



"For I was in prison and you visited me."

December 17, 2014

I spent the afternoon at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's. Every Christmas St. Thomas' Parish leads a service for the inmates and delivers a Christmas gift to each of them. The Bishop takes part although the Prison Ministry provided by the Parish continues year-round with weekly visits and many other pastoral and teaching ministries. Reverend Greg Mercer, Reverend Gail MacDonald, Rick Tessier, Bertha and George Powell, and Jay Coady were with me from the Parish today (Phil Heath also helps with the Alpha program). Archdeacon Shawn Samson accompanied me from the Diocese.

The Parish created a brochure for the service with hymns printed on it. I thought the title was perfect: "**Christmas at HMP ... Welcome to His Majesty's Birthday Party ... featuring Bishop Geoff Peddle and the St. Thomas' Trio – Anne Devine, Gary Davis and Mack Barfoot!**" I really loved the wordplay between "*Her Majesty's Penitentiary*" and "*His Majesty's Birthday Party*" and I also loved the fact that I was "featured" in the party. Of all the ways I've been introduced over the years, this was the first time I have ever been featured!

But this was not the first time I visited Her Majesty's Penitentiary. Over my years as a parish priest I made numerous visits to people staying there, sometimes at their request, sometimes at the request of their families. What I remember most strongly from such times was how appreciated my presence was to the person.

Today was no different. We held two services and I spoke at both. I talked about the gifts we give and receive at Christmas and then reminded everyone that the first Christmas present was God's in the person of Jesus on that first Christmas. Quoting from the second chapter of Luke's Gospel, I said that "*I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" I told them that every good gift is given with love and that is also true of God's gift of Jesus. In Jesus, I stated, God's love for each and every one of us is made real and we should celebrate this not only at Christmas but every day throughout the year. That's an important message for all of us at Christmas but I think it's especially important for someone in prison who will not be home on Christmas Day. I lost count of the number who said "Thank You" when I shook their hands at the end. Prisons really are one place where ministry is always appreciated.

I am also grateful tonight for this ministry carried out by St. Thomas' Parish. They've been doing it for a long time. Christians have been doing this work from the beginning. In the 25th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel we read about the people Jesus so identified with in this world that acts of

compassion toward them would be accounted the same as acts of compassion toward him on the day of final judgment. Jesus named the hungry that were given food, the thirsty who were given drink, the stranger who was welcomed, the naked who was clothed, the sick who were cared for, and the prisoner who was visited. *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”*

Jesus really did have a special concern for the weak and marginalized in our world. Billy Graham characterized it as a concern for the **“Four L’s”: the Last, the Least, the Lost, and the Lonely.** I’m glad when my church shows the same (com)passion. I’m glad my church visited the prisoners at Her Majesty’s Penitentiary today. I think they were blessed by our time with them. I sure know that we were blessed by our time with them.

And I give thanks for the One who calls us to go to such places.

Blessings,
+Geoff