



***Our Hospitality House
has become a refuge
for asylum seekers
from war-torn lands***

Although we tend to count the years from fall to summer at *Casa Milagro*, the end of one calendar year and the beginning of a new year is as good a time as any to take stock of what we've been up to and where we're at.

We've been busy. At present, besides Ned McMahon, one of our own Catholic Workers, and Mike Anderson, another stalwart of the community, living in our House of Hospitality, there is one political refugee from Cuba, Manuel, another from Iraq, Dodi, and three from Nigeria, Linus, Iekae and Jonas, as well as Lewis who used to cook the Friday lunch for the homeless in Pacific Beach and who is now taking classes to become a chef.

Asylum seekers

Ned and Mike have full-time jobs. The Nigerians are awaiting a court hearing, probably in January, when their application for asylum will be considered. They have all been tortured. Manuel has already been granted asylum, so he is working, saving up, and preparing to move on to the next stage of his life. Dodi is in touch with the Iraqi community in San Diego and he will be finding shelter with his own countrymen soon.

They are all taking classes in a variety of subjects at nearby City College and elsewhere.

We are so blessed by their presence in Casa Milagro and amazed at the amount of time they spend taking care of house. It has never looked better. Over the past few months we have had other refugees from Congo, Iran, and Eritrea. We are truly privileged to be able to help them, and slightly embarrassed by the gratitude they continually shower on us.

Refugees living in harmony

It really is a miracle that our small *Casa Milagro* has accommodated so many people from so many war-torn countries around the world. And everybody gets on extremely well with everybody else. Can't imagine the stories they have to tell.

But imagine what would happen if Dorothy Day's recommendation that each parish should have at least one house for homeless people and each diocese should open up the spare rooms in its rectories and seminaries. It has been reliably estimated by the people who know that if every community of every church, synagogue, mosque and temple had just one house for people in need, homelessness would be abolished in San Diego. Just imagine.

We began taking in refugees at the behest of Catholic Charities with whom we initially arranged to accept homeless people who had undergone a program of rehabilitation into society. For the moment we are no longer accepting people from that program.

Brother Denis Murphy, the retired Christian Brother who came from *Su Casa*, one of the Chicago Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality, has returned to Chicago and is now living in his order's retirement home. Denis came to us last January with the inten-

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**Saved by the Catholic Worker
after running away from home**

By Tom Reifer

Tom Reifer is a professor of sociology at the University of San Diego.

I was born in Spanish-Harlem in 1967, to heroin-addicted parents, though raised behind the Orange Curtain, the border of Orange and Los Angeles counties, where I grew up in a household whose only certainty was the apocalyptic violence and torture that came with being physically attacked, assaulted and strangled over and over again. In 1980, when I was 13 years old, I got up the courage to run away from home.

Later, I went to a school for hard-core truants where all the students were on probation, and I had a few trips to juvenile hall myself. I barely went to Junior High School, from which I was expelled. On the tough streets of greater Los Angeles, I did what I had to do to survive, living here and there, sometimes nowhere. I remember going for many months without a pair of shoes. I often wondered where I was going to be living the next day, the next week.

Catholic Worker saved my life

And then a sort of miracle happened. I met my sister Jane, whom I hadn't seen in a year since I had run away, just by chance. She was working for the nuclear-freeze campaign, which had close ties with the Los Angeles Catholic Worker. Meeting up with my sister

“My own survival and involvement in the Catholic Worker was, as I said, a miracle itself, for the experience of violence and growing up on the streets had hardened me.”

that day and the folks in the Catholic Worker, changed—indeed, saved—my life.

Over time, I got off the streets and became involved with the Catholic Worker movement. I remember my astonishment at meeting adults, seemingly for the first time—except for some of my grade-school teachers—where there was no difference between what was said and actually done. I got to know many of the Workers, spent time in the Ammon Hennacy House of Hospitality and served food to the poor in its soup kitchen on Skid Row in the early 1980s.

Meeting and becoming involved with the Catholic Worker was a powerful testament to the power that Jesus' message of forgiveness of sins, love and community had for me. It was with the Worker that I began my long road to a sort of redemption that included going onto college and becoming a teacher myself. One of my first teachers in college, who later became a close friend, was Daniel Ellsberg, the former State and Defense Department official who released the Top Secret Pentagon Papers to the New York Times in 1971 to protest the Vietnam War.

Becoming a social activist

After getting a bachelor's degree in sociology at UC Santa Cruz, in the 1990s, I enrolled in a graduate program in sociology at SUNY Binghamton; I got my master's degree and doctorate there, working especially closely to the world's premiere historian of capitalism, Giovanni Arrighi, in a program focusing on the inequalities of violence, wealth and power in the global system.



The Flight into Egypt by Ade Bethune

When John Yoo, the Justice Department lawyer who between 2001 and 2003 had written memos for President George W. Bush justifying the torture of prisoners, came to USD in early 2007, I helped organize a protest and panel exposing and opposing U.S. policies of torture.

About this time, I got a chance to talk to Sister Dianna Ortiz, the Ursuline nun who had been tortured in Guatemala and who went on to found the Torture Abolition and

Survivors Support Coalition. Talking to her was a milestone for me in my own recovery from a lifetime of child abuse.

As a survivor who struggles to live with the memories of torture, like Sister Dianna, this issue is deeply personal for me. She once said, “We all have a moral obligation to work

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**Did Dorothy really
say she did not want
to be called a saint?**

By Denys Horgan

Editor of San Diego Catholic Worker

So, they're trying to make Dorothy Day a saint.

Well, well, well. Will wonders never cease?

The endorsement of the move to canonize Day at November's meeting of the U.S. bishops in Baltimore stirred up once again a discussion among Catholic Workers, some of whom are for it and others against.

It's not a rancorous debate—although Catholic Workers are not immune to that—it's more of a wondering about what Day meant when she said: “Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily.” Or words to that effect, because there are a number of versions of what she actually said.

What did Dorothy really say?

The Catholic Worker Website has Joe Zarrella, one of Day's earliest recruits, saying, “Don't *make* me a saint . . . ,” and there's the New York Times, Nov. 26, quoting what they call “the church,” saying “Don't trivialize me by trying to make me a saint,” and a blogger on an Episcopal Website says, “Don't you dare let them make me a saint: I don't want to be dismissed that easily.”

Writing in a recent issue of *America* magazine, the Jesuit Fr. James Martin claims the saying, “is probably the biggest barrier to her canonization.” So he asked Robert Ellsberg, the editor of Day's journals and collected letters and former editor of the Catholic Worker newspaper, if he knew where the quotation came from and if he knew what it meant.

Ellsberg came back with a surprising answer: He took credit for publicizing the quotation, but he didn't know where it came from. “I bear a burden of responsibility for publicizing that line, which I quoted in the introduction to an anthology of her writings almost thirty years ago,” he said. But, “Where did it come from? I can't honestly say.”

Jim Forest, the author of a biography of Day, said way back in July, 2008, that Day spoke those words as a sort of a mild put-down of a journalist who said it was the first time he had interviewed a saint.

And Ellsberg remembers sitting down with Day one day and looking at an issue of *Time* magazine that included her in a list of living saints and she saying: “When they call you a saint, it means basically that you are not to be taken seriously.”

And what did Dorothy mean?

What does the saying mean? The first part is easy. Only a fool would presume to be a living saint, and she wanted to make it clear that she didn't claim to be one.

But the second part: “I don't want to be dismissed that easily.” What does that mean? Was Day dismissive of the saints, as if they meant nothing for her, not to be taken seriously?

Hardly. Day had a huge respect for and devotion to the saints. She would pray to St.

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San Diego Catholic Worker
P.O. Box 127244
San Diego, CA 92112
(619) 298-3755

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From the Collected Writings of Dorothy Day

Dementia: A Painfully Slow Death for Peter Maurin



The following thoughts are excerpted from "On Pilgrimage," a column that Day wrote, May 7, 1947.

But something has happened to his mind. We must say it again because it is of tremendous significance. It reveals more than anything else his utter selflessness, his giving of himself. He has given everything, even his mind. He has nothing left; he is in utter and absolute poverty. The only thing he really enjoyed, exulted in, was his ability to think. When he said sadly, "I cannot think," it was because that had been taken from him, literally. His mind would no longer work. He sits on the porch, a huge old hulk. His shoulders were always broad and bowed. He looks gnome-like, as though he came from under the earth. He shambles about one-sidedly, as though he had had a stroke. His head hangs wearily, as though he could not hold it up. His mouth, often twisted as though with pain, hangs open in an effort to understand what is going on around him. Most of the time he is in a lethargy; he does not try to listen or to understand. Doctors say that it is a hardening of the arteries of the brain. Some talk of cardiac asthma to explain his racking cough.

He gave all he had

"I have never asked anything for myself," he said once, and he made every conscious effort to give all he had, to give the best he had, all of himself, to the cause of his brother. The only thing he had left in his utter poverty which made Skid Row his home and the horse market his eating place and the old clothes room his haberdasher was his brilliant mind. Father McSorley considered him a genius. Father Parsons said that he was the best-read man he ever met. Now he remembers nothing. "I cannot remember. I cannot think."

Cold and hunger and hard lodging and all things that affront the senses were well known to Peter. But what of the interior senses, the memory and the understanding and the will? These last years we have seen all these mortified in him. Much of his memory and his understanding are gone, and his will is fixed on God. When we wake him in the morning, all we have to say is "Mass, Peter," and he is struggling and puffing and panting to get out of bed. At night it is the same for Compline and rosary unless we forbid him to get up and make him lie still.

Paralysis and loss of memory

There is a dear priest who used to talk to us about being victims. I could write a book about him, so great was his love of God and of souls, but this is about Peter. What he loved most, after his spiritual work, was to do active work for souls—build houses, work his electric saw, make things for the chapel, travel about to talk of the things of God. He was known for his activity. Then, at the age of fifty-seven, paralysis and loss of memory set in. Incontinent and bedridden, he has spent the last two years away from all those he loved, far from the activities he craved. I asked him if he had offered himself as a victim, and he said wryly, "One doesn't realize what one is saying often. We offer God so much, and maybe we think we mean it. And then God takes us at our word!"

Peter gave himself, he offered himself to a life of poverty, and he has been able to prove his poverty. It is not just something he was used to or was attracted to in a superficial way. His poverty, his self-abnegation was complete.

And now he is dying (if not already dead) to the things of the world. "His life is hid with Christ in God." He is not even appreciated for the saint he is. (And understand that I use this term as one uses it for one not passed upon formally by the Church. A rector of a seminary said to his students, "I want you all to be saints, but not canonized ones. It costs too much.")

The writings of Dorothy Day are available online at <http://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/day.shtml>

Thoughts on the Canonization of Dorothy Day

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Joseph when supplies were low; she would pray to St. Theresa for patience and understanding; and she would pray to St. Francis to increase her spirit of poverty.

According to Ellsberg, what Day was afraid of was being put on a pedestal, fitted to some pre-fab conception of holiness that would strip her of her humanity and, at the same time, dismiss the radical challenge of the gospel.

And that's what some of her most ardent supporters are afraid of.

"I think she would be appalled to have her commitment to voluntary poverty and works of mercy and charity in their deepest sense be used as cover for an agenda that I think she would see as part of a war against the poor," Ellsberg said.

In Philadelphia in November, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago drew applause when he promoted Day's canonization by enlisting her in the bishops' battle with President Obama over his insistence that health insurance cover contraception services, which they saw as an attack on religious liberty, and his support of gay rights. "As we struggle at this opportune moment to try to show how we are losing our freedoms in the name of individual rights," George said, "Dorothy Day is a good woman to have on our side."

"The Church has never told its flock that they have no rights of their own, that they ought to have no beliefs or loyalties other than those of the Pope or one of his cardinals. No one in the church can tell me what to think about social and political and economic questions without getting a tough speech back; please leave me alone and tend to your own acreage; I'll take care of mine." — Dorothy Day on the authority of Cardinal Spellman.

Both Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York and Theodore McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, spoke of Day's Bohemian lifestyle and abortion before her conversion.

However, Day's granddaughter, Martha Hennessy, 57, who volunteers at Maryhouse, a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, told the New York Times that she is uncomfortable with the bishops' increasing focus on her grandmother's abortion. "I wish we would focus on the birth of her child (Tamar, Martha's mother) more than on her abortion because that's what really played a role in her conversion," Hennessy said. "It's hard for me to hear these men talking about my mother and grandmother that way."

There is more than a touch of irony in the U.S. bishops—and in particular the archbishop of New York—promoting Day's canonization. When she was alive, very few—if any, bishops, had much time for her. She frequently drew attention to the church's wealth and the fact that many bishops and priests lived in great comfort and security. She wanted the empty rooms in rectories, seminaries and monasteries to be filled with the poor and, at the very least, every parish should have a hospice for the poor.

She supported the Catholic cemetery workers in New York when they went on strike Jan. 13, 1949 for a living wage, and Cardinal Francis Spellman forced his seminarians into scab labor to dig the graves. The workers wanted a five-day, 40-hour week instead of the six-day, 48-hour week, but to be paid the same amount, \$59.40 a week. Day appealed to Spellman to meet with the strikers, but he refused. She used the pages of the Catholic Worker newspaper to remind the cardinal of the social teaching of Leo XIII and Pius XI, all to no avail.

The strike ended March 11 with the union acquiescing to the cardinal's offer of an 8 percent increase in wages, but the 6-day, 48-hour week was re-instated. The April edition

of the Catholic Worker that year accused the cardinal of surrounding himself with eminent "Catholic laymen advising him out of their own weakness, greed and lack of diplomatic ability to follow a course that must inevitably lead him to a loss of dignity and humiliation."

Some years later Day would write prophetic words with a universal and timeless applicability. She accepted the cardinal as priest, confessor and spiritual leader and continued: "But he is not our ruler. He is not someone whose every word all Catholics must heed, whose every deed we must copy. ..."

"The Church has never told its flock that they have no rights of their own, that they ought to have no beliefs or loyalties other than those of the Pope or one of his cardinals. No one in the church can tell me what to think about social and political and economic questions without getting a tough speech back; please leave me alone and tend to your own acreage; I'll take care of mine."

On March 3, 1951, Day was called to the New York chancery office and told by Monsignor Edward Gaffney that the Catholic Worker would have to cease publication or delete the word "Catholic" from its title. After meeting

with the paper's staff she told Gaffney that "All feel that the Catholic Worker has been in existence for 18 years ... under that name, and that this is no time to change it so late in the day. ... We cannot simply cease the publication of a review that has built up a worldwide circulation of 63,000 ... That would be a grave scandal to our readers" The press run today is 90,000.

Ellsberg, in his response to Martin's questions in America magazine notes how times must have changed because the bishops' vote to promote the canonization of Day was unanimous. "She might have been surprised—and disappointed—that not a single bishop stood up to say Nay," he said. "Were there not at least a few to stand up and admit they have no use for her pacifism, her refusal to pay taxes, her general disdain for the free-market capitalist system?"

Day may not be around any more, but her spirit lives on. There are 200 Catholic Worker groups, around the world, but mostly in the United States, not a few of which—with their open support of social justice and their protests against war—continue to be an uncomfortable thorn in the side of many a bishop. Will Day's canonization be an endorsement of the Catholic Worker movement?

So there may be merit in the bishops' decision. "Day believed we needed a new kind of saint," Martin said. "As she remarked as a child, 'Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery?'"

"I believe the possible canonization of Dorothy Day is an answer to that question. There are those who might try to fit her into a conventional mold. But I don't think she will allow herself to be dismissed that easily."

It's up to today's Catholic Workers to ensure it never happens.

Casa, Continued from Page 1.

tion of getting away from the cold of Chicago and helping us out for a few months. He saw our needs and stayed for the spring, then for the summer and this fall went back again. We will always be grateful for the contributions he made to Casa Milagro and its community.

Denis is a true Catholic Worker, prayerful, totally dedicated to living a life of voluntary poverty, and standing up for social justice and peace. It was he who inspired the Casa Milagro community to make huge bowls of hot soup that they distributed, along with bread and hard-boiled eggs, to people living on the streets, two nights a week. Before he came to San Diego, he had been arrested six times for acts of non-violent civil disobedience to protest war. He used to joke that he could not go back to Kansas City because there is a warrant out for his arrest for not paying a fine. Obviously, we wish nothing but the very best for Denis and look forward to

seeing him again and hope he remembers to stay away from Kansas City.

We continue to feed upwards of a hundred mostly homeless people in Christ Lutheran Church hall on Cass Street in Pacific Beach every Friday; and our free clothing distribution program does a roaring trade downtown twice a month. Now that winter's in the air, the demand for warm clothes and raingear (ponchos) is greater than usual.

Earlier this month we had a visit from Lynn Myrick and Joel Vaughn, a couple who had just completed a three-year stint as lay Franciscan missionaries in Cochabamba, Bolivia. They have returned to the United States and are interested in coming to San Diego as part of the Casa Milagro community. If they do, they will be most welcome and their presence will make a huge contribution to the running of the house.



The Three Wise Men, (bearing gifts) by Ade Bethune.

Another Highly Successful Dinner and Auction

This year's Annual Gourmet Meatball and Spaghetti Dinner and Silent Auction held at the end of October was another resounding success.

The ambience of the hall at St. Mary Magdalene Church was spectacular, the meatballs were delicious, the spaghetti was scrumptious, and of course the people were delightful, as usual.

The only problem was that the evening did not last long enough. So many friends of the San Diego Catholic Worker and each other attend this event every year that none of us ever has enough time to talk to each other for as long as we would like.

Although the attendance may have been slightly down from previous years—nobody's counting—the funds that were generated (close to \$16,000) surpassed all previous years. We, and the people we are privileged to serve, are extremely grateful.

We are especially grateful to the people who helped set up the hall on Friday and Saturday, the people who spent many hours rolling meatballs in the kitchen with Fr. Gil, those who served the food and ran the bar, those who helped with the silent auction, those who provided items for the silent auction and the bargain-basement tables, and those who did such a marvelous job cleaning up the kitchen and the hall afterwards. We do not know the names of all the people who helped, but I hope they know that they were much appreciated. It takes a lot of people working in harmony to organize this event, and without them it could not take place.

Last year we began asking for donations to support special services we provide—money for items such as clothing, toiletries and food that we have to buy—and people responded so generously that we did it again this year, and again the response was overwhelming.

Although we are amply rewarded by the people we are privileged to help, being human, we do appreciate the encouragement that the friendship, presence and support we get from the people who faithfully attend our only fund-raising event every year.

People who gave gifts to be auctioned

Lois and Joe Acosta
Ray and Joyce Bettencourt
Claremont Surf Shop
Tara and Ryan Dell
Tony Demiglio
Donna Dinan
European Cake Gallery
John Paul Getty Museum
Terry and George Hajny
Hope Hanifin
Karen Kampp
Angela Langham
Diane Langworthy
Lillian Macy
Ellen McMahan
Iris Mensinger
Mingei Museum
Mingei Museum Gift Shop

Nati's Mexican Restaurant
Barbara Perez
The Pond Family
Jackie and Ed Renger
Art Scotesse
Barbara Shepherd
Jackie Smith
Tarantino Wholesale Food Distributor
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Villar
Warwick's Books
Terry Whitcomb
PRP Wine International
Sister JoCeal Young
Jean Zizzo

We apologize if we have omitted anybody. If we have, we will include them in a future issue.

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for the abolition of torture." If we agree, then the question becomes: what are we called upon to do, as moral human beings?

My own survival and involvement in the Catholic Worker was, as I said, a miracle itself, for the experience of violence and growing up on the streets had hardened me. My earliest memories were of violence and being labeled a juvenile delinquent.

Thus, like Jean Valjean, the protagonist convicted for stealing a loaf of bread, in *Les Misérables*, and sent to jail where many years were added onto his sentence for trying to escape, I grew callous towards others. After all, if you reject society, it doesn't hurt so much when society rejects you.

I was determined to drive away anyone who tried to love me or show me kindness, convinced as I was that I was stupid, bad, evil. Not caring was my way of trying to survive. Don't let anything touch you and you won't get hurt. Inside, though, I was deeply hurt, wounded and rejected, by those very persons whom I had to attach to in order to survive. Perhaps this was why Christ's message of love and redemption, enacted through the Catholic Workers I met, as part of the Mystical Body of Christ, meant so much to me.

Meeting the Catholic Worker transformed my life just as much as the Catholic bishop who provided Valjean shelter and whose kindness he returned by stealing silverware—as I had also done when I was a teenager—transformed his. The bishop said to Jean: "... you no longer belong to evil, but to

good ... I've ransomed you from fear and hatred, and now I give you back to God."

It was then, and only then, with this display of the mercy of Christ's forgiveness, that Valjean began to realize Christ's message, which is that God loves us not only at our very best, but at our very worst. For God forgave us and died for our sins, on the cross, bringing the message of unconditional love, resurrection and redemption. In the words of the Catholic Worker founder, Dorothy Day, "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

For me, a former runaway, thief and criminal, it was in the Los Angeles Catholic Worker where I learned the same. And so, at this time of the year especially, I remember the miracle of Christ and the Catholic Worker in my life, then and now, and humbly give thanks.

Tom Reifer frequently writes on torture. He is currently writing a book, Lawyers, Guns and Money: Wall Street and the American Century.

The San Diego Catholic Worker is grateful to the Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego and its director, Dr. Gerard Mannion, for the Festivals of Lessons and Carols in the Founders' Chapel and the proceeds of the collection that was taken up on our behalf.

Day by Day

A selection of thoughts that readers bring to the attention of the editor from time to time. To submit a thought of your own, please e-mail denyshorgan@gmail.com

Rantings promote socialism

Indeed, it is fair to say that nothing has done more to promote the cause of socialism than the ranting and raving of Sarah Palin, Paul Ryan, Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh. It's not just that the right has spread the word about socialism, raising the ideology's profile to levels rarely experienced in recent decades—if ever—and associating the ideology with Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, President Obama and a lot of other programs and people that Americans actually like. The fact that so many agitated, angry and—at least in some cases—politically toxic characters go apoplectic at the mere mention of the ideology has undoubtedly caused millions of Americans who don't know much about socialism to say to themselves, "Anything that Paul Ryan does not like must have some merit."

—John Nichols, writing in *The Nation*, Dec. 1, 2012.

Our stories relate to parables

As Christians, we have to see one another as people for whom Christ died, people joined to his life and death in baptism, people who, because of him, hope for resurrection, for he is the first-born of many brothers and sisters. As he showed in the parables, Jesus knows us, knows that we see our lives as stories, and so can understand the Pharisee and the tax collector, the prodigal son and merciful father.

—John Garvey, *Commonweal*, Dec. 21, 2012.

Not quite up to speed

And as my brother remarked on Facebook after watching the official video of the Pope's maiden tweet: 'If it takes five aides to show you how to make one touch on an iPad and whilst doing so you look confused by the whole ordeal, you're still some way from joining the digital age, your Holiness.'

—Steven Bullivant, a guest contributor to a blog in *The Tablet* magazine, Dec. 7, 2012.

Bishop speaks up for nuns

I find it very disappointing, to put it mildly, that the Vatican would try to intervene in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. They are adult people; they all come out of communities that have followed the Vatican II teachings very carefully; and now the bishops are trying to put in some kind of oversight committee to control what they do or don't do. I find that reprehensible, to try to treat these women who are at the forefront of efforts to teach Catholic social justice and also to act on these teachings, as though they are children in the church instead of autonomous adult people.

—Bishop Tom Gumbleton, auxiliary bishop of Detroit in an interview published in the Los Angeles Catholic Worker paper, *The Agitator*, December 2012.

Come, Lord, Do not Delay

Keeping Christ in our Lives All Year Long

By Fr. Gil Gentile S.J.

Father Gil is the spiritual director of the San Diego Catholic Worker.

One morning, earlier this month, when I arrived at the *Casa de los Pobres*—the House of the Poor—in the *Colonia Altamira* of our sister city, Tijuana, for our regular seven o'clock Mass, I was struck by how many people seemed to be in the courtyard and in the street that passes in front of the *Casa*. When I went up to the sacristy, Sister Armida, the director of the *Casa*, who has been there for more than 30 of the 55 years of its existence said, "I just want to prepare you padre for how full the chapel is today." I asked why and she explained that people have been coming to the *Casa* for the last weeks in the hope of securing one of the much-sought-after "boletos" or tickets that the sisters would distribute for the "Reparto Navideno" ("Christmas Distribution") on December 22.

The sisters and the "voluntarias" would give out to families and individuals approximately 1,500 "boletos" that would entitle them to a pound of *masa* (dough), rice and dried beans, a loaf of bread, a bag of fruit, an uncooked chicken, a blanket, a pair of shoes (one pair per family) and one toy per family. Sister Armida told me that families with children, elderly persons and single men and women had been sleeping on the sidewalk just outside the front wall of the *Casa* in the hopes of being blessed with a "boleto" when the *Casa* opened its gates at 5 a.m. She looked very sad and tired as she said this, but then as if to get the disturbing image of all of those people sleeping on the street out of her head, she smiled and said, "Vamos a misa—let's go to Mass."

Sister Armida was of course right. When I entered the chapel to the sounds of the opening song, "Ven, Ven Señor. No Tardes"—"Come, come Lord. Do not delay," I was indeed struck by the crush of humanity that had come to praise God and to pray for God's help and healing and perhaps (!) also for one of the prized "boletos".

Poignant words

The words of the song, a traditional Mexican Advent song, are very poignant in general but especially in that little, crowded chapel at the House of the Poor:

*"Come, come Lord. Do not delay.
Come, we are awaiting you.
Come, come Lord.
Do not delay. Come quickly Lord."*

The verses are dark:

*"The world is dying of cold;
souls have lost their warmth,
men are no longer brothers;
the world has no love.
Wrapped in shadowy night,
the world without peace does not see;
it goes looking for some hope,
looking, Lord, for your faith."*

*The world is without life,
the world is without light.
The world is without heaven.
The world needs You."*

And then comes the refrain again:

*"Come Lord, do not delay,
we are awaiting you.
Come quickly, Lord."*

The people sang with great gusto. It's a catchy tune and one that is easy to sing—loud. The refrain repeats and therefore it's also easy to sing from the heart. For our people, the poorest men, women and children of Tijuana, the singing of these words embodies their joyful yet painful longing for those things that the celebration of Christmas at the *Casa* can offer them: a blanket, a

pound of *masa*, a pair of shoes ... and Jesus.

The more pessimistic—albeit sadly true—verses probably don't mean as much as the refrain does to our people, whom I have never heard complain about their lot in life. Rather, these somewhat shocking words are perhaps an unconscious expression of the reality that forms a sad backdrop to their difficult, yet in so many ways, surprisingly joyful lives. I say joyful because I couldn't possibly count the number of times that people say to me, "Gracias a Dios," "Thanks be to God." And it is that sense of gratitude that seems to create in them joyful hearts and joyful words and joyful smiles.

Fiesta-like atmosphere

When I came down from the chapel out into the courtyard, I was lifted up by the fiesta-like atmosphere of all those who were waiting patiently for a breakfast of oatmeal, refried beans and fresh corn tortillas (and Flintstones chewable multivitamins for the children). People were talking and laughing, the children were playing, the few dogs were looking for scraps to eat—and Jesus was being born all over again.

Earlier at the Mass, the guests of honor, so to speak, were the 11 children who would receive their first Holy Communion on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12, and their families. I had asked them who it was that the Advent wreath represented and they had responded enthusiastically, "Jesus!" I asked them who it was that the psalm was referring to when it said, "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord," and they responded "Jesus". I asked them whose birthday it was that we would be celebrating on December 25 and they responded, "Jesus!" I asked them what was the greatest gift that God had given to the world and they responded, "Jesus!" I asked them whose mother was Our Lady of Guadalupe and they responded, "Jesus" and finally I asked them what they would be receiving on the day of their First Communion and one little boy nearly jumped out of his seat with excitement and fairly shouted, "Jesus!"

"So," I said to them, extending my arms out and taking in everything around me, "all of this is about Jesus. The wreath, the Mass, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christmas, Holy Communion, your families, all the people of the *Casa*, the sisters, the voluntarias, the benefactors, the oatmeal, the tortillas, the "boletos", the vitamins, are all part of what the birth of Jesus means here in this wonderful place that we call the *Casa de los Pobres*. "Bendito Sea Dios – Blessed Be God!"

Keep Christ everywhere

In an article that appeared in this newspaper a few years ago I used the phrase, "Keep Christ in Culture!" I wrote, "For years the Knights of Columbus have promoted the 'Jesus Is the Reason for the Season' and 'Keep Christ in Christmas' campaign. Keeping Jesus ever before us in our minds and our hearts, in our families and our workplaces, in our cities, our nation our world, should not end with the end of the Christmas season. Let's keep Christ in our homes. Let's keep Christ at our jobs. Let's keep Christ at the mall (and in the mall parking lot!). Let's keep Christ on the freeways. Let's keep Christ on vacation etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." And so, Let's keep Christ in culture.

I cannot speak for the culture of all of Mexico but I can speak for the culture of the *Casa de los Pobres* and I can say without hesitation that it is indeed Christ-centered. Jesus is at its core. And so after almost 30 years of being privileged to be a tiny part of the experience that is the *Casa de los Pobres*, I continue to be in awe and eternally grateful for all that the *Casa* has been, is and will be for the people who work together there and for all of those who come looking for Jesus. And so I say, with a grateful and joyful heart, "Gracias a Dios!"

Social services may be inadequate but people always deserve respect

"The sad truth is, though many social service programs are able to secure housing for the homeless, few agencies or charities have adequate resources or staff to offer the level of intensive, long-term support necessary to protect those who suffer with severe mental illness or addiction. And most of the time, it is precisely severe mental illness and addiction that prevent homeless people from receiving the aid they need to live a life that upholds their dignity as human beings.

"It was a situation I encountered frequently in my own work running a day services program for the chronically homeless. We provided socks, underwear, toiletries and snacks for anyone who came through our door. We even offered a small storage bin and took in the mail for our regular guests. And we were frequently criticized for "slapping a band-aid on a massive wound" or "making things worse for them by giving them handouts."

"But I knew that for many of these men and women, "the system" of homeless services simply could not support them in their profound levels of suffering. So we filled the only role that there was to fill: honor their dignity as human beings through the basic acts of feeding them, giving them a drink, clothing them and visiting them in the hospital and in prison.

"Did some of them lose or squander or lack gratitude for what we gave them? Yes. But I took these disappointments as an opportunity to deepen my understanding of the unconditional love and mercy of God. After all, how many gifts was I given every day by God that I overlooked or failed to appreciate? How many of God's invitations of grace and transformation had I refused because my own fears or self-sabotaging ways?"

—**Jamie Manson**, commenting in the *National Catholic Reporter* Dec. 12, on the story of the New York police officer who bought shoes for a barefooted homeless man with his own money.

Catholic Worker Meetings

For the foreseeable future, the San Diego Catholic Worker will continue to hold its regular monthly meetings on the second Monday of each month. Our meetings will begin with a Eucharist at 6 p.m. in the House of Hospitality, *Casa Milagro*, 2428 L Street. Everybody is invited to the Mass and to the meeting. The next meetings will be held on January 14, February 11, March 11, April 8, and May 13.

Mission Statement

The San Diego Catholic Worker is committed to the following actions that imitate Christ: a call to service, a belief in the human dignity of all, and an interrelationship with a compassionate God and one another.

As Catholic Workers, we struggle to carry out our double mandate: to minister to the needs of society's forgotten people, and to challenge and offer alternatives to the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and perpetuate suffering and violence.

Following Christ's example, we also believe it is our duty to spread the word of our work and provide others with the opportunity to serve.

The San Diego Catholic Worker will achieve its goals by the grace of God and by working together to bring about a world of peace and justice as envisioned by our founders, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin.

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President

Tina DiStefano

Vice President **Treasurer** **Secretary**

Sharon Everett Patricia Robinson Nancy Green

Editor

Denys Horgan

Proofing

Nancy Green

Mailing

Tina DiStefano and Volunteers

The San Diego Catholic Worker welcomes everybody and provides services to all, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, ethnicity, national origin, age, handicap, gender, or sexual orientation.

San Diego Catholic Worker

Casa Milagro

2428 L Street

San Diego, CA 92112

Tel. (619) 298-3755

You may also contact the editor at denyshorgan@gmail.com

Please note new Web Site: www.catholicworkersd.org

"Never Again, War!"