



2013 Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday Encyclical

June 9, 2013

Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me...only Luke is with me.
2 Timothy 4:9-11

To the Most Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics and Devout Laity of the Orthodox Churches in North and Central America:

Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen!

We greet you in the surpassing joy of the Risen Christ. By the grace of God, we are blessed to observe the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, which this year falls on June 9, as Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday. We embrace the *diakonia* of prison ministry in keeping with the example of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Physician of our souls, who *did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*; who ate in the houses of thieves and forgave the sins of harlots; and who said that, when we visit those in prison, we are in truth visiting Him, the Lord of Glory.

Rejection and isolation are experiences that are common to nearly everyone who is in prison. Even the Holy Apostle Paul was forsaken by his fellow ministers of the Gospel when he was imprisoned in Rome. The Lord has called us to take the part, not of Demas, but of the Beloved Physician Luke, and to stand by our brothers and sisters who are in prison, ensuring by our presence with them that they remain connected to the community of the Church.

We call on all Orthodox Christians--both clergy and laity-- to emulate the faithfulness of the Apostle Luke by participating in the Church's ministry to those who are in prison, and by offering support and encouragement to all those who bring the Gospel of hope and salvation to the incarcerated.

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) is the official prison ministry of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops. OCPM provides books, bibles, icons and bible studies to people who are in prison, *all free of charge*. OCPM also provides support and training for Orthodox throughout the country who are participating in ministry to people who are in prison. On this Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday, we humbly ask each parish to take up a special collection for OCPM. We also ask all the faithful to pray fervently for all those who are visiting Christ in prison. With prayers and love in the Risen Christ,

+ Mark

+Bishop Mark of Baltimore, the Orthodox Church in America; *Liaison to OCPM for the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America*

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