

Learning from the Witness of Others



Don't we learn from others how to bear witness? We learn from their example – our parents, our teachers, our peers... and our saints.

Have you met activist and holy woman Dorothy Day? Ask Dorothy about bearing witness. Even as a young woman in the 1920s and 1930s in New York City, before she became an active follower of Jesus, she was passionate about justice. We remember her courage in standing up to the U.S. government against all the social injustice she experienced, including all war efforts and the ill treatment of workers. She undertook to feed the long lines of hungry people during the Great Depression and to care for the poorest and neediest. Then, when she met holy man Peter Maurin, she learned to balance work and prayer. She learned that to work is to pray, and to pray is to work. Together, Peter and Dorothy founded the Catholic Worker Movement.

Have you met activist and artist Kristi Pfister? Kristi lives and works in Staten Island, New York, which was a favorite refuge and retreat for Dorothy. Kristi's art is helping to spread Dorothy's message about bringing together both working for justice and praying for justice. Visit Kristi's website (<https://www.kristipfisterartist.com>) and you will find these words describing her Dorothy Day Mosaics: "They explore Day's duality of what is 'seen' – her lifetime of radical actions, with what is 'unseen' – her spiritual self."



Kristi has mounted large exhibits of art depicting Dorothy's work and prayer. Here are just a few examples from Kristi's series of mosaics titled: *Dorothy Day Mosaics: Iconography of an Activist*.

Ladles and Hands (both shown above) remind us of the long lines of hungry people who would be nourished by Catholic Worker warm soup and warm welcomes – and even beds. Dorothy wrote: "The destitute were the men and women who came to us in breadlines and we could do little with them but give them bread and clothing." And this: "The Catholic worker, as the name implied, was directed to the worker, but we used the word in its broadest sense, meaning those who worked with hand or brain, those who did physical, mental, or spiritual work."



Another mosaic, *Protest* (shown above), calls to mind Dorothy's commitment to pacifism and opposition to all wars, and her stance for supporting all categories of workers' rights: "It was after the suppression of the masses that I again went to Washington, this time with a group to picket the White House with the suffragists."



Kristi's mosaic *Meditation* (shown above) reminds us that prayer became central to Dorothy's life work. "My absorption [was] in the supernatural rather than the natural," she wrote, "the unseen rather than the seen."

The mosaic *Fishes* (shown right) can be considered a symbol of Dorothy's unity of work and prayer. On the one hand she has written: "Lines of people began to form, saying, 'We need bread.' We could not say, 'Go be thou filled.' If there were six small loaves and a few fishes, we had to divide them."

On the other hand, the fish could represent the Eucharist. Daily Mass was a constant in Dorothy's active life. Even before she converted to Catholicism, she frequently concluded a long night with her radical friends and poets in Greenwich Village by attending the 6:00 a.m. Mass at nearby St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

Artist Kristi Pfister is *bearing witness* to a great saint-to-be of our times. Dorothy Day is bearing witness to the power for good packed into this combination of work and prayer. Kristi, thank you for your witness. Saint Dorothy, pray for us that we may continue to be inspired by the witness you have given us.

Notes:

- All the Dorothy Day quotations are from her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness* © 1952. Harper & Brothers.
- The Dorothy Day Guild offers a wealth of information on its website, <https://www.dorothydayguild.org>.
- We are grateful to Kristi Pfister for her generous permission to use images of her art. For more about this artist: <https://www.kristipfisterartist.com>.

