

SUNDAY PLUS

Cornerstone

The cornerstone of the crucifix

By James Gallogly

All around our prisons, like worker bees, men are busy scrubbing and cleaning, polishing and buffing the well-trodden floors. Corridors are clean, wings shine and stairways have a welcoming gleam. The role of cleaner is a trusted post. It is a sought-after job. It guarantees an income and provides welcome time out of a cramped cell. In the grand scheme of the working day, it is simple service. But everybody who walks by can't fail to notice the improvement.

The vineyard about which Jesus spoke was Isaiah's House of Israel: a wasted project, damaged idea and a loss of faith. God-given gifts were cast aside and ignored at great cost. Crime has this effect. Gifts of family love, of nurturing, of education and training become lost. Deluded decision-making born of poor choices takes control. Here lies the road to sin – and we are all sinners. In the wrong circumstances great damage can be done.

Men in prison sometimes talk honestly about the glamour of crime. They describe it as a way out of the mundane, an escape and a career. Then it all comes tumbling down!

The simple service of a daily job provides clarity. It is the beginning of a journey back to the appreciation of simple gifts. In the silence of the chapel the din of the world is hushed. The cornerstone is nailed to a cross, waiting to leap from rejection, to restore and rebuild. "There is no need to worry," he says, "my peace will always be with you."

James Gallogly is a lay Catholic chaplain in a UK prison.

Remember the families

By Sr Janet Fearns FMDM

Childhood is famously innocent – or naïve? I loved my friend's birthday gift to me of a tiny bottle of "real" perfume: definitely not something from Woolworth's. I totally believed her subsequent statement, some days later, that the Queen, hearing about her father's hard work, had rewarded him with a holiday at her personal expense.

Life is hard for the families of people in prison. "You don't want

to be here on visiting day when the mothers say goodbye to their children," remarked a member of staff in a high security women's prison. "It would break your heart."

It's also tough on the residents. A man burst into tears as he prayed aloud for his children who would be celebrating Easter without him.

Someone's custodial sentence extends to their families, even when innocent of wrongdoing. That's why, when we pray for the prisoner, we also remember their families. May God give them the courage and help that they need.

Sr Janet Fearns is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood

Feast of the week
Monday 9 October

St John Henry Newman
(1801-1890)

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus! Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, will be all from you; none of it will be mine: it will be you shining on others through me. Let me thus praise you in the way you love best: by shining on those around me. Let me preach you without preaching, not by words, but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you.

St John Henry Newman

All Christians and people of good will are today called to work not only for the abolition of the death penalty, legal or illegal, in all its forms, but also to work for the improvement of prison conditions, out of respect for the human dignity of persons deprived of their freedom. I would link this to life imprisonment... A life sentence is a secret death penalty."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 4:6-9
Matthew 21:33-43

Monday:
Jonah 1:1 – 2:1, 11
Luke 10:25-37

Tuesday:
Jonah 3:1-10
Luke 10:38-42

Wednesday:
Jonah 4:1-11
Luke 11:1-4

Thursday:
Malachi 3:13-20
Luke 11:5-13

Friday:
Joel 1:13-15; 2:1-2
Luke 11:15-26

Saturday:
Joel 4:12-21
Luke 11:27-28

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 25:6-10
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14