

## LITURGICAL RESOURCES

### INTRODUCTION TO MASS

Prisons Week is a Catholic initiative which began in 1975, instigated by Bishop Victor Guazelli. The week has since gained ecumenical support and observance. It reflects the work of the Prison Advice and Care Trust. This Sunday and the following week seek to focus attention not only on the needs of prisoners but on all those involved in the field of prison care, prisoners' families, victims of crime, prison staff and volunteers.

*Father of mercy,  
the secrets of all hearts are known to you alone.  
You know who is just and you forgive the unjust.  
Hear our prayers for those in prison,  
Give them patience and hope in their sufferings,  
and bring them home again soon.*

*Roman Missal*

### HOMILY NOTES by Bishop Richard Moth

Next weekend brings us to the last Sunday in the Church's year. Advent follows – a new year for the Church. So, at this time in the year, the readings from Scripture invite us to think about endings – especially the end of our lives here on earth. The readings present us with the challenge to think about the way in which we live our lives and, this week especially, we think about the way we listen to others.

It is not easy to go against the tide. It is usually much easier to go with the flow, to fit in with everyone else. This can make for an easy life. It can be nice to be one of the crowd; to be popular; to fit in.

Sometimes, though, walking with the crowd proves not to be the right way. We can think of times in our lives when going with crowd has taken us to the wrong place. Jesus warns us, in the Gospel we have just heard, not to be deceived – for deception takes us down the wrong path. It is necessary to give thought to things, to give time to the decisions we make and to keep in mind what we know is right and good.

Very often, this demands that we do stand out in the crowd, that we walk against the flow and that we are prepared for the struggle that will result. Standing up to others, especially



when there is pressure to behave in a particular way, demands a real strength. Anyone who has been in prison knows how hard it is to stay faithful to Jesus, to be deaf to the nonsense and worse which so many people talk about on the landings. We shall need to defend our decision to stand up for what is right. We shall need to do this in a way that is consistent with the way of truth. When such occasions come our way, Jesus reminds us that he will give us the words we need, enabling us to hold fast to the right path. When we take this path, hard though it may be, it is our opportunity to witness to the Gospel message. Others may even turn against us when we hold fast to what is true – but this is the way to life.

Today and during the coming week, we have a wonderful opportunity to remember in prayer those who are members of our prison communities and to remember the need to support them and their families in the choices they face. Support when husband, wife, father or mother, son or daughter, loved one, is serving a sentence will sustain families when times are hard and equip them to welcome a loved one home to new possibilities for the future.

All of us are called to help each other, but maybe especially those who have just come out of prison, in this struggle to stand against the crowd – to offer support in practical ways to those who come out of prison, not dwelling on the past, but looking to the future with confidence. Offering the support that is needed will often demand a counter-cultural effort of another kind, reaching out to those who are in need of help for a time, heedless of the past but looking forward with them in hope and confidence in what the future can have in store.

On this Prisoners' Sunday and in this Prisons Week, we must pray for our society, that all may find the strength to hold fast to what is good, even though this may be unpopular and require the courage to stand out in the crowd. This journey is difficult to take alone and the way of the Gospel demands that we reach out to others on the way. We must strive to offer support to all who are in prison and also being released from prison returning to the wider community. As they join us on the journey, may they remain firm in purpose and renewed in heart, united with families and loved ones, free from fear and strengthened to do always what is right.

## **SUGGESTED INCLUSIONS FOR THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

We pray for the work of Pact, the Prison Advice and Care Trust, that they may continue to strengthen and grow in supporting prisoners, their families and children.

Lord, we ask You to heal those who have been damaged and wounded by crime. Help us all to seek reconciliation and to forgive.

We pray for all prisoners and their families and we ask You to help them all to make a fresh start.