

# Editorial

On April 14, Americans will commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Anne Sullivan, Helen Keller's teacher. Anne Sullivan was a great American and a Christian worthy of imitation. She saw a need in a fellow human being and did what she could to fill that need. She is one of those "who with a right and good heart, having heard the word, held it fast, and bore fruit in patience." (Luke 8:15)

Today there are over five-thousand deaf and blind persons in our country. They need the same kind of personal help that Helen Keller received. No amount of federal legislation or bureaucratic assistance, helpful as this may be, will fully satisfy their needs. What they need is more Anne Sullivans.

In recent years our nation has developed a kind of ballot box mentality. We see the needs of our fellow men and recognize our obligation to help. But we feel we can satisfy our obligation at the ballot box. We vote for the right people and we expect the government to take over from there. Unfortunately it cannot, for no government can legislate human warmth, no government can legislate charity. It is significant to note that Dorothy Day of *The Catholic Worker* is as much opposed to the welfare state as any reactionary. But she is not opposed to it because of a desire to protect the privileged position of a few, or to perpetuate the injustices of the *status quo*. Rather, she is opposed to it because of her genuine concern for her fellow men, because of her understanding of the Gospel of Love. This is what America needs today, a real understanding of the Gospel of Love.

The basic precept of the Old and the New Law is the precept of charity, but the Old Law was a law written on stone. It legislated exterior acts of charity. It laid down rules of conduct towards the poor, the laborer, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, rules that *could* be obeyed apart from the motivation of love. (Deut. 24:10-22) It was called the law of fear because it induced men to observe its commandments by threatening them with penalties. But the New Law, the law promulgated in the Gospel of Love, is a law of love. It is a law written in the hearts of men. It is called the

“Law of Liberty” (Jas. 1:25), because it freed the people of God from the heartless legalism of Pharisaism. As a gift of God residing in the hearts of men it prompts them to perform freely those actions necessary for salvation. And what are these actions? They are to love God and to love one’s neighbor.

Unfortunately, we seem to be returning to a pharisaic situation, where exterior acts of charity are the objects of federal legislation, where a man shares public facilities with his neighbor simply because the law says he must. It is hard to see how such a person is much better than one who refuses to share these facilities because he does not love his neighbor. The problems at the root of our nation’s ills will never be solved so long as people depend upon our government to legislate charity. And the New Law will never be manifest in our public life so long as Americans continue to ease their consciences at the ballot box. What America needs today is more Anne Sullivans.

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