

Don't Stereotype Prisoners

There are as many different types of people in prison, as there are outside of prison. Not all people in prison are gangsters, or drug addicts, or child molesters. Some are hijackers, forgers, burglars, rapists, and murderers. Some are even innocent.

Not all gangsters, murderers, child molesters, rapists, drug addicts, etc. could be expected to have the same social skills. Some have no family; some have come from very good families; some have very faithful spouses; some have very unfaithful spouses; some are single; etc.; some have always been poor; some have always lived in luxury; some are well-educated; some are illiterate. **All are capable of living a good Christian life.**

The most important difference to take note of is that some prisoners are intent on a life of crime; some want to change their lives but don't know how, and feel hopeless. The most dangerous type of criminal is, to himself and to others, one who feels hopeless.

We can help, with our Catholic faith, those prisoners, who feel hopeless, to enjoy the great undefeatable Christian hope which can keep them working toward the good life they desire, in good times and in bad. We must try to help everyone because everyone does hunger and thirst, within the depths of their being, to experience the perfect love in their lives, that only comes to the devout and fervent follower of Jesus Christ.

We will always need police, armies, prisons, and other deterrents to discourage criminal actions of those who are determined to live the proud, selfish, greedy, immature life of the gangster, drug addict and dealer, mugger, child molester, rapist, thief, etc.

Some gangsters, some alcohol and drug addicts, some child molesters; these and all other types of criminals do repent, and should be given a chance to participate in Holy Mass, and have a deep change of heart when in prison. **They then become serious dedicated evangelists** for their friends in prison who are caught up in criminal activities.

With regard to prisoners, we need to take the approach of Jesus Christ, "*I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.*" (Luke 15:7) Read all of chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel. If we are serious followers of the merciful Jesus Christ, we must try to help the sinner to a better life, and not be anxious to condemn him.

Many prisoners feel trapped, with no chance to live a good life. Our work in the prisons is intended to help them realize, that, with God in Christ, all things are possible. Some very great Saints had less than promising beginnings.

St. Francis of Assisi was just a rich Playboy, before his conversion. St. Augustine was a womanizer, before his conversion. St. Paul was trying in every way to destroy the church, before his conversion. If God could make such great changes in the lives of these men, he certainly can help anyone who wants to live a good Christian life to do so like these great Saints. We have to be serious enough to make an effort, to become good faithful friends of Jesus Christ.

For success in Christian life, criminals must no longer just take care of number one (themselves). Jesus Christ is never self-centered and concerned only with his own well-being. The opposite is true. Jesus Christ, at all times and in all circumstances, tries to make things better for others, to the point of ignoring his own well-being, and even his safety. Mercy love will lead us to every good thing, including a deep understanding, and an intimate love relationship with God, in Jesus Christ.

When a prisoner desires only to do good for others, he is no longer a criminal. Then he, more than any of the others he tries to help, will benefit from all of his charitable and merciful work.

A good example of what can be done by an inmate who has a change of heart, and desires to have a good relationship with God and others, can be shown by a conversation which was held among three inmates. One of them was young and had just arrived in prison with a 20 year sentence. He was downhearted, depressed, and saw no good future possible for himself. Another inmate was giving him advice on how he could have the best life possible while in prison. He was an older man, who had already served 20 years on his 60 year sentence. He told the younger man that he was just beginning to learn how to make the best of his life while he is in prison, and be well prepared to live a good Christian life in the world, in the event, he should be able to leave prison before he died.

He then told the newcomer that the other man with them was his teacher and model who was showing him how to make a life for himself in prison. The other man in the group was an inmate who had served 20 years on his five-lives sentence. This man is very happy, and is determined to live the rest of his life as a devout, intimate friend of Jesus Christ and, as much as possible, be a good neighbor to everyone. This is the way this lifer has been living for several years, in prison. He is admired and highly respected by other inmates, guards, chaplains, wardens, and everyone else who knows him in the prison.

He studies and prays for three hours every day. He will try to answer questions, or counsel, or help, in every way possible, other inmates to enjoy the good life he is enjoying while in prison. This man is teaching everyone around him that a good, productive, meaningful life is possible for anyone, even a prisoner, who can have no realistic hope of ever being released from prison.

The majority of prisoners seem to be very immature. They are always looking for someone else to do something for them that will give them the good life they hope for. The one keeping them from having everything good in life, is themselves. To realize this is a necessary first step to repent and change for the good Christian life that is possible for everyone. A person must become humble(truthful and honest) enough to be able to see himself as he is, in order to turn to God, truly believing that he cannot change his life without the help of God.

Two things are necessary to accept the life-giving relationship with God in Jesus Christ. God is love and God is truth. Jesus Christ will be our Lord and Savior, if we allow his way of loving and his perfect truth to rule our hearts and minds. We will be citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) when we subject ourselves obediently to God's merciful love and truth (reality). Then we will be able to see and enjoy the goodness of God and everything in this good and beautiful world he created out of love, for us to enjoy, as he does. That is what St. Francis of Assisi experienced in

his life.

Read chapter 1 of the book of Genesis. God sees things truthfully (realistically) as they are, and he looked upon all that he had created and saw that it was good; and after he created humans, God said that his creation was very good.