News



A man dressed in a period costume speaks to crowds while a giant cake sits beside him in Washington, D.C., July 4, 1976, during celebrations for the nation's bicentennial. (AP)

by NCR Staff

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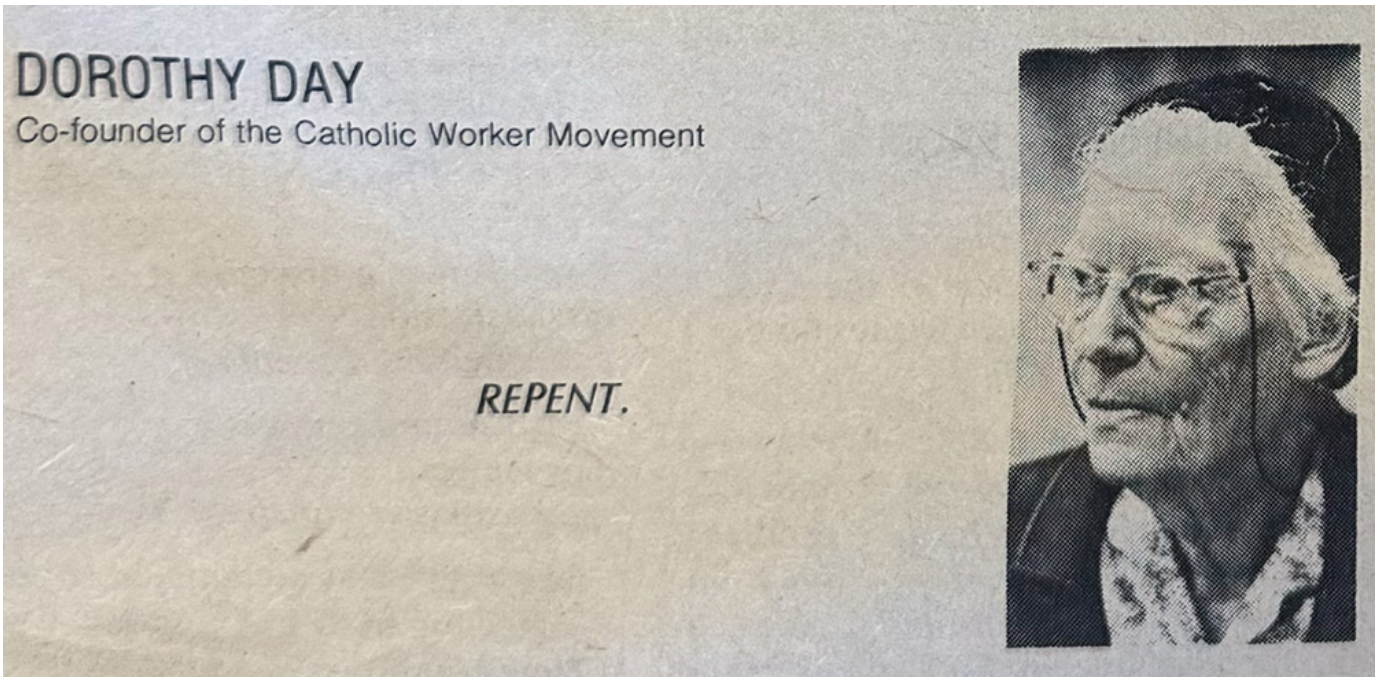
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"REPENT."

That was Catholic Worker Movement co-founder Dorothy Day's one-word message to America in celebration, or perhaps just recognition, of our nation's bicentennial birthday in 1976.

National Catholic Reporter published a six-page spread in the July 2, 1976, issue, with dozens of birthday greetings from Catholics and others around the nation, from those who were well-known and from people on the street.



Dorothy Day's message to the United States for its bicentennial, printed in the July 2, 1976, issue of the National Catholic Reporter (NCR photo)

Following is a sampling of those messages.

Bing Crosby, singer and entertainer

Our problems seem monstrous and sometimes insoluble just now, but when we reflect upon some of the troubles that have plagued the nation in the past 20 years, and how they were overcome, our confidence in the future is renewed.

The most important thing to keep us indomitable and reliant is the preservation of a strong and active family life. Family life is the basis for a strong community and a great nation.

Betty Ford, first lady of the United States

1976 can be an old-fashioned celebration of the heart, if each American pauses to reflect on the meaning of freedom. More than parades, and I hope there are many, and more than pilgrimages to the scenes of the past, this 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence should be celebrated by savoring our freedoms.

We enjoy so many freedoms. We may worship as we choose. We decide where we live and where we work. We are free to express ourselves politically and artistically. But, best of all, we have the freedom to dream and to follow those dreams.

With best wishes for a meaningful, personal celebration and high hopes for the next 200 years.



President Gerald Ford and first lady Betty Ford watch the national fireworks display from the Truman Balcony at the White House on July 4, 1976. (Wikimedia Commons/U.S. National Archives and Records Administration)

Richard DeMaria, New York City cab driver

America, I'd say you're great! All other countries look toward America to see what the future's gonna be, so they can fall in line with us. We've got peace here.

I meet all different types of world people — when you're a cab driver you bump into all kinds of people — and they'll give their lives for America. In this land where we are now, there was a lot of blood spilled so we can have our freedom today, and so people just coming into this country can have their freedom.

Even my wife — she comes from Naples, Italy. I kid around and say, "I'll ship you back," and she says, "I'll ship you back." She'd give her own life not to go anywhere. She was raised in a convent in Monte Cassino — she came here and found a new way of life.

Eddie Sanchez, prisoner 18827-175 in Marion, Illinois

Happy Birthday, America? I don't really feel we can call it a happy birthday. Our country has over 500,000 prisoners. We lost thousands of others in senseless wars. Our society is still split level with people on one side of the track eating dog food and on the other side steak. Let's join hands and help America grow.

Advertisement

Dominican Sr. Mary Shawn Copeland, executive director of the National Black Sisters' Conference

Three wishes — two in memory of my ancestors long dead, one in hope for my descendants:

I wish America discomfort
dissatisfaction

and splendid discontent.

I wish American unrest
uneasiness
and exquisite unhappiness.

I wish America commitment to see and face the truth
conviction to seek and know the truth
and courage to live and finally do the truth.

Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame

Abraham Lincoln called Americans an "almost chosen people." Even so, we showed the world in 1776 that we could proclaim "that all men are created equal," and then we spent 200 years trying to make that promise come true.

We did it the hard way, welcoming those "huddled masses" seeking freedom and opportunity, and granting them both. As long as we continue to enlarge freedom and justice, not only here but worldwide, we will be evermore a "chosen people" and our nation ever more blessed.



A strip of four 13-cent stamps pictures the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The stamps were issued at the bicentennial in 1976. (Wikimedia Commons/National Postal Museum)

Dee Alexander Brown, author of *The Westerners* and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

If there is to be a tricentennial, we must listen well to what the Native Americans are trying to tell us: that our land and its waters, its wild creatures and plants and forests, cannot be ravaged for another 100 years and still endure.

Bishop Antulio Parrilla-Bonilla, titular bishop of Ucres, living in Puerto Rico

On the occasion of the bicentennial of the founding of the United States, I salute the principles of freedom and justice upon which the federation was established. I cannot give the nation my congratulations until those principles are again put in practice by returning full sovereignty to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Panama Canal Zone, Guam and the other islands of the Pacific.

Alvertis Davison, cable car bell-ringer, San Francisco

My birthday wish for America is that I hurry up and get old enough to get my Medicare. That way I'll get back the money that I already put into the country. I'm 38 — I've got a while to go, but I'm hoping.

I'm the bell-ringing champion on the cable cars, elected by the people of San Francisco in the bell-ringing contest, but I've had a back injury on the job. I hope I get better — there's nothing like standing up straight in America.

America, just keep on being America. Things're getting better — it's just the people that are getting worse.

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