

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

8th August 2010

PASTORAL LETTER

**Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 8 of August 2010,
in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

Today the Church celebrates Prison Ministry Sunday a day set apart to pray and to help the brethren behind the bars. We are reminded of our mission towards our brothers and sisters imprisoned. There are more than 3 lakhs of people languishing behind the huge walls. All of them may not be criminals. Some are there as victims of circumstances, many others are wrongly accused. 70% of the prisoners are undertrials and majority out of these are there for long period without any trial. Another sad thing is that 65% of them are youngsters of our society: The greatest suffering for our brethren is loneliness. Mostly families, friends and others abandon them. Rejection by dear ones leads them to choose wrong friends while inside the prison. But remember that the prodigal son was converted when he underwent all kinds of miseries in his life. Anybody can be touched by God. But we need to be the instruments of God's love for them.

It is to this situation that Jesus said, "I was in prison, and you came to see me". He himself was a prisoner, an innocent prisoner, like Jesus there are many innocents, who need our support. Yes, the Church is called to respond to the suffering humanity behind the bars. It is indeed a challenge for all of us Christians in order to show God's love, compassion and forgiveness. Prison Ministry India, a national voluntary organization works for the welfare and rehabilitation of the prisoners and their families as well as the victims' families. Prison Ministry India is recognized by the CBCI in the year 2000. There are about 6000 volunteers working for this noble cause. We have 30 rehabilitation centers all over the country. Special attention has been given to educate prisoners' children everywhere. Volunteers not only visit prisons and organize programs, but they also contact families and relatives of prisoners. Even a simple visit and the gesture to reach out to their dear ones may go a long way. This year, Prison Ministry India will be celebrating the silver jubilee of its origin in 1986. From the tiny seed sown as a prayer group, the ministry has grown and has reached far and wide. Prison Ministry India does not entertain any projects. Inconvenience is our convenience; begging is our style and God's providence our bank account. It is through you and me God works.

Prison Ministry Sunday is celebrated in connection with the feast of our Patron saint Maximillian Kolbe. He was imprisoned in the concentration camp during the World War II. He sacrificed his life for another companion at the camp. "There is no greater

love than this to lay down one's life for others", said Jesus. Prison Ministry India volunteers are called to give their best while in service. Any good that we can do or any kindness that we can show to any human being let us do it now.

I express my heartfelt appreciation to all who are involved in this mission of the Church to release, renew and rehabilitate the brethren in prisons. Peace and love to each and every one of you!

Yours in Christ Jesus,

+ Most Rev Bp Peter Remigius
Chairman, Prison Ministry India

POSSIBLE 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 sister 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 through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the holy spirit one God for ever and ever.

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. R...

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. R...

But you, God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, o lord abounding in love and truth, turn and take pity on me. R...

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 sister 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 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 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. 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 with the volunteers of Prison Ministry who celebrate the silver Jubilee of this great mission. Started as prayer group, you blessed them with abundance of graces. Keep them close to your heart and help them to continue with more enthusiasm. Help them with good volunteers and generous benefactors. 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 prayer

Concluding prayer

Loving Father, you are the happiest when we your children reach to you. Stretch out your healing hands and touch all brethren behind 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: TOGETHER WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD
"Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again"

Prison Ministry India is a national voluntary organization working for the release, renewal and rehabilitation of prisoners as well as women in distress. This was just started like a prayer group by two seminarians some 25 years before and now it has become a big organization in our church having more than 6000 volunteers working

for this cause. Very often people do ask why should we help the prisoners. They are criminals. They are in the prison because of their crimes. They must be punished for the same. It is right. But look into the life for Jesus Christ, our master and savior. He himself was in the prison at the last moments of his life with the hardcore criminals. But we believe that he was an innocent prisoner. He suffered for others. There are many innocent prisoners in our prisons, who are innocent and unjustly punished. Who cares for them? Who is responsible for it? What is the back ground of their life? What about their family, the kith and kin? What is their future? And finally, who can help them?

Jesus said, "I was in Prison and you visited me" and continued to say, truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me". Every innocent prisoner is the image of Jesus Christ himself. By helping them we are serving Jesus himself. And the reward is the entry to the kingdom of God.

But in our church for centuries, we forgot the importance of this ministry. We only just considered them as criminals and failed to do something for them. But today we have a great need to reach out to them because they are also our own brothers and sisters.

Prison Ministry in our church came into existence by a divine inspiration that prompted Bro Varghese Karipery and Bro Francis Kодиан MCBS to take leadership in forming a group specially dedicated for the service of prisoners. It was truly divine, that is why it could grow so fast and become a national organization having thousands of volunteers rendering their selfless service in bringing up the lost brethren of our society.

The theme of this year's Prison Ministry Sunday is "Together we can change the world". We are not alone in this service, because the whole church is involved in this ministry. We can proudly say that this is the only one ministry in the church that involves all sorts of people together - priests, religious, seminarians, lay men and women. Lay people's involvement in this ministry is highly appreciated.

Yes, Prison ministry Sunday is also an occasion to give awareness to the public about this particular ministry, our responsibility to give them a chance. Because we are specially loved by God and we are saved by the precious blood of Jesus. Though we have gone wrong and done mistakes, Jesus has always forgiven us and given chances for us to live again. Same Jesus have commanded us "forgive others as I have forgiven you". There is a great blessing in loving these unwanted ones because Jesus says, "If you love only those who love you what greatness do you have? Again, he says, 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". Yes, let us together make a difference in the life of an unwanted one.

Prisoners are very often 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 this 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".

There are many ways through which you all can involve in this ministry. First of all, please do pray for these unwanted ones. Secondly make a visit to the prison or the inmates in the rehabilitation centers and show them that we are your brothers and sisters and we care for you. You can also sponsor a meal for them or contribute your mite for the education of the children or for the maintenance of the rehabilitation centers. There are many who wait for their release, if possible, you can help for their speedy release, so that they can come back to the main stream of the society. Even from our little things let us contribute something for them with the same mentality of the widow who shared all her possessions for others.

By sharing our mite with them let us try to bring changes in the life of these least, lost and last of our society. "Your mite is our might, come forward, may your small contributions and prayers make a difference in the life of one of these least brethren".

God bless you all.

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