

SUNDAY PLUS

One more chance

Change happens

by Gerlinde Symons

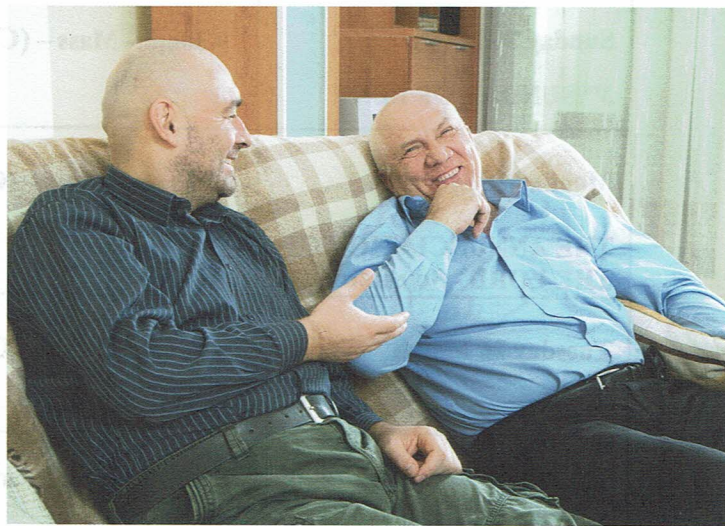
When Mike first arrived at this prison, he was an emotional wreck. He had been bullied at his previous prison and was full of fear and anxiety. He also felt ashamed of his crime and guilty for putting his family through so much pain and suffering. His elderly father had taken it very badly; in short, Mike was a broken man.

However, soon after he arrived, he did something which would have a profound effect on his life – he came to Mass. Mike was welcomed by prisoners and volunteers alike and gradually began to feel part of the faith community. Over several months he became less fearful, less anxious and freer to be himself. His faith was growing, he accepted that

he was loved by God despite his weaknesses, and was confirmed into the Catholic Church. It was a wonderful celebration – his father, John, was deeply moved and saw Mike's confirmation as a real sign of hope for the future.

Mike eventually moved on to an open prison to complete his sentence. Some months later, I received a heartfelt letter from John, telling me that Mike now had a real sense of commitment and purpose, for which he thanked God. What I witnessed with Mike was the transformative power of God's love. Mike turned away from his sinful and destructive ways and turned towards God, who welcomed him with open arms! Mike's relationship with his father, previously very difficult, gradually improved to a point where there was genuine reconciliation and healing.

Many people struggle with



feelings of guilt and shame and believe the lie of the Evil One – that God can't forgive them for their mistakes. But take heart: just like the prodigal son in today's Gospel reading, we too can turn away

from the things that separate us from God and return to our loving Father and there will be much rejoicing in heaven!

Gerlinde Symons is a Catholic lay chaplain in two UK prisons.


Try again

by Paul Nizinskyj

The coming of God's kingdom promises "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." Until that time, though, most of us will find comfort from these harsh realities of being human in the support of friends and family. True friendships are precious things but, like faith, they need frequent tending and renewal. All too often we can neglect this and stray from our relationships with God and those who love us, despite the obvious joy that they bring. For the apostles, Christ became as much a friend and family member as he did a teacher, but even Peter denied him three times at what seemed

like his lowest ebb. Despite this, all was forgiven. Peter went on to be the rock on which Jesus built his Church. Love is what binds us to God and it is through love that friendships are built and renewed.

Paul Nizinskyj is a local government officer and freelance journalist.

Lord of the "one more chance", thank you for all the chances you have given me. Help me to be compassionate to others and to be generous in forgiving them for the things which I find irritating.  Amen.

Keep hoping

by James Gallogly

Every now and then the map of our journey reaches a point known as Wit's End. There are countless roads that lead there: work, relationships, family and illness, to name but a few.

If we are blessed enough to draw breath on arrival we will find there is a place to sit and think. It is a place to look into the depth of our heart. It is where we can discover a well of love. From it we can draw hope, a desire to reconnect, the will to go on.

On the map of life's journey, Redemption is found very close to Wit's End. It is sometimes difficult to locate: the weather in the area is mixed to say the least! Countless

previous travellers that way suggest the most successful and reliable route is to be found in the depth of our heart rather than our satnav.

James Gallogly is a Catholic prison chaplain.

"Jesus does not say, 'Blessed are those who plot revenge'. He calls "blessed" those who forgive and do so 'seventy times seven.' We need to think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven. All of us have been looked upon with divine compassion."

Pope Francis

Today:
Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15
1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12
Luke 13:1-9

Monday:
Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10
Hebrews 10:4-10
Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday:
Daniel 3:25, 34-43
Matthew 18:21-35

Wednesday:
Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9
Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday:
Jeremiah 7:23-28
Luke 11:14-23

Friday:
Hosea 14:2-10
Mark 12:28-34

Saturday:
Hosea 5:15 - 6:6
Luke 18:9-14

Next Sunday:
Joshua 5:9-12
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32