

PRISON MINISTRY AWARENESS SUNDAY

Sample Homily

July 27, 2025



Orthodox Christian[™]
PRISON MINISTRY

+In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Glory to Jesus Christ!*Glory Forever!*

In today's Gospel reading, we encountered two blind men crying aloud to Christ, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." And then Our Lord asks these men such a profound question in response to their pleas: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they say, confessing not only the power of Christ, but His rightful place as Lord. They know Christ can heal them, because they know who Jesus is: Lord, Son of David, Son of God.

This Scripture passage is one of our Church's key texts in Her teachings on the Jesus Prayer, for these men were not crying out for Jesus to have mercy on them just once, but continually. They were begging to be healed.

Surely, in these blind men, the Gospel is calling us to see our own spiritual blindness, to remind us that in moments of darkness, we too will benefit from crying out to the Lord: *have mercy!*

And who hears the cry? It is Christ himself. As a Church and specifically as clergy, we know that healing can be most powerful when there is someone to physically be there, to embody love, to hear the plea. This Gospel passage compels us to be ready to listen to the cry of another as much as it reminds us to not be ashamed to ask for help in a moment of darkness.

The Hierarchs of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of the United States have appointed today as **Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday**, the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Silas, the patron saint of prison ministry. Prison ministry is not something most of us think about often, and so today we are encouraged to consider how we might serve those in prison.

Brothers and Sisters, however unknown, frightening, or off-limits the prison system might feel to you, I can assure you this: there are so many men and women in prison right now,

so many of God's own children, begging to be healed. The United States has reached a truly crisis level of incarceration with over 1.8 million people incarcerated. The traumas these men and women have caused, the traumas they have often suffered before their crime, and the traumas they witness now behind bars are all tragedies in need of Christ's healing touch.

This is why the Assembly of Bishops created Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry, or OCPM. Our Church follows Christ's example: we are here to hear those crying out.

Last year alone, 235 people in prison reached out to OCPM to begin their journey toward Christ and His Church, adding to the more than 1,200 people in prison OCPM serves each year. It can be hard to believe that people change. But they do. Miracle stories abound in prison ministry. Formerly suicidal inmates have now dedicated themselves to a prayer rule. Former gang leaders are excitedly teaching others about the faith they have gained. One man in the Mental Health Unit of his facility stepped out of his cell, took the hands of the priest who had been praying for him for months, and was given his first prayer rope.

The word is spreading. Personal testimonies of God's power and the love that dwells in the Orthodox Church are going around in prison facilities across the United States; OCPM continues to serve more and more people every year, because people in prison are asking for them. They are ready to be healed.

But Brothers and Sisters, let us not forget Our Lord's question from the Gospel reading today: "Do you believe I am able to do this?" Thousands of people in prison are saying "Yes, Lord." But what about us, what about you and me? Do you believe that Christ is able to make the blind see? Do you believe that Christ is able to heal those in prison, just as He is able to heal you? Do we honestly believe this?

I hope we can say together, "Yes, Lord." May we not hinder the healing Christ desires to bring to people in prison. May we be more like the blind men, more like people in prison, asking for Christ and His Church. And may we believe with our whole hearts that *no place, however far from us today, even as far as a prison cell, is too far for Christ to reach.*

To Him be all glory, honor, and worship to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.