

## **PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY**

**11 August, 2013**

### **PASTORAL LETTER**

**(Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 11th of August 2013,  
in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

#### **Prison Ministry Sunday**

The church in India observes the Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2013 as Prison Ministry Sunday. On this day our attention should go to those who are suffering in prison and those who engage themselves as volunteers to minister the prisoners following the divine request - have you visited me when I was in prison (Mt 25:39). We read in the gospel how Jesus reached out to the marginalized and rejected people. This pastoral letter will help all people to follow Christ very closely and respond positively to the divine quest - Have you visited me in Prison

#### **The Prison Ministry of Pope Francis**

Pope Francis, after assuming the Holy Office as Roman Pontiff held the Maundy Thursday Ceremony in a prison in Rome. He washed the feet at the juvenile detention center in Rome and he surprised the world by reflecting the ministry of Jesus beyond gender, caste and creed. As Vicar of Christ, he reminds us that we are called to respect human dignity of every person including those who have committed serious crime because all are made in the image of God. In raising the issues of prisoners, the Church is in no way seeking to justify crime but make an ardent desire to make prisoners to become law abiding and productive citizens after their release from the prison.

#### **Terrible realities of Prison**

There are about 2,41,200 undertrial prisoners as against 1,28,592 convicted prisoners in 1382 prisons of India. The overcrowding number of undertrial prisoners give staff less time to screen the prisoners to see the signs of self-harm, risk of suicide, mental health problems and potential violent prisoners. It increases the availability of drugs and other contraband as the prison staff does not have time to observe and attend the prisoners. It creates long queues before toilets, showers, phone booths and so on. Family contacts and visits are much restricted.

No scientific classifications of criminals are possible. First time offenders, circumstantial offenders and young offenders are kept with hard core criminals.

There are group violence and personal attacks on other prisoners. First time offenders are tortured and made to do all the menial works. Many criminal activities are going on in prisons and among prisoners - murder of fellow -prisoners and suicide; The prisoners are depressed and cannot sleep at night because of mental and physical tension about their existence in prison and about their future.

### **Year of Faith and Prison Ministry**

In this year of faith celebrating the Prison Ministry Sunday is very relevant one. Faith without charity bears no fruit. In this year of faith church strongly advocates to work for justice and charity, to heal and protect the prisoners, to make the offenders accountable for what have done, to provide restitution to the victims, to facilitate healing process and to reintegrate the victims and offenders. Every diocese and parish should promote prison ministry to visit the prisoners who are in need of counseling, education, medicine to visit the families of prisoners and to educate the children of prisoners.

### **Support for the Prison Ministry**

As this ministry is maintained only by local contribution depending upon the providence of God, personal, parish and institutional level contribution, personal presence as volunteers and prayers are needed to accelerate the work of Prison Ministry India. Do not neglect to show hospitality and generous hearts towards strangers and out castes. Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them: those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured.

On this Prison Ministry Sunday, the untiring work prison ministry Church wishes to pay tribute to the volunteers whose hard work and support have been vital in transforming lives of prisoners and conditions of prison. As we gather to worship and celebrate the Eucharist, let us consider how we can provide a place at the table of the lord for, prisoners deprived of their liberty.

May I express my heartfelt appreciation and prayers to all of you for your committed works and generous contribution in prison ministry. May God bless all of you who volunteer and support for prison ministry.

Yours devotedly in Christ

+ Rt Rev Bishop Peter Remigius  
Chairperson, Prison Ministry India

**Readings**  
**Let us make bridges not walls – Prison Ministry Sunday**

**Entrance Antiphon**

Jesus the good shepherd you came in search of the lost sheep. And when you find them, you carry them on your shoulders and rejoice because you found the lost. Lord, allow us to seek for the last, least and the lost.

**Penitential Rite**

Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you, go and don't sin again". This non condemning attitude of Jesus was a challenge thrown to the woman not to sin again. By this attitude Jesus revealed to her that she is precious child of God in and through whom divine glory may shine. Jesus proved himself not only to be the greatest friend of sinners but also to be the greatest and the unique reformer of sinners. Let us sincerely ask ourselves how are we responding to our own brothers and sisters in prisons and their families?

**Opening Prayer**

Merciful father, you know the secret of all hearts, the just and unjust deeds we have committed. Hear our prayers for those in prison. Give them patience and hope in their sufferings and bless their desire to return home soon. Bless Lord all the people who are working for their good. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of Holy Spirit one God forever and ever.

**First Reading: Jeremiah 33:1-9**

Psalm 102

**Response: The lord is compassion and love**

My soul, give thanks to the lord, all my beings, bless his holy name. My soul, give thanks to the Lord and never forget all his blessings. R...

It is he who forgives all your guilt, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion. R...

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy. His wrath will come to an end; he will not be angry forever. R...

For as the heavens are high above the earth so strong is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our sins. R....

**Second Reading: Col 3:12-17**

**Acclamation:**

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

**Gospel: Jn: 10:11-18**

**Prayer of the Faithful**

**Response: Lord hear our prayer**

Cel. Dear brothers and sisters, God loves us unconditionally. He expects us also to Him and other unconditionally with all our heart. Let us bring our prayers before Him who loves us mercifully and listens to us, saying: Response: 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. Let us pray to the Lord.

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 the inmates. Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord we ask your blessings upon all the volunteers of prison ministry who dedicate their time and energy for the least lost and last Jesus our Good Shepherd, we ask your guidance and protection always upon them and in their ministry. Let us pray to the Lord

- Lord, we pray for all those who are wrongly accused and imprisoned. Lord as you know, they are undergoing a lot of agony and bitterness within them. Merciful God graciously bless them with positive self-realization and legal assistance that they may be released fast. Let us pray to the Lord

Cel. 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**

We offer you, O Lord, the sacrifice of reconciliation and praise, that, being moved to compassion, you may both pardon our offences and those in prison and direct our wavering hearts. Through Christ our Lord.

### **Communion Antiphon**

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

### **Prayer after Communion:**

Grant us, merciful God, that, receiving in this gift the forgiveness of sins, we may be able by your grace to avoid sinning from now on and to serve you in the least, lost and last of the society. Through Christ our Lord.

### **Prison Ministry India**

Prison Ministry India, a national voluntary organization works for the welfare and rehabilitation of prisoners and their families as well as the victims' 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 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.

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 wait for their release; if possible, you can also help for their speedy release. The more we help, the better we become human.

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