

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

14th August, 2011

PASTORAL LETTER

**(Please read this pastoral letter in all the Churches on 14th of August 2011,
in connection with the Prison Ministry Sunday)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

Today the Church celebrates Prison Ministry Sunday, a day set apart to pray for the inmates of prison. It is a special occasion in which the Church reminds and encourages his people to live the words of Jesus, "When I was in Prison you visited me". By these words we are reminded of our mission towards our brothers and sisters behind the bars. There are more than three lakhs of prisoners languishing in the prisons in our country. The Church tries to proclaim through the prison ministry, the profound dignity of every human person despite their crimes even those condemned to death. Our human dignity comes from God our Creator in whose image we are all made. Despite their criminal behavior, they are longing for love and affection. The greatest suffering for our brethren is the sense of loneliness; their own near and dear ones abandon them. It is to such souls the Prison Ministry India volunteers are reaching out.

When the adulterous woman was brought to Jesus, for stoning her to death, Jesus not only challenges people who came to condemn her but He himself refused to condemn her and said to the woman neither do I condemn you, go and do not sin again, (Jn. 8, 11). Thousands of our brethren are waiting for us in the prison. The PMI volunteers go regularly to the prison and join hands with our suffering brothers and sisters thereby they share with them an unconditional love and forgiveness of Jesus.

It is really an alarming situation to say that, large percentage of violent criminals among the convicts and undertrials are youths between the age group of 18 to 35. The youth who represent the future and pillar of India have unfortunately deviated their minds off altruism and goodness in to the contemptuous acts of violence, anti-social movements, naxalism etc. Prisoners do not lose their fundamental rights as prisoners, says Cardinal Renato Martino (Vatican). "An imprisoned man has the right to be considered as a person" asserted the president of the pontifical council of Justice and Peace, when opening a seminar on the human rights of prisoners. The crime in the world is rising to an alarming rate. The prison world population has reached to 9 million and in India alone 3,32,112 of which 2,25,817 are undertrials. Many of the inmates of prison are innocent, but in no way their innocence is proved in the court and painfully 70% of the prisoners are hailing from broken families.

Prison Ministry India, a national voluntary organization works for the welfare and rehabilitation of the prisoners and their families as well as the victim's 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. Through these centers, hundreds of released men and women whose life had been found in morally dangerous atmosphere, affected children of prisoners, the victims and the juvenile delinquents enjoy peace of mind and new layers of hope for their life. Our volunteers all over the country are constituted in 850 units, who are actively involved in carrying out various programs like counselling, medial camps, free legal aid, cultural programs, inner healing retreats, job-oriented training programs and so on in the prisons of India. Special attention has been given to educate prisoners about their worth and organize programs to make them feel human and the ministry spread across to the families and relatives of prisoners.

As Christians we have the responsibility to participate in this mission. Jesus reminds us, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me" (Mt 25,40). Jesus himself was an innocent prisoner brutally convicted. The culminating good deed on the cross was the rehabilitation of a criminal in to his heavenly paradise. With these perspectives, I humbly request you to pray and help these prisoners, their families and all those who suffer because of them. St Maximillian Kolbe, the perfect example of inviolable courage, paved an exemplary model of care of the prisoners through his own life. Kolbe was arrested during the World War II and was sent to the concentration camp. When he was there with the prisoners, he shared his meagre ration of food with those around him. He prepared many of them to have good confession and prayed for them. Finally, he sacrificed his life for the sake of someone else something that we see seldom in today's world. This is the same what Jesus expects of us, to develop an attitude of sharing, wherever we hold precious in our life, our prayer, our time, our money, etc. Therefore, let us take a decision today through our prayer and sacrifice to honestly share some portion of our earnings for the rehabilitation of a prisoner. Remember that we shall pass this way but once. Therefore, any good that we can do or any kindness that we can show to any human being let us do it now.

With words of gratitude and appreciation to all who work hard towards this mission of the Church to release, renew and rehabilitate the brethren in the prisons.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

+ Most Rev Bp Peter Remigius
Chairperson, 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 Therefore 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 and finally to save all in to everlasting peace. Let us sincerely ask ourselves, how are we responding to the so-called least, lost and the last in the society, very particularly the brothers and sisters in Prison and their families? How do we look at their lives?

Opening Prayer

Father of mercy the secrets of all hearts is 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 bless their desire to come home soon. Bless Lord, all the people who are working for their good. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God Forever 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: Mathew: 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 with their mental torture and physical discomforts. We request your blessings upon them to help them renew their lives. Your response...

We shall also pray for those who care and plan programs for the good of the prisoners such as Police, Prison Staff, Judges, Advocates, and Political Leaders. So that, they may carry out their responsibilities with justice, patience and kindness. Your response...

Lord, we pray for all those who are imprisoned unjustly. They suffer the bitterness, frustration and above all humiliation. Lord, help them to get fast release. Your response...

Lord, we pray for your powerful blessings upon the volunteers of prison ministry who tirelessly toil for the good of the people. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding to understand the prisoners the way they are and to love them unconditionally. Your response...

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 become sensitive to the brethren behind bars through their prayer and humanitarian services. Your response ...

Concluding Prayer

Loving Father, you are the happiest when we your children reach to you. Stretch out your healing hand 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 the prison as though you were in prison with them (Heb. 13:13)

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 untied in

heart and service with all your faithful people in the land of living. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY **(A Call to Transform the Society Together)**

Prison Ministry India is a national voluntary organization working for the release, renewal and rehabilitation of prisoners both men and women in distress. It was initially started like a prayer group with the inspirational leadership of 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 raise questions such as, why should we help prisoners who are entitled the criminals. They are in the prison because of their crimes and they must be punished for the same. It sounds right but we are called to look into the life of Jesus Christ our Master and Savior. He himself was in prison at the last moments of his life with the hardcore criminals. He is convicted not for his own guilt, an "innocent prisoner" but for the atrocities of others. There are many innocent prisoners in our prisons, who are unjustly punished. Who cares for them? Who is responsible for this situation?

Prison Ministry in our Church came into existence by the Divine inspiration that prompted Bros. Varghese Karipery and Francis Kodiyan 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 to the mainstream of our society.

Every communication with the prisoner conveys to us the plain truth about their life as it has explained well in the Gospel of St John, Chapter 5: 1ff. It speaks about a miracle pool called Bethsaida. There was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. He was waiting for healing since a long time. Jesus came to him and asked: do you want to be made well? The sick man answered him "Master" I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. Hearing the cry of the man, Jesus said to him, "stand up" take your mat and walk". The story of the brethren behind bars is exactly the same as in the case of this sick man. Hundreds of world's population behind bars is destined to live a life of utter solitude and alienation that carry similarity with the hopeless awaiting of this ill man for 38 years. They are compelled to helplessly continue the deviated life style in spite of their decision to stop crime and start living, all because the punishments carry them for a long period. They feel like a barren land giving nothing to anyone. No one understands the pain of his or her heart Do they look like the man who had been waiting for many years for a recovery from his illness?

There are many ways through which you can get involved in this ministry. First of all, this mission calls you to raise your hearts in prayer for this less privileged one in the society. Secondly, encourage each other to make visits to the prison or the inmates in the rehabilitation centers to make them feel that we love them and care for them. You are also invited to contribute your mite for the education of the children, to support at least with a meal for the day and possibly also for the maintenance of the rehabilitation centers. There are many who wait for their release, if possible, you can help to facilitate the genuine cases to get a speedy release. By sharing our mite with them let us try to bring changes in the lives of all suffering men and women in our society.

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