

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

12 August, 2012

PASTORAL LETTER

**(Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 12th August 2012,
in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

On this Prison Ministry Sunday, the Church asks us to make a journey, a journey to the prisoners and prisons to live the words of Jesus, "When I was in prison, you came to visit me". It helps us to see the crucified face of Jesus in 3,68,998 prisoners in 1394 prisons of India. They are often neglected by the society desperate and disappointed. They are marked with a number instead of a name. They wear the cloth stitched for somebody else. His time clock is smashed as soon as he enters the prison. He is watched all the time. He is chained like animal while being taken to the court. His absence is marked by the warden, never as father or mother nor son or daughter but merely as a missing number. Once the judgment of a prisoner has been made, the matter remains closed for the general public and the judiciary but the Church cannot forget them. The Church hails the profound dignity of every human person, despite his or her cruelties even those condemned to death. It bears witness to the truth that the worth of a human person is not measured by usefulness or talents, health or sickness, age, creed or race. Our human dignity comes from God our creator, in His image we are all made. (Gen 1,26). No amount of privation or suffering can ever remove this dignity, for we are always precious in the sight of God. We shall join hands with all those who are engaged in this demanding ministry to reinstate the prisoners, victims and affected families in to the main stream of society.

Typical Indian Prison Situation

The Indian prison today is a human warehouse. It is always overcrowded. Almost we have lodged 3,68,998 prisoners which exceed the available capacity of 3,20,450 prisoners, approximately an increase of 48,548 prisoners. A small hall accommodates about 40 to 60 people with one toilet without a door. There is always a bad smell around which normally stops them from having even a satisfactory meal. 70 % of the prisoners are undertrials in India. Being an undertrial in India means an endless tale of oppression. The vast majority of undertrials have committed petty crimes. As per the National Crime Record Bureau in 2010, two third of 3,68,998 prisoners that is 2,40,098 prisoners are undertrials. It is an alarming statistic that points to the failure of the system at all levels. There are reportedly about 29,85,719 pending cases before the court. And another notable aspect of prison is that, they are no more reformatories but breeding grounds for criminals. Even if they are given job-oriented programs inside the prison, it often does not motivate them to live. There is not enough trained

staff to handle the prisoners. Many a time, they handle the prisoners like goods in the go down. This is the real situation in most of the prisons in India.

It is true that many of the prisoners are criminals but 60% of them reportedly hail from broken families. Most often the neglected childhood has catered them to the prisons. The famous theologian Karl Rahner says that "we are not essentially different from prisoners whom we visit in prison. It is only circumstances that distinguish us and we must be grateful to God for these circumstances". Our Master the Good Shepherd who deserted 99 sheep and had gone in search of the one that was lost. It is most certain; the lost sheep was not one of the obedient sheep. Today the works of mercy towards the prisoners is coordinated by Prison Ministry India under Catholic Bishops Conference of India. About 6000 volunteers including priests, sisters, brothers and lay persons are involved in this ministry, 30 rehabilitation centers are set apart in the care of released prisoners, children of prisoners and the victims by giving them hope, love and help.

St Maximilian Kolbe, the patron saint of prison volunteers sacrificed his life to save a poor man and his family. Definitely the supreme sacrifice endured not in honor of a friend but a total stranger. In fact, he had not even seen each other before. So your prayer, your personal visit to a prison and your financial contribution may be for a stranger but you become another Maximilian, another Mother Theresa, and a Good Samaritan after the example of Jesus.

Mother Theresa once told, "Jesus said love another; He did not say, love the whole world; we can do no great things, only small things with great love". On this prison ministry Sunday, the Church instructs us to follow the same. We shall help prisoners to pick up the bits and pieces of his broken life, to make a whole that is perfect and holy, his moral life. Prison Ministry aims at reconciliation of the offender with the person he/she has offended, the offended child with his/her family and the prisoner with God who hates the sin but loves and forgives the sinner.

Therefore, in prison, we want to instill hope for a prisoner without hope, to meet his creator who believes in him and created him in his image. We want to make the prison, a place where men and women pray. We shall make the prisoner know that, they are not alone, without friends but we are their friends who truly love them in the name of Christ.

In order to achieve this, we seek the collaboration of all of you, priests, sisters, brothers, social workers, health personnel, lawyers, family members, councilors, psychologists and the civil society at large to make someone worthy whom society has judged worthless, consider useful whom society has judged useless.

May I express my heartfelt appreciation and prayer to all of you for your committed works in prison ministry.

May God bless all of you with His choicest blessings.

Rt Rev Peter Remigius
Chairperson, Prison Ministry India

Help for the Liturgy of 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 the 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 visit the prison inmates and to see God in them. Jesus came to this world in search of the lost ones. He was always with them, moving with them, sharing the Good news to save all in to the everlasting peace. Let us sincerely ask ourselves, how are we responding to the needs of the least, lost and the last in the society, very particularly the brothers and sisters in Prison and their families?

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: Philemon: 1:8-21

Acclamation

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

Gospel: Luke: 15:1-7

Prayer of the Faithful

Response: Lord hear our prayer

Lord, our loving Father, we thank you for your abundant blessings upon us. We offer and pray for all the leaders of Catholic Church, pope Benedict the XVI, the Archbishops and all the Bishops and priests. Through their powerful guidance and intercession may all of us experience true love and reverence towards God and of his Church. Your response...

- 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 and their families. Bless the jail authorities to be kind, gentle and understanding towards their situation. Your response...

Lord, we pray for your powerful blessings upon all the volunteers of prison ministry who dedicate their time and energy for the good of the prison inmates across India Jesus our Good Shepherd, we pray for your blessings upon them, seek your protection and guidance in all their ministry endeavors. Your response

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

Lord, we pray for all the sick and suffering around the world, especially those with incurable and contagious illnesses those deserted in the society, without proper shelter, sufficient food and education. Touch them with your healing power and enable us to be instruments in giving comfort to those who suffer. Your response...

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord, accept the gifts we offer you in faith and may this offering bring 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 united in heart and service with all your faithful people in the land of living. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are so gracious that you never wanted anyone to be lost in this world. Stretch out your healing hands and touch all brethren behind bars to lead a renewed life. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Prison Ministry India

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. This organization has been borne, as a result of the continuous prayer and consistent prison visits of two great inspiration of change, namely, Fr Varghese Karipery and Fr Francis Kodiyan MCBS. Later 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 otherwise 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 counseling, medical camps, free legal aid, cultural programs, inner healing retreats, job oriented training programs so on, in the prisons of India. Special attention has been given to the education of prisoners about their worth and their potential to live as dignified persons of our country.

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 meager 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 which we see seldom in today's world. This is the same what Jesus expects of us, to develop an attitude of sharing, whatever we hold precious in our life, our prayer, our time, our money etc.,

The Prison Ministry India operating among the National, Regional, State and the Diocesan levels, believes that reformation rather than retribution is what will rehabilitate transgressors. Apart from bailing out innocent prisoners, the ministry helps spouses and children of prisoners to lead a crime free life by rehabilitating them through vocational courses and admitting them to schools.

There are many ways you all 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. It requests you to visit the prison inmates in the rehabilitation centers or in the prison in order 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 them at least with a meal for the day. There are many who ways for their release; if possible, you can also for their speedy release. The more we help, the better we become human.

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