

# Inspiration from Dorothy Day



“The only thing is to keep plugging along at the works of mercy and all that teaching implies.” I was rereading some letters of Dorothy Day as the first stage of her cause for sainthood was being [finalized](#) in New York. At a Mass on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan and leaders of the Dorothy Day Guild in the archdiocese signed the documentation and sealed the final of 137 boxes, which contain more than 50,000 pages of documents for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican.

My favorite quote about [Day](#) comes from Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, who said, “I don’t know if Dorothy Day is a saint, but she makes me want to be one.” That’s when you know you are dealing with someone holy – we want what she has! Myself, I simply hear her name and feel nudged to truly live the Beatitudes – now.

The Mass was beautiful, as every Mass is. This particular one combined the monthly young adult Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral with this milestone. I was wishing the after-party that the young people typically have could have included storytelling and reading from [Dorothy Day’s writings](#). There is much to be learned from this contemporary woman. Much has changed in the world, but the roots of the evil we confront attacking the human person were quite present to her.

There were three things in “All the Way to Heaven: The Selected Letters of Dorothy Day” (Image, \$16) that stood out to me as particularly helpful at the end of another pandemic year:

“To sit in the presence of the Sun of Justice is healing, though I have to force myself to remain in fatigue and

fullness and misery often. But the healing is there too. No matter how corrupt the Church may become, it carries within it the seeds of its own regeneration. To read the lives of the saints has always helped me. We've had corrupt popes and bishops, down through the ages, but a St. Francis, a St. Benedict, a St. Vincent de Paul, a Charles de Foucauld will keep on reminding me of the primacy of the spiritual. Peter Maurin [co-founder of Catholic Worker movement with Day] used to tell us to study history through the lives of the saints."

Part of why the canonization cause is so important is to help people see a witness of true trust in Christ and his Church, which will be a place of spiritual battle.

In another letter, she talked about why she wrote a book about St. Thérèse and her little way. "We know how powerless we are, all of us, against the power of wealth and government and industry and science. The powers of this world are overwhelming." That sure resonates. "Yet," she continued, "it is hoping against hope and believing, in spite of 'unbelief,' crying by prayer and by sacrifice, daily, small, constant sacrificing of one's own comfort and cravings – these are the things that count."

And this third letter is a remarkable meditation at the end of a year where there continues to be more Christian [persecution in the world](#) than during the first days of Christianity, and yet it all too often goes unnoticed.

"During these bombing days [the massive 'Christmas bombing' campaign over North Vietnam] I console myself or rather try to strengthen my weak knees by reading 500 Days (Salisbury) and 1914 (Solzhenitsyn) and realizing we never will have peace on earth but that we will survive and keep happily proclaiming the good news that men (and women) have tremendous capacities for spiritual growth. That little prayer of Ivan Denizovich on the Baptist, that strange joy lights up the world for me." The prayer? "I do not pray to get out of prison but to do the will

of God.”

This Christmas, may we all pray thus. And for one another. His plan is better than any of ours. Dorothy Day is a good example and intercessor in this. I know his will is not what I would design. And I’m ever grateful and pray for peace in total surrender as it unfolds.

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