

Pius, XII, Pope, 1876-1958

To all who are in prison

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To All

Who are in Prison

A Message

from

Pope Pius XII

All here on earth ... are prisoners

In Our ceaseless solicitude for every class of sufferers, who are bound to Us by special bonds of paternal love, you are not the least, beloved sons and daughters of Italy and of the world, who languish in prisons, where you find yourselves through a sad series of circumstances which are sometimes inexplicable even to yourselves.

During these days of Christmas solemnities, in which every Christian finds reason to rejoice, We feel very close to you who more than others are sighing in your loneliness for some little comfort and seeking a ray of hope in your darkness.

We are also close to your families whom your absence not rarely deprives of the necessities of life as well as the joy proper to Christmas, which consists in the joy of the mysteries of the Infant Jesus shared with warm affection in the domestic hearth.

Nevertheless, if the severity of human justice temporarily denies you this sweetness, the Divine Child lying on the hard straw for love of us offers you other comforts which are deeper and truer; for this Jesus was invoked by all and especially by you through the voice of the Advent prayer: "Come and free the captive from his prison" (Is. 42, 7).

Jesus has come for you no less than for other men since all here on earth are in a certain sense prisoners; He has come to bring a more noble

and intimate liberation, namely from the yoke and chains of passion and sin, to the peace of soul which was announced on that Holy Night, and which works an interior renovation and elevates men to the restoring light of a glorious redemption.

If you can free yourselves by the wings of faith from the fetters which bind you, you will not only enjoy these hidden pleasures but you will hold them in such a way that no one can deprive you of them: neither the affliction of circumstances, nor the hardships of prison, nor the possible errors of human justice, nor the misunderstanding of men, nor your own remorse which is elevated by grace to the level of salutary and consoling repentance.

To Cancel The Past

By reproving and denying when necessary, in the depth of your heart, the sad past, which contrition and love may cancel and wipe away; enlightened and strengthened by faith to see and appreciate the things of earth with the eyes and spirit of Christianity; you will find in your present conditions precious occasions and very fruitful sources of great good. If you humbly and willingly place yourselves in the hands of God—today severe, but always beneficent—what great providential designs cannot be fulfilled in you and through you!

Even though there might seem to have been in you a “mystery of iniquity,” We, knowing the frailty and tremendous weakness which often crushes to death a human being, understand the sad drama which could have surprised or involved you in an unhappy series of events not always entirely imputable to your free will; We understand, even though human laws, owing to

their natural insufficiency, cannot take into account all the attenuating circumstances which diminish the guilt, nor can they condone all the weaknesses. It rests with you to see that in the secret of your soul a brightness of redemption shines similar to that which shone on Jesus when, all-innocent, He came to take on Himself our sins.

Partners of God

If you do not let constraint embitter your spirit, but dominating despondency, voluntarily embrace your expiation instead of submitting to it as an inevitable fate, each one of you will be a conscious designer of your moral resurrection and will look on it as an honor to be a minister of the great justice of God, for Whom there is equal glory in inviolated order as well as in order restored by expiation. Then each one of you, interiorly and truly freed from guilt, is no longer a culprit and a target of vengeance but a collaborator of God in the restoration of injured order.

And as in Heaven there is more joy for a sinner who is converted, so on earth; every honest man should bow before him who though fallen, perhaps in a moment of bewilderment, knows how to redeem himself and to rise again.

The long days passed in those places of punishment — where Our heart is voluntarily chained with you — are no longer lost, since nothing is vain in the eyes of God when your will is conformed to His. He has always designs of mercy and of life in the severe exercise of justice, and especially when you employ these days in the works of loving charity, sympathizing with the pains of others, encouraging, comforting and helping your brethren who are suffering with you.

The Innocent

When, however, full or partial innocence is the protection of your clear conscience and when you are convinced that the rigor of human justice has exceeded the measure of guilt, do not curse adverse fate or false creatures, but lift your mind with confidence to the final victory of truth and of good, and comfort yourselves with the certainty that you have all honest men on your side; be so strong in adversity that you can rise to the point of sympathizing with the errors of law and facts to which unfortunately the inherent imperfection of human judgment is subject; while striving effectively for your legal and moral restoration, make your life of innocent expiation shine forth with a super-human dignity going beyond the reparation of error.

Religious and Political Prisoners

Much more sad is the fate of those who, in not a few countries, are innocently suffering on account of iniquitous laws, either inspired by false ideas which dominate civil life, or dictated by revolutionary political passion or by the blasphemous prejudice which considers it a crime to act in the service of God. To these beloved children, persecuted for justice's sake, goes out all Our human and supernatural love as Father. We understand the fearful martyrdom, especially in the moral order, which afflicts you. But if God Almighty, Who is Justice Itself—although He reserves complete justice for Heaven, where there is no shadow of evil—does not prevent the innocent from unjust punishment at times here on earth, this does not mean that, while fully respecting the laws of human liberty, He allows unbridled action without en-

forcing sanctions; for He may draw higher good from the evil, both for the victims themselves and for society, which now provides them with scanty bread and many tears.

While We do not cease to exhort legislators and magistrates to review, repair, and remedy these anomalies and errors which do dishonor to all justice and especially Christian justice, or are an outrage to Divine rights; to you, innocent victims, We repeat the encouraging words of the Angel: "Be of good courage, thy cure from God is at hand" Tob. 5, 13).

But until that day you are assigned a very high vocation and indeed, We would say, a great privilege: to expiate for a really guilty world. This expiation is linked with the wonderful Beatitudes which were announced by the Saviour in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they who mourn . . . Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice . . . Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake . . . Blessed are you when they persecute you for My sake." (cf. Matt. 5)

Beloved sons and daughters scattered over the face of the earth, if you could only see how pleasing in the eyes of God is your immolation! how effective it is for the salvation of all men! and how much the Vicar of Christ dares to count on your sufferings to obtain from God sincere peace and the true salvation of the world in these very sad times!

The Young

Finally, We wish to direct a very affectionate and paternal word to you, over whom hovers the grieving love of your Divine Friend, to you who, at a tender age, have already tasted life's bitter fruits. Prematurely poisoned by the cor-

ruption of modern society, placed in circumstances hostile to right education, you are perhaps more sinned against than sinning.

Let your present condition be a severe warning to those who, more than you, are really guilty; to those who, trampling underfoot the holy innocence of little children and piling up immense moral ruin, make the press, the theater, the clubs, and even the school means of eager gain, if not of the premeditated corruption of childhood.

My dear young people, bury in Christian repentance whatever has happened to you in your youthful inexperience; and let this burial be followed by a resurrection of the ideals of morality and virtue. Let not your present sufferings dash your hopes or cool the enthusiasm of your youth. The Infant Jesus looks on you with special love. He will be your support, so that this young seedling of your life, tested and saved, may grow into a robust oak, defying the tempests, so that you may be an example of the fear of the Lord and obedience to law and order.

Suffering for Others

Dear sons and daughters!

In exchange for the precious gifts which the Infant Jesus comes to bring to you in the place of your sorrow, offer courageously and generously your sufferings and sorrows to Him Who even from the crib made expiation for the sins of the world; and offer them with that warmth of faith that transforms tears into pearls and sorrow into joy.

Far from despising your offering, He will make it the precious occasion of mercy, of salvation, of grace, for your families as well as yourselves,

for His Church, for the entire world. The perfumed incense which placates and saves goes up to Heaven not only from consecrated temples dedicated to the worship of God, but also from prisons, from concentration camps, from hospitals, from every place where there is suffering, weeping, supplication. We pray the divine Goodness to hasten for each one of you the day of deliverance, so that, transformed and made, as it were, superhuman by your trial accepted with Christian faith, having returned to the bosom of your families and to society, you may become its glory and the bulwark against the evil which threatens it.

With these good wishes then, and remembering you constantly in Our prayers, We bless you and your dear ones with Our paternal Apostolic Blessing, praying that it be an earnest of heavenly consolations.

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