



**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

DECEMBER 2009

A Thought in God

A Miracle for Christmas

By Liza Apper

This is the Christian's joy: I know that I am a thought in God, no matter how insignificant I may be—the most abandoned of beings, one no one thinks of—I am a thought incarnate in God's womb.

--Oscar Romero, December 24, 1978

"The prophet. He knows. Life is. What do you mean you hear? Yesterday was cold. Gotta hurry time is runnin' out. Who are you? Startin' trouble, eh? There is peace here, isn't there?" The man continued the random conversation with himself, seemingly unaware of the people who passed by him in the Catholic Worker soup line that night in front of Fresno County Jail.

The man had become a regular, on our line, coming every Monday and Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons. He would stand in the same place every time at the far end of our serving table. At some point, there would be a break in his conversation and he would join the line. After being served, he would return to his place by the table, with his food and drink, and without skipping a beat, continue his schizophrenic dialog.

Several times over the past few months I had tried to break through the madness of his conversation by introducing myself, asking his name and making attempts to understand his inner conversation but to no avail. His presence at the end of the table became increasingly frightening for some of our volunteers, exasperating for others, and unsettling for those who came through our line. I patiently continued to try and engage "the man at the end of the table" who alternated between present day reality and his own constructed one. In observing him, however, I began to notice a slight smile when he received dinner on the line. As he ate, I began to hear bits of conversation from him about how good the food was, how well it was prepared and how good "these people" (meaning the Catholic Worker volunteers) are "to do this." He also began to ask for seconds on coffee, a huge step in making a connection with us.



Serving coffee on the soup line.

A Thought in God, *continued from page 1*

“Sean. My name is Sean.”

Then one night, he approached me, saying, “You’re a Catholic Worker. Dorothy Day—she’s up for sainthood isn’t she?”

One night, after greeting him with the usual, “Hi, my name is Liza. What is your name?” He looked me straight in the eye, his own clear blue eyes a window to his now-present lucidity, and answered, “Sean. My name is Sean.” At that moment, Sean no longer was anonymous. He was not “the man at the end of the table,” the outcast standing at the edge of life. Instead, he was Sean, a person whom we at the Catholic Worker had seen all along as beloved of God. And now Sean had begun to see it too, by that first step of telling me his name.

In the weeks that followed the night that he first introduced himself to me, I made sure to greet him by name, engaging him in conversation over the meal we were serving, how his day had gone, or what he thought of some current event I would bring up. I noticed that his conversations with himself began to diminish as he was drawn more and more into conversation with me.

Then one night, he approached me, saying, “You’re a Catholic Worker. Dorothy Day—she’s up for sainthood isn’t she?” He then started to talk about the various Catholic Worker communities he was familiar with, the Catholic Workers he had met and the “good work,” as he called it, that they do. I stood there and listened as he talked on and on about Dorothy Day “and her followers,” as he put it. At the end of this miraculous conversation, he looked at me and said, “You know, you are one of them. You do pretty good.” He then asked me, “Can I help you clean up tonight?” “Sure.” I said, “We can always use your help.” That night Sean wiped down the tables and loaded them into the truck.

A few days later, at our Saturday serving at the jail, Sean came with a bright orange plastic storage box. “I found this dumpster diving and thought you might be able to use it.” “Oh yeah,” I said, “we Catholic Workers can never have enough good sturdy boxes to carry stuff in for the soup line.” Sean beamed, “All righty then, she’s yours.” As he proudly carried it into the back of our truck.

Sean had come to us the most abandoned of beings—a person suffering from mental illness. His status as an outcast was broken by the power of unconditional love—the love that Dorothy Day says is “the only solution.” It is that love that transforms the outcast who perceives him/herself as nothingness to seeing themselves as a thought in God...an incarnation of His love.

As we prepare ourselves for Christmas this year, let us remember the miracle of Christmas—that we all are a thought in God, the incarnation of God’s love.

House Journal *by Liza Apper*

This year brought challenges and change to the St. Benedict Catholic Worker. Early this year I had some serious health issues that needed to be addressed. In late February, I saw a doctor and together we began to work toward bettering my health. I took time off (March and most of April) so that I could adjust to my medications and new health routine. I did however continue working as the Kincaid Settlement Administrator with my husband, Bryan. By May our soup line was operating at less than full speed, but nevertheless with enthusiasm!

In August we reorganized the soup kitchen pantry. Thanks to the efforts of *Los Amigos de San Benito* under the leadership of Natalia Bolanos-Monreal we were able to purchase eight heavy duty utility shelves to store canned goods, soup kitchen pots, utensils, etc. In late August I helped move the youngest member of the St. Benedict Catholic Worker to her dorm apartment at Creighton University, where she transferred from Fresno City College.

In September our house and extended community members met to help reorganize our ministry so that we can better serve others with a less harried schedule—we now serve meals on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. A food preparation day on Sundays from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at St. Mary's kitchen was also added.

We began our 13th year in October—committed and strong. During this 13th year we pray for good health and a renewed sense of commitment to the “duty of delight,” as Dorothy Day described Catholic Worker life.

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Catholic Worker volunteers making cole slaw in the St. Mary Queen of Apostles' kitchen on a Sunday afternoon.



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Christmas Appeal



*Oh God, look upon the face of Thy
Christ in these poor, and help us to
keep going.*

-Dorothy Day

As we enter into the long, cold
foggy days of winter and
harsh economic times, our
soup line grows longer. At the
same time, our resources are
at an all-time low.

We turn to you, dear friends, for help to keep us going. We depend on your generosity so that we can look upon the face of Christ in those we serve and not turn them away for lack of food or other hospitality needs (see list at right).

Please help us to keep going...

Needs List

- Hot chocolate packets
- Christmas cookies
- Christmas candy
- Instant coffee
- Split peas
- Dry kidney beans
- New coloring books
- Sweat pants/shirts
- 8 oz/12 oz Styrofoam cups
- Styrofoam plates
- Plastic forks and spoons
- Smart and Final gift card
- Food Maxx gift card
- Costco gift card
- 13/33 gal. trash bags