



CREATE HOMES NOT CELLS

PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

9th August, 2015

PASTORAL LETTER

(Pastoral letter - Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 9th of August 2015 in connection with Prison Ministry Sunday.)

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

“He sent me ... to proclaim ... release to prisoners” (Is 61:1). While inaugurating his public ministry at Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed that this passage of Isaiah (Lk 4:18) is being fulfilled that day. In fact, Jesus went further when he identified himself with all the least ones and said in the description of the Last Judgment “... I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt 25:36). We cannot and should not shy away from the fact that in the last 18 hours or so of His life on this earth, Jesus was a prisoner and He died the death of a condemned ‘criminal’. **Jesus is the prisoner, par excellence** - By His imprisonment we have been freed from the ‘prisons’ of sin and darkness. Due to His death as a ‘criminal’ we have been ‘pardoned’ and ‘acquitted’.

On this Prison Ministry Sunday we firmly affirm and continue our journey in the lives of people in prison **with the theme of creating homes not cells**. The word home is the one of the most soothing words of our lives where as Cell brings a fearful feeling in us. In a home there is a father and a mother, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives but in a cell only human beings with numbers. There is an atmosphere of care in a home but in cells only security. There is respect in a home but only humiliation in cells. There is prayer at home but only complaints in cells. There is a drastic difference between homes and cells.

One day one of the volunteers took a few chocolates to a prison at Gujarat to give a child who was with the mother in prison. As usual she told the child that she had brought them from her home. Immediately the child asked the volunteer in surprise, what is a home? Again she asked with

astonishment in her eyes, are you not from the jail? The child was not even able to understand the term home. Jail was home for her. Not only for the children but also for grown up men and women in the prison they feel the same. The church invites each and every one of us to give a touch of a home by our presence to the 411992 prisoners in 1391 prisons of India.

Pope Francis has given us a new vision for prison ministry after being elected Pope in 2013; he celebrated his first Maundy Thursday as Pope by washing the feet of 12 prisoners, including two young women, at a Detention Centre for juveniles on the outskirts of Rome. On the 23 October 2014, in his address to the International Association of Criminal Law, he appealed for abolishing the death penalty and life imprisonment. This year (2015) the Holy Father celebrated Holy Thursday by washing the feet of 12 inmates and a baby at Rome’s main prison – six men from the main Rebibbia prison and six women from the nearby women’s detention center. One was a mother carrying her son on her lap; Pope Francis washed and kissed his little foot as well, The inmates wept; and the pope asked them to pray that he, too, might be cleansed of his ‘filth’.

Once the judgment has been made against a prisoner the matter is closed. The judiciary, the government and the general public loose interest but those who are involved in it cannot do it very easily. There are many issues involved in the imprisonment of a person such as victims coping with the impact of the crime, prisoners coming to the terms with their sentence, families coping with the consequences of imprisonment, separation, social stigma, financial hardship and some fighting against what they believe to be

injustice. The law can see to the welfare of a prisoner but is not the victim and family. The government can see the prisoner but not help his wife, children and their education. Their helplessness is due to the absence of a husband and a father

On 21st of April a wife of a prisoner came to the national office at Bangalore and shared her pain about her child who posed a question to her; Mom, all the children's parents in the school come home after their work but why doesn't our papa come home at night? The realities that we face are more complex and are in need of our attention. We cannot pass by these realities like priest and Levite in the parable of Good Samaritan and cannot even be like the innkeeper of the parable but be like the Good Samaritan. "Ours is not a Lab faith, but a journey in faith, a historical faith where God has revealed himself as history, not as a compendium of abstract truths.

Prison Ministry and associate ministries:

The Prison ministry consists of services inside and outside the jails. Regular visits to the jail for personal meetings with inmates, conducting / organizing / assisting in vocational training such as tailoring, computer, mechanical engineering, driving, fine arts & crafts, educational programmes such as literacy classes for the illiterate, formal education for inmates and other programmes for the integral well being of prisoners such as yoga, music, sports and games;

There is one more aspect of the Prison Ministry which is as being with' or 'Walking with' the prisoners. This aspect of the ministry consists of sharing silent moments, speaking a few right words at the right moment which the Holy Spirit puts into our mouth, a gentle touch and a compassionate look. Here is an example. Like many others, initially Ram said that he was falsely implicated in the case; but a number of visits gave him confidence in the volunteer. Slowly he became silent and accepted his fault. In one of the visits with eyes filled with tears he said, "I don't want to live any longer; I want to die." The volunteer put his hand gently on his shoulder. After sometime of silence, Ram asked the volunteer if he too would be awarded the same punishment for his

heinous crime. He told him that what he did or didn't do is between him and God. Based on the evidence placed before it, the court would decide on your case. After some time, Ram asked him if he too would stop meeting him once the judgment was delivered. The volunteer told him that he would try for special permission from the jail authorities to meet him in his cell and if and when he were led to the gallows, he would walk with him till the last step. Ram looked deep into his eyes; his eyes welling up with tears but his lips twitched in a little smile, he said "Please do that for me." He promised him that he would. Being with or walking with the prisoners is another call. We know that God is working in the inner being of a prisoner. We can become an instrument in the hands of God.

Services outside the jail include legal assistance, rehabilitation, visits to the families of the inmates, networking with government and other organizations and so on. Prison Ministry Sunday is a day of recognition, acknowledgement and appreciation to all those who are engaged in the service of our brothers and sisters behind the bars. **"The harvest is plenty, but the labourers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest"** (Lk 10:2). Praying for the prisoners, their families and all those who are engaged in this ministry is one of the first things that all of us can and must do. Let us not forget to pray for the prison officials and security personnel who are doing their duty, at times at the risk of their lives. St. Maximillian Kolbe, the patron of Prison Ministry India may intercede for all of us to the Lord, our master.

Besides prayer, appreciating those who are engaged in this ministry, volunteering and providing financial support to it are other forms of participating in this service. Expressing my heartfelt appreciation and humble prayers to all of you

Yours devotedly in Christ,



Bishop Peter Remigius
Patron of Prison Ministry India

Liturgy Part

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.

Penitential Rite:

The parable of lost sheep and the immortal picture of the prodigal son being welcomed back by the father, with an embrace, (Lk 15: 11-32) have constantly urged the Church to embody the message of love and forgiveness preached by Jesus. Only the heavenly father missed the prodigal son in his sinful and pauper situation. Nobody else felt the missing of prodigal son neither his friends nor his elder brother. As the members of the Church do we feel the missing of the sons and daughters of our society?

Opening Prayer:

Almighty ever-living God and Father of all, you have called us to serve you in bringing good news to the poor and liberty to those in prison. Look with kindness upon all who serve you in this ministry, grant them the wisdom, knowledge and understanding of your mission. Fill our hearts with zeal for your kingdom and place on our lips the Tidings of peace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen

First Reading: IS. 61: 1-4

Psalm 85.

Response; **O Lord, you have forgiven people's sins.**

Lord, you have been merciful to your land; you have made Israel prosperous again. **R...**

You have forgiven your people's sins and pardoned all their wrongs. You stopped being angry with them. **R...**

Bring us back, O God our Saviour, and stop being displeased with us. Make us strong again. **R...**

Show us your constant love, O Lord, and give us your saving help. **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: Lk : 15: 1-7

Prayer of the Faithful

Cel. Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus shows great compassion towards the sinners and the poor. Let us therefore pray that we will be guided by the Holy Spirit to show our compassion towards others saying.

Response: Lord hear our prayer

- **Lord**, our loving Father, we thank you for your abundant blessings upon us. We offer and pray for Pope Francis, 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. Let us pray to the Lord...

- **Lord**, you were an innocent prisoner. We bring before you all our brothers and sisters behind the bars who despite their faults and failing are still our brothers and sisters in the Kingdom, Grant them a real change of heart that Christ will bring them to paradise, Let us pray to the Lord...

- **Lord**, We pray for the victims who suffer and continue to live with the emotional, spiritual, physical and psychological harm that has been created by the crime of others. May the brokenness of their lives find new strength, hope and love in the actions, prayers and words of others; let us pray to the Lord...

- **Lord**, we pray for your powerful blessings upon all the volunteers of prison ministry India who dedicate their time and energy for the good of the prison inmates across India. Jesus our Good Shepherded, we pray for your blessings upon them, seek your protection and guidance in all their ministry endeavors. And help them to bring the word and face of God alive in the hearts and minds of those imprisoned. Let us pray to the Lord...

(Pray for personal and community needs)

Concluding Prayer

Cel. 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.

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 the prison as though you were in prison with them (Heb. 13:13)

Prayer after communion

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, and we may be untied in heart and service with all your faithful people in the land of living through Christ Our Lord.

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 kariperry & Fr. Francis Kodiyan. 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 centres all over the country. Through these centres, 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 society 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 centres 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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