



# Dorothy Day

## Saint or Troublemaker?

### Overview

On his 2016 visit to the United States Pope Francis, addressing Congress, praised an American lay-woman, Dorothy Day, for her social activism and her passion for justice. This sparked a huge spike in Google searches as people who had never before heard of her tried to find out who Dorothy Day was and why the Pope thought so highly of her.

They will have learned of a prayerful woman, a faithful Catholic, and a woman devoted to the poorest in society. They would have also found a woman who was unafraid to court controversy; who was an outspoken critic of governments and their wars, and who spent time in prison for her activism.

In this assembly we will meet Dorothy Day: Saint and Troublemaker.

### [Slide 1] Introduction

What might we call someone who...

- ... devoted most of her time to the poorest in society
- ... fed them, clothed them, provided a home for them
- ... went to mass daily
- ... prayed unceasingly for friend and enemy alike
- ... cared little for worldly things and possessions
- ... aimed to follow Christ and see him in those around her?

### [Slide 2] A Saint, perhaps?

What about someone who...

- ... was an outspoken critic of those in government
- ... criticised the way of life in her country
- ... spoke out tirelessly against war and injustice
- ... criticised the church for not living up to its teachings
- ... didn't pay taxes or vote
- ... went to jail several times

### [Slide 3] A troublemaker?

[Slide 4] What if these were one and the same person? Meet Dorothy Day: Saint and Troublemaker!

### [Slide 5] Reading (Matthew 25: 31-46)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave

me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'



### [Slide 6] About Dorothy Day

Dorothy Day was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1897. It was as a student at the University of Illinois that she first became involved in social movements in support of workers and the poor. She left university early to become a campaigning journalist and an activist. Dorothy remembered this time as a period of searching – for purpose and meaning.

Dorothy was increasingly drawn to the Catholic Church – which she saw as the church of the poor – and she converted to the faith in 1927. Yet still she searched.

**[Slide 7]** She met Peter Maurin in 1932 and together they co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement. She had found the work to which she would dedicate the rest of her life.

Catholic Worker communities are built around doing those works of mercy we heard about in the Gospel – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the prisoner, care for the sick.

For Dorothy this work also meant courting controversy. She was arrested numerous times for her protests in support of peace and justice, and she spent time in prison. Dorothy agitated, irritated, and annoyed the powerful and important in support of the poor, the weak, and the oppressed.

Dorothy Day worked tirelessly to relieve suffering and to tackle the economic and structural causes of injustice.

**[Slide 8]** She died in November 1980, aged 83, and is buried in New York. On her gravestone is the phrase *Deo Gratias* – Thanks be to God!

### **[Slide 9] Reading from Dorothy Day**



There is nothing we can do for people except to love them...

**[Slide 10]** What we would like to do is change the world – make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the fights of workers, of the poor, of the

destitute – the rights of the worthy and unworthy poor, in other words – we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world.

**[Slide 11]** We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God – please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbour, to love our enemy as well as our friend.



### **[Slide 12] Conclusion and Prayer**

Today Dorothy Day is a Servant of God – which means she is being considered for sainthood by the Church.

Sometimes, when people are considered special or extraordinary this leaves the rest of us thinking that we cannot possibly be like them because we don't consider ourselves to be special but ordinary.

Dorothy knew this all too well and in her life she resisted being described as a Saint – Do not call me a saint, I do not want to be written off so easily.

She knew that if she was considered extraordinary then others would have an excuse not to do the same work as she.

**[Slide 13]** For Dorothy, life as a Christian means to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visit the prisoner, care for the sick, challenge the works of war. And this work is expected of us all.

**[Slide 14]** Let us pray that we too can live our lives generously in loving service of others...

Heavenly Father,

Grant that we may be moved by your Holy Spirit,  
to share Dorothy Day's compassion and concern  
as true disciples of the Lord Jesus,  
giving ourselves as she did  
to the love and care  
of the neediest members of Christ's Body  
and committing our lives  
to bring the light and hope,  
the justice and peace of the Gospel  
to all your people.

This we pray through Christ, our Lord  
Amen

### **Other Resources**

The Catholic Worker have a rich archive of writings by and about Dorothy Day: [www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)  
The theme for this assembly was borrowed from this article by Jim Forest available here:  
[www.catholicworker.org/pages/forest-saint-our-age.html](http://www.catholicworker.org/pages/forest-saint-our-age.html)

There are three Catholic Worker communities in the UK who would value support and prayers:

London: [www.londoncatholicworker.org](http://www.londoncatholicworker.org)

Glasgow: [www.catholicworker.org.uk](http://www.catholicworker.org.uk)

Hertfordshire: [www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org](http://www.thecatholicworkerfarm.org)