



Orthodox Christian PRISON MINISTRY

Sunday July 25, 2021

Prison Ministry Awareness 2021

“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name.” (Psalm 142:7)

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Pious Faithful of our Holy Orthodox Church in the United States:

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you all!

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States has blessed us to observe the Sunday before the feast of St. Silas, the patron saint of prison ministry, as Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday. This year we remember this sacred ministry on July 25, 2021.

After a year of isolation, we are experiencing the full joy of our freedom this summer. Many of us are making up for lost time: taking trips, seeing our friends, and most importantly, returning to our churches in person.

For our brothers and sisters in prison, it has been a hard year as well. Lockdowns meant many of the 2.3 million men and women incarcerated in the United States were in truly deep isolation without visitations from family, friends, and clergy. As restrictions now ease, we are called more than ever to exercise our own freedoms to serve those who have suffered emotionally, physically, and spiritually over these last months. Now is the moment to cherish our blessings by sharing them with those who our Lord has commanded us to see Himself in.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ (Matthew 25).

Along with those in prison right now, we can find the Lord in the faces of those who have been released from prison and are seeking to find community in our parishes and rebuild their lives through the Orthodox way of life. We can also visit the Lord in caring for the family members of prisoners. Indeed, the staggering rates of incarceration in the US make it difficult to find an Orthodox parish in our country that does not have a parishioner deeply affected by the incarceration of an immediate family member.

As the Episcopal Moderator of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, I respectfully request you observe this day of awareness. The Holy Orthodox Church, through Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, brings the mercy, forgiveness, and love of Christ to those people who need hope and healing living in the darkness of prison.

We humbly ask that after passing a tray for the ongoing work of your parish, you please pass a second tray on Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday for the work of the Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry.

As Saint Isaac the Syrian says, "A cruel and merciless heart is never purified. A merciful man is the doctor of his own soul because as a strong wind from his heart, he drives out the darkness of the passions." Please show mercy to our brothers and sisters in jails and prisons across the United States on July 25th.

With much love and thanks in our risen Lord,

+ Mark

† Archbishop Mark of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania, OCA