

# ***Harden Not Your Hearts***

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Cycle B | January 28, 2024

## **WISDOM FROM THE CELLS**

I remember when I first came to the prison I am now many years ago. I had just gotten out of the S.H.U. after my first S.H.U. term. Another lifer from the S.H.U. and I decided to cell up together. We had a history of heroin use. Right from the start, we both turned to drugs to find some comfort in being in prison with a life sentence.

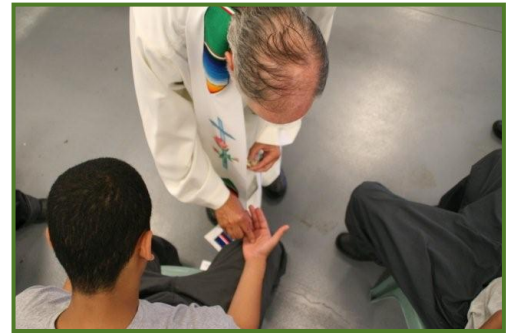
I noticed that my addiction kept progressing when our neighbor asked us to start selling for him. That marked the point when we got really out of control.

We used more and more drugs. We were always getting high. But the heroin that I craved was in short supply. So I got lost in crystal meth. The more I used it, the more violent I became. I was a drug addict.

I used drugs to cover-up my pain, but in the end it only made things worse for me. Two years later, I found myself going back to the S.H.U.

It was during that last S.H.U. term that God got a hold of my heart. I repented for the sins that I was lost in. At times I still crave drugs, but with the help of God, I don't use anymore. My joy today comes through prayer, not through a needle.

**- Joe, who is in a California State Prison.**



## **PENITENTIAL RITE**

**Lord, have mercy.**

**Christ, have mercy.**

**Lord, have mercy.**

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

**R. Amen.**

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Let us pray:

Lord, Almighty Father,  
You release those who are  
imprisoned mentally and  
spiritually. Grant me  
freedom to receive your love  
in my heart and be free  
from all the things which I  
am addicted to.

We ask this through Christ,  
our Lord. **R. Amen.**



# LITURGY OF THE WORD

## First Reading: Deuteronomy 18: 15-20

Moses spoke to all the people, saying: "A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen. This is exactly what you requested of the LORD, your God, at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let us not again hear the voice of the LORD, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die.' And the LORD said to me, 'This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. Whoever will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.'"

The Word of the Lord.  
**R. Thanks be to God.**

## Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 7: 32-35

Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties. An unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. But a married man is anxious about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and he is divided. An unmarried woman or a virgin is anxious about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy in both body and spirit. A married woman, on the other hand, is anxious about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to impose a restraint upon you, but for the sake of propriety and adherence to the Lord without distraction.

The Word of the Lord.  
**R. Thanks be to God.**

## Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 7-9

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;  
let us acclaim the rock of our salvation.

Let us come into his presence with  
thanksgiving;

let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Come, let us bow down in worship;  
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

For he is our God,

and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he  
guides.

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:

"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,  
as in the day of Massah in the desert,

Where your fathers tempted me;  
they tested me though they had seen my

works."

**R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

## Gospel: Mark 1: 21-28

Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Quiet! Come out of him!" The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**



# MEDITATION: POSSESSED

in the early morning  
i had gone down  
by the water  
to be with god  
it was dark  
there was a silence  
at that time of day  
reflecting during  
these days  
of all the possessed  
of capernaum  
some really wanted  
to change

god  
sometimes i wonder  
where you are  
when i listen to the stories  
of these ones  
it is like a dark cloud  
that has taken over  
their hearts  
they live but it is not like  
they are really living

yesterday afternoon  
as the sun was setting  
a man came to where  
i was speaking  
i could see his heart  
as he began to speak  
how he treated his wife  
the blows to her  
i could see abba  
the faces of his children  
inside of his heart  
and i felt sad  
seeing such potential  
but he was never at home  
and they were young  
they needed a father

i felt powerless  
when he came to talk  
his heart was surrounded  
by a dark cloud  
how many people in  
this country have i met  
whose hearts have been  
taken over by this darkness?  
before i could say anything  
he ran off because  
he knew i could  
read his heart

sitting here with you abba  
i pray for this man  
i pray for all who are  
possessed like he is  
there is such

darkness within  
that to kill another would  
mean nothing to him  
what do you do  
when you are in front  
of those whose hearts  
are cold?

looking out at the lake  
as it was changing colors  
i was feeling a sadness  
sweep through me  
just as the wind off  
the lake was sweeping  
across the water

it was now time to  
walk back into the village  
to begin another day

wandering up  
to the synagogue  
to be free  
to not be ruled  
by any powers  
that want to rule  
over the heart

how important it is  
to keep the heart free  
to be full of light and love  
the powers that drive  
so many to actions  
that fill others with darkness

seeing my friends  
we began to walk  
toward the synagogue

it was a beautiful day  
the sun was out now  
it was warm  
you could look down  
from the synagogue  
and see the lake below  
i was still thinking  
of the man i met yesterday  
possessed by darkness  
did he want to change  
and cast off the power  
that had taken control  
of his heart?  
the look in his eyes  
still haunts me  
what must have happened  
so that he could breathe  
in so much darkness?

i was glad that  
i could come here

and listen to the word  
listen to the voice  
of my abba  
the synagogue was  
inviting this morning  
i wanted to get away  
from this darkness

we walked in  
through large doors  
this place to reflect on  
what was happening  
inside and outside  
we walked through the doors  
making our way to sit  
when the same man  
who came to me  
yesterday sees me

i felt shocked  
to find him here  
but it is clear  
he is looking for me  
he falls on his knees  
and says  
jesus  
i implore you  
i beg you after i talked  
with you yesterday  
i could not sleep all night  
i feel as if i am drowning  
i want to rid myself  
of this darkness  
but i have no control  
over it  
it has taken over me  
the first thing i did  
last night after seeing you  
was become intoxicated  
i didn't want this  
i promised my family  
i would not do this  
anymore  
when i got home  
i saw the faces  
of my children  
they were hungry  
they wanted my attention  
but i left the house

there was a stillness  
within the synagogue  
no one was moving  
not one sound  
the man was  
screaming for help

i remembered back  
to the time with my abba  
in the morning

in a loud voice  
i loudly commanded  
the darkness controlling  
his heart to leave

all of a sudden  
as a dark presence  
escaped the synagogue  
a real change  
of temperature was felt  
the man lay on the ground  
totally exhausted

i went over and  
picked him up  
this time he did not  
try to run away  
he had let go of  
this darkness that  
was possessing him  
his heart was free again

lines of gratitude spread  
across his once  
very troubled face  
thank you jesus  
for taking away this evil  
that i had chosen  
i felt powerless  
to free myself

yesterday  
when i talked to you  
i wanted to free myself  
but i was not ready  
never again do i want  
to go back to how  
i was possessed  
by powers of death

he walked out the door  
of the synagogue free  
he walked to his house  
and became the husband  
he never was  
the father he never was  
he always remembered  
back to that morning  
in the synagogue  
when this one freed him  
from the darkness  
he never missed  
going to the synagogue  
to thank god  
for this healing



**REFLECTION:** I remember a time when I reached out to Jesus and felt healed. This is what happened... I remember... I remember...

### OUR FATHER

Let us pray with confidence to the Father  
in the words our Savior gave us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy Kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against  
us, and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**R. For the kingdom, the power and the  
glory are yours, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

### SIGN OF PEACE

Jesus, you said to your apostles: "I leave you  
peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our  
sins, but on the faith of your Church, and  
grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom  
where you live forever and ever. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.  
**R. And with your spirit.**

### LAMB OF GOD

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:  
**have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:  
**have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:  
**grant us peace.**

This is Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the  
sins of the world. Happy are we who are called to  
his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter  
under my roof, but only say the word and  
my soul shall be healed.**

### COMMUNION

#### CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray:

Father,  
At one point in our lives, we may have had a  
hardened heart because we kept you out of our  
lives. As we open our hearts to you, keep us on this  
path so that we hear your voice and receive  
healing.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. **R. Amen.**

