

The Guild for Dorothy Day

A Woman of The Gospel, Prayer, The Church, Works of Mercy, Justice, and Peace



NEWSLETTER

The Very Human Friendship of Two Saintly Women

by Lourdes M. Ferrer



Aristotle wrote, "A true friend is one soul in two bodies." One can say that the friendship between Dorothy Day and Catherine de Hueck Doherty confirms the truth of these words. Both women were converts to the Catholic faith, mothers, writers, social activists, strong and independent, prayerful, loved the poor, lived lives of great faith and love for Jesus, and today, are both candidates for Canonization.

Like Dorothy, Catherine "challenged Christians of her day to live a radical Gospel life and to recognize God's image in every human being." Catherine was born in Russia in 1896, to an aristocratic family. It was a devout Christian family, and there she learned to see Jesus in the poor. Following the Russian Revolution, she emigrated to Canada in 1921. In the early 1930s, she founded Friendship House, a lay apostolate that

ministered to the poor of Toronto and she helped established a newspaper called *The Social Forum*. In 1938, at the request of Father John LaFarge, she opened Harlem Friendship House and traveled the U.S. condemning racial discrimination against African Americans. Catherine later returned to Canada, and in 1954 established the community of Madonna House.

In 1933, after reading the first issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Catherine wrote to Dorothy requesting copies, and as they say, the rest is history. The two women formed a bond that lasted until Dorothy's death in November 1980. After a long illness, Catherine joined Dorothy in December 1985 and my guess is the two friends picked up right where they left off.

Thanks to the old-fashioned art of letter writing, we are blessed with the opportunity to experience the friendship of these two amazing women, long after they have both left us. In 2009, *Comrades Stumbling Along: The Friendship of Catherine de Hueck Doherty and Dorothy Day as Revealed through Their Letters*, was release by Alba House. The book is a compilation of never-before published letters between the two friends. The volume was edited by Father Robert Wild, Postulator for the Cause for Canonization of Catherine de Hueck Doherty, and includes diary entries, by Catherine, as well as commentary by Father Wild, sets the stage for the communication between the women. The letters give us a glimpse into their lives, work, struggles, joys, and feistiness. But more important, the letters reveal the depths of their friendship, that was based on mutual love and admiration, and survived disagreements as well.

I am reprinting two such letters. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I have.

Continued on back page.

Guild News

- The Guild's membership has grown to 323. We are grateful for your dedication and enthusiasm for the Cause for Dorothy's canonization, and for your willingness to pray on behalf of the over 173 prayer requests The Guild has received.

- If you believe you have received a favor through the intercession of Dorothy Day, please notify The Guild so that it can be documented. We can be reached at The Guild for Dorothy Day, 1011 First Avenue, 12th floor, New York, NY 10022 or email us at lourdes.ferrer@archny.org.



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Setting the Stage:

Catherine is invited by Dorothy to spend the night at the House of Hospitality. The house is full, and the two women are to share a double bed, but as they get ready to retire, a knock at the door brings an additional guest. The homeless woman, afflicted with syphilis, is welcomed by Dorothy. The letters that follow indicate that Dorothy did not agree with Catherine's account of that night's events.

February 21, 1938

Dear D.D.

I hear that you are mad at me because I praised you too highly and you say that the "B's Russian dramatic sense (exaggeration) runs away with her."

May I take you back into the vistas of years—to your first H.H. (House of Hospitality) on 15th St., my first visit, your beds for women? I was sitting near the door. The female in question has a mop of peroxide hair that had not been washed for months, a raucous voice, 2 front teeth missing, a pinkish blouse over flabby hanging breasts, a skirt that hung askew, shoes with heels going inward, dirty feet, pink nails, bracelets 5-10 cent variety, and a very dirty neck. The conversation took place near a door; I was on a bench. She certainly came in and slept, and you certainly offered her your bed. That you did not know she was a syphilitic, was obvious. I told you so and you smiled and said, "What of it? St. Francis kissed a leper." I certainly did not dream this incident which more than anything else since has made me your reverend admiratrix.

You are very foolish at times. Darn it all, don't you realize how I love you, and what you mean to me! Because of you, I am in Harlem. Life has been hell for me for so many years. I have suffered much. But because of you the last 5-7 years have had something human to hang on to. You are like a beacon in the darkness to me. I am not given to sentimental, trashy worship. I just love you for what you are. I remember that incident as clearly as day. You have forgotten! But that is neither here nor there. Lay off being angry with me! It is high time someone with a punch stood up for you. And you can't stop me anyhow. If you did not stop Rev. D. when he reviled you, try to stop me when I praise you! Truly humble souls accept both indifferently. So there!

Your funny face, will you take care of yourself, please. I worry about you because I love you much.

Catherine

Dearest Catherine,

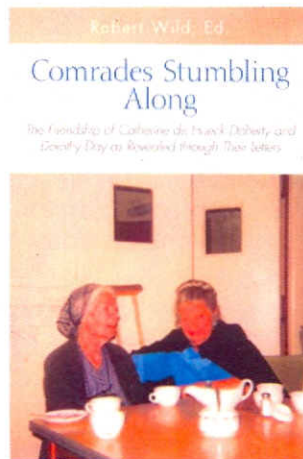
No, I cannot say that I remember the incident. I only know this, that though I have slept on the floor, I haven't never (*sic*) shared my bed. I know that most assuredly, so when you tell the tale that I took a syphilitic into bed with me, you make me out as one of these creatures fanatical and quite lacking in common sense, and there have been actually reactions against us and the work because of this story. The Church is noted for common sense! She first segregated the lepers. You will have the board of Health down on us all if you continue to repeat this story. So please, please! Your generous, Russian exuberance in defending us often delights me, but I must confess this story got ~~under~~ my skin. I shall continue to deny it as I hear it.

But I do love you, my dear, and always shall. Only you're too damn humble. You worry too much about your own humanness which makes you so charming and so *effective*. I have never suffered from complete lack of privacy to which you have submitted yourself this last year. It is good to urge each other on to virtue, but remember, we are comrades stumbling along not saints drifting along in ecstasies.

I'm dying to see your new paper. We are so broke, I wonder if we are not on the verge of complete annihilation. Then we will go down to the farm and cultivate our gardens. Our printing bill is still \$15.00. Pray for us, darlink.

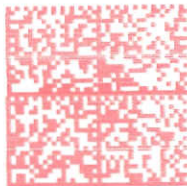
In Christ, Dorothy

Excerpted from:
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Written and Edited by Robert Wild,
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