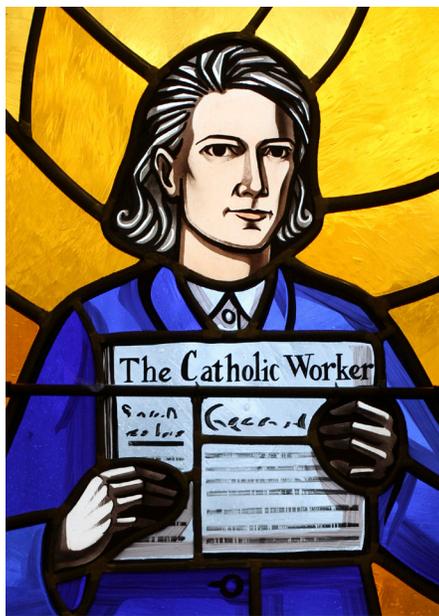


The Dorothy Day Story

Dorothy Day was born on November 8, 1897, and died on November 29, 1980. Daughter of a journalist, she also chose journalism as a profession. As a young woman, Dorothy became involved in several love affairs, entered into a brief marriage, and also gave birth to a child out of wedlock. She also had an abortion for which she later deeply repented.

During World War I, she became a Socialist and was influenced by the Communist Party, believing this was the best way to help the poor. But after the birth of her daughter, Tamar, she became a Catholic



and came under the influence of Peter Maurin, with whom she formed the Catholic Worker Movement. She embraced voluntary poverty, raised her daughter, devoted her life to the care of the poor, and struggled to remove both the causes and symptoms of poverty in society.

On November 9, 1997, Cardinal John O'Connor delivered a homily about sanctity and Dorothy Day on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of her birth. We quote here some of the comments that he made:

Dorothy Day died before I became archbishop of New York, or I would have called on her immediately upon my arrival. Few people have

had such an impact on my life, even though we never met.

A number of new books are appearing now, because of the centenary of her birth, but I still find her own book on St. Thérèse of Lisieux to reveal as much about Dorothy Day as anything else that I have read. Most particularly she seems clearly to recognize that Thérèse's "little way" was the way of suffering, and to understand with Thérèse that all suffering united with that of Christ on the Cross is of inestimable value for souls.

I wish every woman who has suffered an abortion . . . would come to know Dorothy Day. Her story was so typical. Made pregnant by a man who insisted she have an abortion, who then abandoned her anyway, she suffered terribly for what she had done, and later pleaded with others not to do the same. But later, too, after becoming a Catholic, she learned the love and mercy of the Lord, and knew she never had to worry about His forgiveness. This is why I have never condemned a woman who has had an abortion; I weep with her and ask her to remember Dorothy Day's sorrow but to know always God's loving mercy and forgiveness.

Not everyone who knew Dorothy at a distance is aware of her meetings with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or of the esteem in which Mother Teresa held her. A new book by Jim Forest, *Love is the Measure*, includes a portion of a Mother Teresa letter written for Dorothy Day's seventy-fifth birthday: Mother Teresa wrote to her, "So much love—so much sacrifice—all for Him alone. You have been such a beautiful branch on the Vine, Jesus, and

allowed His Father, the Vine dresser, to prune you so often and so much. You have accepted all with great love. . . .”

I wish I had known Dorothy Day personally. I feel that I know her because of her goodness. But surely, if any woman ever loved God and her neighbor, it was Dorothy Day! Pray that we do what we should do. (*Catholic New York* [November 13, 1997]: 13-14)

The Vatican has begun proceedings that may lead to her canonization. She went down many blind alleys before she found the road that Christ was pointing out to her all the time.

As the archbishop of New York City, Cardinal John O’Connor pointed out in his endorsement of her cause for sainthood that she “anticipated the teachings of John Paul II” in her uncompromising devotion both to the Church and to the cause of social justice. The Cardinal said he considered her a model for everyone, “but especially for women who have had or are considering abortion.”

Dorothy Day’s life was dedicated to seeking holiness, defending life, and promoting social justice and peace. In valuing human life, she came to reject the violence of abortion and to abhor war and crushing poverty. Her story seems most suitable for our reflection on the Fifth Commandment.