



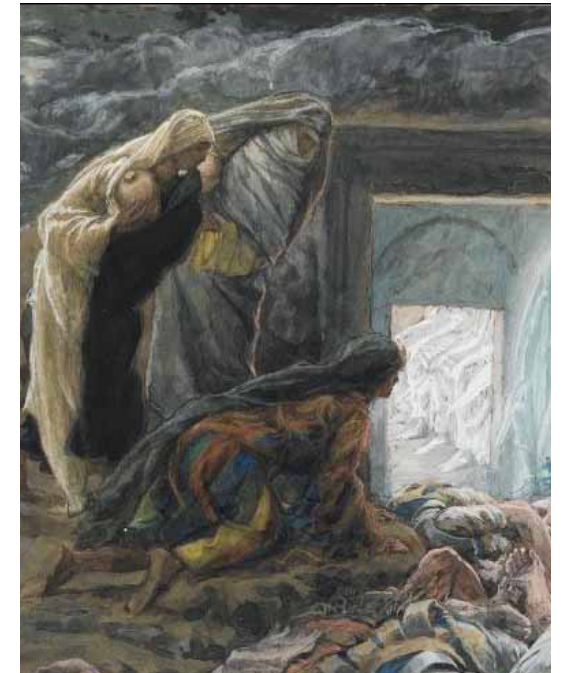
“A national Catholic ministry supporting the spiritual lives and rehabilitation of prisoners.”



***“He is not here,
he has risen, just
as he said. Come
and see the place
where he lay.”***

(Matthew 28:6)

The gospel story of Easter is one of absence and presence. It is a parable of our spiritual lives wherein we experience both the absence and presence of God. There are times of darkness and times of light. The tomb of Jesus is empty when the women walk through the early morning darkness to anoint the body of the Lord. Then, as they arrive the gospel tells us that the sun had already risen, as if to say, Jesus the Son of God had already risen. But what they saw was an empty tomb and it filled them with confusion if not a sense of mystery. Where was Jesus? Did someone take his body away? Why?



The Story of Saint 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.”*

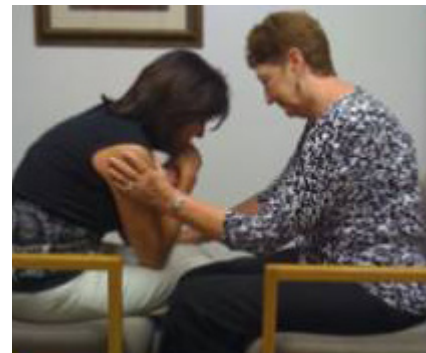
Luke 23: 39-43

God is with us and not with us. We *“walk by faith not by sight”* as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:7. But we feel God near at other times. We will only know his loving, enduring presence when we reach the end of our sojourn on earth. Then it will be a joy no one can take from us. Then it will be a joy that knows no end, for *“...eye has not seen, nor ear heard the things that God has prepared for those who love him”* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

On Catholic Prison Ministry

“In response to so much crime and the treatment of those touched by crime, a strong and growing movement has emerged that advocates on behalf of crime victims and seeks to make the justice system more responsive to their concerns. We believe that these efforts deserve support. We encourage and stand with victims and those who assist them. A fundamental moral measure of the criminal justice system is how it responds to those harmed by crime. Too often, the criminal justice system neglects the hurt and needs of victims or seeks to exploit their anger and pain to support punitive policies.

Not victims in the usual sense but certainly personally affected by crime are peace officers and those who work in correctional facilities. This is difficult work especially for those who work on death row and participate in executions in the regular course of their duties. They too are often in need of healing and compassion. We support steps to educate, train, evaluate, and counsel peace officers, consistent with a culture of life.”



From: Introduction: 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

From Christ's Body Behind Bars

From Chaplains and Ministries...

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We received the Bibles and pamphlets that you recently sent us. We want to thank you for your generous contribution to our facility. This has been added to our library for the men to read and study along with building their Christian walk. We ask you to continue to think of us in your prayers as we minister to the more than 1600 men incarcerated here at Varner. If in the future you are able to give to this ministry, please do so. We need good, solid Bible-based material, and your ministry is one we know we can count on. In His Service, *Chaplain Charles*

I wish to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your most generous gift to this ministry. Your prayer books and the forthcoming bibles are a wonderful addition to our library. In addition, we have a Maximum Security Unit here 12 Catholic on permanent lock-down, single man cells. We will be able to give each of them their own books now. Again, thank you for your gift; they do make a difference here. Yours truly and blessing on your work, *Chaplain Stephen*

Your assistance has touched our hearts and we will always remember you in all our prayers. Your support has given us new inspiration and perseverance in our Catholic way of life. On behalf of the community, chaplains and volunteers, I sincerely thank you for all of your support. We feel the God has blessed us in our genuine needs by sending you to us. We committed our trust in God's grace and pray that His grace may continue to cover you with his rainfall of blessings to you all. We will not forget you; we will always be connected to you by our spirits in prayer and worship, our intentions for you will always be remembered as we know you will do for us here at Oshkosh. I close by sending you the love and blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the grace of God our Father. Thank you again and God Bless! *Chaplain Roosevelt*



From Prisoners...

These materials have helped me to begin repairing the damage I've caused to my relationship with God and other people. Thank you so much and God bless you! *William - Ellsworth, KS*

Thank you for your help, it means a lot to me, I'm trying to and hopefully succeeding in finding my way to God. Being lock up and in hear with all this Bad is hard so thank you again. *Adam - Abilene TX*

Thank you so much for sending me the Bible, the prayer book and the catechism. It is so great to have the Bible. I read it almost every single day and it keeps me grounded. It is my conduit for having contact with God. I'm very thankful that God led me to Him when I was seeking him in order to help me get through these hard times. *Chris - Waupun, WI*

I wanted to let you know that you are making a difference. When the judge sentenced me to decades of prison time for a non-violent crime I became bitter and abrasive. In June I received your little blue prayer book for inmates and slowly my heart began to change – that book and action by faith helped me to set aside time to reflect, repent, and heal. Having been raised Catholic and practiced my faith all my life it was assumed I had a system down. The prayer book changed that by giving me a pattern and setting forth some new prayers such as during count, while waiting in line, and helping me start to heal. My favorite is “Do it Anyway.” As men in prison we are not always kind to each other; but over the last 6 months it has been proven a kind word, smile or conversation can sometimes mean the difference that releases joy and peace in people I never imagined. I pray the rosary everyday and would like to obtain one through you. Thank you for all you do, and know each and everyone of you is in my prayers. Much grace, *Robert - Lake City, FL*

From the Director

Sometimes it hits home...

Dear Friends,

Those of us who work daily with Dismas Ministry read statistics and stories about crimes committed and victims who suffer the consequences. We are familiar with the various studies produced by organizations and government offices about the status of U.S. crime. In that sense, it is “out there” and intellectualized - not personal. Then it happens that a crime hits home and then it is something too real.



Friend, father and grandfather
Greg Zyskiewicz

When we held our national Catholic prison ministry conference here in November 2016, one of our main presenters was Jean Bishop. She wrote a book and speaks about the horrendous murder of her pregnant sister and her husband by a local teenager in a nice suburb of Chicago – a place where you would not expect something like that to happen. Jean's book, called “**A Change of Heart**” describes the details of the murder, the impact on her and her family, and then her long journey as a Christian to meet him in prison and forgive him. I did not understand the Baltimore Catechism words “supernatural grace” until I heard story and realized that grace can take the seemingly impossible and make it possible.

On March 22 a friend of our family was killed by teenagers with a shotgun attempting to hi-jack his car while he was on a routine city inspection job. His casket was not open for the wake and funeral, and the shots that killed him also ripped through an entire family of wife and three children, leaving them utterly devastated. I visited them the following day and brought a rose and a card that had just a few words. There are no words at such a horrific moment in a family's life. Their hearts are open wounds that you dare not touch, but only reverence with no words at all. All I could do was hug them and cry with them. Our kids sent to school together, had birthday and Halloween parties together, and to see them now, grown but their eyes filled with disbelief and sorrow was deeply disturbing.

I've heard and read and attended conferences and workshops on restorative justice and the central role of the victims in the aftermath of crime, but now it is no longer an intellectual thing. It is tremendously sorrowful and angry and frustrating and mysterious and senseless. The only religious image that brought comfort to me – and this is not about me - was Michelangelo's Pieta. These two - Mary and the dead Son in her arms - knew what it was to be crushed in the wine press of the senseless cruelty of others. And there is the dark prayer Jesus shared from the cross, “*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?!*” (Matthew 27: 46).

Obviously, this is not a joyous Easter letter that I share with all of you. It is more of a lingering passion. The memory is too fresh. Thank you all for your faithfulness to this ministry that has to deal with such things usually at a distance, but now in the heart of it. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 14: 8, “*If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*”



May God bless you with peace, courage and comfort,
Ron Zeilinger
Ron Zeilinger
Director