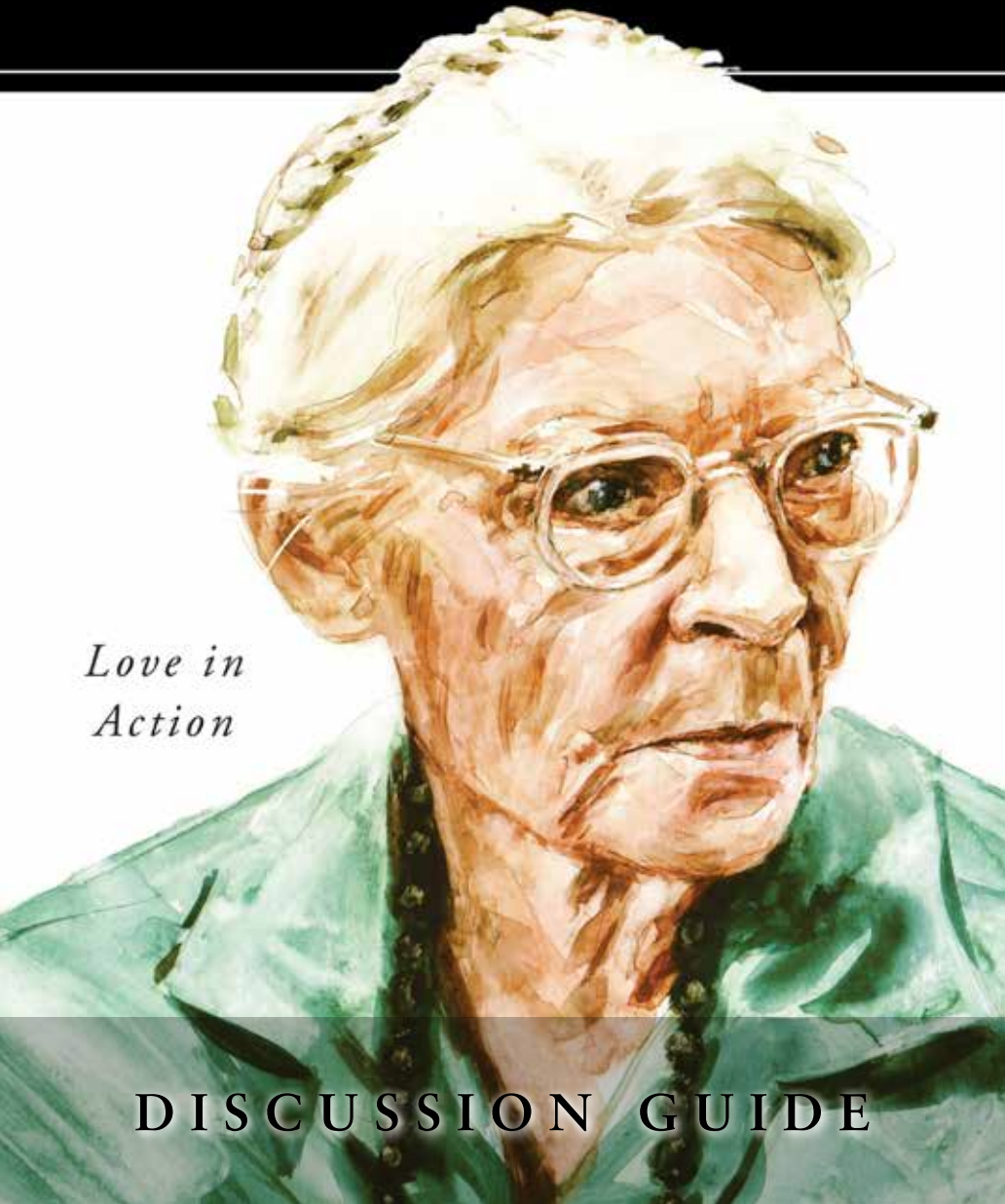


PATRICK JORDAN

# DOROTHY DAY

*Love in  
Action*

A watercolor-style portrait of Dorothy Day, an elderly woman with short, light-colored hair, wearing glasses and a green jacket. The portrait is rendered with soft, blended colors and visible brushstrokes, giving it a textured, artistic appearance. She is looking slightly to the right of the viewer with a gentle expression.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## About the Book

By any measure, Dorothy Day lived a fascinating life. She was a journalist, activist, single mother, convert, Catholic laywoman, and cofounder of the Catholic Worker Movement.

A lifelong radical who took the gospels at their word, Dorothy Day lived among the poor as one of them, challenging both church and state to build a better world for all people. Steeped in prayer, the liturgy, and the spiritual life, she was jailed repeatedly for protesting poverty, injustice, and war. Through it all, she created a sense of community and remained down-to-earth and humanly approachable.

To have known Dorothy Day was to have experienced not only her charm and humanity, but the purposefulness of her life. In *Dorothy Day: Love in Action*, Patrick Jordan—who knew her personally—conveys some of the hallmarks of Day's fascinating life and the spirit her adventure inspires.

## About the Author

Patrick Jordan is a former managing editor of *The Catholic Worker*. He and his wife Kathleen were associated with Dorothy Day from 1968 until her death in 1980. From 1984 until 2012, Jordan was an editor at *Commonweal* magazine. He is the editor of *Dorothy Day: Writings from Commonweal* (Liturgical Press, 2002) and, with Paul Baumann, coedited *Commonweal Confronts the Century* (Touchstone, 1999). He serves on the advisory board of the Dorothy Day Guild.

# Discussion Guide

## Introduction

1. What do you already know about Dorothy Day before reading this book? What do you think you will learn from this book that you don't already know?
2. Discuss Jordan's description of Dorothy's recovering from past sins (p. 5). What is the difference between remorse and forgiving oneself for past wrongdoings?
3. Does Dorothy's "acute sense of loneliness" (p. 7) resonate with your personal experience or not?
4. Have you ever known someone whose presence communicated acceptance and inspired you to greater things (pp. 8–9)?
5. How does Dorothy's life witness to the Bible quote on page 11 (Phil 4:4-7)?

## Chapter One

1. Dorothy moved around a lot as a child (p. 14). What effects could this have had on her? Did it inspire her future work?
2. Where do you think Dorothy gained her strong political ideals (p. 16)?
3. Why do you think Dorothy wanted to baptize her child while not yet Catholic herself (p. 19)?
4. Why did Dorothy continue to pray despite feeling closer to fellow protesters than Catholics (p. 21)?
5. Within its first year, the *Catholic Worker* “took off” from a circulation of 2,500 to 100,000 (p. 22). What accounts for such rapid success?
6. Reflect on Dorothy’s difficulties balancing her career and her spiritual life (p. 24). Have you ever faced similar difficulties ?
7. “To resist is to survive” (p. 28). What does this mean?

## Chapter Two

1. What accounts for Dorothy's charisma among so many different people (pp. 31–32)?
2. Why does the author refer to people like “Mad Paul” and “Scottish Mary” as “a litany of sinners and saints” (p. 32)? Do you think Dorothy treated these people as if they were sinners or as if they were saints?
3. Is there any truth to William Buckley Jr.'s harsh critique of Dorothy (p. 32)?
4. How do you understand the relationship between freedom and “the notion of personal responsibility and care for the common good” (p. 33)?
5. Why was George P. Carlin surprised by Dorothy's pride in her grandson (p. 35)? Did she compromise her pacifist principles?
6. Discuss Dorothy's interaction with Tom Sullivan (p. 35).
7. Consider the William James quote that Dorothy was so fond of (p. 36). Identify some of those “invisible, molecular moral forces” in your own life.

## Chapter Three

1. Dorothy describes Dostoyevsky as her spiritual reading (p. 38). Have you grown spiritually by reading any texts not usually classified as “spiritual”?
2. How can holy people and places prompt an increase in faith or even a conversion (p. 39)? Do you have any personal examples?
3. Have you ever had to end a toxic relationship like that of Dorothy and Forster? What effects did that have on others (like Tamar)?
4. What drew Dorothy to the Bible quote on page 40: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15)?
5. When do you think Dorothy began to prioritize writing for Catholic journals over radical political journals (pp. 41–42)?
6. Dorothy saw saints as protesters and rebels (p. 42). Which saint’s story do you find most inspiring?
7. Compare and contrast Peter and Dorothy’s approaches to faith. What does it mean to “go back to go forward” or to “go forward to go back” (p. 43)?
8. What is your favorite line from those poems of Peter quoted in this chapter (pp. 44–46)?
9. How does the “little way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (p. 47) compare to other views on work and faith expressed throughout the chapter?

## Chapter Four

1. What can be hard about “getting started” in faithful work (p. 50)?
2. How does the Bible quote on page 52 (Luke 6:27-30, 35) relate to Dorothy’s experiences and decisions before her conversion?
3. Which injustices in the world do you find most angering (p. 54)?
4. What does Dorothy say is the best way to change some people (p. 55)? Do you agree?
5. What do people think of when they hear the word “Catholic” (p. 56)? What do you expect when you see “Catholic” in the title of a publication?
6. Dorothy speaks of a variety of people embracing poverty “and the irresponsibility which goes with it” (p. 59). Who are these people, and what does she mean by that?
7. Discuss Dorothy’s quote from page 59: “The wolf is at the door daily, but we are so used to him that we’d miss him if he were not there.” What does the wolf represent in your own life? Or in society?
8. Why do you think the author chose to include this particular article of Dorothy’s from the *Catholic Worker* on pages 62–63? What does it say about her faith?

## Chapter Five

1. Do you agree with the three areas that Gustave Weigel said the church needed to address (p. 66)? Does the church still need to address these areas?
2. What do you think of the title *Catholic Worker*? Did Dorothy make the right decision in fighting to keep it (p. 68)?
3. Reflect on Paul's quote to the Ephesians in 2:19: "You are no longer stranger and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints" (p. 69). Why does the author reference this particular verse?
4. What do you think of Dorothy's observation that only "the minimum" is generally expected of laypeople (p. 71)? Is this true?
5. Explain the distinction drawn by Georges Bernanos between obedience and docility (p. 72).
6. Why do you think Dorothy was chosen to represent the United States along with an astronaut (p. 73)?
7. Do you agree with Dorothy's statement that "one must live in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction with the church" (p. 73)?
8. Dorothy believes that canon law should be interpreted according to Scripture's emphasis on love, rather than simply law (p. 75). Do you agree with her understanding of Scripture—and its application to law?
9. What does Dorothy call the least understood issue (p. 76)? Why is it so difficult to grasp?



10. In whom do you see Jesus? In whom do you *fail* to see Jesus (p. 77)?
11. Discuss the quotes of Sts. Ambrose and Gregory the Great (pp. 79–80). Do you agree with their redefinitions of ownership?
12. What does Dorothy mean when she says, “We are not going to win the masses to Christ until we live it” (p. 80)?

## Chapter Six

1. What do you think you would gain from living in “Catholic Worker poverty”? And what do you think of the author’s contrast between “quotidian concerns” and “the gut fear and anxiety generated by exposure to violence” (p. 81)?
2. How does “perfect love cast out fear” (1 John 4:18; p. 82)?
3. Dorothy states that love of one’s enemy must not be done simply to avoid war but because God loves that enemy (p. 82). What is the difference? Does it matter?
4. Can a faith experience be “overly rigorous” (p. 85)?
5. What has been the best source of faith education in your life (p. 86)?
6. What did Dorothy mean when she wrote Cardinal Spellman that “one of our jobs as women is *to restore the natural*—the good natural” (p. 87)? Do you agree?
7. What is your favorite form of prayer (p. 88)?

## Chapter Seven

1. What do you do to overcome sadness (p. 90)?
2. Do you agree with how the author understands pity as sentimentality? Why does Bernanos say that “reciprocity is not possible when there is pity” (p. 91)?
3. What is the difference between “announcers” and “denouncers” (p. 92)?
4. Which part of Dorothy’s diary entry stands out to you the most, and why (pp. 93–94)?
5. Why do you think Dorothy underlined that passage in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* (p. 94)?

## Chapter Eight

1. What does the author mean by the term “personalism” (pp. 95–96)? Do you know any personalists in your own life?
2. Do you think Dorothy made the right decision in demanding Judith join her cell (pp. 96–97)? Why did Dorothy come to regret that decision?
3. Reflect on the conversation between Dorothy and the warden (p. 98). What prompted that “tiny smile”?
4. What is the significance of Dorothy signing her letter to Paul “your fellow worker” (pp. 100–101)?
5. What do you think of Gornick’s description of Dorothy’s faith (pp. 102–3)? Is faith an ongoing struggle?
6. Do you agree with Dorothy’s statement that “one person shouting ‘No’ is enough” (p. 103)?

## Chapter Nine

1. How would you define a “real saint” (p. 104)?
2. What do you think of the statement that Dorothy was “too interesting to be a saint” (p. 105)?
3. How do you understand Henri de Lubac’s claim that the present age “has lost its taste for God” (p. 106)?
4. Why is it so important to have saints—and to ask for them (p. 106)?
5. Reflect on Nina’s quote. Why would Dorothy be crucified (p. 107)?
6. How is prophecy a “way of being in the world” (p. 108)?
7. What do you know about Thomas Merton? What is the value of doing nothing (p. 109)?
8. Do you agree with Dostoyevsky’s Fr. Zosima (p. 110)?