

"WALLS DO NOT CREATE PRISONS"

PRISON MINISTRY
SUNDAY



11 August 2019

PASTORAL LETTER

[Please Read this Pastoral Letter in all the Churches on 11 August 2019]

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

On 17 March 1887, Marie Regnault, a prominent Parisian woman was found dead on the floor of her chamber, her throat cut and her body terribly mutilated. Lying near the door was the dead body of Annette, her servant whose throat had also been cut. On her bed was lifeless little Marie, the servant's daughter. The *New York Times* reported that the motive was robbery of jewelry. Within a week police caught Pranzini, the culprit and he was condemned to death for the triple murder.

St Therese of Lisieux

St. Therese of Lisieux was just 14 at the time, but she felt compelled to intervene. In her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul* she wrote that she felt that Pranzini would die impenitent. She wanted at all costs to keep him from falling into hell. She offered to God all the infinite merits of Our Lord and offered Holy Masses and mortifications to redeem Pranzini. On 1st September 1887 Therese read in the paper that when he was about to put his head into the device, he turned, took hold of the crucifix the priest was holding out to him, and kissed the sacred wounds three times! Then his soul went to receive the merciful sentence of him who declares that in heaven there will be more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who have no need of repentance (Lk 15: 7).

Prison Ministry – Our Responsibility

Like St Therese of Lisieux, we Catholics have a great responsibility to liberate and redeem prisoners from eternal damnation. Have you ever thought of the

plight of prisoners? Their suffering, humiliation, hopelessness, helplessness, frustration, and inhuman situations? Often, prisons are overcrowded, understaffed, unhygienic, and underfunded. Have you ever prayed for them, written a letter to them, and visited them? To remind us of this significant task, every year the Indian Catholic Church dedicates the second Sunday of August for the incarcerated, known as Prison Ministry Sunday. According to the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR) report on 30 September 2018 there are 10,743,619 prisoners worldwide and 4, 19,623 brethren behind the bars in India. It is our duty to pray for them, visit them, and help them in their process of release, reformation, rehabilitation and redemption. For prisoners are our own brethren created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27).

Prison Ministry India

To guide you in prison ministry, we have Prison Ministry India (PMI), a voluntary organization for the integral development of prisoners, their victims and families working under the Justice, Peace and Development Commission (JPDC) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI). PMI volunteers visit brethren behind the bars regularly and build relationships with both staff and inmates. Every diocese has its office and a priest is appointed as its director to coordinate the ministry. Most of the major seminaries have prayer groups who organize liturgical ceremonies, cultural programs and extend spiritual, psychological and material assistance to prisoners. PMI has more than 30 rehabilitation centers

in different states where released prisoners who are committed to renewing their lives can come and stay for their reformation and rehabilitation. I am happy to note that many religious communities come forward to take this challenging work of prisoners' release, reformation, rehabilitation and redemption. While I wholeheartedly appreciate them on behalf of the CBCI, I would also like to invite the laity to do prison ministry in association with the PMI volunteers and thereby acquire your ticket to heaven. For Jesus said, "Come, you that are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... for I was in prison and you visited me (Mt 25: 34-36). "Just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).

Jesus' Mission

Prison is a place where criminals are sent as punishment by the judicial system with the intention to reform them. We may not like prison and prisoners. But Jesus was not like us. He loved prisoners, prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners and criminals in a special way and shed His blood to redeem them. He said, "the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you" (Mt 21: 31). He visited the tax booth of Mathew, called him and made him His disciple. While He was eating with sinners and tax collectors, Jesus declared that He had come to call not the righteous but sinners for repentance (Lk 5: 32). Jesus proclaimed publicly His commitment to the prisoners in the Synagogue of Nazareth "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives" (Lk 4:18). He revealed to us that He Himself lives in the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoner (Mt 25: 31-46).

Walls Do Not Make Prisons

The theme of the 2019 Prison Ministry Sunday is *Walls Do Not Create Prisons*. This title is taken from Richard Lovelace's poem entitled "*To Althea, from Prison*." He wrote this poem in 1642 while imprisoned in the Gatehouse Prison adjoining Westminster Abbey and meant that stone walls and iron bars may prevent a person from moving freely in their body, but if they can still love freely, whoever they want and let their thoughts fly free, then in heart, mind and soul, they are free. Incarceration will not lock up one's thoughts, imagination, dreams,

visions, insights, plans, and projects. If you have the right frame of mind - if your mind is innocent and quiet, then what others see as a prison can be a refuge, a hermitage, an ashram where reformations and revolutions can take place. For nothing will be impossible with God (Lk 1:37).

No Friend But the Mountains

Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian Kurd and an asylum seeker who was detained for years on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, is the best example for someone who lived the theme *Walls do not create Prisons*. From Manus Detention Center he wrote a book *No Friend But the Mountains* by text messaging through WhatsApp to his friend. This book won the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature, worth A\$100,000, Australia's richest literary prize. In response to winning the award, he said "We are forgotten people thrown on forgotten islands. I write in isolation with 700 other people who are hidden on a remote island in the north of Papua New Guinea. My goal has always been to make people in Australia and around the world clearly aware of the systematic torture of innocent people on the islands of Manus and Nauru for six years".

Liu Xiaobo (1955– 2017)

Liu Xiaobo is another example of someone who lived in prison but beyond its walls. Known as China's Nelson Mandela, he was a writer, literary critic, human rights activist, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who called for political reforms in China. He was incarcerated as a political prisoner in Jinzhou, Liaoning. During his fourth prison term, Liu was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize for "his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China". He said that freedom of expression is the foundation of human rights, the source of humanity and the mother of truth. Like Mahatma Gandhi he stood for non-violent resistance and taught that even as man is faced with tyranny and suffering, he shall respond to hate with love, prejudice with tolerance, arrogance with humility, humiliation with dignity, and violence with reason.

Pope Francis

His Holiness Pope Francis on 25th January 2019, during a penitential liturgy at Las Garzas de Pacora detention center for minors, in Panama, denounced how society

puts up “invisible walls” to marginalize sinners and criminals. In his homily, the Holy Father exhorted, “I invite you not to build walls but bridges to conquer evil with good, offence with forgiveness, and to live in peace with everyone”. Let us join hands with Pope Francis in his attempt to abolish capital punishment worldwide because it is “an attack” on human dignity.

Wall-Less Prison

In this context CBCI would like to appreciate one of the novel steps introduced by the Indian prison administration, the Wall-less prison or the Open Air Camps. Self-responsibility plays a greater role in such system. Eligible convicted prisoners are sent to open air camps with the objective of making them learn self-dependence by lawful means of livelihood and social interaction. These half way homes have changed the scenario of prison discipline as the prisoner becomes more rule abiding and relaxed when living with family. The presence of family avoids many unwanted distractions that a person may otherwise indulge in.

Conclusion

Through the celebration of Prison Ministry Sunday, the

Church wants to affirm to each one of those 4,19,623 prisoners held inside 1401 prisons in India that walls do not make prisons. What matters is our attitude, our perception, our vision, our outlook, our acceptance of the will of God! Dear brothers and sisters in prison, we walk with you, pray for you and support you. God is your stronghold, He will restore your life. Dear brothers and sisters outside the prison, let us hear the cry of prisoners and try our best to respond with our prayer, presence and assistance like St Therese of Lisieux. As the Letter to the Hebrews says, “Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them” (Heb 13:2). Along with my brother Bishops, I express my sincere gratitude for the generous contribution towards this ministry and acknowledge the dedicated service of PMI volunteers in liberating, reforming, rehabilitating and redeeming prisoners. May the patron saint of Prison Ministry India, St. Maximilian Kolbe guide you and may Mary our Blessed Mother be always there to protect you.



Bishop Allwyn D'Silva
Chairman of Prison Ministry India

LITURGY

Entrance Antiphon

Jesus our master identified himself with the people in prison by saying, “I was in prison and you visited me”. You include every one as your sheep. Lord, give us the grace to include all our brothers and sisters whom we have excluded as disposable and worthless.

Penitential Rite

Once a judgment has been passed on a prisoner, for the general public, the matter is closed. But for God it is not a closed chapter. It takes a “renewed mind” to forgive your enemies and do good to those who spitefully use you. It takes a “renewed mind” to visit prisoners especially those living in very deplorable living conditions. It certainly takes a “renewed mind” to provide housing, clothing and food for people who have raped, maimed, robbed, abused and destroyed the lives of other members of society. While

the normal or natural mind would prescribe a punitive response to crime and criminals, a “spiritual mind will prescribe redemptive response without minimizing the pain, horror and negative consequences of the criminal act. Let us sincerely ask ourselves, do we have the same heart as our Master has?

Collect:

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 the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

First Reading: Ezekiel 34: 11-15

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: Hebrew: 13: 1 -8

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, Graciously 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 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 Shepherded, 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, there is 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.

(Pause to pray for personal and community needs)

Concluding Prayer: Loving Father, you are the happiest when we your children reach up to you. Stretch out your healing hands and touch all our brethren behind the 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 pardon those in prison, and direct our wavering 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 to serve you in the least, lost and last of the society. Through Christ our Lord..

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