

# Hospitality and Works of Mercy: *The Art of Ade Bethune*

The first designs Ade Bethune did for *The Catholic Worker*, published in the March 1934 issue, used the theme "hospitality." In one, Joseph and Mary are being thrown out of the inn in Bethlehem by an angry innkeeper, his raised fist illustrating a lack of hospitality. Another depicts a tearful Mary carrying her child into exile in a cold and strange land. The essential theme here is also "lack of hospitality."

A third image was inspired by a list of the fourteen works of mercy in the Catechism. At the top of the list was hospitality itself—harboring the homeless. With this image, she began a series of circular designs depicting the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. The other six in the series appeared in later issues of *The Catholic Worker* throughout 1934. Rounding out her images for the March issue, Ms. Bethune created a design of St. Joseph the Worker.

For the April 1934 issue of *The Catholic Worker*, Dorothy Day asked Ade Bethune to draw Saint Catherine of Siena and John Bosco. As a result, Ms. Bethune said:

A great program opened up before me. In the lives of two actual holy people of the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, [Dorothy Day] had sketched a lifetime plan for me. Catherine and John alone illustrated "feeding the hungry," "visiting the prisoner," "counseling the doubtful," "converting the sinner," "giving a home to the homeless" and "instructing the ignorant"--six of the fourteen works of mercy! I went home full of enthusiasm...

To save printing costs for *The Catholic Worker*, Ms. Bethune began engraving the printing plates for her designs herself. These were originally done on wood, but as reuse wore out the blocks she re-engraved her designs on metal, primarily zinc and copper. She

also received frequent requests for copies of her *Catholic Worker* designs. In 1935 she began printing them onto cards, which Dorothy Day used as thank you notes for contributions. Eventually, this printing effort would become the St. Leo Shop, her mail-order business for products relating to spiritual and family life.



Dorothy Day as she looked when Ade Bethune first met her in 1933



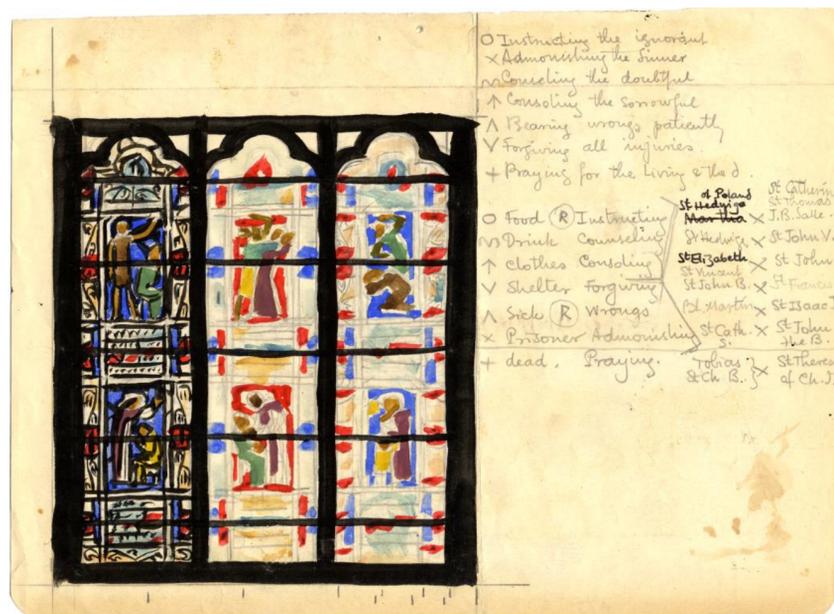
Ade Bethune at work in her yard in Newport, 1939

In 1938, Father Joseph F. Stedman asked Ade Bethune to design stained glass windows for the chapel at the Precious Blood Monastery in Brooklyn, New York, where he was chaplain. In 7 lancets, she designed stained glass versions of her *Catholic Worker* saints practicing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Early sketches for these windows show both male and female saints, but the final version depicted only women. Unfortunately, Ms. Bethune did not have the joy of executing them herself; instead they were done by Per Bergeton of Rambusch Studios in New York.

In her 1988 biography of Ms. Bethune, *Proud Donkey of Schaerbeek*, Judith Stoughton, CSJ, writes:

Designing these windows allowed Ade Bethune to bring together her mystical understanding of physical light as symbol of the illuminating divine Presence, and of the works of mercy as our surest means of contact with the living God through the person of Jesus Christ. "I was sick, and you visited me; I was naked and you clothed me."



Page from Ade Bethune's sketchbook, showing her plans for the stained glass windows, Precious Blood Monastery, Brooklyn, New York

Ms. Bethune was to return again and again to the subjects of hospitality and acts of mercy. Through her art, she made biblical scenes and saints' lives meaningful to those who viewed it.

As I did more and more pictures of the saints in modern dress at their occupations, I realized that what they were doing was one work of mercy after another. They were visiting the sick, comforting the sorrowful, feeding the hungry. More interesting than having only abstract, unknown figures going through the motions, here were real people, who had lived and done these things. And we could do the same!



Ade Bethune working at home, 1984

To view more of Ade Bethune's work, see

Art by Ade Bethune  
*The Visual Imagination of the Catholic Worker*  
 Exhibit at the Basilica of St. Mary  
 Pope John XXIII Gallery  
 May - June 2004