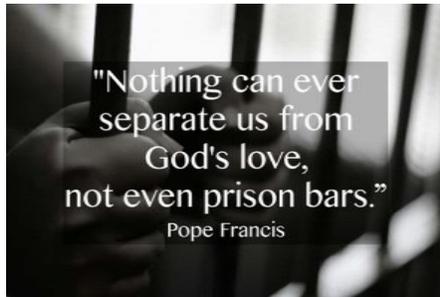


SAINTS ALIVE!
MARCH 25: ST. DISMAS
PATRON SAINT OF PRISONERS



Dismas is the Good Thief crucified with Christ on Calvary. St. Dismas is the patron saint of prisoners.

As Jesus hung on the cross, one criminal on his left and another on his right, "the other [criminal] ... said, '... we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied to him, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise'" (LK 23: 39-43).

The Romans extracted retributive justice on these thieves. Dismas acknowledged his sinfulness; Jesus restored him.

God is about restoring the broken. The result of our current criminal justice system is that the broken remain broken. How can we move society away from retributive justice and toward restorative justice?

One step is to change the focus of prisons from a money-making enterprise to a public structure that protects the public, extracts a just punishment for crimes committed, and restores the offender to become integrated in society, not excluded.

Incarceration has become a for-profit business as the number of private prisons grows. Eleven percent of the federal prison population is housed in prisons operated by private firms (like Corrections Corporation of America and GEO Group). Private prison companies operate 6.8% of the state prison population (a smaller percentage but a much larger number).

By shifting the focus of prisons from profit-making ventures, then the next step is obvious: shift the focus of detention centers away from being a money-making enterprise.

Immigrant detention is a growing industry in this country, with Congress allocating as much as \$2 billion a year to maintain and expand it. Due to mandatory detention laws people who are not flight risks or risks to national security and are extremely vulnerable, such as asylum-seekers, families, and victims of human trafficking, are being held unnecessarily in detention.

Corrections Corporation of America and GEO Group are the primary supporters for the immigration detention bed mandate. Such corporations currently operate 73% of the entire U.S. immigrant detention system.

Restorative justice is more likely achieved when efforts are concentrated on rehabilitating the prisoner, which creates a safer society, than on maximizing profit.

Society is safer when members of society look upon each other neither with suspicion nor fear, but trust.

Societies are healthier when governments focus on protecting families rather than fracturing them.

Societies are protected when officials concentrate on the criminal act, not with an eye on profits and quotas.

St. Dismas, pray for us and all who are imprisoned.