesus's] work,” she included the entire range of Catholic Worker initiatives.¹⁸ She founded *The Catholic Worker* paper to counter what Day considered the “dangerous goodness” of communist humanism on the one hand and lay Catholic ignorance of and indifference toward the Church's social teachings on the other.¹⁹ The paper reported on injustice and proposed an alternative to both corporate capitalism and communism—living the works of mercy.

As protector and provider, the saint cared for the poor, yes, but also for activists who were on picket lines supporting workers' rights, creating a farming and craft-oriented community of mutual care, challenging racial injustice and Nazism, demonstrating a robust program of social justice to communists, or testifying before Congress against a military draft bill. The soup, sandwiches, and coffee shared with those on the Mott Street breadline likewise fed the activists. Day elevated St. Joseph to a new role: patron of radical Christian activists.

She honored St. Joseph with frequent mention in her writings, by naming successive houses of hospitality after him, and through prayer. Works of art gifted by talented artists over the years meant that St. Joseph's image was visible in the widespread succession of houses and rural farms wherever the Catholic Worker was planted. Besides appealing to him for assistance, she offered thanks for his generosity.

Her devotion to the saint inspired devotion in others. Indignant when an unfamiliar saint was mentioned, Catholic Worker Mary Sheehan retorted, “We have St. Joseph and that is enough for me.”²⁰ Over the years, thousands of readers of the paper, volunteers, guests, and visitors encountered Day's promotion of St. Joseph. A nun in India, thankful for CW aid, wrote about

18. Day, “Of Finances and Personal Initiative,” *The Catholic Worker* (February 1938), 2.

19. Day, “The Diabolic Plot,” *America* (April 29, 1933), 82; and Day, “Flowers from East-Side Pavements,” *The Sign* 13 (August 1933), 59.

20. Quoted in Stanley Vishnewski, *Wings of the Dawn* (New York: Catholic Worker, 1984), 123.

prayer to the saint that resulted in a medical miracle.²¹ Even after her death, Day's devotion to St. Joseph influenced others. Felicia Carrano Carl, a neighborhood child when St. Joseph's House relocated to Mott Street, shared her devotion to Day and the CW's patron: "I put a small statue of St. Joseph the Worker [on her grave]."²²

Catholics already showered honors on Mary, the mother of Jesus, in liturgies and through popular devotions.²³ Building on the familiar, Day urged devotion to Mary's spouse. "[W]e are following the example of the Blessed Mother of God," she announced, who depended on Joseph to provide for the Holy Family. Day used this to justify her own reliance on St. Joseph to aid the CW community. In one appeal to Joseph, Day signed herself "Mary's Servant." She urged "our groups throughout the country, and all our friends and fellow workers, to receive communion without fail on that feast day [March 19], and to go to Joseph with special prayer and thanksgiving."²⁴ Their patron's feast became a major social event, too, as Day recalled in 1956, "It was St. Joseph's day, and our house is called St. Joseph's house, so we always celebrate his feast." In one such celebration, she wrote, "A butcher had given us enough chicken to feed the house, and the meal was a good one."²⁵

Words alone could not adequately convey the significance of St. Joseph to others, thus Day graciously welcomed works of art for *The Catholic Worker*. The first image of St. Joseph appeared during the paper's first year (the March 1934 issue).²⁶ A shy, young immigrant artist, Ade Bethune, offered her artwork to the *Catholic Worker*, writing, "There is but one thing I can make: that is pictures." An admirer of social realism in art, Bethune

21. One of the richest sources of Day's early spirituality is *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1939), in which her liturgical and devotional interests and practices were interspersed with stories of daily life at the CW. Sr. Celine, "Appeal," *The Catholic Worker* (September 1955), 6.

22. Quoted in Rosalie G. Riegler, *Dorothy Day: Portraits by Those Who Knew Her* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 193.

23. Studies of Marian devotion include Mary Christine Athans, B.V.M., "Mary in the American Catholic Church," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1989), especially 109–113; Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion since 1940," in James M. O'Toole, ed., *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), especially 90–101; and Richard Gribble, C.S.C., *American Apostle of the Family Rosary: The Life of Patrick J. Peyton*, CSC (New York: Crossroad, 2005), especially chapter 2.

24. Day, "St. Joseph," *The Catholic Worker* (March 1938), 4; "Day after Day," *The Catholic Worker* (March 1939), 4; and "Sow in This Field," *The Catholic Worker* (October 1944), 2.

25. Day, "Priest of the Immediate," December 28, 1956, in Jordan, ed., *Dorothy Day: Writings*, 130.

26. The image accompanied Day's article, "Thank You, St. Joseph!" *The Catholic Worker* (March 1934), 4. St. Joseph was the first of Bethune's worker saints to grace the paper.



Ade Bethune, illustration of St. Joseph the Worker, March 1934 (Courtesy of Ade Bethune Collection, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota).

rejected the lack of substance and “twisted” ideas of communist culture. Neither did she find Victorian sentimentality desirable in religious art. Instead, she created bold depictions of working saints, thus illustrating the holy in the ordinary. Sending the first in her series portraying the works of mercy, Bethune promised, “I also mean to do your Patron St. Joseph for his feast in March.”²⁷ In less than one year, the saint was recognized as *the* patron of the Catholic Worker. Day used the image to complement her article “Thank You, St. Joseph!” in which she offered gratitude to the saint for financial assistance and “sending [Bethune] with her work.”

Bethune’s portrayal of Joseph grasped both Day’s desire to feature the holy humanity of the saints, as she did in her columns, and Maurin’s eagerness for depicting “saints as workers.” Their approach conveyed the connections between daily tasks, sanctity, and Jesus’s law of love as summarized in

27. Quoted in Judith Stoughton, *Proud Donkey of Schaerbeck: Ade Bethune, Catholic Worker Artist* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1988), 37; Day, May 1965, in Robert Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2021), 157; Katherine Harmon, *There Were Also Many Women There: Lay Women in the Liturgical Movement in the United States, 1926–59* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 193–194, 205.

the works of mercy.²⁸ Bethune's sturdy, young St. Joseph, head bowed to his workbench, sleeves rolled up, and apron covering his trousers, concentrated on a carpentry task. Hollow-cheeked and beardless, he was surrounded by hand tools in his workshop. His labor, it was understood, fed and housed Jesus and Mary. He could not have had a more noble task.

This stunning image of St. Joseph the Worker further challenged conventional thought about spirituality and society. By portraying Joseph as a modern manual laborer, Bethune acknowledged the dignity of Depression-era workers. At work in his simple shop, Joseph reinforced the CW ideal of craft labor over the vagaries of factory employment. Ultimately, the depiction of St. Joseph's ordinariness underscored Maurin and Day's belief that all persons are "called to be saints."

Day concluded her article's thanks to the saint with a new request: "for hearts which become increasingly 'soff' [soft], as [daughter Tamar] Teresa says, with the love of God."²⁹ Here was Jesus's teaching on the greatest commandment worded in the vernacular, in a prayer to Joseph, a teaching that even a child could comprehend.

Devotions and Appeals

Agreeing with Peter Maurin that "God sends you what you need when you need it," Dorothy Day trusted that prayer would raise money to defray the expenses of printing the paper and feeding Catholic Worker guests and volunteers. Ample evidence of God's generosity, Maurin taught, came from reading "the lives of the saints," and Day agreed. But he had not urged addressing appeals specifically to St. Joseph.³⁰ Day established the CW's practice of appealing to Joseph. Having quickly caught on to Maurin's impetuosity and inability to handle limited funds with care, she sagely chose Joseph to share responsibility for paying bills.³¹

Day's petitions to St. Joseph often used visual aids, such as a statue or simple shrine surrounded by candles or flowers in his honor. At St. Joseph's House, his statue's prominent placement could become the site of innovative devotions and a symbol of his care for the community. Within the first

28. Day, May 1965, in Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 158.

29. Day, "Thank You, St. Joseph!" 4. At the time of this issue, Tamar was nearly eight years old.

30. Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 173.

31. For instances of Maurin's handling of money, see Day in Ellsberg, ed., *Duty of Delight*, 8; Day to J. Stanley Murphy, December 6, 1934, in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 98, and Day, February 1964, in Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 109, for Maurin's tragi-comic episode of unsuccessfully assisting a thief attempting to steal his money.



Statue of St. Joseph at St. Joseph's House overlooks Mott Street, New York City, ca. 1935, taken by Marjorie Haffen (Courtesy of Ade Bethune Collection, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota).

months of operation, Day was prayerfully slipping unpaid bills under his statue to remind both St. Joseph to provide and Catholic Workers to prayerfully seek his help. Subscriptions to the penny-a-copy paper, of course, never covered the printing and mailing expenses, not to mention the cost of feeding and housing the poor. When the CW owed a large sum to their Catholic grocer, Day reported that “we’ve put [the bill] under the statue of St. Joseph.”³² Eventually, the grocer received payment, as did the plumber, the printer, and others.

One unusual story of successful intervention by St. Joseph in finding funds was recorded by Day’s friend Catherine de Hueck following what they

32. Day, “The Catholic Worker,” *Rosary* (November 1933), 11; Day, *House of Hospitality*, 118. She mentioned the same approach with an unpaid plumbing bill, Day to Catherine de Hueck, July 17, 1935, in which she advised her friend to devote thirty days of prayer “which never fails,” in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 78.

considered a “miracle.” Day was visiting her friend during a brief detour from her trip to St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal in 1935.³³ After asking the saint to help clear a hefty thousand-dollar debt, Day received an insurance payment for fire damage to her Staten Island beach cottage. “A strange way for St. Joseph to help, but saints are peculiar,” de Hueck declared with her trademark frankness. “I suppose that is why they are saints.”³⁴

Employing the language of organized labor, familiar to the era’s working-class Catholics, Day invented a new devotion, “picketing” St. Joseph for material help.³⁵ Her choice of such a loaded word suggested a coordinated plan of prayer, visibility, determination, and self-sacrifice for the good of the CW community. Obviously intended for those sympathetic to the labor movement, Day later addressed critics’ concerns about labor unrest and communist agitation by describing the picketing prayer as “a peaceful and loving” approach to the beloved saint. It initially took place in the Church of the Most Precious Blood around the corner from Mott Street “in the presence of Christ our Leader” where volunteers contemplated St. Joseph, “that great friend of God, and Protector of His Church.”³⁶ As Day explained, the practice was simple: “We would go to church and pray, all of us taking turns. . . .”³⁷

Picketing prayer borrowed from such spiritual practices as *visio divina* and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, but in this case, with infused social messaging. Using a simplified version of *visio divina*, the form of prayer used an artifact to enhance the “presence” of St. Joseph for the petitioner. The image of the saint, whether a painting, a holy card, a medal worn around the neck, a life-size statue in church, or a miniature version at home, could increase the reality of and intimacy with the holy person as an intercessor.³⁸

33. Of her visit to the Oratory, Day wrote, “St. Joseph is also taking care of me . . . as I asked him up at Montreal at the shrine.” Quoted in Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight*, 15. She returned to the Oratory in 1955: Day, “On Pilgrimage,” *The Catholic Worker* (June 1955), 6.

34. Entry for November 14, 1935, quoted in Robert Wild, ed., *Comrades Stumbling Along: The Friendship of Catherine de Hueck Doherty and Dorothy Day as Revealed through Their Letters* (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul’s, 2009), 30.

35. See, for example, Day, *House of Hospitality*, 25, 117, 184. The picketers she named, “Stanley, Francis, me, Dan, Bill, Jim, Charlie, Mr. Hunton, Ann,” had spent “so far four hours” in their efforts (117). Stanley’s memories differ in the details: Vishnewski, *Wings of the Dawn*, 118.

36. Day, *House of Hospitality*, 159. For a description of the nave of the church, rich in statuary, relics, and icons, see www.oldcathedral.org/shrine-church-of-the-most-precious-blood.

37. Day, February 1964, in Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 109.

38. To understand the significance of presence in American Catholic culture, see Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). On Catholic material culture, see Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), especially chapters 1, 2, and 6.

Loosely adopting practices used in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, “picketing prayer” volunteers followed a schedule of sequenced prayer, stretching out their prayerful presence over several hours or perhaps even days. Besides participation at Mass, as recommended in the Catholic Worker’s daily routine, the picketers knelt in church before their patron’s statue to help them focus their prayers. Gazing at the statue could spark a more intimate friendship with the saint, and, free from the inevitable distractions of the house of hospitality, the petitioners could pour out their hearts. Their presence before the statue also alerted other churchgoers of their devotion to St. Joseph, perhaps suggesting that the saint was worthy of their devotion, too. By staggering visits throughout the day, petitioners peppered the saint with repeated reminders of their reliance upon his efficacy. On a practical level, by sending out Catholic Workers sequentially, St. Joseph’s House could run smoothly, feeding and clothing the poor, getting the paper out, and performing other essential tasks. Surely, Day had this in mind when she endorsed picketing prayer.

Referring to this devotion as picketing added a dash of urgency and risk for participants who were familiar with strikers, goons, and those indifferent or hostile toward the labor movement. The devotion’s challenge and novelty appealed especially to men engaged in union organizing. Whereas sequencing created a prayer community, each person’s scheduled visit before St. Joseph evoked a sense of individual responsibility, the CW community’s much-promoted ideal of personalism. Day’s picketing prayer added a strong sense of purpose for working-class Catholic Workers, who were familiar with individual prayers of petition, either spontaneous or guided by a prayer card, and formal novenas, often a form of communal prayer that required one’s physical presence at a particular time and place.

Evidently, the practice was popular. Day launched the devotion perhaps in 1936 or 1937, and it continued at least through 1947.³⁹ Once while traveling, Day instructed Joe Zarrella, a trusted Catholic Worker, to “start a picket line to St. Joseph again immediately” when she encountered difficulties in composing an appeal.⁴⁰ In the Spring 1942 appeal, Day, the presumed author, explained, “We always start our appeals in Church, picketing St. Joseph for help, asking him to tell us what to say to you.” She added a significant observation about their reliable patron’s one limitation, “He was a man of few words. So he isn’t very helpful that way.” Yet she remained con-

39. The Editors to Fellow Workers in Christ, “Appeal,” Feast of St. Joseph, ’47, Ade Bethune Collection, Catholic Worker Papers, box 1, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota.

40. Day to Zarrella, April 22, 1940, quoted in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 115.

fidet “that he will remind you of our needs. He knows just how much we need, with how much we can get along.”⁴¹

Despite the gravity of the CW community’s need and the depth of Day’s trust in and respect for the foster father of Jesus, petitioning St. Joseph delivered delicious moments of humor. Responding to Day’s request for volunteers, a literal-minded person asked if carrying a sign to the church for the half hour of picketing prayer would be required.⁴² On another occasion, Day took her spring appeal to the chapel and read it to Jesus, Joseph, and the Blessed Mother, such that her faith in St. Joseph made a strong impression at St. Joseph’s House. When a creditor phoned about unpaid bills during Day’s prayerful absence, a Catholic Worker answered that St. Joseph would take care of it immediately. Taken aback, the creditor, presumably a non-Catholic, asked, “Who is this man Joseph who’s paying your bills?”⁴³

St. Joseph’s influence was felt inside the Catholic Worker, but appeals were also aimed at persons who might have only vicarious knowledge of the CW and its houses and farms. Day sometimes combined humor with other strategies for soliciting donations. After listing previous material gifts, ranging from butter to blankets, she explained that cash, too, was needed to pay an outstanding printing bill. Using humor to poke fun at the printer’s anxiety over the CW possibly defaulting on its debt, she mused, “But what is \$165 to St. Joseph, or to St. Teresa of Avila either,” suggesting that the CW’s debts and needs would seem trivial to their powerful intercessor. “We refuse to be affrighted,” she insisted. “(Though, of course, the printer may be, oh he of little faith!).”⁴⁴

In another anecdote, Day encouraged potential donors to curb their personal desires to stimulate more generous aid. Sharing her daughter Tamar’s charming appeal to the saint, Day wrote that her soon-to-be eight-year-old cleverly noted that her birthday comes in March, “St. Joseph’s month.” Taking advantage of this coincidence, Tamar planned to ask the saint’s help in convincing God to send her “a baby goat, a sheep, a pet hen” and other coveted items. Concerned about an expanding and unmanageable menagerie, Day cautioned Tamar to “not ask St. Joseph for them.” “If he sent them. . . ,” she predicted, “we might . . . not be grateful as we should.”⁴⁵ Day had passed her trust in St. Joseph to her daughter, but con-

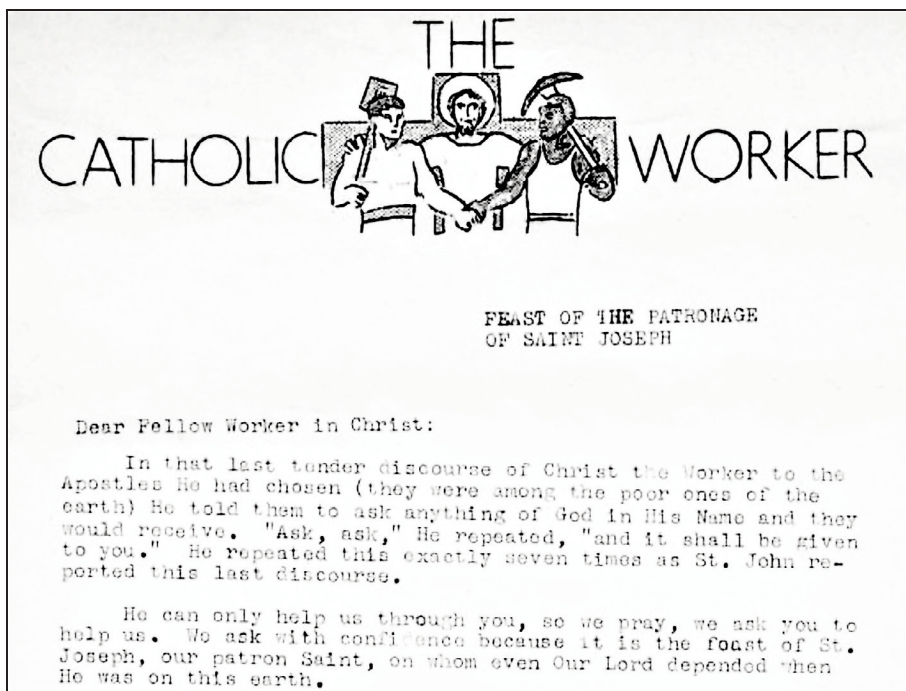
41. The Editors to Fellow Workers, “Appeal,” Easter Sunday 1942, Ade Bethune Collection, Catholic Worker Papers, box 4, St. Catherine University.

42. Day, *House of Hospitality*, 159.

43. Day, “Distinguished Visitors Mark Past Month,” *The Catholic Worker* (April 1938), 1.

44. Day, “Another Miracle, Please, St. Joseph!” *The Catholic Worker* (February 1934), 4.

45. Day, “Thank You, St. Joseph!” 4.



Appeal letter, 1938, asking for financial assistance on the feast of St. Joseph, the Catholic Worker movement's patron (Courtesy of Ade Bethune Collection, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, Minnesota)

vincing the printer and other skeptics of the saint's reliable aid and motivating potential donors posed more daunting challenges.

Day's light touch in writing appeals peaked early in the Catholic Worker's history. Besides softening followers' hearts, it probably reflected Day's discomfort in begging for the community. During the movement's early years, she also admitted that "as a convert I felt diffidence at going on with my writing and work, not feeling qualified. . . ." On another occasion, she voiced concern that she "was a woman, a convert (and converts ought to keep their mouths shut. . .) and . . . was a former radical. . . ."46 That the CW in the 1930s was new and unproven also provoked uneasiness, and resulting criticism for CW positions on such hot button issues as labor, communism, and war could be unsettling. However, after assessing personal strengths and weaknesses, she concluded Maurin's strength was in presenting daring ideas and provoking thought, hers in attending to practical mat-

46. Day, "The Catholic Worker," 11; "Start of 'Catholic Worker' Described by Its Founder," *The Queen's Work* (April 1934), 3.

ters. Maurin apparently acquiesced because she reported his shrug when he once noted, "Man proposes, but woman disposes."⁴⁷

Occasionally, the CW incurred exceptional amounts of debt due to generous outreach in living Gospel values to achieve social change. Assistance to striking seamen during 1936–1937, for example, stretched expenditures far beyond their slim resources. After listing a litany of foods purchased to feed the hungry men and admitting to a whopping \$1,500 expense during the previous month, and already having an astonishing \$1,200 debt, not including rent for a building near the waterfront, Day explained that Catholic Workers were turning confidently to St. Joseph.

Not only was the debt enormous, but aiding strikers, and especially Left-leaning ones, was divisive. "People are always glad to donate money to 'charity,'" Day knew, "but when it is a question of hungry strikers many call them 'Communists' and refuse to help."⁴⁸ To remind supporters that the CW helped strikers because of their humanity and need for just wages and representation, she attempted to redefine the situation for doubters.

The Catholic Worker was performing works of mercy, not aiding and abetting the domestic growth of communism. In such a delicate situation, Day elevated the appeal by calling upon a heavenly helper, "We have placed our troubles, of course, in the hands of St. Joseph. We told him frankly: 'You must help us.'"⁴⁹ Donors could respond to the call from heaven and earth to heed the saint and Day's urgings to join in works of mercy. While the effectiveness in changing hearts and minds is impossible to assess, the bills were paid.

To draw followers more deeply into the culture of devotion to St. Joseph, Day described her personal devotional practices and insights, establishing intimacy with supporters through sharing an example they could imitate. After lighting a candle "before his altar," a common practice, she prayerfully "contemplated the gallant figure of the workman saint as he stood there, his head flung back, his strong arm embracing the Child, a smile on his face as he looked down at the . . . kneeling workers worshipping at Mass."⁵⁰ By describing Joseph's positive masculine traits, she aimed to highlight his role as a model for men and reinforce both faith in his intercession

47. Quoted by Day in "On Pilgrimage," *The Catholic Worker* (February 1979), 7, one of several times she recalled it.

48. Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 39. In this account she cites a \$3,000 debt "after our money gave out."

49. Day, "'They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread,'" *The Catholic Worker* (February 1937), 1.

50. Day, "'They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread,'" 1.

and respect for and devotion to the saint. Catholic Worker personalism meant that women and men alike needed to perform works of mercy.

Having established need, engaged in prayer, addressed potential donors' concerns, and set an example of personal devotion, she reminded followers that even the smallest donations mattered and would be gratefully accepted; even the poorest could contribute. The small gifts of ordinary people, a modern version of the widow's mite, would give them a stake in the Catholic Worker, making them part of its widespread community.

By soliciting modest donations, Day expected to protect the CW's freedom to follow the Gospel without compromise. She later explained that she wanted none of the conditions that frequently accompanied large donations and foundation grants. She cited several donors, who, like one named Frank, provided \$2 weekly from his poverty-level \$10 weekly salary.⁵¹ In sharing examples of generosity and commitment, Day suggested that others might imitate them, setting aside a regular amount for the Worker. And persons of greater means received an especially compelling invitation to donate: If the poor found ways to support the work, surely those better off could do so, too.

Day addressed another concern of consequence to hesitant donors: the "worthiness" of recipients. This was an age-old issue, a tendency to divide the needy into "worthy" and "unworthy" poor. Were all entitled to assistance? Did helping those who seemingly "caused" their own problems enable them to persist in dysfunctional or immoral behaviors? By helping the "unworthy" poor, were the "deserving" poor cheated from receiving their fair share of limited resources? She had long emphasized the God-given dignity of all persons. Therefore, all deserved help, no matter their situation. If descriptions of hunger and debt could not soften the hearts of potential donors, then perhaps concern for the souls of "the masses . . . being lost to the church" might inspire their support.⁵²

Day further encouraged followers by discussing why Joseph met the community's needs. Perhaps he was responding to their commitment to voluntary poverty and to following Jesus's core teachings. As she explained, "I know that if we do our share, he is perfectly faithful about fulfilling his obligations."⁵³ Certainly, the saint could not dispute Day's conviction that the work of feeding the poor was what "our Lord wants us to do. . . , so we must

51. Day, "They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread," 1.

52. Day, "They Knew Him in the Breaking of the Bread," 1.

53. Day, *House of Hospitality*, 151; Day, "Day after Day," *The Catholic Worker* (December 1936), 4.

do it.”⁵⁴ Additionally, because Joseph cared for Jesus’s needs on earth, Jesus could not “disregard his requests.”

Acutely aware of class divisions within the Catholic community, Day privately hoped for the generosity that would honor St. Joseph as an almoner for the poor. Contrasting “scarce and often bad” food at the CW with the “delicate wine, the delicious food, the abundance of delicacies and exquisite service” at “the Archbishop’s palace,” she regretted the community’s food sometimes failed to meet minimum standards. “It is an insult to St. Joseph, our provider,” she noted, “to serve such meals.”⁵⁵ She hoped that generosity could assist the saint in narrowing the quality and quantity gap between the food on the tables of the rich and the poor.

Optimistic when praising St. Joseph’s efficacy and expressing gratitude for donations in *The Catholic Worker* paper, Day privately shared a more nuanced account of the community’s precarious finances two years into the Catholic Worker experiment. She informed Catherine de Hueck that the community was rationing food, limiting meals to two each day “and slim ones at that.” Lacking cash to print the paper, she could not even mail an appeal. In perfect honesty, she admitted that “we sometimes get nothing” from an appeal.⁵⁶

What appeared as an apparent failure, however, gifted Day with an opportunity for deeper spiritual reflection. She did not chide St. Joseph for failure to provide. Appreciating that privation was drawing her closer to the poor, she acknowledged that “we are talking to the insecure, to the poverty-stricken, so why should we have less worries and more security than they?” Her response was to persist in prayer and make “a pilgrimage to St. Joseph,” which likely involved visits to churches.⁵⁷ Joseph, she allowed, would himself decide how to care for the Catholic Worker. And she would accept his wisdom.

To perform the works of mercy, the Catholic Worker community needed adequate shelter for guests and volunteers. Catholic popular culture had fashioned St. Joseph into a home seller. Burying his statue in the ground and praying the accompanying prayer were said to produce a sale. For Day, Joseph’s real estate skills also included assistance with locating and funding a

54. Day, “Of Finances and Personal Initiative (Day after Day),” *The Catholic Worker* (February 1938), 2.

55. Day, 1938, in Ellsberg, ed., *Duty of Delight*, 29.

56. Day to de Hueck, July 1935, in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 76.

57. Day to de Hueck, July 1935, in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 76. For a more optimistic letter concerning petition prayer to St. Joseph, see the letter to de Hueck of July 17, 1935, *All the Way to Heaven*, 78.

house or farm purchase.⁵⁸ When facing imprisonment in 1959 for violating the State of New York Civil Defense measure, Day wrote to a Catholic Worker member: “We must redouble prayers to St. Joseph, the home-finder. I feel, ominously, that this *not* finding a place right away must mean that we are slated for six months in jail.”⁵⁹ She was wrong about the lengthy sentence, but the saint eventually located a new home.

Postwar Challenges

During the early postwar era, Day’s appeals reached a smaller list of donors. Opposition to her firm Gospel pacifism during World War II thinned the ranks of readers. *The Catholic Worker’s* circulation plummeted to slightly over 50,000 in May 1945 from its peak of 190,000 in May 1938.⁶⁰

Still, she loyally promoted devotion to her faithful patron, and St. Joseph continued to provide and protect. By the 1950s, Day increasingly launched appeals to St. Joseph with the assistance of other favored saints. Amidst rising global and domestic crises during this long era of American prosperity, Day would elevate St. Francis of Assisi to co-patron of the community.⁶¹ He would serve as a prominent spiritual guide and model of socially engaged Christianity.

Following a lengthy era of scarcity and restrictions, many Americans, including Catholics, sought to make up for lost time by pursuing the highly touted “American way of life.”⁶² The middle class’s postwar quest for wealth and consumer goods and the government’s reliance upon weapons stockpiles alarmed Day as existential threats and sharp departures from Jesus’s teachings. Having envisioned Joseph as the working class’s protector, supporter, and model, Day believed that other saints were better equipped to fill the void left by the saint’s silence in scripture.⁶³

In addition to Mass and Communion, Day’s robust faith in the saints naturally directed her to certain holy men and women. Explaining her use of cer-

58. Vishnewski, *Wings of the Dawn*, 132.

59. Day to Deane Mowrer, April 5, 1959, in Ellsberg, ed., *All the Way to Heaven*, 251. She was sentenced to ten days in the workhouse. See Day, “On Pilgrimage,” *The Catholic Worker* (July 1959), 1.

60. Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 180.

61. Day, “On Pilgrimage,” *The Catholic Worker* (July-August 1968), 2. The date that Francis became co-patron is unknown.

62. For a thoughtful analysis of American way of life ideology, see Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

63. In her 1942, 1951, and 1952 appeals, Day described Joseph as “a man of few words,” hinting that perhaps other saints could address issues that Joseph could not.

tain saints for “spiritual instruction,” she named favorites in her 1952 memoir, including Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi, and Therese of Lisieux, all of whom left a rich legacy of spiritual writings.⁶⁴ Tellingly, Joseph was absent from the list. The study of the saints’ lives and works enabled “the beauty of holiness [to] shine thru them,” connecting the human with the divine. “We can do nothing today without saints,” she counseled, “big ones and little ones.”⁶⁵ Simply the thought of being in their presence delighted her: “Oh, the joyful doctrine of the communion of saints!”⁶⁶

Since the 1930s, Day had occasionally written about St. Francis of Assisi as a model of personalism, grounded in the radical message of the Gospel. When the United States entered World War II, Francis symbolized a familiar Christian precursor who relied upon Gospel nonviolence. Familiar with the stories and legends from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, Day pointed to his peacemaking in such stories as the wolf of Gubbio and Francis’s meeting with the Sultan as evidence for his rejection of violence and war.⁶⁷

Accompanying the Catholic Worker declaration of Christian pacifism following Pearl Harbor, Day printed an image of St. Francis standing under the slogan “PEACE WITHOUT VICTORY.” With wolf and squirrel at his feet, and birds fluttering in the air, the saint’s outstretched hands gave a blessing. The unidentified artist added the sun, moon, and a star as if to illustrate Francis’s insight that a loving Creator, not humankind’s dependence on lethal weapons, provided the path to peace.⁶⁸

With St. Francis in mind, in 1952, she informed comfortable American Catholics that “Poverty is the grace we most need in this age of crisis, at the

64. Several times Day mentioned her belief in the communion of saints; for example, “Aims and Purposes,” *The Catholic Worker* (May 1943); “On Pilgrimage,” *The Catholic Worker* (May 1976), 10; *The Long Loneliness*, 246.

65. Day, quoted in Ellsberg, *The Duty of Delight*, 414, 69.

66. Day, “May Day—1956,” *The Catholic Worker* (May 1956), 2.

67. Day often referred to *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. She had read the stories to children shortly after her conversion. See “About Mary,” November 5, 1943, reprinted in Jordan, ed., *Dorothy Day: Writings*, 86. Shortly before her death, she requested a copy of *Little Flowers* and expressed thanks for several editions received from *Catholic Worker* readers. See Day, “On Pilgrimage” (March–April 1979), 2; “On Pilgrimage” (May 1979), 2.

68. The Editors [Day], “Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War: We Continue Our Christian Pacifist Stand,” *The Catholic Worker* (January 1942), 1, 4. The tiny image appeared on page 1. Although CW pacifism was rooted in the Gospel, during World War II, Day published the writings of priests John Hugo and G. Barry O’Toole to show that just war theology and philosophy could support pacifism. See Patrick G. Coy, “Conscription and Catholic Conscience,” in Anne Klejment and Nancy L. Roberts, eds., *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 47–63. See also Anne Klejment, “The Spirituality of Dorothy Day’s Pacifism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2009), 1–24.



Image of St. Francis of Assisi by an unidentified artist as published in *The Catholic Worker*. The image appeared in the January 1942 issue following the bombing on Pearl Harbor along with Dorothy Day's editorial "Our Country Passes from Undeclared to Declared War."

time when expenditures reach into the billions to defend 'our American way of life.' Maybe it is this defense which will bring down upon us this poverty which we do not pray for." The apparent postwar peace and prosperity, Day prophetically noted, would eventually expose its own fragility. What could bring a true sense of freedom and joy? "An understanding and a love of poverty" like that of St. Francis was the model to imitate.⁶⁹

Peter Maurin, a "modern Francis," for his detachment from materialism and single-hearted embrace of mission, died in 1949, and Day redoubled her efforts to promote Franciscan spirituality.⁷⁰ In doing so, she honored Maurin's profound commitment to Franciscan virtues, especially his practice of voluntary poverty and manual labor, which, she noted, "was

69. Day, "Poverty and Precarity," *The Catholic Worker* (May 1952), 2. Day's reliance on Francis to challenge the status quo was one of the interpretations of the saint that surfaced during the postwar years. See Patricia Applebaum, *St. Francis of America: How a Thirteenth-Century Friar Became America's Most Popular Saint* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 89–109.

70. Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 273–274.

the beginning of all true reform, which was to begin with one's self."⁷¹ Like him, she had long appreciated Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Rite Expiatis* (1926), honoring Francis, Franciscan charisms, and the Three Orders on the 700th anniversary of the saint's death. Describing it as "great," she considered the encyclical "a clarion call to action, Catholic action."⁷²

Day still cultivated fervent devotion to St. Joseph, rejoicing when, in 1955, during the reign of Pope Pius XII, the Vatican added the feast of St. Joseph the Worker to the liturgical calendar. Decades after the Catholic Worker had promoted Joseph as patron of and model for workers, the Church celebrated him as a symbol of the "Christian understanding of work."⁷³ By honoring the dignity of work and the worker, the Vatican intended the feast to offer a cold war era Catholic alternative to the communist and capitalist degradation of human dignity.

By the 1950s, Joseph and Francis were often in each other's company at the Catholic Worker. In her 1956 journal reflection on the feast of St. Joseph, she found it humorous that, "Today a most beautiful book has come in, almost as a gift from St. Joseph on his feast day. It is a *Pictorial Life of St. Francis*. . . ."⁷⁴ After providing for the endless needs of the frequently destitute Catholic Worker community, perhaps Joseph welcomed Francis's assistance. Addressing the 1958 fall appeal to St. Joseph "to keep us going," Day aimed to mail it on the feast of St. Francis.⁷⁵ Calling upon Joseph and Francis for assistance did not mean enjoying creature comforts at the house of hospitality but rather sharing poverty in community. When St. Joseph House relocated to 36 East First Street in 1968, she delighted in the installation of St. Francis and St. Joseph statues, which, she felt, were "beautiful indeed in their clean new setting."⁷⁶ But when cost overruns to meet building code requirements awakened her at night, she thought of guests and volunteers

71. Day, "Personalist Peter Maurin," *The Catholic Worker* (May 1953), 2.

72. Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis*, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_30041926_rite-expiatis.html; [unsigned], "Days with an End," *The Catholic Worker* (April 1934), 3.

73. Vatican News, "St. Joseph the Worker, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of Workers," <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/saints/05/01/st-joseph--the-worker--spouse-of-the-blessede-virigin-mary---pat.html>. May Day is also known as International Workers' Day.

74. Day, quoted in Ellsberg, *Duty of Delight*, 210.

75. Mentioning the statue of St. Joseph, Day addressed her "Fall Appeal" to Therese of Lisieux and Francis of Assisi, *The Catholic Worker* (November 1957), 2; "On Pilgrimage," *The Catholic Worker* (September 1958), 2.

76. Day, "On Pilgrimage," *The Catholic Worker* (July-August 1968), 2. The statues of the saints, Joseph by Joseph O'Connell, and Francis by Charles Umlauf, mentioned in Day, *Loaves and Fishes*, 186, were the ones that moved to East First Street. Patrick Jordan, email to author, October 24, 2021. However, he did not know who had sculpted St. Francis.

benefiting from the improvements and “fell asleep again,” comforted and confident, because “St. Joseph had always aided us.”⁷⁷

Day’s Devotionalism in Historical Context

Like many Catholics in the first half of the twentieth century, Day maintained a lively and fruitful devotional life. Unlike the majority, she grounded herself spiritually by attending daily Mass and receiving Communion, and she supported liturgical renewal, which sought the laity’s active participation.⁷⁸ Reflecting on Catholic Worker spirituality, she noted that the renewal “has meant everything” to the CW “from its very beginning. The Mass was the center of our lives. . . .” As she often reminded others, “Mass is the most important work of the day,” while also cautioning that one must not forget the example and power of the saints.⁷⁹

Such lay participation at Mass was unusual during the 1930s and 40s, and even into the 1950s. A devoted missal user, Day supported using the vernacular in the liturgy to help the laity understand Mass as sacrifice and their role in it.⁸⁰ She connected the liturgical movement’s ecclesiology, particularly Mystical Body of Christ theology, with social action in the world.⁸¹ Worship, she believed, should not deny the corporate nature of the Church, human interdependence, or the reality of each person as “another Christ” at prayer and in daily life.

Participation at Mass and in devotions drew Day closer to God. Devotional prayer helped sustain and develop Day’s relationship with the communion of saints, her prayer partners who offered spiritual guidance that strengthened her will to live as a committed Christian. Not only did Day address the saints in prayer, but she sought knowledge of their lives through reading their works and popular hagiographies. For her, “the cult of the saints is a most fas-

77. Day quoted in Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 285.

78. Day never explained what motivated her initial support for liturgical renewal. She did claim that the first serious book she read after her conversion was Karl Adam’s *Spirit of Catholicism*, originally published in 1929, which exposed her to Mystical Body theology related to the renewal. Day, “Books Received,” *The Catholic Worker* (November 1954), 4. Her understanding of the Mystical Body and renewal would develop during the 1930s. At the Catholic Worker, supporters of liturgical renewal, including Virgil Michel, O.S.B., among others, gave talks and Day and others read the works of the renewal, generously donated by Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota.

79. Day, May 1966, in Robert Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 198; Day in Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight*, 37, 69.

80. Day, September 1966, in Ellsberg, ed., *On Pilgrimage: The Sixties*, 212. She preferred using a missal to read the canon of the Mass, review saints’ feasts, and understand the words of the liturgy.

81. [Day], “Liturgy and Sociology,” *The Catholic Worker* (January 1936), 5.

cinating study—the beauty of holiness shines out thru them and illumines history. One feels their influence still. . . .”⁸² Their writings enriched her insight into the Christian life, which she regularly shared with others.

Day promoted and enlarged devotion to St. Joseph in the United States. Before the late nineteenth century, Joseph’s obscurity hindered devotion, but that changed during the reigns of two popes.⁸³ In 1870 as the papacy’s temporal authority waned, Pius IX named St. Joseph the patron of the Catholic Church. To encourage the laity to call upon him to protect the Church in “disastrous” times, in 1889, Pope Leo XIII wrote an encyclical on St. Joseph, *Quamquam pluries*, discussing how Joseph provided a model of harmony, faithfulness, purity, and love in family life, virtues that addressed contemporary personal and social moral decay. Leo’s concern for workers’ interest in socialism led to his second theme: Joseph’s station in life as a worker. Leo declared “that there is . . . nothing abject in being of humble station” and that virtuous work ennoble the worker. Anticipating the social teaching encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), he proposed that workers “have the right to . . . better their condition by legitimate means.”⁸⁴ Some of Day’s devotions seem to be informed by Pope Leo’s ideas, if not by the document itself.

A sampling of devotional literature available to U.S. Catholics prior to 1930 viewed St. Joseph as a protector and a model of virtue to be imitated. An earlier work from the eighteenth century promoted devotion to a neglected saintly protector, along with nourishing “his clients’ piety.”⁸⁵ Joseph did not seek “prominence among men,” according to a Paulist author; instead, he was a “model of the faithful steward” whose “perfection” could guide modern Catholics living an active life.⁸⁶ An imaginative volume by a

82. The best source on Day’s knowledge of the saints’ lives is her writings. For valuable context and interpretation, see Brigid O’Shea Merriman, O.S.F., *Searching for Christ: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 171–197, and Mark Zwick and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), especially the chapters on Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Siena. Day in Ellsberg, ed., *The Duty of Delight*, 414.

83. For background on devotions to St. Joseph, see Charles Souvay, “St. Joseph,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), <http://newadvent.org/cathen/08504a.htm>; and Sandra Miesel, “The Often Silent and Surprising History of Devotion to Saint Joseph,” <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2021/03/18/the-often-silent-and-surprising-history-of-devotion-to-saint-joseph/>.

84. For this translation, see Leo XIII, “On the Patronage of St. Joseph and of the Blessed Virgin,” [*Quamquam pluries*] (1889), reprinted in *Life of the Spirit* (May 1949), 481–485. Also, Leo XIII, *Quamquam pluries*, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15081889_quamquam-pluries.html.

85. Joseph Anthony Patrignani, S.J., *Devotion to Saint Joseph* (New York: D & J Sadlier, 1887), 5, a translation of an early eighteenth-century work.

86. A Paulist Priest, “St. Joseph: Model of Fidelity” (New York: Paulist Press, 1915).

Holy Ghost priest focused on Joseph as a saint of the commonplace, living under “monotonous” and “wearying” circumstances without becoming disheartened. Having “solved the problem of the Holy Will of God,” Joseph excelled as a saintly protector and patron of a happy death.⁸⁷

By 1930, devotion to St. Joseph appears to have become more popular. In its fifth edition, a devotional pamphlet echoed the themes of Joseph as “our Father and Protector,” a saint whose power exceeded the requests of his petitioners. Its prayers include a litany calling upon the saint as “Model of Laborers,” “Patron of the Dying,” and “Protector of our Holy Church,” and specific prayers addressed to the patron of the universal Church and patron of a happy death.⁸⁸

Relatively few articles concerning devotion to St. Joseph appeared in American Catholic periodicals between 1890 and 1930.⁸⁹ Just how many Catholics encountered this literature is impossible to estimate. Among the virtues of Joseph, purity, faithfulness to God, protector of the devout, and caretaker of the Universal Church received attention. Although he was occasionally portrayed as a worker, an 1890 article focused on Joseph as an “honest” and “contented” “artisan,” a description that failed to convey concern for the exploitation of laborers.⁹⁰ St. Joseph as an intercessor for a happy death prevailed more than any other orientation in these writings.⁹¹

When interpreting Day’s devotional innovations in light of prevailing themes, a few conclusions can be drawn. She cited Teresa of Avila several times as a key influence in developing trust in St. Joseph’s resourcefulness. Familiar with social encyclicals, specifically Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, whether she read Leo’s letter on Joseph remains unclear, despite shared concern about workers and the choice of Joseph as a model for and patron of workers. Her socially infused descriptions of the saint and pioneering devotions for workers furthered Pope Leo’s efforts and represented her most influential effort to promote devotion to St. Joseph. Day’s approach bears

87. Michael A. Kelly, *A Man Who Was a Man: St. Joseph* (Cornwells Heights, PA: Paraclete Publishing, 1920), 19–20, 132.

88. “Devotions to Saint Joseph” (Clyde, MO: Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, fifth ed., 1930).

89. Among those surveyed were the (San Francisco) *Monitor*, *Our Sunday Visitor*, (Cincinnati) *Catholic Telegraph*, and (Hartford) *Catholic Transcript*, selected issues of which are available online in the Catholic News Archive, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/>.

90. *The Pilgrim of Our Lady of Martyrs*, [untitled excerpt], *Catholic Telegraph* (March 16, 1890).

91. Examples with the happy death focus include: *Catholic Telegraph* (March 19, 1903); *Monitor* (August 15, 1908), and *Our Sunday Visitor* (October 5, 1913).

only superficial resemblance to his portrayals and typical devotions to him in popular Catholic writings prior to 1930.

Conclusion

Dorothy Day developed a spirituality defined by participating at daily Mass, receiving Communion, and engaging with the communion of saints. Her special devotion to St. Joseph initially affirmed his two traditional roles, provider and protector. He served her as a most dependable assistant. During the Depression, Day initiated devotions that illuminated his underappreciated status as a worker and enlarged the sphere of his social concerns. By feeding and sheltering striking workers and their allies, Joseph aided labor union activists' efforts. His ability to motivate donors, rich and poor alike, advanced the Catholic Worker's experimental farming communities and provided for its urban houses of hospitality. By delivering miraculous aid during times of dire need, he implicitly supported the Catholic Worker's social agenda. He broke through barriers, assisting even those many considered unworthy. His decades of help validated the core Catholic Worker belief—that besides the love of God, love of neighbor was a requirement rather than an option for Christians. He became an unassuming ally as Day comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable with her Gospel-based social action.

Over the years, Day's frequent mention of St. Joseph in *The Catholic Worker* and elsewhere reached tens of thousands of readers. By describing Joseph's saintly attributes and the ordinariness of his life experiences, she built a spiritual path between the saint and working-class American Catholics of the Depression era. As a common man, manual laborer, and head of the Holy Family, Joseph became an accessible role model for Catholic men. Her reports of Joseph answering prayers encouraged hopefulness during dark times and convinced others to turn to him in time of need.

With the onset of world war, the culture of conspicuous consumption, and the development of the military-industrial complex, Day realized that Joseph's hidden life limited his value as a spiritual guide for Christians responding to postwar existential challenges. St. Francis of Assisi's profound conversion, his rejection of material wealth, and peacemaking attempts, she thought, could remind mid-century middle-class Catholics that the pursuit of wealth and power did not reflect authentic Christianity. Day named Francis co-patron of the Catholic Worker, while continuing to promote devotion to St. Joseph and ask his aid.