



**WHAT THE CATHOLIC WORKER BELIEVES**

BY PETER MAURIN

- The Catholic Worker believes in the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism.
- The Catholic worker believes in the personal obligation of looking after the needs of our sisters and brothers.
- The Catholic Worker believes in the daily practice of the works of mercy.
- The Catholic Worker believes in Houses of Hospitality for the immediate relief of those who are in need.
- The Catholic Worker believes in creating a new society within the shell of the old. . .

# Ora et Labora

PRAY AND WORK

SEPTEMBER 2011

## Where There Is Love by Liza Apper

*Where there is no love, put love and you will find love.*  
-St. John of the Cross

*I was thinking how, as one gets older, we are tempted to sadness, knowing life as it is here on earth, the suffering, the Cross. And how we must overcome it daily, growing in love, and the joy which goes with loving.*  
-Dorothy Day, February 2, 1961

"Please come... I need you," said the troubled, barely audible voice on the other end of my cell phone last week. It was my friend John, a former Fresno County Sheriff whom I met in 1997 when the St. Benedict Catholic Worker first began serving those in need in front of Fresno County Jail. During those early days, John became drawn to our Catholic Worker, encouraging our presence at the jail and even providing us with rice and beans for our soups and clothing and blankets for people in our soup line. Over the next fourteen years, John has remained a part of our community--encouraging and supporting our work and taking a keen interest in Catholic Worker spirituality.

My cell phone had rung that evening while I was driving "Dorothy," our Catholic Worker truck, accompanied by my husband, Bryan. We were on our way downtown, the truck fully loaded, to serve at the jail. When I heard the phone ring, I felt a pressing sense of urgency that caused me to immediately pull Dorothy over to the side of the road and answer the call. "Please come...I need you. This is John. I don't feel good. I am having trouble breathing. I need you to come as soon as possible." The desperation in his voice, and a visit with him earlier in the day, told me that John was having a COPD exacerbation.

Two years ago John was diagnosed with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). COPD is a progressive disease that makes it hard to breathe. COPD includes two main conditions: chronic bronchitis and emphysema. When John has a COPD exacerbation that means he is experiencing a worsening of his symptoms of emphysema (which include difficulty breathing, coughing, & wheezing that can, and often do, lead to infection, i.e. bronchitis).

While I was on the phone with John, I could hear him wheezing between his measured words, his anxiety increasing by the moment. He was scared and, frankly, so was I. Over the past two years, COPD has ravaged John's body and, at times, his spirit.

It was a little over two years ago that John came to me asking for help. The COPD has already cost him a number of losses—marriage, home, job and his ability to do the things he once could do with ease. Helping John meant that we would have to limit our efforts

## Where There is Love, *continued from page 1*

*The St. Benedict Catholic Worker decided to do the same—to love as Dorothy loved.*

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on the soup line at the jail and put, as first priority, ministering to John’s needs. We asked ourselves: What would Dorothy do? We found our answer in the published diaries of Dorothy Day entitled, *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day*. In an entry dated Monday, September 28, 1959 Dorothy writes of a similar request for help. Nanette, the 30 year companion of Foster Batterham (Dorothy’s former lover and father of her daughter, Tamar), was dying of cancer, and asked Dorothy if she would take care of her. Dorothy, she was told, had “a reputation for caring for other people;” would she care for her? At once, Dorothy responded to this plea. And, the St. Benedict Catholic Worker, decided to do the same--to love as Dorothy loved.

We decided that we would do everything we could to love John through his pain and suffering to a better quality of life for as long as possible—until our God calls him home. This meant, and means, daily visits spending time with him, listening to him, talking with him and assessing his needs; being his medical advocate (dealing with doctor’s appointment, medications, hospital stays, etc.); preparing meals, doing housekeeping chores, and companionship his otherwise healthy 86 year old mother, Ann, with whom he lives. It is a daily commitment of love that the St. Benedict Catholic Worker has pledged to be faithful to “above all else.”

The phone conversation continued...“Okay John, I said, calmly trying to reassure him, “I am on my way right now. I will be there in 15 minutes.” “That will be fine,” he quietly replied. “Alright, my friend,” I said, matter-of-factly, “See you in a bit.”

When the phone conversation ended, Bryan understood what we were facing and lovingly said, “That was John, wasn’t it. Is he having trouble with his breathing?” “Yes,” I answered him. “Let’s get back to the house,” Bryan suggested, “and I will unload the truck so that you can go and help John through this.” At that moment, love was taking a different direction. We would not be going to the jail tonight to be God’s loving presence to those in need; instead God’s love was more directly needed with John. It was a matter of priority, a priority of love that the St. Benedict Catholic Worker pledged to honor two years ago.

Bryan and I were each being called to love and serve God by loving John that night. For Bryan, it meant unloading the truck so that it would be ready to be of service to John, to be on call in case I needed his help, and to pray as I headed to be with John. For me, being called to love meant being God’s loving presence with John and helping him through this medical crisis. Bryan and I were being led, once again, to love and serve where there is no love—in the pain, suffering, and loneliness of someone who is ill with a progressive and ultimately fatal disease.

John ended up in the hospital that night, his breathing severely compromised by the COPD exacerbation to a point where I had to call 911. But that night and for the next week neither John nor his mother were left alone. We “put love,” the love of God that overcomes suffering and continues to fill us in the space between so that all of us share in that love and the joy that comes from it.

## Reflections of a Server by Felicia Batts

Any and everyone come through the line on Monday and Wednesday nights; even midday on Saturdays. Young old. Tall short. Black White. Men women. Visitors to the jail. Recently released inmates. Downtown residents. Fresno's homeless. It's been a year now and serving on the line has become very meaningful to me. Creating a new meaning to the term "giving back", I have enjoyed seeing and meeting all of these people; smiling at and talking to all of these people.

Peter Maurin wrote about *What Makes Humanity Humane*. He said:

To give and not to take,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 To serve and not to rule,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 To help and not to crush,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 To nourish and not to devour  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 And if need be,  
 To die and not live,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 Ideals and not deals,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.  
 Creed and not greed,  
     that is what makes humanity humane.

***It's been a year now  
 and serving on the line  
 has become very  
 meaningful to me.***

On Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays anyone who visits us gets treated with dignity and respect.

that is what makes humanity humane.

## Teen Perspective by Paris Batts

Working the line was very interesting to me. I was scared at first but then I got comfortable with all the different people. I got to meet people that were very kind and very well mannered. I would try to be nice to everyone to make them feel more welcomed about what we were doing (providing food & drinks).

The kids were just the sweetest. They were like every other kid. I loved working inside the jail with the kids who were waiting with someone to visit an inmate. It was fun because I got to color with them and learn their names and they learned mine. I felt excited to go back and to be able to color with more kids. I love to see them smile. It makes me feel like I'm doing a good job. And when their parents thank me with a smile on their face -- that made me feel--- like I accomplished something great.

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## House Journal

Our summer began with the Fourth Annual St. Benedict Catholic Worker Yard Sale. Natalia Monreal and the Los Amigos de San Benito raised \$3,520.00 for our Catholic Worker. Thanks to everyone who volunteered and donated items.

On Sunday, October 2, the St. Benedict Catholic Worker will be selling our famous bread pudding at the best parish carnival in Fresno-- St. Mary Queen of the Apostles Parish Carnival.

Fall will see us going to two very special gatherings, our "Sister House Retreat" at La Casa de Maria on September 23-25 and the International Catholic Worker Gathering on October 6-9, where we will be giving a workshop, *Benedictine Spirituality and the Catholic Worker*. We look forward to both of these Catholic Worker get-togethers; they help to strengthen our commitment and provide Catholic Workers with opportunities for mutual support.

As we enter our 15th year as a Catholic Worker house we look forward to new ways to give and experience God's love.

## Needs List

New coloring books

Hot chocolate

Instant coffee

Coffee creamer

Wooden coffee stir sticks

8 oz Styrofoam cups

13/33 gal. trash bags

Quickie wheelchair

Outdoor storage unit