



April Work of Mercy: Visit the Imprisoned

Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body.

~Hebrews 13:3

The meaning of this Work of Mercy has changed over time. The first Christians were outlaws, so many were in prison at any given time. St. Paul and St. Peter, along with numerous other saints and bishops, spent time in prison. Free Christians would visit their friends, bringing food, encouragement and if possible, liberation. Since being imprisoned for the faith was a mark of great courage, Christians also sought the blessing of prisoners.

In our world today, it is different. People in prison are there as the result of a judgment by a criminal-justice system that, while by no means perfect, does make them different from the Christian prisoners of Jesus' day. And modern prisons are not, by and large, visit-able places. So how are we to understand this Work of Mercy today?

We can begin by remembering that even the prisoner guilty of the most awful crime is still created in God's image and is loved by God no less than God loves you or me. Along with the protection of society from truly dangerous individuals, one goal of imprisonment should always be rehabilitation so that the "lost" can be "found" and restored to a right relationship with God and others.

We can also extend the meaning of this Work of Mercy to consider those who are imprisoned metaphorically in other places: the elderly isolated in nursing-homes (or their own homes); people imprisoned by their addictions or their fears or their ignorance; people imprisoned by others' views of them (immigrants, non-English speakers, people with disabilities). Visiting the imprisoned can be as simple as a welcome that breaks down the wall of mistrust. Each of us has opportunities to do that every day.

~Msgr. Vincent Rush

For information on opportunities to Visit the Imprisoned within the Diocese of Orange, please contact Catholic Detention Ministry at flapuzza@rcbo.org or (714) 282-4261. The next information session for volunteers will be on Tuesday, May 17.