

Visit The Imprisoned



"For I was in prison and you visited me"

To the extent that we are imprisoned by our human weakness and imperfect nature and the resulting sin, visiting the imprisoned merely means that we extend our charity and love of others from being there for each other to helping each other free ourselves from the trap of sin. We can also be chained by confusion, deception, and distortions served by this society or a lukewarm Church. True social justice demands that we help others free themselves from such chains and that we not chain others to spiritual prisons even as we pretend to be freeing them of physical prisons or having compassion for their plight. Those who really know their faith can be a tremendous help to those incarcerated, for you could say they have a captive audience and since God often allows man to hit rock bottom before building him back up, prisoners know best what that means and could very well be willing catechumens to learn more about the true Faith and the font of Divine Mercy - the Sacrament of Penance.

"You're grounded," were pretty familiar words in response to some infraction we committed as children. Many of us will recall the feeling of captivity when confined to our rooms, even for a short time. Consider, then, what it is like to serve time in prison.

We might say of justly convicted criminals, "they got what they deserve— a prison term to pay their debt to society in isolation from the comforts of home, family and friends." We seek justice, and not vengeance, realizing that even the most vile criminals are entitled to humane treatment. We hate the sin, but not the sinner, for Jesus taught us both forgiveness and love of our enemies.

Throughout the world there are those imprisoned for little else than their political or religious convictions. Also there are those confined within webs of domestic violence and even racism.

"Measures to release political and religious prisoners and intervene in cases of domestic violence constitute this work of mercy." (*The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*)

As God's hands on Earth, we can help the imprisoned.

Here are some suggestions:

- Volunteer for local prison ministries, many of which are run by faith-based communities.
- Support educational and job-training programs to rehabilitate and restore inmates as useful members of society.
- Pray for the inmates' families, because they are suffering too.
- Support parish programs to provide gifts for prisoners and their children at Christmas time.
- Encourage crime victims and victims of domestic violence to seek pastoral or secular professional counseling.
- Guard against racism; practice inclusion, not exclusion.
- Learn more about the plight of those unjustly imprisoned for political and religious beliefs, as well as how to advocate for their release.
- Be mindful that we are all members of the human race and equal in God's eyes.
- Contact Mike McNeil at St. Gertrude's (693-7801) to volunteer for his jail ministry program
- Be involved with neighborhood safe watch programs.