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Daily Reflections



Center for Spiritual Development

GOOD SHEPHERD!

By Sr. Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ

Today's Responsorial Psalm

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley

I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

Reflection

In continuing with the reflection on the documentary **26.2 to Life**, Psalm 23 speaks to the heart of the journey of those who find themselves in prison. No matter the heinousness of crimes committed, there is always the invitation to return to the Lord, the Good Shepherd.

In the documentary that focused on the 1000-mile club within San Quentin, the men took to running and training for an annual marathon as a way to find peace and a will to survive. Prison is tough and menacing, and these men found a path to assist them in changing their lives even if they had little chance for parole. I find their stories both compelling and uplifting in that no matter the circumstances of their lives, they sought reconciliation both within themselves and regarding the harm they inflicted upon others.

Prison is certainly an environment of “walking in the shadow of death.” To survive, some stated that they were told to “mail their emotions home” as this was no place to show weakness. Despite this, these men stayed committed to their goal of changing their lives in hopes of a second chance at life outside the walls of San Quentin. They spent time reflecting on what landed them behind bars and how they wanted to make significant changes in their lives, starting with themselves.

Toward the end of the documentary, one of the key persons highlighted was a man named Markell. He had his sentence commuted and was able to leave San Quentin after decades of confinement. On the “outside,” the volunteer coaches who had trained him at San Quentin continued to support him as he began life as a free man.

This in no way diminishes the impact of his crimes on his victims; what it does give us is a reminder of God’s redemptive power. Markell, like many in the 1000-mile club, worked on turning his life around, and most especially, looking to the future with hope.

Another member of the running club sought many avenues to pivot his life toward good. He participated in the restorative justice program, became a member of the internal newspaper at San Quentin, and committed to changing his life to be a productive member of society even if he never saw another day of freedom outside the prison walls.

At the end of the film, there were updates on each of the men profiled. What was most astonishing was that every member of the 1000-member club who

was released from prison *never returned*. Many of these men were incarcerated for decades, thus this this statistic is astonishing. It shows the power of the work of the Holy Spirit if we are open to making changes within ourselves to be our best selves.

The hope these men found is hope that flows from the Lord. It is the hope found in the Good Shepherd. It is a path of discipleship that takes heart, commitment, prayer, honesty before God and others, and the desire for change.

This is something we can all take to heart as we journey together on this earth. It is a story of redemption, forgiveness, humility, sorrow, and ultimately, triumph. Those still behind bars continue to run and seek to be the persons God created them to be.

It is something each of us can take from this story. What do we do when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death in our own lives? Do we have the humility to ask and seek out the help we need? This documentary was one of individual conversion, and showed what it means to support one another in the valleys of life when hopelessness wants to take root within us.



Exterior of the San Quentin State Prison
Photo by Robert So

For Pondering

- To whom do you turn when the waves of life seem to overpower you? Do you reach out to those who care and love you? It takes courage to admit we don't have it “all together.” Trust that you have this courage within you and seek out those who will walk with you; you need not be alone.
 - What part of this documentary speaks to you? Why? What part causes unease or distress? Why? Sit with your own feelings and see where the Holy Spirit leads you.
-

For Prayer

*Loving God,
conversion is a choice, a path to follow,
that necessitates a hard, clear view of oneself.
We pray that all of us have the humility to assess our own well-being
and seek the help we need.
Let us be open to the redemptive stories of others
as we seek redemption in our own lives.
Amen.*

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