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A Reflection from Fr. Paul Douthwaite, National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons



A commonly observed characteristic of the human condition is the tendency to deny or hide anything that is considered imperfect, shameful, or wrong. An instantaneous reaction to the finger being pointed is almost certainly "it wasn't me!". Traditionally, illegal or sinister enterprises were thought to have been performed under cover of dark or behind closed doors. The Church has not been exempt from employing covert techniques as, until recently, the normative practice of confessing sins took place anonymously.

The presumption that what is 'out of sight' is also 'out of mind' has historically been a hallmark of our penal system when we recall that, until the end of the 19th century, prisoners from our country were sent to Australia to serve their sentence. It is worth considering the possibility that, when an offender is 'locked up', this is not only society's way of dealing with crime, but also a way of putting at a distance the embarrassment of human imperfection. It is not something new! The lepers of Jesus' time and place were an embarrassing human imperfection, an imperfection that was aligned to sin, and for that reason they were not allowed to enter villages and had to remain at a distance. Jesus, breaking with the tradition of his own people, was a bastion of inclusion. The holistic curing of ten lepers, and his readiness to enable them to return to the community physically and spiritually, was but one example of

restoration that he gave to his disciples; an example which he intended all his followers to embrace.

On this Prisoners' Sunday, which marks the beginning of Prisons Week, we are asked to bring to the fore the plight of prisoners. In praying as a Church for those who are in prison, separated from our society and from their loved ones, we, remaining faithful to the example of Jesus, are endeavouring to attain the spiritual restoration of those who are imprisoned to the community of faith. This Prisons Week, the verse 'he sets his people free', from the Psalms (111:9), reminds us that, as disciples of the Lord today, we are called to be instruments through whom prisoners can receive the liberation that God promises.

Whilst the physical restitution of the prisoner to the local faith community is limited by law and the authorities, there is, in the setting of the prison chapel, a small number of offenders who – not unlike the Samaritan leper in today's gospel passage who returns to show Jesus his appreciation for his cure – are awakened to an awareness of their wrongdoing, who seek forgiveness, and who express their gratitude to a God who forgives. Behind bars, we find not only the lost of society but also those who, in the merciful embrace of the God of tenderness and compassion, have been found and can be restored.

Mass Readings

2 Kings 5:14 – 17

¹⁴So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, as Elisha had told him to do. And his flesh became clean once more like the flesh of a little child.¹⁵ Returning to Elisha with his whole escort, he went in and, presenting himself, said, 'Now I know that there is no God anywhere on earth except in Israel. Now, please, accept a present from your servant.' ¹⁶But Elisha replied, 'As Yahweh lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing.' Naaman pressed him to accept, but he refused. ¹⁷Then Naaman said, 'Since your answer is "No," allow your servant to be given as much earth as two mules may carry, since your servant will no longer make burnt offerings or sacrifice to any god except Yahweh.'

Psalms 98: 1-4

'Sing a new song to Yahweh, for he has performed wonders, his saving power is in his right hand and his holy arm.² Yahweh has made known his saving power, revealed his saving justice for the nations to see,³ mindful of his faithful love and his constancy to the House of Israel. The whole wide world has seen the saving power of our God. ⁴Acclaim Yahweh, all the earth, burst into shouts of joy!

2 Timothy 2: 8-13

⁸Remember the gospel that I carry, 'Jesus Christ risen from the dead, sprung from the race of David'; ⁹ it is on account of this that I have to put up with suffering, even to being chained like a criminal. But God's message cannot be chained up.¹⁰ So I persevere for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they, too, may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ Here is a saying that you can rely on: If we have died with him, then we shall live with him. ¹² If we persevere, then we shall reign with him. If we disown him, then he will disown us. ¹³ If we are faithless, he is faithful still, for he cannot disown his own self.

Luke 17: 11-19

¹¹ Now it happened that on the way to Jerusalem he was travelling in the borderlands of Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered one of the villages, ten men suffering from a virulent skin-disease came to meet him. They stood some way off ¹³ and called to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.' ¹⁴ When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' Now as they were going away they were cleansed. ¹⁵ Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice ¹⁶ and threw himself prostrate at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ This led Jesus to say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they?' ¹⁸ It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' ¹⁹ And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

Prayer

Written by Rt. Rev. Richard Moth,
Liaison Bishop for Prisons

Lord Jesus Christ,
You have come so that we
may have life to the full.
Listen to our prayers for all in
prison and their families,
Touched by your Spirit,
May they find newness of heart
and be open to that new life that
is found only in you.
May they know care, and receive
support from those around them.

May they find new purpose in
serving you in their brothers and sisters.

Amen

Our Lady of Mercy
Pray for us

St Maximilian Kolbe
Pray for us

Prisoners' Sunday FAQs

What is Prisoners' Sunday?

Prisoners' Sunday is the day we pray for prisoners and their dependants as marked in the Catholic calendar. The day begins the ecumenical week of activity called Prisons Week. Enclosed with this pack you will find several Prisons Week flyers which offer daily devotional prayers.

Can we take a voluntary collection and where should we send donations collected?

Yes please! We depend upon the generosity of our supporters to keep our services running. All cheques should be made payable to 'Pact' or 'Prison Advice and Care Trust' and returned in the enclosed Freepost envelope. We have also enclosed Freepost Gift Aid envelopes for you to leave out for individuals who may prefer to return a donation separately. Please forward any completed Gift Aid envelopes from your parish directly to Pact in the Freepost envelope provided. Please ensure you include your name and parish contact details.

Can we mark Prisoners' Sunday on another Sunday?

Yes, if you feel your parish could better mark Prisoners' Sunday and support those affected by imprisonment on a different date, please choose one convenient for your community.

How can people receive Pact's Fresh Start Newsletter?

Fresh Start is our quarterly newsletter. It features stories of our work, impact reports, details of events and information on how to become more engaged in the work of Pact. To sign up to receive the newsletter please contact:
parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk



Lisa & Priscilla
Our Parish and Supporter Relations Team.

Who do I contact for more information/ materials?

Our Supporter Relations Team are here to share information and answer any questions you might have. They can arrange for more flyers/ donation envelopes etc. to be sent to you on request. Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Supporter Relations:
parish.action@prisonadvice.org.uk
Call our team on: 020 7735 9535



Exploring Hope & Freedom

13 October 2019

Parish Pack

An Appeal from His Eminence Cardinal Vincent Nichols Archbishop of Westminster

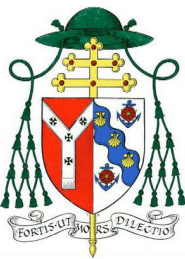


As President of the Prison Advice and Care Trust (Pact), I invite you to join with me in supporting this year's Prisoners' Sunday.

Pact was founded in 1898 by Canon Cooney, who provided care to Catholic prisoners and their families in London. Today, the charity supports prisoners from every diocese in England Wales, working with them from the point of sentencing to release, in over 60 prisons as well as in courts and local community settings.

Care for the families of prisoners is an important part of Pact's work. This year, over 200,000 children will suffer the heartache and trauma of the arrest, trial and imprisonment of a parent. Pact supports prisoners' children as they seek to cope with the effects of imprisonment, and where possible, to maintain meaningful relationships with their parents in prison.

Pact's website www.prisonadvice.org.uk goes into further detail about the breadth of the work undertaken by the charity. All of this work is dependent on volunteers who give generously of their time and talent. The financial support offered by many parishes is also crucial, and as I offer my sincere thanks to all



who have supported Pact over the years, I ask for your support for Pact today.

This may not be the easiest of causes to support. But we do well to remember that visiting the imprisoned is one of the Corporal Works of Mercy (cf Matt 25:35); we might reflect too how Jesus himself experienced imprisonment and judgment at the end of his life on earth. Prisons and imprisonment are realities that the Christian community should not lightly ignore or easily forget: Pact's work brings this into focus for us.

This Prisoners' Sunday, I pray that we may never forget that all people, whoever they are and whatever they may have done, are loved by God and called to be sharers in his Kingdom. I commend to you the work of Pact, who do so much to support those in need of hope and a fresh start.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster
President of Pact

A Message from Andy Keen-Downs, CEO Pact



Prisons are in a terrible mess. Suicide rates are at their highest ever recorded level. Some prisons are full of drugs. Some are violent. Some just feel like places of hopeless squalor. People leave prison with no hope of being welcomed back into society and just commit yet more crimes. This is one story you will hear time and time again.

Prisons are holiday camps. People get away with murder, literally. Sentences are too soft. Life should mean life. This is the other story you will hear.

What to believe? Who to trust? What are we called to believe as Christians? Pact is the Catholic charity which works in prisons across England and Wales. In some areas, we also work in the community, supporting ex-prisoners, family members and children. We have been doing this work for 120 years. We work 364 days a year. The only day we are not working in prisons is Christmas day. That's one day we spend with our own families and communities.

So you can trust us to tell you that prisons are not holiday camps. Losing your freedom is a terrible punishment. Every day inside is hard. Some prisons are indeed dangerous and squalid. Others are relatively safe and decent. Many prisoners leave prison ill prepared for life outside. But wherever our brave, compassionate Pact workers can be

found, you will find one thing. Hope.

Hope for women and men in prison that they can pay for their crimes, and be allowed a fresh start.

Hope for mothers of prisoners, and other relatives, that someone cares, someone listens.

Hope for children, that they can be reunited with their dads, mums, brothers and sisters.

Hope for victims of crime, that the person who harmed them has changed, and has left prison determined to start a new life in which they give back to Society. This Prisoners' Sunday, we ask you, please, to be with us in this work of Hope. Christ told us to visit the prisoner. He told us about mercy, and redemption. Our workers are on the frontline of Hope. Right now, as you read this, Pact workers are using their freedom to make a difference. I hope you will use your freedom to support us in any way you can. God Bless and Thank you all.

Andy Keen-Downs



About Pact

Pact is the national Catholic charity that provides support to prisoners, people with conviction, and their families through a range of family, court, helpline and prison and community-based services. Our vision is of a society in which justice is understood as a process of restoration and healing, and where the innate dignity and worth of every human is valued.

What does Pact do?

We build stronger families and safer communities, significantly reducing the risk of reoffending.

We reduce the risk of harm to prisoners, their children & families.

We identify and support some of the hardest to reach prisoners during and after custody.

We speak truth to power, in turn informing and influencing policy and decision makers.

Pact's Services

We provide a range of services, including:

- Prison-based family engagement work and casework
- Prison visitors' centres
- Prison and community-based relationship and parenting programmes
- Peer support and befriending
- Through the gate community-based support mentoring and support
- The Prisoners' Families Helpline and digital information
- Court support for families

Did you know...?

There are about 83,000 people in prison in England and Wales.

There are 118 prisons in England and Wales, Pact works in more than half of them.

About 3,000 people are in prison for motoring offenses and about 35 for not paying their TV license.

6 out of 10 boys whose Dad is in prison will go on to serve a sentence themselves.

Last year Prisoners' Sunday raised over £60,000 which contributed to:

2,116 prisoners receiving personalised support from our prison-based caseworkers

76 family days being run, where 1,131 prisoners and 3,762 family members spent quality time together

264,905 people supported to maintain contact with loved ones in prison

8,957 people in crisis being helped by the Pact helpline

673 people benefiting from our relationship and parenting programmes in 26 prisons

14,084 children using Supervised Play Services during prison visits

Rhian's Story

In January 2018, Rhian* was serving a prison sentence. She had been in prison before, but this time was different. During a short period of time when she was in the community, Rhian had fallen pregnant. This time, she was determined that when she was released, she would stay out for good. She'd make a fresh start and live a crime-free life as a new mum.

When Rhian was released from prison, Sarah* from Pact was there to meet her. Sarah's goal was to support Rhian to stay on the right road - from

accompanying her to meetings, supporting her to sort out finances and accommodation, and lending a kind, listening ear.

Rhian explained to Sarah that her ex-partner and the father to her child had a history of being violent towards her, and she was very worried, not wanting to slip back into the unhealthy relationship. Sarah and Rhian agreed it was important for her to stay safe during her pregnancy and thereafter, and so they set about securing a stable, safe home for Rhian and her unborn child, where she could have independence and make a fresh start without her ex-partner.

Sarah also accompanied and supported Rhian in speaking with social services, so that she could declare her pregnancy, talk through her history and be totally open and upfront with professionals, in order to maximise the

chance of her keeping her baby. The social services were pleased to see Rhian rebuilding her life, and taking the right steps to ensure the safety of herself and her unborn baby. They would continue to monitor and stay in touch with Rhian, and were pleased to see she had the support of Sarah.

After a few weeks, Rhian moved from temporary accommodation into a flat owned by a family member. Things were starting to look up, however, after a short period of time a breakdown in the wider family saw Rhian become homeless when she was 5 months pregnant. Sarah and Rhian had returned to the flat after a meeting to find the locks had been changed.

After securing emergency permission from Rhian's Offender Manager for her to stay overnight at her nan's house, Rhian and her baby were safe for the night. The next morning Rhian

and Sarah were able to work with the council to secure accommodation, where Rhian stayed, enjoying a stable, happy life until it was nearly time for her baby boy's arrival.

Six weeks later Rhian gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Sarah attended the discharge meeting at the hospital along with her probation officer, social worker and health visitor to agree how Rhian would manage her new life in the community.

In August, Rhian was referred to a local women's mentoring service, where she was assigned a new mentor moving forward. Rhian was exceptionally grateful for the support provided by Sarah, and their flexibility in supporting her through a very emotional and challenging period in her life. She has matured, grown in confidence, and become a caring new mum to her son, truly making a fresh start.

Parish Response

Ways your Parish can support Prisoners' Sunday:

- **Use the resources** in this guide during your Mass on Prisoners' Sunday.
- **Invite a Pact Speaker** to come and speak at Mass or a special event.
- **Hold a collection or special event** to support the work of Pact in prisons and the community
- **Use the weekly prayer guide** from Prisons' Week (included in this Parish Pack)
- Encourage members of your congregation to **find volunteering opportunities** with Pact



Name of Church/Parish:

Contact name for Parish:

Our Church/Parish has raised for Prisoner's Sunday 2019.

This was raised by:

Mass collection ☐ Special Event ☐ Other ☐

☐ Please tick this box if you would like us to contact you about ways for members of your congregation to volunteer for Pact in your local area.

Please send all cheques to:

Pact
29 Peckham Road,
London SE5 8UA,

Please include all gift aid responses you have also received.

*Name changed to protect identity

