

Robert didn't say it outright, but you could tell it was what he meant: *That homeless woman is crazy.*

See, when he walked into the charity house, there were two older women sitting there. The first woman, clearly there to be in off the streets for a while, talked and talked and talked in a rambling sort of way. She was obviously drunk, "yet determined to carry on a conversation." The second woman was one of the people who ran the charity house, and she barely seemed phased by the other's woman's rambling exclamations. She just nodded her head from time to time. The whole conversation looked pretty ridiculous to Robert.

After a while the drunk woman was finally quiet long enough for the other woman to ask if she would mind an interruption in their conversation. Then that second woman – the one who ran the charity -- got up, walked over to Robert, and asked, "Are you waiting to talk with one of us?"

*"One of us."*

Those words hit Robert hard. The worker hadn't assumed he was there to speak with her because she was in charge of the place, but instead she had treated the drunk, homeless woman like an equal, simply by assuming Robert could be there to talk with either of them. He later reflected, "With those three words, she had cut through layers of self-importance [and privilege]...and scraped the hard bone of pride...With those three words, so quietly and politely spoken, she had indirectly told me what [that charity house was] all about and what she herself was like."

That humble woman was Dorothy Day – a woman who dedicated her life to helping those in need to such a remarkable extent that the Catholic Church has given her the official title "Servant of God" and is considering canonizing her as an official saint of the Catholic Church.

When Dorothy asked that humble question – "Are you waiting to talk with one of us?" – and in much of how she lived her life, she followed the example of Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:6-7).

But Dorothy Day wasn't always a follower of Jesus. Though she grew up going to church and devotedly reading her Bible, and she chose to be baptized and confirmed, and though she always felt pulled towards the Church and the teachings of Christ, she spent much of her young adult years living a pretty wild life, and only really truly dedicated herself to God at the age of 30.

So how did Dorothy finally follow God's lifelong call on her life? And how did she become someone who lived with a Christlike humility – something that all Christians struggle with?

If we really study her life, we can come up with all sorts of answers to those questions. After all, each of our faith journeys is filled with lots of little stories that build up to who we are in Christ. But one answer we might give to how Dorothy Day became such an example of faith is: thankfulness.

Here's why I say that:

In the months leading up to her conversion, Dorothy began to pray more and more. She had always prayed, at least from time to time, sort of as an instinct, but around this time she became intentional about praying. Someone asked her why – what was going on in her life that made her start to pray like that?

We might expect to hear a story of tragedy now. A lot of the time these sorts of conversion stories come about because someone is going through a really hard time: struggling with loss or illness, addiction or a crisis of faith.

But that's not the kind of story Dorothy told. Instead she talked about how happy she was. She was in a relationship with a man named Forster, who felt like her perfect match, and she loved their life together. So she prayed to give thanks for all that joy. She later said that the good things in life had always made her want to pray. She said:

*I don't think prayer for me has only been connected with sadness and misery. I have prayed when I have felt low and tired and worried. But when I have felt joy and fulfillment in this world, I have always wanted to say thank you. I just can't believe there isn't someone to thank. I remember when I was a child and I'd wish something would happen, and it did, I would try to find a minute to whisper "thank you." I wasn't thanking my mother and my father; I was thanking the god of fate and chance, I suppose, the way children do. Lady Luck or my Good Luck Charm or the little piece of rabbit fur my younger brother carried on his key-chain. Now I hope you don't jump on me and tell me I was being superstitious then, and I'm being superstitious now. I was being thankful. I felt thankful when I met Forster and fell in love with him and he fell in love with me. I wanted to express my thanks.*

That thankfulness she felt was like the rain that watered all the little seeds of faith that had been planted in her life. That thankfulness made all those seeds finally bud and blossom in her life. She soon had her daughter baptized and joined the Catholic Church, where she stayed for the rest of her life.

In today's Gospel story ten lepers beg Jesus to heal them, and he does. But only one of them comes back to praise God and thank Jesus – and that one was a foreigner of a different religion. Jesus looks around and asks: *What's up with that?*

Those nine other men who were healed, what were they thinking and feeling? The Gospel of Luke doesn't tell us; it leaves us to guess. Maybe they were kind of entitled, felt like they were just getting what they deserved when Jesus healed them – if you spend enough time around humans you'll see that kind of attitude, and I'm sure I've shown off my own entitlement in my life, too. But maybe they were grateful, too, but they were just so taken up by their own joy and excitement that they just took off running to show themselves to the priests, like Jesus said to do, took off running to be declared clean and to be able to touch their families for the first time in weeks or months or years.

But this one man put his thankfulness into practice. Thanking God, thanking the person who'd helped him.

How often do we do the same? Do we thank God for the good gifts in our lives – through word and action? Do we thank the other people in our lives for the good they bring? It's so easy to take things for granted, or to feel like thanks don't *need* to be really said or shown. But if we make an intentional practice of saying "Thank you" – how might that practice change our lives?

Dorothy Day once said: "The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us."

One way to kick off that revolution has to be thankfulness. Just think of all that thankfulness can do in us our hearts:

Thankfulness humbles us, when we realize we're receiving something we good that we did not earn all on our own. It gets us past our pride and our defensiveness – which is also the path to greater joy, because...

Thankfulness helps us to see all the good we have in our lives...and maybe that will open our hearts to others who don't have some of what we've got. So it's also the path to greater compassion and generosity.

Practicing thankfulness has the power to transform us: to help us to feel more positive by really noticing the good things in our lives; to brighten our relationships as we appreciate the people in our lives; to help grow our faith as we realize our dependence on our good God; to empower us to do good in this often dark world.

Something as ordinary-sounding as practicing thankfulness can actually be revolutionary.

So join me in praying this simple but powerful prayer today: *Thank you. Thank you, God. Amen.*

And now let's turn that thankfulness into action, too.

### **Bibliography:**

Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion*, (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1987).