

"Forgiveness cannot undo the past but can enlarge the future".



PRISON MINISTRY SUNDAY

13th of August, 2017

PASTORAL LETTER

(Please read this pastoral letter in all the churches on 13th of August, 2017)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

"Forgiveness cannot undo the past but can enlarge the future". This thought-provoking statement is chosen as the theme and Message of this year's Prison Ministry Sunday. It is uniquely fitting that we all reflect on this theme anew as our reflections of a Year of Mercy are still fresh in our minds. Mercy and Forgiveness go hand in hand. We know that the Almighty God, the author of our life, made himself known to humanity as "a God of tenderness, compassion, slow to anger, abounding in mercy" (Ex 34: 6) Our God is a God who forgives, the offences and iniquities of human beings. He is a liberating and saving God. And when God became man **'Jesus is the Father's Mercy'** (Face of Mercy, No.1) On the occasion of the recent Joint-meeting of Lutheran-Catholic leaders held in Rome, Pope Francis reiterated "the past cannot be changed, but it is possible to engage in a purification of memory, that is to tell that history differently".

Prison Ministry is entirely a service of Mercy and Forgiveness. The incredible isolation and loneliness, powerlessness and hopelessness experienced by our ill-fated brothers and sisters locked up inside the prison walls are known to those engaged in the Ministry in the past many years. Through the celebration of Prison Ministry Sunday, the Church wants to declare once again to each

one of those 4,19,623 prisoners held up inside 1,401 prisons in India that **they are not alone and their situation is not hopeless.**

The crime Scenario in the world is bleak and increasingly frightening. The criminal justice system is overburdened. The general trend in dealing with the situation is more and more punitive. Yet, the more people are punished, the more crime is committed. Offenders are not threatened enough by imprisonment. They remain in bondage; their victims remain in hurt and pain. The society remains in fear. Imprisonment is supposed to offer correction, reform and rehabilitation. But nothing of these happen in reality; instead it makes things worse. Prison is becoming both a dumping ground for the destitute and a crash course in crime for delinquents. We know that our prisons and the system have failed to bring down the crime rate. The methodology carried out for reformation produce negative results. Perhaps there are other serious issues that need our attention? Why crime is on increase?

At this juncture, the church offers an alternative, inviting us to turn to JESUS, to imitate his approach to, his ways with the offenders, sinners and the outcasts of his time, all those untouchables and condemned of his society. The parables of the shepherd and his lost sheep, the woman and her lost coin of today's Gospel present a powerful point for our

consideration. Just as the shepherd values his lost sheep and the woman values her lost coin and take every effort to go behind the lost, search until they are found, God our Father values every one of his lost son or daughter, feels for them, wait for their “coming into senses” for their return. God’s love is unconditional.

“Mum, is God a grown-up or a parent?” A friend was confused by her child’s question. “I’m not sure what you mean,” she said, “What’s the difference between grown-up and a parent?” “Well,” the child said, “Grown-ups love you when you’re good and parents love you anyway.” What a good question! Is God a grown-up or a parent? That’s what the Gospel tells us about: Jesus, who seeks the lost things, is the God I want to proclaim. God is looking for us. Sometimes it’s a long journey, and with some people it takes a lifetime. Prisoners need our support to help them move away from a life of crime and towards the light of His healing rays. They need the strength of our Faith, Hope and Love. A new approach with most understanding and compassion can in surprising ways, disarm even the most hardened offender. Based on Jesus’ values of mercy and forgiveness we should commit ourselves for the reform of these suffering people. Three proposals are put forward:

First, we work to make the prisons Communities of Hope:

This means we work to change the oppressive sense of hopelessness that pervades the atmosphere of any prison, the result of guilt, silence, solitude etc. Ministers, men and women of Faith must act as agents and Angels of Hope, making ourselves “Channels of hope and peace”. Then we can sing with St. Francis “Where there is despair, let me bring Hope”[Ref. Pope Francis]

Secondly, we work to make prisons Communities of Faith:

Human being is basically spiritual. Healthy spiritual orientation is a prerequisite for any holistic Reform which is a must for lasting result. Faith helps one to listen, to reflect, to forgive. The faith only can give answer to the family members who questioned a volunteer of a prison ministry; can you give back the mother who was killed by our father? Faith helps us to cross the borders on the seemingly inaccessible shores.

Thirdly, we make prison communities of Restorative Justice:

Restorative justice is a way of responding to a person who has been harmed, a person who has caused harm and the community affected by the harm done. The Restorative justice repairs damaged relationships between the offender and his/her family and the community. At the occasion of the beatification of Sr. Rani Maria Let us not forget the hard work and prayers of many who made the killer in to tears at the feet of the father, mother and family members and the incident stands as the best example for the restorative justice and thereby building the relationship with the offender, victim and the community.

In conclusion, we turn to today’s reading, how God acted for those who worked for Him, how the captors of Paul and companions were converted, reconciled and set free. As we celebrate the prison Ministry Sunday, I would like to remind you all to pray for the prison Staff. Most prison officers and administrators begin their service with high ideals and good will. They have to struggle to keep them through disappointments, difficulties and sometimes betrayals. Keep praying for the prisoners, their life has been shattered and they have become bound up with the burden of their own sins and their own thoughts. Along with my

brother Bishops, I express my sincere gratitude for the generous contributions towards this ministry and acknowledge the dedicated service of all the volunteers of this most demanding mission of the church today. May the patron saint of prison ministry India St. Maximilian Kolbe guide you. Let us remember the great Joseph of the Old Testament and understand; only the strong can forgive.

Brothers and sisters, let us be Messengers of forgiveness.

May God Bless you all!

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+Bishop Peter Remigius
Patron of Prison Ministry India

Liturgy

Entrance Antiphon;

You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today. You have nothing to fear. I will take care of you and your children. Alleluia!

Penitential rite;

Prisoners are often in miserable and painful situations like Isolation, alienation, mental anguish, idleness, bullying and self-harm; violence and suicide are the daily experiences. Our God forgiving and seeks the lost ones, is the God I want to proclaim. He brings back the lost ones. Sometimes it is a long journey, and with some people it takes a lifetime before they allow themselves to be found. Do we, take trouble like Christ the good shepherd, go into the world looking for those sheep that God has entrusted into our care? We ask pardon.....

Collect;

Merciful Father, you know the secret of all hearts, the unkind and the unjust deeds we have committed. Hear our prayers for those in the prisons. Give them patience and hope in their sufferings and grant 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 the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever

First Reading; Genesis 50; 15-21

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 : Acts; 16;23-28

Acclamation :

Alleluia, Alleluia; I am so happy that I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate. Alleluia!

Gospel Lk. 15;1-10

Prayer of the faithful;

Cel : God is our holy Shepherd, the hope of those who are lost, and the joy of those who are found.

God has revealed to us as a loving parent who never ever stops loving us; Let us all join together and pray for all those in prison and all those who are called to be messengers of His forgiveness saying;

Lord, show us your mercy and forgiveness.

We pray for our Holy Father pope Francis, Bishops, Priests, Consecrated people and volunteers of prison ministry. In following Christ's example, may they be compassionate, welcoming, and hospitable to prisoners, bringing them comfort assurance and hope.

We pray...

We pray for all our political leaders and prison officials, especially those responsible for prisoners and detainees; May they clearly see the needs of those entrusted to them and provide for those need with justice and compassion.

We pray....

We pray for all those benefactors who support this ministry. May they receive in hundred fold from your hand for their sacrifice and good will.

We pray...

We pray for all who are in prisons or in juvenile homes: May they understand that they are loved, and accepted, find a fulfilling and rewarding life, helped by family, friends and the community.

We pray...

We pray for the families of prisoners: that they have the strength and patience to support their loved ones in prison, and one day to receive them back in to their

homes with love and forgiveness.

We pray...

We pray for the victims of crime that through a spirit of forgiveness, they find healing and comfort in their distress.

We pray..

[Pause to pray for personal and community needs].

Concluding prayer;

Lord Jesus, you have accepted imprisonment and condemnation for our sake. Grant these prayers through your divine mercy and compassion as we present them in faith to you. Bring us at last, with all your people, into that fold where nothing can ever again be lost. We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Prayer over the Gifts:

We offer you, O Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation and praise, that, being moved to compassion, you may pardon our of fences and those in prison and renew hearts and minds. 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 serve you in the least, lost and the last of the society. Through Christ our Lord.

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