

Be perfect ...

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"Be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matt 5:48

This is one of the most enigmatic sayings in the Sermon on the Mount. What is perfection?

Greek architecture and sculpture expresses conformity with underlying laws of proportion pleasing to the eye and satisfying to the mind's need for completion, fulfillment.

Jesus offers a more mysterious notion of wholeness, applying it to God's capacity to hold everything, even contradictory qualities together. God's wholeness encompasses both good and evil, his friends and his enemies. God's love is unconditional, and to be perfect as God is perfect, so must our love also be unconditional.

In the postscript to her 1952 autobiography, Dorothy Day captures the human striving toward wholeness in the following words: "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

The center of our striving is an existential and universal emptiness. In and of ourselves, we are solitary, our consciousness is a soliloquy, our journey is solo. But this is what compels us toward companionship and, no surprise, toward community as the only place where our smaller intimacies find context and survive best, as any couple knows. Life is a love story, and this is where we encounter God, who draws us forward into love, showing us how to expand the circle of love wider and wider, even to include our enemies.

Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day saw this expanding love in the mystery of the Eucharist. God is bread for the starving. The houses of hospitality established in the Catholic Worker movement were open doors to eucharistic tables where hungry people could be fed, and in turn feed one another, physically and spiritually. Everyone is welcome. The prim widow in sunglasses and sandals walking her little dog through the Plaza, the young woman surviving another night of abuse on Independence Ave to feed her kids, they have both known the long loneliness. It invites them to know one another at the same table where a perfect God is the food that satisfies everyone.