Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“When did we see you hungry and feed you?” (Matt 25:36).

Lv 19:1-2, 11-18; *Mt 25:31-46*

I have always been impressed by the life and work of Dorothy Day, cofounder with Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker movement. Twenty years ago, I was fortunate to

be able to volunteer at Holy Family Catholic Worker House here in Kansas City.

For some 40 years, this local Catholic Worker House was meant to be an explicit response to the challenging, final parable of judgment Jesus tells in Matthew 25:31-46. Feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; visit the sick and the imprisoned; welcome the stranger. It opened its doors each day to guests who came in off the streets for an hour of warmth, coffee, toast, oatmeal, a chance to use the bathroom, wash up, make a phone call, get clean socks or a stocking cap and gloves.

Over the years, hundreds of volunteers from local churches crossed the threshold into the reality of poverty and homelessness so many people face in America. The 200 or so houses in the movement, begun in 1933 during the depths of the Depression, witness in various ways to the dream of a more just and compassionate world.

The “Corporal works of Mercy” described in today’s Gospel reading bookend the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12, the vision of God’s Kingdom leaning into history, laying the foundation for what will be but is not yet.

What is most striking about Matthew 25 is that Jesus reveals that he himself has disappeared among the poor, the homeless, the sick and in prison, strangers and outcasts, where he waits to be ministered to. Anyone who serves him there, even if they do not know it, will be welcomed into God’s Beloved Community. Those who ignore him there, whatever their credential, ritual station or good intentions, will have missed the chance to know God’s presence in the world.

When taking office a decade ago in 2013, Pope Francis’ early call for a “church of the poor and for the poor” stirred the dream but also measured the distance to what is not yet. Closing the gap is the work of discipleship. Because of Dorothy Day, a small vanguard holds contested ground each day in trying to live the works of mercy. Their lives invite all of us to find our way to the frontlines where Jesus awaits our loving care. This, together with prayer and fasting, is part of our Lenten search for God.