

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY 2008

August 10, 2008

Pastoral Letter

**Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 10 August 2008
in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday**

My dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, Today, the church celebrates the Prison Ministry Sunday, a day set apart to pray and to help the brethren behind the bars. There are 1397 prisons and more than 3, 60,000 prisoners in our country. The most amazing fact is that majority of them are undertrials and most of them are youngsters. All of them are not criminals. Some of them are real victims of circumstances.

We may sometimes ask ourselves why should we pray for them or do something for them. The answer is very simple. We do it for Jesus. Because the last moments of his life he spent with the hardcore criminals and he himself was in the prison. We know that he was unjustly punished and put in the prison. Today if we can do something for a person who is unjustly put in prison, or who needs a chance to renew his life we are seeing the innocent face of Jesus in the face of that one in the prison and fulfill the command of Jesus, "I was in Prison and you visited me".

We consider ourselves as good and those in the prison as criminals. But can we honestly say that we have not done anything wrong in our life. No, we cannot. In spite of that we are saved and taken care by our good Lord. He gives us again and again chances to renew our life. Should we not in the same way give a chance for these people to bring changes in their life? That is what Jesus did always in his life. He forgave the adulterous woman; he accepted Zacheus and brought salvation to his family. And he even accepted the good thief with him to the paradise.

Let us recall the words of Jesus in the gospel of St Mathew 9:13, "I came to the world not to call the righteous but the sinners". Jesus approached the sinners and sick with a compassionate and loving heart. He never condemned them but was able to say "I too do not punish you". He gave yet another chance for them to come back to the main stream of the society.

Prison Ministry India is trying to do the same. We are trying to give them a chance to renew their life. The volunteers of prison ministry go regularly to the prison and teach the inmates about the unconditional love and forgiveness of Jesus. We try to educate the inmates in the prison itself and take care of the children outside the prison and help for their education, so that they may not end up their life in the prisons. The released inmates are brought to the rehabilitation centers and we form them mentally,

physically and spiritually to come back to the main stream of the society. First of all, we try to unite them with their family and reconcile with the victims and their families. In rehabilitation centers we train them in computer, candle making, welding, repairing, tailoring, making greeting cards etc. We also try to settle them in marriage.

Today the church invites us to pray for them. Not only to pray but also to stretch out our heart and hands to help them by our generous contribution and kind visit to them. Prison Ministry Sunday is celebrated in connection with the feast of St Maxmillian Kolbe, the patron saint of Prison Ministry India. He was a Catholic priest from Poland. He was imprisoned in the concentration camp during the 2nd world war. He sacrificed his life in order to save the life of a poor person.

Like Maxmillian Kolbe, we may not be able to sacrifice our life for them. But we can do many other things. First of all, you could be a volunteer of prison ministry. Secondly, you can pray for them. Thirdly, you can help this ministry with your financial contributions. Because Prison Ministry India does not encourage any kind of foreign fund or project. It is with the help of local contribution we do marvelous service for the prisoners and their families. We shall be sure of our reward for doing something for these lease brethren in the society, because Jesus says "whenever you did it for the least of my brethren you did it for me".

May I request you to extend your helping hands for this ministry and help us to reach out many more and create a better society.
May Almighty God bless you all!

Yours in Christ Jesus

+ Most Rev Bp Peter Remigius
Chairman, Prison Ministry India

LITURGY FOR THE PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

Entrance Antiphon

He has chosen me and sent me to bring Good News to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to announce release to captives and freedom to those in prison. Alleluia!

Penitential Rite

Jesus tells us, I was in prison and you visited me. He commands us to see God in them. He came to this world in search of these lost ones. He was always with them, moving with them, sharing the Good news with them in order to save them. Let us

sincerely ask ourselves, how do we see the so-called least, lost and last of the society, specially, the brothers and sisters in prison and their families? How do we judge them?

Opening Prayer

Father of mercy, the secrets of all hearts are known to you alone. You know who is just and you forgive the unjust. Hear our prayers for those in prison. Give them patience and hope in their sufferings and bring them home soon. Bless all the people who are working for them. We ask this...

First Reading: Ish 61:1-4

Psalm

Response: O Lord, you are good and forgiving

O Lord you are good and forgiving, full of love to all who call. Give heed, O Lord, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my voice. Response

All the nations shall come to adore you and glorify your name. O lord, for you are great and so marvelous in deeds, you who alone are God. Response

But you, God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, O Lord abounding in love and truth, turn and take pity on me. Response

Second Reading: Gal. 6:1-5

Acclamation

Alleluia, Alleluia; I am the good Shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. Alleluia!

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-40

Prayer of Faithful

Response: Lord hear our prayer

Lord, you were an innocent prisoner. You had experienced the plight of a prisoner. We bring before you all our brothers and sisters behind the bars for the grace to renew their lives as we pray, your response, Lord hear our prayer

Lord we pray for the victims of crime in their struggles. Victims of the crime in their struggles. Victims of the crime are often ignored by the society and criminal justice system. Lord, give them the courage and people to help them to face the challenges.

For this we pray... Lord hear our prayer

Lord we pray for men and women in prisons. They may realize the need of renewing their lives and they may make use of all the opportunities in the prison to prepare themselves to be contributive members of the society. For this we pray... Lord hear our prayer

We shall offer to God all those who care for prisoners such as police, prison staff, judges, advocates and political leaders that they may carry out their responsibilities with justice, patience and kindness. For this we pray... Lord hear our prayer

Lord, see all those who are imprisoned unjustly. They suffer the bitterness, frustration and revenge. Lord, help them to get fast release. For this we pray ... Lord hear our Prayer

Lord, give the spirit of wisdom and understanding to the prison ministry volunteers who minister love and forgiveness to those who have done wrong. For this we pray... Lord hear our prayer

Lord we pray for the universal church. May the Pope, Bishops, priests and consecrated people be the powerful instruments of your liberating love and shall be helpful to the brethren behind bars to rejuvenate the image and likeness of You in them. For this we pray... Lord hear our

Cel. Loving Father, you are the happiest when we your children reach to you. Stretch out your healing hands and touch all brethren behind the bars and help them to lead a renewed life. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord, accept the gifts we offer you in faith and may this offering release peace and love to all who are in the prisons. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Communion Antiphon

Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them (Heb 13:3).

Communion Rite

Lord, you have refreshed us with your body and blood, help us to offer our love and friendship to those in prisons and to all those in need, that we may be united one day with all your people in the land of living. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Prison Ministry: A Call to Serve the Least
"Be a Love bomb, let it be exploded,
Not to kill, but to heal the broken hearts"

Prison Ministry India is a national voluntary organization working for the release, renewal and rehabilitation of prisoners as well as women in distress. It was started like a prayer group some 20 years ago. It was a divine inspiration for two brothers: Bro Varghese Karipery and Bro Francis Kodiyan MCBS to become a bomb like Jesus Christ to give comfort and consolation to the least, lost and last of the society. First it was known as Jesus Fraternity and later it was registered as Prison Ministry India to get more access in all the prisons in our country. We got the recognition from CBCI in the year 2000. Now it has become a national organization having around 850 units and more than 6000 volunteers. We involve priests, sisters, seminarians, laymen and women in our volunteer group. We have established 28 rehabilitation centers for the welfare of the released prisoners and the children of the prisoners. The national office is at Bangalore and we have four regional offices in different parts of our country. All our activities are done with the help of our well-wishers and benefactors. Prison Ministry India does not have any foreign fund or projects.

From the year 2004, we started to celebrate Prison Ministry Sunday in our church. The theme of this year's Prison Ministry Sunday is "Together, for a Better tomorrow". This is a day set apart to pray for our suffering brethren behind the bars. It is also an occasion to give awareness to the public about this particular ministry. 'This is Jesus' own ministry. Jesus says, "I have come to this world not in search of righteous people, but in search of sinners. Not the healthy people need the help of doctors, but the sick". He has fulfilled his mission on earth. The same Jesus has commanded us to continue his mission, "Love each other as I have loved you". He again asks us, "if you love only those who love you what greatness do you have...if you greet only those who greet you what greatness do you have... instead you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". Prisoners are not our enemies. Very often many of them are victims of situations. The only difference is that they are inside and we are outside. It is God's providence for us that we are safe. Because he loves and forgives us unconditionally. We need to show this love and forgiveness to those people who are suffering in the society. By doing service to the suffering human beings, we are fulfilling the command of Jesus as well as getting the reward from the good Lord. Because Jesus says, "whenever you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it for me".

Yes, we are in need of your help to help the least brethren of our society. The national coordination work, functioning of the regional offices, legal help and release of the prisoners, maintenances in the rehabilitation centers education of the children of

prisoners, marriage of women inmates, and various training programs all depend on your generous contributions. Life in the prison is pathetic and unimaginable. Let us bring them back to the main stream of the society by extending our helping hands towards them. Your small contribution will bring a big change in the life of a lost friend. May God bless you all.

Fr. Josekutty Kalayil MST, National Director, Prison Ministry India
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