

Catherine

Issue 13 • Spring 2007

A Newsletter to Promote the Cause for Canonization of Servant of God Catherine Doherty



Catherine and Dorothy

■ From the Postulator's Desk

As I was driving Catherine back to our motel in Albany after she had given a lecture, she said, "tomorrow, let's go visit Dorothy." I thought to myself, "Oh, great! I've never met Dorothy Day, and this may be one of the last times they see one another." I called the Catholic Worker in New York, but unfortunately Dorothy was not there. It was one of the great disappointments during my years of knowing Catherine.

Another on-going disappointment is how infrequently, in biographies, articles, and books about Catherine and Dorothy, their relationship—if mentioned at all—is cited only in a passing, fragmentary manner. In *Art and Scholasticism* Jacques Maritain wrote: "Unfortunate are the adventures which are never narrated." One of the great contemporary adventures that unfortunately is *not narrated* is the friendship of these two great women, Catherine and Dorothy. They were raised up by the Holy Spirit at the same historical moment in the Church of North America. They were almost mirror images of one another: their apostolates covered roughly the same historical period, from 1930–1980, totally loyal Catholics, serving the poor, conditioned by the great depression, women of prayer, dedicated to the Church, founders of move-

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ments that continue to this day.

When Did They First Meet?

1933 was a significant year for the lay apostolate: Sheed and Ward opened their New York office; Dorothy and Peter Maurin published

the first issue (May) of the *Catholic Worker*; and Catherine in Toronto began a group of laity to study and implement the papal social encyclicals. As soon as Catherine had read the first issue of the CW, she wrote Dorothy for copies. Catherine and her associates used to pass them out on street corners and after Mass on Sundays. It was very moving for me the first time I read the following first exchange between these two great women.

December 12, 1933

Dear Miss Day,

Your *Catholic Worker* came to me thru Rev. Fr. Stroeh of Toronto, where I work amongst the foreign born Canadians which is easy because I am Russian myself. There is nothing as yet that has aroused as much interest in my people as your paper. I am anxious to get it because it does so much good. It makes them realize that the Church is interested in the worker.

Thank you for the splendid work you are doing. Catherine de Hueck

December 19, 1933

Dear Mrs. De Hueck:

Your letter made us very happy



Dorothy Day and Catherine Doherty

and we are sending the paper as you suggested to the place you mentioned.

The Archbishop [McNeil of Toronto] has already sent us his subscription and a very kind letter. If you can use more copies to distribute among your friends, we will be very glad to send you a dozen.

Trusting that you will remember us in your prayers, and we need them especially for the House of Hospitality.

I am, sincerely, Dorothy Day

In the summer of 1934 Catherine attended a summer school of Catholic action in Stamford-in-the-Catskills, N.Y. Both Peter Maurin and Dorothy spoke there. In her diary for August 10, 1934, Catherine wrote: “O Jesus, I am happy today—I thank you for having allowed me to meet Dorothy Day. Bless her and keep her,

and bless thy priesthood.”

After this initial contact, Dorothy came to Toronto on several occasions. From Catherine’s diary, Feb. 12, 1935: “Dorothy Day arrived at 12:30. It was lovely to see her again. She has such a wonderful spirit.”

They not only consoled one another and exchanged experiences about their apostolates, they were good enough friends to challenge one another and call one another to higher ideals.

Their contacts were more frequent in the 1930s and 1940s. Their love, support, and friendship with one another never waned, but the growing demands of their individual and unique apostolates did not allow them much time for personal contact. Their letters best convey their friendship in the Lord, which should not be lost to the Catholic history of the lay apostolate in North America.

But, besides their correspondence, we are fortunate to have several early eye-witness accounts, and an important one from our good friend Stanley Vishnewski. He was one of Dorothy’s earliest and most faithful followers. He had a love for both Friendship House in the 30s and 40s, and Madonna House in Combermere. He visited here several times, and I had the good fortune to have met him. He published a book entitled *The Wings of the Dawn*, and Chapter 11, about Friendship House, is significantly called “Sister Movement.” He is talking in the following passage about the time after the visit of Dorothy (1935) to Toronto.

“A few weeks later, the Baroness came to pay us a visit. Dorothy and the Baroness sat around the round table in the privacy of the kitchen. They talked at length about the work they were both doing. The Baroness

told Dorothy of the opposition that was being raised against her in Toronto. ‘I’ve been accused of being a Communist. I don’t know how long I will be able to continue the work.’ Dorothy tried to console her by telling her of the many slanderous at-

tacks she had suffered since starting the Catholic Worker.”

They not only consoled one another and exchanged experiences about their apostolates, they were good enough friends to challenge one another and call one another to higher ideals. The closing of Friendship House in Toronto was very devastating to Catherine. It was during this trial, more than at any other time in their relationship, that the friendship, support, and love of Dorothy was lavished upon Catherine. In one of her most significant letters, Dorothy wrote:

“Written with a million interruptions
c. Nov. 1936

Dear Catherine,

Got your last two letters and cannot really make head or tail of the whole thing. If they are closing Friendship House, it is really disastrous. I thought they were only taking them away from you and handing them over to an Order to run. That is bad enough of course, but it is the kind of thing which is always happening in the history of works such as ours. I’m always expecting I’ll be asked to leave the work for the good of the cause, and I’m more or less prepared for it. All the kind of gossip and rumors that have gone around about you, have gone around about me too these last

The Little Mandate

Words which Catherine Doherty received from Christ, and which guided her life:

Arise—go! Sell all you possess. Give it directly, personally to the poor. Take up My cross (their cross) and follow Me, going to the poor, being poor, being one with them, one with Me.

Little—be always little! Simple, poor, childlike.

Preach the Gospel with your life—without compromise! Listen to the Spirit. He will lead you.

Do little things exceedingly well for love of Me.

Love, love, love, never counting the cost.

Go into the marketplace and stay with Me. Pray, fast, pray always, fast.

Be hidden. Be a light to your neighbour’s feet. Go without fear into the depth of men’s hearts. I shall be with you.

Pray always. *I will be your rest.*

years. I'm supposed to be an immoral woman, with illegitimate children, a drunkard, a racketeer, running an expensive apartment on the side, with money in several banks, owning property, in the pay of Moscow, etc. etc.

"I should think you would feel privileged and happy to be sharing in some of our Lord's sufferings, and above all not surprised as though it were something entirely unexpected. What in the world do you expect. The very fact that there is all this obstruction and hindrance and trouble shows the work must be succeeding beyond your wildest hopes; otherwise the devil would not be putting so many hindrances in the way and trying to break down your morale. For that is surely what is being done.

"When you write in such terms as 'I have fallen a hundred times to our Lord's three,' I wonder at you. I wish to goodness I were up there to talk to you. You will think I am cold and unsympathetic, but really, darling, I am not at all. I have been thinking of you constantly for the past week.

"I should think you would feel privileged and happy to be sharing in some of our Lord's sufferings, and above all not surprised as though it were something entirely unexpected."

"What I am wondering about is why you are fleeing. I should think you would hold your head up through it all, and if you are deprived of any work to do, abandon yourself completely to divine providence, try to keep to ordinary routine as much as possible and leave things in God's hands to work out. If you are deprived completely of a means of earning a living and have no money for rent or food, I would quite simply throw myself on their



Dorothy and Catherine on Dorothy's 80th birthday, New York

charity; in your humility be a charge to them, instead of a person who has been taking a charge off the shoulders of others. But I would not flee from the scene of strife and persecution. I'd stay right there and face them out. Besides, you are making a decision right in the heat of things which is never good.

"I purposely make this letter frank and sane as possible, because you are in such a state of mind. But at

the same time, if you do not believe you have our love and sympathy, you are lacking in faith in us. We most truly believe though, that the devil makes all this hullabaloo just when work is accomplishing the most good, so for that you should be most happy. Much much love. Dorothy"

The next prolonged and intense period of their friendship was when, through the efforts of Fr. Paul of

Graymoor and Fr. John LaFarge, S.J., Catherine agreed to open a Friendship house in Harlem. Sometime in late January, 1938, she took a train to New York City. She spent several weeks at the Catholic Worker before she rented an apartment at 138th Street and began her apostolate to African Americans. Although their apostolates were distinct, there were frequent visits between Catherine, Dorothy, and those who worked with them.

Again, Stanley put it this way: "In those early days Friendship House and the Catholic Worker were considered by many to be Sister movements engaged in the Apostolate. Catherine and Dorothy would meet once a week at the Child's restaurant in the mid-town area for lunch to discuss the various problems of their respective apostolates." (A historical note: In 1898, Child's restaurant chain, catering to office workers in downtown New York, introduced the first cafeteria at their 130 Broadway branch restaurant. A cup of coffee was 5 cents.)

Catherine wrote about one of these visits with Dorothy in her

diary of May 3, 1939: “Went to Child’s. Had a lovely visit with her. Always consider her wonderful, more convinced than ever that she is a saint. What a joy it is to be with her. She shines with an inward light that no one can suppress. Her difficulties are as mine—mostly with the human beings and their blindness and self-love—and ability to put second things first.”

Child’s was a little bit of heaven for Catherine, one of those enchanted places to which you always want to return with a great nostalgia. In February 10, 1942, she wrote to Dorothy: “Dear D.D.: It is a long time since I have written to you or seen you. But daily, in fact, several times a day, I have talked to the Lord about you in my own funny way, and I have found you and in His heart too, and I know that you have been praying for me.

“Nothing has changed since the first day I have met you. You mean just as much to me now as you did then, and I need you and your wonderful example and friendship and advice now, just as much as I did

then. Will you in your great charity give me a little bit of it now?

Could we meet and have lunch at Scraffts or Child’s some day soon. After this Friday I shall be at my

“We would go to Child’s, where you could get three coffee refills; and we used to enjoy each cup and just talk. Talk about God. Talk about the apostolate. Talk about all the things that were dear to our hearts.”

desk at F.H. Write to me or call me up and let us meet soon.”

Dorothy also looked back with nostalgia at those early intimate meetings. In a letter in the early 1940s, she wrote to Catherine: “I want to be seeing you soon. Can’t we runoff by our selves, meet half way the way my sister and I do, so we will both be free of our respective families for a few hours? You know, I often think with joy of that first visit we had together in that nice large apartment of yours in Toronto. We really had time to talk, and space to talk in. You and I need a lot of space and when we get to heaven we’ll put in our bid for mansions where we can stretch. I always

think of you with love and sympathy in that one room filled with books and people, bulging with talk. Not enough room. God bless you and pray for me. Dorothy”

And on the occasion of Dorothy’s death, Catherine’s thoughts again went to those precious intimate moments they shared together: “When I moved to Harlem, New York, Dorothy Day and I became even closer. There was only about five miles between her house and my Harlem House. So occasionally, when we both had enough money, let’s say about a dollar, we would go to Child’s (a popular restaurant in America at the time), where you could get three coffee refills; and we used to enjoy each cup and just talk. Talk about God. Talk about the apostolate. Talk about all the things that were dear to our hearts.

“But we were both very lonely because, believe it or not, there was just the two of us in all of Canada and America, and we did feel lonely and no question about it. Periodically we would have a good cry in our coffee cups. We really cried, I mean honest, big tears. We would sit there, and the waitress would look at us. Dorothy and I would hold hands, and we would cry. We had had it! But we would always rally; and I think rallying is a sign of perseverance.” (*Restoration*, February 1981)

It is well known that Dorothy entitled her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*. And, at the heart of Catherine’s spirituality, was her desire to assuage the loneliness of Christ. I think one of their strong bonds



Catherine and Dorothy at the Lay Congress in Rome, Fall 1967

was their loneliness, caused by their being pioneers in an area of Catholic life that was little understood or appreciated, even in the Church. They met in the loneliness of Christ. What follows is the most beautiful and touching letter Catherine ever wrote to Dorothy.

November 26, 1945

“Dear DD,

It has been now over a month that a great desire to write to you has come to my heart. I have been making, as you know ‘pilgrimages’ into my distant and not so distant yesterdays, stopping now here, now there, to render thanks to the Lord of Life, for this special grace or that, for this wonderful gift or sorrow, and for that infinite moment of joy. Short as my life is, as any human life is, there are, strange to say, many a shrine in it before which, as is the custom of my people, I can bow low from the waist, touching the earth with my hands, and singing alleluias in my heart for each.

“For in the clarity of the past, the terrible awesome clarity that is shed on the past, I should say, all things have indeed woven themselves into a rosary of all three mysteries, the sorrowful, the glorious, the joyful, and together they seem now to become the steps that will maybe lead my poor soul, my sinful soul, to the Lord of Mercy.

I think one of their strong bonds was their loneliness, caused by their being pioneers in an area of Catholic life that was little understood or appreciated. They met in the loneliness of Christ.

“Amongst the memories of my yesterdays is a shrine that I reached into today, at which, in a manner of speaking, I still worship. Long ago and far away I arose in search of the Lord, for there was a mighty



Catherine receives a kiss from Dorothy at the Lay Congress in Rome, Fall 1967

hunger in my soul for him. Only I was confused by the many roads and cross roads that stretched out before me in a maze that bewildered me. When suddenly, out of nowhere, you came, and hand in hand we walked together. You knew the way out of the maze, you most certainly did.

“And as we were walking along the road one eventide—or was it many?—a Stranger joined us, a

strange Stranger who spoke beautifully and convincingly about the Lord. We went to sup with him, and in the breaking of the bread we knew him as Christ the Lord. At times it seems to me that the

road was just your soul, and at other times it comes to me that it was your words that brought the Stranger to our side. He materialized, as it were, out of them, at least for me. He spoke, if I remember correctly, across the divide of years with your voice. One thing I know is that we both ‘knew him at the breaking of the bread.’ Was it in the little strange Church full of Italians where we both went to Communion, and after which we had that enormous breakfast in some beanery on Canal St., during which it seemed the Lord was still with us?

“I have never forgotten these far away days, DD, when you and I and a few others, started on the lonely hard road of the Lay Apostolate. We were very young then, and so full of zeal and hunger and love. Praise be to the Lord that none of these virtues have left us—except ‘youth.’



Dorothy Day with Eddie Doherty and the staff of Madonna House Texas, 1960

But as I make my strange pilgrimages into my yesterdays, both distant and near, I find myself sorrowful, that you and I do not exchange the speech of men, while we are still in the land of men. For a friendship like ours, me thinks, is a great and holy gift of God. And though you and I know that we are very close in prayer and meet daily at his Table, nevertheless, I think we should renew that inner closeness, and express it again, as it were, in the halting simple words of human love and understanding.”

Dorothy and Catherine were both busy women. They frequently had to apologize to one another for delay in answering letters, or for not writing more frequently. However, various events—such as the deaths of mutual friends, visits to one another’s apostolates—did occur that sparked a spurt of letters.

The Last Visit

In November, 1978, Catherine went with Fr. Emile Briere to visit Dorothy for the last time. She was living at Mary House on 55 E. 3rd St. A few days before their visit Doro-

thy had celebrated her 81st birthday. Here are some of Catherine’s reflections on their last meeting.

Catherine: “Well, this was quite a red letter day as far as I was concerned. It was the fact that I met Dorothy Day. She had her 81st birthday. She looks so thin, so thin. Life is sort of ebbing out of her. Only her eyes are still sparkly. For me this was a red letter day. To me there was really nobody there, only Dorothy. I looked at her, and I sort of took her in with my whole heart, my mind, my eyes, my body, my everything. And I said to myself, ‘Catherine, you are meeting a saint. Don’t you ever forget it, the saint of New York.’”

Fr. Briere: “And Dorothy kept saying to me [Fr. Briere] - I was sitting very close to her, and she said to me, over and over again, looking at Catherine sitting across from her, ‘Isn’t she beautiful. She is radiant. Look how she radiates. See how beautiful she is.’ And she told me this quite a number of times.”

As I (Fr. Bob) delve more deeply into their relationship it strikes me that if Catherine and Dorothy hadn’t been so united in Christ in the lay apostolic movement, and in zeal for the kingdom of God, most

probably their differences of character and approach to life would not have drawn them together in any kind of friendship. Their friendship is a profound example of how Christ can draw and bind together, in love, people of very diverse temperaments and backgrounds, and unite them by the power of his Holy Spirit.

In one (undated) letter of Dorothy’s to Catherine, she wrote: “It is good to urge each other on to virtue, but remember, we are comrades stumbling along, not saints, drifting along in ecstasies.”

Both of their causes are now in process. That will be a glorious and historically significant sight when Catherine’s and Dorothy’s huge beautiful portraits shine together in the brilliant Roman sunlight on the façade of St. Peter’s.

Prayer for Favours through the intercession of Catherine Doherty

All loving Father, through your beloved Son, Jesus, we have been taught to ask for what we need. And through his spouse, our Mother the Church, we have been instructed to pray for one another, and to ask the intercession of your servants, who have fallen asleep in Christ. Therefore, through the intercession of your servant, Catherine Doherty, we ask...

[here mention your petition.]

We ask this for your honour and glory, and in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son Our Lord. Amen.

*Imprimatur: † J. R. Windle, Bishop of
Pembroke, May 1, 1993. For private use.*

What about the faults and sins of either Catherine or Dorothy—or anyone else for that matter—being obstacles to canonization? Here is part of what the late Cardinal O'Connor wrote to the Congregation of the Saints initiating Dorothy's canonization process. Except for the specific sin of Dorothy's, his remarks could apply to Catherine as well.

It has long been my contention that Dorothy Day is a saint—not a gingerbread" saint or a "holy card" saint, but a modern day devoted daughter of the Church.

To be sure, her life is a model for all in the third millennium, but especially for women who have had or are considering abortions. It is a well-known fact that Dorothy Day procured an abortion before her conversion to the Faith. She regretted it every day of her life. After her conversion from a life akin to that of the pre-converted Augustine of Hippo, she proved a stout defender of human life. The conversion of mind and heart that she exemplified speaks volumes to all women today on two fronts. First, it demonstrates the mercy of God, mercy in that a woman who sinned so gravely could find such unity with God upon conversion. Second, it demonstrates that one may turn from the ultimate act of violence against innocent life in the womb to a position of total holiness and pacifism. In short, I contend that her abortion should not preclude her cause, but intensify it.

(The Catholic Worker Movement, Mark and Louise Zwick, 300)

An Early Witness Story

"I came to New York in 1939 and shortly thereafter started going to the Monday night lectures and open-discussion meetings which were run at Friendship House in Harlem by the Russian Baroness, Catherine de Hueck. She would usually obtain the services of some good speakers on the social problem about which I knew nothing. I remember going to these meetings rather faithfully every Monday night, listening to the lectures, trying to stay out of things (since I knew so little) and yet, inevitably, being drawn into the midst of some conflict regarding the Church and the social order. I was frequently the only priest and, therefore, the Church's last (and only) word. Catherine was usually there taking an active part in the discussion. She was a very strong woman, physically and spiritually.

"Some evenings I would go to dinner with the staff members. Catherine would sit at the head of the table. A huge bowl of soup would be brought out and she would ladle a generous portion to everyone, sometimes ending with a huge bone on her soup plate. The discussion was lively and loud. There

were all kinds of people there, gentle and not so gentle, happy and yet strangely serious.

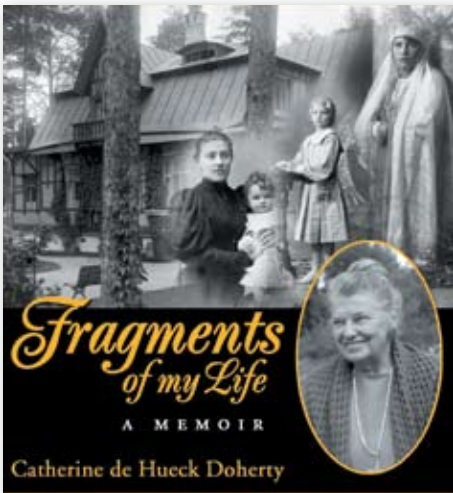
"Instinctively, I recognized the Baroness as a great woman, which many other people easily saw. At the same time, I think her personality was so strong that I did not want to be dominated by her. She could press a point very hard and yet did not seem to hold any grudges after the argument was over. The next time you met her, however, she would go right back to the same point again. In other words, there was some strong objectivity in her ideas and thinking.

"On my visit to Combermere last summer [1963], the Baroness struck me as the same Catherine, a little gentler and less rambunctious. Her long desire to form lay people seemed to be paying off there with a group of priests, men and women who project some sort of Christian love which is truly unique in the face of our hectic world. It is warm, personal, even affectionate, and yet somehow restrained and one might say, objective. With every best wish..."

— Letter to Fr. John Callahan from Fr. Francis Wendell, O.P., 1964

■ Catherine in print and media

Catherine Doherty has been the subject of many books, and she herself was a prolific speaker and author with dozens of published works. We hope to introduce you to these popular and important works, considered by many to be modern spiritual classics.



Fragments of My Life

A Memoir by Catherine Doherty

Catherine tells in her own words how she was born to wealth in pre-revolutionary Russia, raised among Arab children and pashas in Egypt, French students in Paris, and Russian peasants and aristocrats on her

family estate. She shares how she dodged bullets as a nurse during World War I, barely survived the Russian Revolution, encountered poverty as a refugee and returned from her rags to riches in North America. Then finally, how she gave everything away to serve the poor.

She tells of her adventures as a magazine correspondent in pre-World War II Europe, as a leader in the U.S. Civil Rights movement, and as an internationally-renowned speaker and writer who dodged rotten eggs and tomatoes, calling for racial and economic justice, ecumenism, and an active role for lay people in the Church.

Then she goes on to how she fell in love with and married Eddie Doherty, Irish-American newspaperman, and how they together founded Madonna House Lay Apostolate, and became leaders in the development of new forms of Christian community and service in the world.

A journey into Catherine's life, disclosing the mysteries of world events that shaped her life; the mysteries of her leadership; the mysteries of her marriage; and, most of all, the mysteries of God's love.

"This autobiography has a special, divinely-touched richness. It reads like an adventure novel. If this were nothing but pure fiction, it would still be extremely intriguing. But because it's all true, it goes beyond intriguing to become enthralling and inspiring." — Larry Holley, *The Pecos Benedictine*

"This is no dull, date-filled biography, but a deeply personal sharing of the experiences of her life. The book shines with her vision of uncompromising commitment to the Gospel. If you have time to read no other book, read this one." — *Sign Magazine*

206 pages — Trade Paperback — ISBN 0-921440-41-3 — \$12.95 USD — \$16.95 CAD
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More information about Catherine Doherty and the progress of her Cause—as well as printable copies of this and previous newsletters—can be found on the Internet at:

www.catherinedoherty.org

■ How to Contact Us

If you believe you have received favours through Catherine's intercession, we would be pleased to hear from you. We are also in need of financial donations to help cover the expenses of her Cause. If you would like to contact us, please write to us at:

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