

May 22, 2020

Dorothy Day (1897-1980) was a part of a Catholic intellectual movement in the United States that tried to bring Roman Catholic Tradition and teaching into a meaningful conversation with American culture and society that began after the First World War and intensified and broadened its base after the Second World War thriving until John Paul II was elected.

Some of you might remember Bishop Gaughan, second bishop of Gary, he was a member of this group.

This movement was fueled by an appetite to use the wisdom of Catholicism as an agent for change in the Church's perception as a foreign influence by addressing social justice issues, literature, art, and was unique in that the expertise of lay people was sought and valued as a keystone of a more relevant and fruitful presence of Catholics and Catholic values in the common life of the United States.

Needless to say, this was not generally appreciated by most bishops and priests. They Preferred Fulton Sheen with his no nonsense approach to Catholicism that targeted in subtle and dramatic ways any slippage in the absolute separation of Catholic clergy from Catholic lay people.

The only lay people that had any status in the conventional Catholic world of the early through mid 20th century USA was the Notre Dame football team and that is the way that many would like to have kept it then, and, I am sure, now for many clerics that is the way to keep it.

Dorothy Day was an educated journalist and activist who did not find her way to Roman Catholicism until her late 20's after a long and unsettled search for an intellectual foundation that took this world and the next with equal seriousness.

She was passionate and untiring in working for the poor, the underprivileged, and the legions of men and woman caught up in the patently unjust, underpaid work force that was being used to build American industrial dominance of the world in the 20th century and before.

The Communist Party in those times offered the alternative thinking that addressed issues of social justice and many people like Dorothy day embraced it.

As is often the case people who rock the boat of the status quo get labeled to reduce the significance of what they actually are saying and the label "communist" in mid-century America became a catch all term of derogation for anyone who challenged or questioned the status quo.

Dorothy with a fellow activist, Peter Maurin, founded a small little newspaper called, the Catholic Worker which was published monthly and helped spread the wealth of teachings developed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century that addressed the realities of life in this world not as a prelude to heaven but precisely the locus of the Kingdom that we pray for on earth every time we say the Lord's Prayer.

When Pope Francis addressed a joint session of congress on his visit to this country in 2015, he included Dorothy Day as one of four great Americans, the others being Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr., and Abraham Lincoln.

Dorothy is believed to have come to embrace the Catholic Church because she just knew that there had to be Someone to thank for all of this and she found that in Catholic Mass, our Liturgy of the Eucharist which is essentially a ritual of thanksgiving, as she found her life and the world that she lived in to be so

filled with beauty even in the midst of terrible world wars and poverty and abuses of power and people in God's name.

In our time of loss, try and gather the gracious beauty of your own lives, the lives of those that you love, and this world that we live in so troubled but still filled with beauty and bring it to your own liturgies of Eucharist of thanksgiving as we wait until we can do it together.