

Taking Up Your Cross

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A | June 28, 2026

WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

I remember sitting in my cell in the SHU when I had come to some tough realizations. I was 34 years old and I was doing the same things I had done since I was 16. I was living a life that I no longer believed in, and for what?

The answer to that was I could not see myself as anything other than an 'inmate' or anything other than a gang member, and fear. The fact that I was admitting to myself that I was afraid was a big step for me. I always lied to myself saying I was not afraid, that I feared no one, that I did not care what people thought of me, that I was my own man. The truth of the matter is that I was afraid of being hurt and having to hurt someone else. I was afraid of what might happen if I left the life behind, and sadly, what people might think of me.

I placed a lot of value on what others thought of me. I allowed others to tell me what my values were and those values were all based on identity, specifically, the gang identity. I realized that I didn't know who I was as a person. However, I came to realize that I was not a gang member.

The lie that was being preached to me since I entered prison was, "You're a lifer, you're never going home!" But it was just that, a lie. I began to see myself as a free man. The only question was: Was I going to allow my fear to control my behavior and thinking? The answer to that question was: No! So about 6 years ago, I dropped out of the gang and gave my life to God. I had to give up a lot of learned behavior and it was not always easy, but I finally reached a place in my life that I can be proud of.

- Joaquin, who is in a California State Prison.

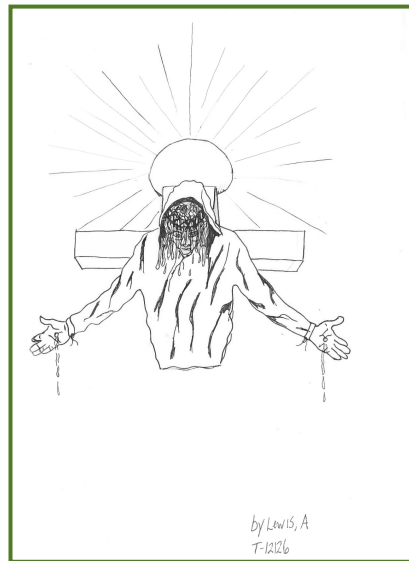


Image by Alvin Lewis

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 God,

When our ways bring only death and destruction, you show us a path that leads to goodness and life. Help us to die to sin so that we might live in your new life.

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



LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: 2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

One day Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her. Afterward, whenever he passed by, he used to stop there to dine. So she said to her husband, "I know that Elisha is a holy man of God. Since he visits us often, let us arrange a little room on the roof and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp, so that when he comes to us he can stay there." Sometime later Elisha arrived and stayed in the room overnight. Later Elisha asked, "Can something be done for her?" His servant Gehazi answered, "Yes! She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years." Elisha said, "Call her." When the woman had been called and stood at the door, Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son."

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

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19

R. Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

The promises of the LORD I will sing forever,
through all generations my mouth shall
proclaim your faithfulness.

For you have said, "My kindness is established
forever;"

in heaven you have confirmed your
faithfulness.

R. Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Blessed the people who know the joyful shout;
in the light of your countenance, O LORD,
they walk.

At your name they rejoice all the day,
and through your justice they are exalted.

R. Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

You are the splendor of their strength,
and by your favor our horn is exalted.
For to the LORD belongs our shield,
and the Holy One of Israel, our king.

R. Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Second Reading: Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Brothers and sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

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

Gospel: Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus said to his apostles: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward."

The Gospel of the Lord.
R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



MEDITATION: BECOMING A WARRIOR OF LIGHT

*(from the eyes
of a chaplain)*

i was walking
to see a kid
in one of the units
on a monday
afternoon

arriving to the unit
luis stood
outside his room
he said to me
you know
i am proud of eric
he could have easily
gotten into the riot
but he acted
like a referee
standing there

looking into
the day room
thinking how
important it is
to give kids images
to provide more
opportunities
so that transformation
really can happen
not just a jail house
but a conversion
life-changing images
that have
a lasting effect
on choices
and actions

maybe this simple
relating of

eric's choice
of not reacting
like his old self
a hardcore gangster
is not earth-shaking
compared to
the world's
problems but
it was something
because during
these months
of being a warrior
of light
this act was
an official way
of publicly stating
that you have made
the decision to
stop gang banging
could have
back-fired

but this one
action of eric
as referee rather
than mixer
said to me
that maybe
something has
been happening
in the unit
with god
with some youngsters
as they choose
to honor
their parents
that little by little
maybe these youngsters
can really see

they can be
someone different
other than
what they had been
on the streets

there are families
that go home happy
after visiting and
having experienced
the change in
their kids
after signing
the book of life
something the
youngsters in
the units never see

some of the parents
who used to have
tears in their eyes

as they passed
through the gates
are now smiling
if only other
youngsters
could see the
difference
maybe their hearts
and their minds
can change

later that day
luis commented
that eric had power
within him
that showed itself
during the riot

this is what it is
to have your lamp lit

you do not hide it
but rather
put it in a place
where it can shine

to spread brightness

in the surroundings

watching this kid
who was once a
total knucklehead
who once
gang banged
become

someone who
because of
his light and
healing brought
change to
the culture
of a whole unit
in a juvenile hall
is moving

this is real brightness
from a strong light

a lamp lit
in a small world
but a powerful image
in the big world



REFLECTION: I remember a time when I got a second chance at life... 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:

Lord God,
Help us to lay down our life for you and for our
brothers and sisters, so that we might take it up
again when you come in glory.

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

