

Consulting with others before acting is always a wise thing to do. Sometimes this involves direct communication with another, sometimes that more indirect communication we call lectio – the reading of the scriptures, or the consulting with the Fathers, that is: the tradition of the Church and always ideally accompanied by prayer – that direct communication that underpins all the rest. In short, some sort of structure is needed if the practice of our faith is to have coherence and integrity: some sort of reservoir of common Christian experience which can be drawn upon when things get tough, when decisions have to be made to keep the nascent Christian community together – and there is a sense that the Christian community – at whatever level – is always nascent, always in need of a 'return to the sources' as it begins each new day. Hence Paul and Barnabas revisit the fragile communities they have established in their travels through Asia Minor to reaffirm them and appoint elders, that is; put in place a structure to see them through the difficult times that they know by experience will lie ahead. It wasn't easy being a Christian then, and is no more so now. So each time I'm called to preach, as well as pray I consult the commentaries to learn what other Christians have to say on these always difficult texts which the Church brings to our attention at each and every Mass, and this one I think is worth quoting in full: *'Love in John is not emotion, sentiment, or personal attraction, but very practical dynamic and demanding. Jesus himself is the revelation of God's love (3:16;1 Jn3:16) in his ministry and in his death (15:12-13). Love will now be the distinguishing mark of disciples of Jesus (.35) rather than dress, diet, rituals or observance of the law, as Christians are always in need of calling to mind.'* (New Collegeville Biblical Commentary page 1184)

But this comment, in turn, as always, needs a commentary of its own, for love itself is never straightforward – it's interpretation, as the commentary says is 'dynamic and demanding – always in a sense 'new'. This has been brought home to me recently by reading a quite disturbing commentary on the life of the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day, by one of her granddaughters, and by a visit to us yesterday by a man in a wheel chair demanding entry to the monastery in order to live here as a paid guest. Suffice it to say that in both instances there was a balance to be struck between the needs of the individual and the needs of the community as a whole, and in Dorothy Day's case the needs of her family also. It's easy to get the balance wrong as this short story told by Stanley, a very long term live-in member of the Christian Worker Movement, may illustrate: *'It wasn't his writing but his storytelling and his jokes that I knew best. All of us children, the Henessys, the Corbins, the Hughseses listened over and over to his stories, especially ' Oswald the HUUUUUNgry Lion'. The story is about the family who take in a lion. The lion gets hungry and, as they don't the much to feed him, he eats one of the children. But the family is so nice and hospitable they can't put him out, so he eats another child, and another, until the whole family has been eaten up.*

It wasn't until I was older that I realised it was a satire on the Worker.' (ie the Christian Worker Community)

Dorothy was very much loved but not at all easy to live with or as Stanley was also find of saying in her hearing: *'there are the saints and martyrs. The martyrs are the ones who live with the saints'* (Dorothy Day by Kate Hennessy p314)

Another commentary is of course needed on that one, and so it goes on, for we are indeed as Christians always 'a New Creation'.

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