



THIS DAY

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A Newsletter
Published by
DISMAS MINISTRY
*A National Catholic
Outreach for Inmates,
Victims, their Families,
the Released from Prison,
and for the Community*

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Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration:

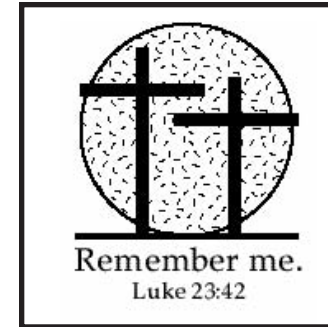
A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice

A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of the United States, November 15, 2000

Every day Christians pray for justice and mercy in the prayer that Jesus taught us: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Every day we recognize both that we are guilty of sin and that we are forgiven: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This prayer, recognizes our failures and offenses, and acknowledges our dependence on God's love and mercy. Our Catholic faith can help us and others to go beyond the current debate and gain a deeper understanding of how to reject crime, help heal its victims, and pursue the common good. We wish to move away from the so-called "soft" or "tough" approaches to crime and punishment offered by those at opposite ends of the political spectrum.



In the United States, history tells us that the prison system was built on a moral vision of the human person and society—one that combined a spiritual rekindling with punishment and correction. But along the way, this vision has too often been lost. The evidence surrounds us: sexual and physical abuse among inmates and sometimes by corrections officers, gang violence, racial division, the absence of educational opportunities and treatment programs, the increasing use of isolation units, and society's willingness to sentence children to adult prisons—all contributing to a high rate of recidivism. Our society seems to prefer punishment to rehabilitation and retribution to restoration thereby indicating a failure to recognize prisoners as human beings. ❖



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FALL 2015

A NEWS LETTER PUBLISHED BY DISMAS MINISTRY
A National Catholic Outreach for Inmates, Victims, their Families and the Community.

"The Church is the house that welcomes all and refuses no one."

During Lent this past year, Pope Francis called for a special **Year of Mercy**.

He asked that all members of the Church "rediscover the richness encompassed by the **spiritual and corporal works of mercy.**"



The Story of St. Dismas

One of the criminals hanging in crucifixion said, "We are only paying the price for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong."

He then said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign."

And Jesus replied, "I assure you, **this day** you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23: 39-43

He continued, "The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see how much generosity everyone is capable. **No one can be excluded from the mercy of God;** everyone

knows the way to access it and the Church is the house that welcomes all and refuses no one. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness. The greater the sin, so much the greater must be the love that the Church expresses toward those who convert.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary Jubilee that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)"

This Holy Year will begin on the coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 2015) and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – and the living face of the Father's mercy. ❖



Hearing from Christ's Body behind bars...

From Chaplains and Ministries

" we want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your generous gift of Catholic Bibles for our ministry to the inmates in the AZ State Prison here in Florence. They arrived last night and when the UPS man delivered them, we all rejoiced in God's goodness through Dismas Ministry! We will continue to pray for you and the work you are doing, and we treasure your prayers for us. We can't wait to begin to make them available at our services next week! God bless you and your partners." A Catholic volunteer in Arizona

"My wife and I are grateful for your prayers. We have committed the Dismas Prayer to memory and we pray it often during the day. And I spend two hours each Monday at our local jail. What a blessing it is to pray in fellowship with these men. I know the Lord is present when we meet and pray. What a mighty God we serve! I can never thank you enough for the help you have given. And the men I meet with thank you too. "

A Catholic volunteer in South Carolina

"Thanks for the prayer books and all the support you so generously give. Your service is greatly appreciated, not only by me and other volunteers of our diocese, but those who actually receive our gifts to them. I always try to let them know there are good people out there who care about them, ones who donate to make this possible. Many blessings to you and all. Thanks again"

A Catholic volunteer in West Virginia

"Thank you for all you do to support the women and men I am so honored to serve and learn from."

A Chaplain in Washington

From Inmates

"Thank you so much for the bible studies. They have truly expanded my relationship with Jesus Christ, my Lord. I'm looking forward to the next study! God Bless you all & your ministry."

An Inmate in Texas

"Thank you for the material that you have sent me. I am using the material to better understand what God's plan is for me. I also use to strengthen me and encourage me as I continue to study the word of God.."

An Inmate in Arkansas

"I received a daily prayer book and am using it every single morning as I start my day. Before I was not able to this. I now (not that I wasn't as all before) feel full in God's Holy Spirit. Thank you all so much. You have mad a difference in my life! God Bless!"

An Inmate in Goergia

"The prayer book you sent has helped me to guide my daily prayers in offering to Christ. It gives me a guidance on how to pray, what prayer to say when in times of disorientation and desolation."

An Inmate in California

"We now have and are building a Catholic group here at the prison. I am a "Johnny Appleseed for Christ" and I am spreading what gifts I received among fellow Catholics! Thank you so much for your help! "

An Inmate in Florida

Thank you for Your Prayers



Dear Prayer Partners,

I want you to know how often I think of you and the prayers you offer on behalf of the prisoners we serve daily, and for one another. Our Union of Prayer is a rather unique group because many of you are family members with a loved one in prison, and others are directly involved in prison ministry.

So much has happened since our last newsletter, especially regarding the trips Pope Francis has made to South America and to the United States. Everywhere he went he made it a point to visit prisoners, embrace them and assure them of their worth in the eyes of God and the Catholic Church. He is living this special work of mercy, not just talking about it.

And here at Dismas Ministry, as is the case with many other Catholic groups and ministries, we are very excited about the Pope's announcement of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. It's a perfect fit with our mission of reaching into every jail and prison of our country and bringing the hope and mercy of God. It was fifteen years ago that we founded Dismas Ministry during the Jubilee Year of 2000.

By God's grace and with the intercession of our Mother Mary, our ministry has grown from a pilot project in Wisconsin to a national outreach to inmates and chaplains in every state. Our budget is not large, between \$250,000-\$280,000 each year, but it is like the temple oil in the Old Testament story that does not run out. In addition, prayer has been the underpinning of this ministry, because all

of you who are praying for it, are bringing God's grace to bear in the lives of hundreds upon hundreds of inmates who are rediscovering their Catholic faith and opening their hearts to God's action and healing. We receive so many testimonies daily and weekly, some of which are on the next page in this newsletter. These are just a small percentage of the testimonies we have received and treasure.

God's grace is powerfully at work behind bars. Many inmates are like Jonah the prophet, and find themselves swallowed up and trapped at the bottom of the sea of life, and unable to escape their situation without God's help.

At some point, when their lives seem to have hit bottom, they begin to rebuild with humble hearts. They receive a Bible and prayer book from our ministry, and then are invited to enroll in a correspondence course on the Catholic Bible, Catholic faith and/or prayer, and they begin their journey back to the Father's arms. For Dismas Ministry, it is an honor and a privilege to accompany them.

As Pope Francis reminds prisoners, *"I am a sinner too"* and as St. Paul wrote, *"All have fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3: 23). We too, who carry out this ministry, along with those serve, are also sinners in need of God's grace and forgiveness. So as followers of Jesus and his vicar, Pope Francis, let's look to this upcoming Year of Mercy as a time of great grace. The mercy of God is boundless, it is there for everyone – for al of us who are sinners too!

In God's great mercy,

Ron

Ron Zeilinger

Director

