

CHANGING HEARTS, TRANSFORMING LIVES AND IMPACTING THE WORLD;



PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

14th August, 2016

PASTORAL LETTER

(Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 14th of August 2016, 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 meet the prisoners and prisons with the theme, "Prisoners no more but brothers and sisters". The gospel of today is a reflection on the adulterous woman and Jesus' Mercy upon her. On Monday, April 7th, 2014 during Pope's Mass at the Vatican City, he reflected on the same biblical scene in which Jesus prevents the stoning of the adulterous woman, observing how the Lord's forgiveness extends even beyond what is considered just. "So Jesus was left alone with the woman before him and said to her : 'woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'"

When the woman replied to Jesus saying "No one, sir," she did not say, it was a false accusation: neither did she say 'I have not committed adultery,' the Pope explained, emphasizing : "she recognizes her sin". "Mercy goes beyond in such a way that sin is put to the side : "We look at the sky, there are many, many stars; but when the sun rises in the morning, the light is such that we can't see the stars," the Holy Father reflected, highlighting that "God's mercy is like that: a great light of love and tenderness."

Jesus does not humiliate her but says: 'Go and do not sin again!'. Jesus' mercy is great. It forgives us and heals us!"

The Prison Situation

Who are there in the prisons? Are the prisons filled with the violent, the organized gangsters and racketeers? Hardly! They are filled with the poor, socially, accused of petit offences and the mentally ill.

Undertrial prisoners numbering 282879 prisoners form an overwhelmingly large portion of the total prison population of 418536 prisoners as per the Government record of 2014. The undertrial population has been increasing over the years and came to 67.6 percent and the convicted prisoners being just 31.4 percent.

Again, most of the undertrials are people who cannot pay the money for bail and do not have sufficient proof of residence. They cannot assure the court that they will turn up for the next date of hearing.

Ministry of the presence

The volunteers walk with the forgotten and despised of our society. They are with them to listen to their story, their spiritual needs, their hopes and dreams, regardless of their culture and creed. The volunteers' day is unpredictable as they never know from one moment to the next what they will have to face. It could be a death or the death of a family member or an attempted suicide in a family. There may be persons weeping in the corners of prison, because being the first time in jail they are in great fear of their safety. They are angry and revengeful. They speak ill of everyone. What the volunteers can do, is to sit in silence, place them in the hands of our loving God and pray that peace will soften their murderous mind, give them hope and solace and that the Great Lover of all humanity will touch their souls and heal their tortured minds.

One of the volunteers shared her experience. Not so long ago she met a man who had just murdered his mother. He was shaking from head to foot, a body riddled with the effects of alcohol. He

sat in front of her, a broken man trying to come to terms with what had happened that fateful night. Although he appeared to be a gentle person, a person who had cared for his mother but circumstances had led to explode in anger. He spoke how angry his family was with him and how they did not want anything to do with him. He felt isolated and alone, staying with him, gave him time to tell his story. He himself felt horrified by his action. In his agony she was able to be with him in an unconditional concern to help him to prevent from a further decline of his dignity of a human person.

The year of Mercy and Prison Ministry Sunday

In this holy year of mercy Prison Ministry Sunday has got a special importance. On the 1st September 2015 Pope Francis wrote to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of Pontifical Council for the Promotion of New Evangelization and the details of the opening of the Holy Doors in the Jubilee Year that “the imprisoned may obtain the indulgence in the chapel of the prisons; May they all be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of His forgiveness; May the gesture of directing their thoughts and prayers to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform the bars into an experience of freedom”. So in this Holy Year of Mercy you can participate in the various programmes of Prison Ministry India such as in the release of innocent prisoners, participating in victim and offender reconciliation programme, visiting families of victims, helping prisoners’ children, helping rehabilitation of prisoners, arranging visit of family members in prisons and so on.

Faith and Spirituality of Christians towards the prisoners

Compassion is a core virtue of our faith and as volunteers, these qualities need to

be evident to the prisoners. The nature of prisons deepens their worthlessness and our interaction and reflection with them enables them to increase their self worth, dignity and identity to crawl back into their lives. The spirituality of prison ministry is based on this Faith. Faith helps us to be listeners. Faith helps us to cross the borders on the seemingly inaccessible shores. Faith illumines us and helps us to see the reality as God sees. Faith helps us to be merciful to the prisoners. Faith does not depart us from the world but make us socially responsible on what is believed to the social dimension of Christian charity.

Conclusion

It is a fact that the various activities of the prison ministry do not make any enriching relationship with the outside world. Most often volunteers are not able to take any one to the place where they are working. People at the gate of the prison may not show any familiarity towards them. They are always treated as unwelcome guests. Even after a tiresome time spent in prison they have to make phone calls to relatives and advocates. Always they get the answer from the family members,” let him or her be there. Don’t bother about him or her”. They are not entertained. Volunteers are in need of perseverance in all their endeavours of helping a person in prison. They are at the mercy to make some assistance for a person in prison. So I would like to call all the volunteers of prison ministry as hidden heroes of the Church. I appreciate you for your generous contribution that you make every year. St. Maximilian Kolbe, the patron saint of Prison Ministry India may guide you. “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples” says Bl. Mother Theresa. Let us do our might. May God bless you and be with you

Yours devotedly in Christ,



**Bishop Peter Remigius
Patron of Prison Ministry India**

Liturgy

Entrance Antiphon :

The Lord has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearts, to announce peace to captives and freedom to those in prison. Alleluia!

Penitential Rite :

Jesus said to them, "let him who is without sin among you be the first to through a stone at her." He came to this world in search of those lost ones. Let us sincerely ask ourselves, how we consider so called, last, lost and the least of the society, specially the brethren behind the bars, their families. For the moments that we have failed to show mercy and forgiveness we ask pardon...

Collect :

Father of mercy and compassion, the secrets of hearts are known to you alone, hear our prayers for those in prisons and the situations that have made them what they are today. Turn your merciful eyes be upon them; grant them patience, hope and consolation in their sufferings. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen

First reading : 2 Sam 12 : 1-7, 13

Let our response be : Lord, come to my aid.

1. I waited, I waited for the Lord
And he stooped down to me,
He heard my cry.
2. He drew me from the deadly pit
from the miry clay,
He set my feet upon a rock
And made my footsteps firm.
3. He put a new song into my mouth
In praise of our God,
Many shall see and fear
And shall trust in the lord.
4. As for me wretched and poor.
The Lord thinks of me,
You are my rescuer, my help,
O God do not delay.

Second reading : Gal 6 : 1-5

Acclamation :

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

Gospel Jn 8 : 1-11

Prayers of the Faithful :

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in this special year of mercy, when Pope Francis wants us to be as merciful to others as our Heavenly Father is, let us all join together and pray for our brothers and sisters waiting to receive God's mercy saying:

Lord, let us see your merciful glance.

1. Lord we bring to you in prayer our holy Father Pope Francis, Bishops, Priests, and Consecrated people that they may be worthy instruments of God's mercy to our brothers and sisters behind the bars, and help them to see your image in one another and in themselves. Let us pray to the Lord.
2. Lord we bring to you in prayer all the under trials languishing in our prisons without a hearing. In Your mercy we ask you to grant them a speedy hearing, so that they may enjoy the freedom that is theirs. Let us pray to the Lord.
3. Lord we bring to you in prayer those who work for the good of our brothers and sisters behind the bars who suffer not for their own wrong deeds, but the wrong deeds of others, innocently. Let us pray to the Lord.
4. Lord we bring to you in prayer all our Volunteers who make Peace between prisoners and their families, or prisoners and the victims, through their love, support and sacrifices. Let us pray to the Lord.
5. Lord we bring to you in prayer all the parishes and parishioners who have always been generous towards our ministry. May our loving God bless them and their families abundantly and keep them in His loving care. Let us pray to the Lord.

(Pause to pray for personal and community needs)

Concluding Prayer :

Lord we place all these intentions at your

feet, knowing that you will grant them to us in your favourable time. May we all who intercede for our brothers and sisters behind the bars become channels of grace by our deeds and presence. We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Prayer over the gifts :

Accept the gifts we offer you, O Lord in praise and thanksgiving, may your merciful love fill our hearts and the hearts of all those who need your care, find peace and love particularly those innocent ones who are

unjustly imprisoned. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Communion rite :

Lord we have indeed, experienced your mercy in its abundance. For, you have refreshed us with your body and blood. Help us to love and show compassion to those in prison and to all those who seek it. May your mercy flow from our hearts and gently heal souls that are wounded. May we all be united one day in the land of the living. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

EXTRA ORDINARY JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY AND PRISON MINISTRY INDIA 16 POINTS TO BE OBSERVED

1. **MERCY DAY** by opening Holy Door in every Prison by the bishop.
2. **Release at least 10 prisoners** who are innocent or involved in petty cases.
3. **Take initiative for Victim offender reconciliation** at least for 10 cases.
4. **Visit 10 families of victims** and hand over request letter of asking pardon from the offender.
5. **Encourage 10 families to visit the prisoners** who are not visited by the family since more than five years
6. **Arrange parole or furlough** for those who have not gone out even after ten years of imprisonment.
7. **Visit 10 young offenders' families**, even beyond the state.
8. **Visit the government homes for children** who are in conflict with the law.
9. **Women's day** celebration with special gifts, games and input sessions in prisons.
10. **Re-patriation Day Celebration** in 2106.
11. **Home Day for rehabilitation centres** in 2016.
12. **Observe prayer day** with prayer and fasting for volunteers, benefactors, prisoners and prison officials on **August 1st 2016.**
13. **Letter posting day** to prisons by volunteers for the brethren behind bars 24th of September, 2016.
14. **Elder's Day** for the inmates of the prisons who aged 65 and above on 1st of October, 2016
15. **Children's day celebration** with special gifts for the children with mothers in the prison on 14th of November, 2016
16. **'Prison Service Personnel Day'** on 19th of November, 2016.

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