

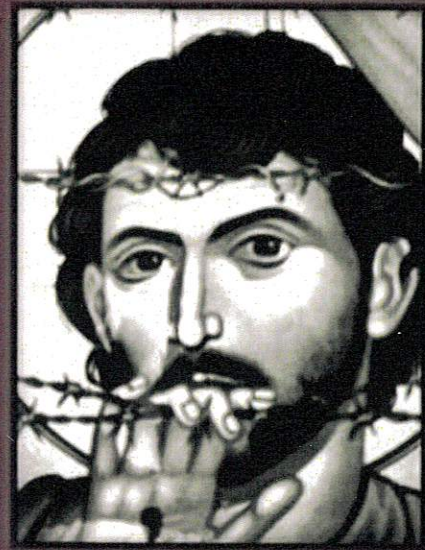
ADEODATUS

"Gift from God"

A Spiritual Field Hospital in Philadelphia



Augustinian Defenders
of the Rights of the Poor
Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova



"I was in prison and you visited me."
Matthew 25, 31

VOICES FROM PRISON AND THE EDGE

Winter 2018
No. 31



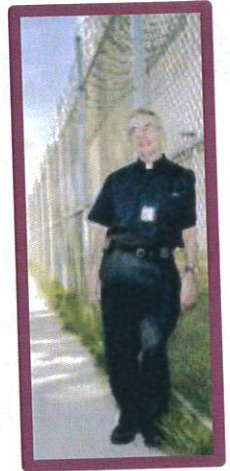
THE AGE OF MASS INCARCERATION

"The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid."

Michelle Alexander
The New Jim Crow

MASS INCARCERATION

is the practice of sentencing an enormous number of people, mostly poor and people of color, into prison in the



Fr. Paul Morrissey
O.S.A.

Some of the Factors That Contribute to Mass Incarceration?

Fr. Paul Morrissey O.S.A.

1. The Numbers issue - Though the United States has about 5% of the world's population, we incarcerate 25% of the world's prisoners, more than China, Russia, Iran and all the other repressive regimes we can name. Why?
2. The Race issue - 60% of the incarcerated people in the US are people of color, black and Hispanic. How can this be so imbalanced compared to their percentages of the population?
3. The Money issue - Poor people are more likely to be in prison by much greater percentages than people with money. Just one example: They can't afford attorneys and cannot come up with the bail money. Therefore, thousands of men and women languish in the Philadelphia Prison System, awaiting trial, some for up to two years, without even being given a trial. They are guilty--because they are poor--until they can prove themselves innocent. Meanwhile, their spouses and children are left to fend for themselves, their jobs (if they had one) are given to others. And if they are judged innocent, they are released with a token for transportation and the clothes they were arrested with, no matter the weather. A second money issue is the waste this represents: It costs taxpayers about \$34,000+ a year to keep one person in prison. Two million people in prison in our country costs taxpayers 60 billion dollars per year. How is that for a waste of money? What does community college cost per year? Wouldn't it be worth trying to educate many of these people, rehabilitate them rather than simply punish them?
4. The Addiction issue - The percentages of people in prison on drug-related charges (using or selling) is astronomical, especially people of color. "In less than thirty years, the US penal population has exploded from around 300,000 to more than two million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase." (Michelle Alexander in the New Jim Crow). In some states, black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men. And in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80% of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives.

No wonder He said that on Judgement Day, one of the things we will be judged on is whether we visited people in prison. He ought to know. He was in prison. He died between two thieves. He seemed to identify with them in a special way ... "Whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for Me." (Mt. 25-36) No wonder Pope Francis visits prisons when he travels to various countries. Pope Francis has been particularly strong about Life Without Parole. He says it is torture, a hidden death sentence. He said we must work for its repeal as well as we do for the Death Penalty. What follows is a message from a volunteer visitor

Tale of Two Inmates . . . and God

by John Killeen...A Volunteer Who Visits the Prisons

I am never without awe as I learn the backgrounds of inmates with whom I work in prison. As a volunteer, I do not get a staff of helpers - only more inmates that are volunteers. The road to state prison is similar for most of its residents: a crime of passion, sudden flow of inner juices with severe outer consequences or crime of opportunity, that is, faulty decision making at the time. Yes, there are those that are "pure evil" but they are the rare cases.

ZEKE: Zeke is a large man, former marine, former altar boy and boy scout, never had a drink or smoked / used drugs. He is serving a double life sentence for the deaths of two people in a restaurant fight. *Per him*, he was breaking up an altercation and things got out of hand. Two of the combatants died. He was charged, arrested and found guilty. He will not be eligible for parole. Once a stalwart in church, altar boy and sacristan to a Navy chaplain he now proclaims himself to be a non-believer. I don't try to evangelize him.



JAKE: Jake is also a mountain of a man. Large wouldn't describe him. He is currently serving the first of five consecutive life sentences. By his words, he was the worst kid on his block and in school. He was in trouble his whole life. His crescendo reached the pinnacle of the drug world. His plea deal with the state kept him from a federal prison and possibility of execution. He was THE penultimate bad boy. At over six foot seven he casts a very large shadow. As he stated many times, his only belief was in money and power and whatever it took to garner as much of both as he could. Never any God. Now fifteen years in, he has completed high school, college and now he has graduated from the theological seminary and is an ordained minister serving the poor in prison (unofficial). He mentors kids in prison with schooling and how to live a straight and narrow and religious based life. Zeke is mad at God because he is being punished for what he believes was the right thing to do. An event that was already out of control became a nightmare primarily because of his size and former training doing a higher good. Jake sees the selfish jerk he was for the truth. He turned into a formidable cuddly bear helping those in need especially the young salvageable men. Both men they look on God differently now.

This is a powerful work that John does. It shows us two different responses to a Life Without Parole sentence. For my own part, I know people - friends of mine now whom I got to know as their chaplain in prison - who are currently serving life without parole. I can't imagine how they bear each day. I write to them, visit them, but then I walk out, waving goodbye to them - my "sons" as they go back to their cells. You may say, "Stop being a soft-hearted enabler. They did wrong, some very wrong things - murder, rape, etc." As in an earlier issue, I quote one of these men; "Fr. Paul, I have wept over the harm I caused, repented from my deepest soul. I have begged God's forgiveness and I know he forgives me. But do you forgive me Fr. Paul?" His question stung me to the heart. Did I? I have prayed to forgive him, and I believe I have done so. But do you who are reading this forgive him? If God has forgiven someone and they are truly remorseful why can't a person be redeemed? What good does it to keep a person in prison for 20,30, 40, or 50 years? Is there no room for repentance and reconciliation in our prisons? I have even prayed that I could take one of their places... Fr. Paul



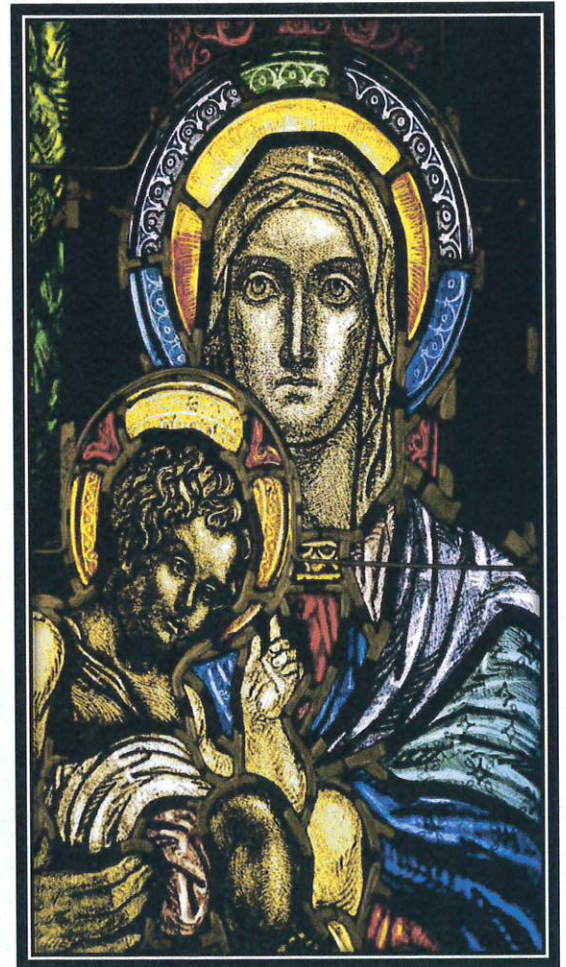
A Prayer for Advent and the Winter

Advent is the period before Christmas marked by a waiting, hoping, longing for the Lord Jesus. As Catholic Christians, we don't just jump into Christmas songs like "Who Threw Grandma Under the Reindeer"! (a little smile to lighten us up). Advent is meant to be a time of interiority, going down into the darkness of winter approaching, down into our needy hearts. Our hymn is "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." We need a Savior, don't we? I know I do. Please join us as we hush and listen, not just for the reindeer on the roof as we did as kids, but for the Christ Child to enter our hearts and our world. "Maranatha...Come, Lord, Jesus!" Now please listen to a note (below) from an inmate who is a sex addict. His letter is brief and vulnerable. His poem, "More Than A Feeling," may show you how human he is. Please pray for Charlie, for all those in prison during the holidays, and for us. A blessed Christmas to all of you from all of us at Adeodatus/ADROP. Fr. Paul

"I saw the Parole Board and came clean about being a sex offender, even though technically I was convicted of aggravated assault. People tell me I was a fool to be honest, but Fr. Paul, I recognize that I am a deeply troubled man who needs help. As a result, they denied my parole request, and I have to take a Sex Offender's Program. I know in my heart that I did the right thing, but it's hard not to feel that I should have lied. I'd rather be true to God than go on pretending I am something I am not.

I can't apply for parole until September 2019. I am reading Matthew Kelly's Perfectly Yourself and Ray Leonardini's Finding God Within, Contemplative Prayer for Prisoners. Please continue to pray for me Fr. Paul. If you get a chance, I'd like to get even a brief note from you every now and then to help inspire me and cheer me up. As usual, I am enclosing a copy of one of my writings."

God Bless! Charlie



MORE THAN A FEELING

“Charlie”



"I used to think that being grateful was a feeling, I can appreciate having my mom and dad still around. I can appreciate being able to hear when I'd rather complain about poor radio reception. I can appreciate that my friend Freddie was ever a part of my life even in the midst of grieving his recent suicide. I can appreciate being clean and sober when I feel like getting high. I can appreciate having food to eat when I'd rather complain about meals in chow hall. I can appreciate the friends who still write me when I'd rather focus on the ones who don't. I can appreciate the fact that God holds me in His loving arms when it is 3:34 A.M. and I wake up crying because I'm sad, scared and lonely. However, appreciation is not gratitude. Gratitude is action. It is staying behind a few extra minutes after the meeting ends to talk to someone who is hurting. It's giving my last shot of coffee to someone who doesn't have any. It's letting my cellie have my chocolate pudding. It's writing my parents to let them know how much their support means to me. It's sharing my story of recovery in front of people I barely know. It's being kind to someone I don't like. Gratitude is praising and thanking God for all His blessings when I am still angry with Him for taking away my loved ones. It's writing this to let you know that you make a significant difference in my life and I love you. Gratitude must be shown not merely spoken, It is not just an platitude; it is an attitude."



WINTER THOUGHTS

"Then we discover what the spiritual life really is. It is not a matter of doing one good work rather than another, of living in one place or in another. It is not a matter of any spiritual psychological effect in our on soul. It is the silence . . . in the realization that He is everything and we are nothing, that He is the Center of all things, and to Whom all our actions must be directed."

Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude

ADEODATUS PARTNERS WITH PAR-RECYCLE TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

P.A.R. One Solution All of Us Can Offer

Par-Recycle Works is a nonprofit that provides transitional employment to people returning to the community from prison through an environmentally responsible electronics recycling service. Working with municipalities, businesses, faith-based organizations and other major institutions, PAR-Recycle Works takes apart computers and other electronics and recycles them into valuable components that are sold to generate revenue to pay our employees. By providing our employees with skills and opportunities, PAR-Recycle Works helps to build safer communities and contribute to stronger families while saving taxpayer money.

P.A.R. Reports...

- 51,184 people incarcerated in PA state prisons
 - \$34,700 cost to maintain a person in state prison in Pennsylvania one year = \$1.78 billion per year
 - 6 in 10 people released will return to prison within 3 years
 - \$44.7 million amount that Pennsylvania could save annually by reducing the 1 year recidivism rate 0%
- Phone 267 335 5455 Website par-recycleworks.org, facebook, Instagram, twitter and you tube.

ADEODATUS GROUP SUPPORT THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

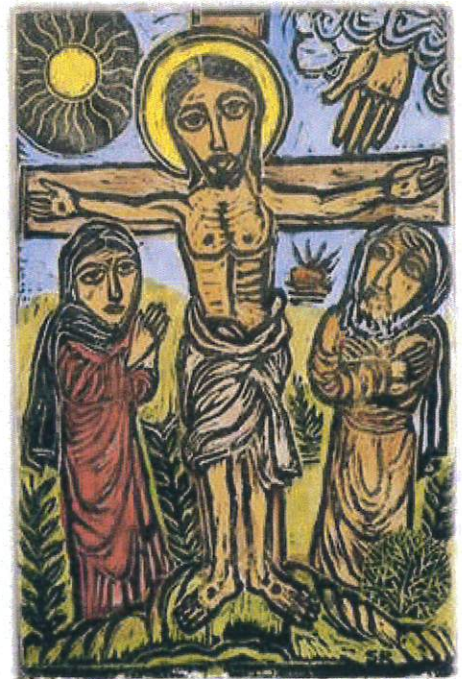
We are Adeodatus, a support group for ex-inmates, for those struggling with addictions, and anyone who cares about their reintegration into society. We meet every Thursday night (7:30 to 9:00 P.M.) at St. Rita's rectory, Broad and Ellsworth street. Through prayer, the Gospel and Christian fellowship we offer strength to meet the challenges of life in this world. Join Fr. Paul Morrissey, O.S.A. and our small circle in the comfort of the rectory living room. George Munyan O.S.A. Affiliate, *Voices From Prison and the Edge*, Co-editor

Visit us at: www.rightsofthepoor.org For more newsletters, making a contribution, and information contact us at:

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Phone: 215 925 3566, email: adropinfo@augustinian.org

Follow us at Youth4PrisonReform on Instagram



When I first heard about the Adeodatus newsletter, I was thrilled by this amazing opportunity for encounter. What better way is there to live out our mission of building bridges and community than to give voice to those who are so frequently silenced and to develop connections between them and the outside world? When we acknowledge the dignity of others, we acknowledge the presence of Christ among us. Let us continue to build true community.

Peace, *Lacie Ann Michaelson, M.A.* Executive Director, A.D.R.O.P.

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