

MANNA

in the wilderness

Christmas 1994

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Vol. 9, No. 2

1994 CHRISTMAS APPEAL:

Turning Towards the Light

Dear friends,

In October we experienced a change to daylight savings time. In the early morning hours, what was darkness became light by the changing of our clocks. Most things in our lives do not change so dramatically, but in a more subtle way. We remember that during this darkest time of the year, Christ was born into the world; not as a bright sun but as a small radiant light, as a vulnerable child.

When I wake up at 4 a.m. to begin cooking breakfast for the food line, it is still dark. But by 6:30 a.m. volunteers arrive and we begin to serve out bowls of food and coffee, it is light.

Everyday I see many people who are grateful we are there, but there are always some who do not show gratitude. Most folks are sober and pleasant, some are not. Similarly, sometimes I'm in a good mood and sometimes I'm not. Some mornings I have a sense of why I am called to serve the least of our brothers and sisters, but there are plenty of days I would rather be home in bed! We are all a mixture of darkness and light.

Somehow the One who came into this world and lived among us can be a light in a very dark world. If I am open to it, this light can come into my dark insides. But usually I don't believe it's there. Often I get so caught up in the weariness of other's addictions, mental illness, neediness and manipulateness that it's difficult to believe the light is still there. In my honest moments, all of the things that frustrate me about homeless people I realize I embody in some way myself. The light shines on.

Since Gary Cavalier and Julia Occhiogrosso left on sabbatical last June, many volunteers have helped continue the ministries of St. John the Baptist House. Volunteering at the food line, donating food, repairing the house and truck, coming to Tuesday night liturgies, or just being present to the guests staying at the house. And so the light shines on.

We still serve approximately 200 people each morning (Wednesday-Saturday), and offer hospitality in the form of food, shelter and companionship at St. John the Baptist House. Your time, energy, prayers and money have kept these ministries going. Thank you for your generosity. I ask that you continue to give in any way you can in the following months. More importantly, I hope that at this time of year we can all attempt to be good Christians instead of merely good shoppers. Before we know it, we begin to love things more than people, to love darkness instead of light. Can we instead say yes, as Mary did, to the divine light within each one of us? Can we believe in this seemingly absurd faith that God offers us during this time of popular Christmas consumerism?

I pray that we may all continue to be open to the new life within, to the changing of our own clocks so that we may see "the light" more often.



THE LIGHT BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

Christ's peace to you this Christmas,
Tim Wertzberger

for the Las Vegas Catholic Worker Community

ROOM FOR CHRIST THIS CHRISTMAS

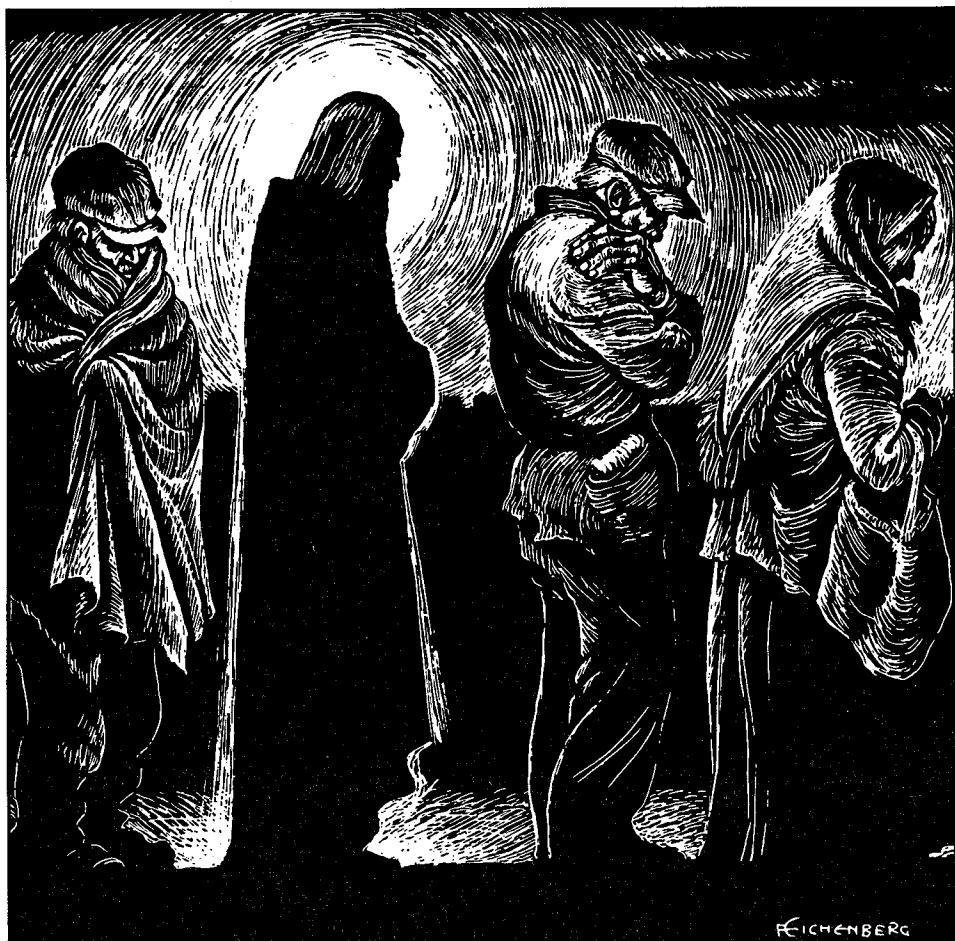
by Dorothy Day, December 1945

It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.

But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that He speaks, with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children that He gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that He gives. It is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that He walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that He longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ.

If we hadn't got Christ's own word for it, it would seem raving lunacy to believe that if I offer a bed and food and hospitality to some man or woman or child, I am replaying the part of Lazarus or Martha or Mary, and that my guest is Christ. There is nothing to show it, perhaps. There are no halos already glowing round their heads— at least none that human eyes can see. It is not likely that I shall be vouchsafed the vision of Elizabeth of Hungary, who put the leper in her bed and later, going to tend him, saw no longer the leper's stricken face but the face of Christ.

This custom existed among the first generations of Christians, when faith was a bright fire that warmed more than those who kept it burning. In every house then, a room was kept ready for any stranger



CHRIST IN THE BREADLINE BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

who might ask for shelter; it was even called "the stranger's room"; and this not because these people thought they could trace something of someone they loved in the stranger who used it, not because the man or woman to whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because —plain and simple and stupendous fact— he or she was Christ.

It would be foolish to pretend that it is always easy to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome, with "alter Christus" shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for

her. But that was not God's way for her, nor is it Christ's way for Himself, now when He is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.

Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin founded the Catholic Worker movement in New York in 1933.

CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

In order to serve a wonderful Christmas Breakfast to 300 or so homeless guests, we need boneless cooked hams by Dec. 22.

Thank You for all your support this Christmas!

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.
Morning Prayer at the house.
Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.
Serve breakfast at E and Washington St. to 200+ homeless persons.
Tuesday 5:30 p.m. Mass or Liturgy at Catholic Worker house, potluck following.
Friday, 7:00 a.m. 1:00p.m.
Hospitality Day. We bring up to 10 people home from the soup line for showers, lunch, conversation.
(Our home is also home to 3-4 guests who were formerly homeless)

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