

WORLD & NATION

Pope celebrates liturgy in prison

By Cindy Wooder
Catholic News Service

ROME — Only conversion, justice and forgiveness can break the "chain reaction of suffering" caused by sin, Pope John Paul II told prisoners and prison officials in Rome.

Opening his July 9 Mass at Regina Coeli prison with a renewed call for government gestures of clemency in the Holy Year, the pope also asked prisoners to seek God's forgiveness and change their lives.

With prisoners awkwardly serving at the altar and with prisoners, guards and officials from Italy's Ministry of Justice reading and reciting prayers, the Mass marked the celebration of the jubilee for Prisons.

Regina Coeli, Rome's oldest prison, is home to 900 male prisoners. Ten female inmates from Rome's Rebibbia prison were brought to Regina Coeli for Mass.

The Mass was celebrated in the prison's small rotunda; the majority of prisoners and even members of the prisoners' choir were seated in the hallways leading off the rotunda.

In his opening greeting, Pope John Paul said, "In the name of Christ who came to proclaim the liberation of prisoners, I ask the competent authorities for a sign of clemency on behalf of all detainees on the occasion of the jubilee."

At the end of Mass, the pope said a Holy Year reduction of sentences would be "a sign of sensitivity" toward prisoners and something that would encourage



Pope John Paul II gives Communion to an inmate during Mass in the rotunda of Rome's Regina Coeli prison July 9. During the special Holy Year service, the pope called on prisoners to seek God's forgiveness and change their lives.

their repentance.

In his homily, Pope John Paul told the prisoners that Jesus — "innocence personified" — became a prisoner and was executed in order to liberate all people.

"The prison from which the Lord came to free us, in the first place, the prison where the Spirit is enchained. Wherever even a weak flame of goodness still burns, he rekindles it with the breath of his love," Pope John Paul said.

The pope told the prisoners that Christ would not impose himself on them, but is ready to meet them whenever he is invit-

ed into their hearts and they commit themselves to sinning no more.

The pope prayed that the Holy Spirit would fill the hearts of the inmates with love and would fill the prison with peace.

"Perhaps the people you have harmed will feel they have had justice more by seeing your interior change than by the simple completion of your sentence."

Saying he was addressing prisoners and government officials all over the world, Pope John Paul said the punishment of criminals cannot be allowed to become a form of retribution, "social retaliation or a kind of institutional vendetta."

Punishment and imprisonment make sense only if they combine justice and the deterrence of crime with helping the criminal change his or her life and learn to live as a respectable member of society, he said.

At the Mass, prayers were offered for prisoners kept in inhuman conditions and those "on death row who await the end of their existence."

"May the death penalty, an unworthy punishment still used in some countries, be abolished throughout the world," the pope and prisoners prayed.

Bishop Vaughan dies at age of 72

NEW YORK (CNS) — New York Auxiliary Bishop Austin B. Vaughan, who died June 25 at age 72, was remembered as "a brave, convicted bishop" by his fellow auxiliary, Bishop Patrick V. Ahern.

"He put his body on the line for his convictions. He went to jail to demonstrate his conviction of the sanctity of human life and the evil of abortion," said Bishop Ahern as celebrant of his June 29 funeral Mass.

Bishop Vaughan was arrested several times since 1988 for blocking abortion clinic entrances as part of Operation Rescue.

Almost 100 priests, 21 bishops, scores of religious and hundreds of lay people gathered at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. (Archbishop Edward M. Egan of New York was in Rome to receive the pallium from Pope John Paul II the same day.)

Msgr. Daniel V. Flynn, pastor of St. Gregory the Great Parish in Harrison, said it was "very opportune" that Bishop Vaughan was elected president of the Catholic Theological Society of America because of the turmoil in the church on theological and moral questions in the late 1960s.

"He helped resolve difficulties and uphold church teaching," Msgr. Flynn said.

In 1968, as CTSA president, Bishop Vaughan was a strong defender in media interviews of Pope Paul VI's encyclical "Humanae Vitae," issued that summer.

Vatican: Civilly remarried are still barred from Eucharist

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Allowing Catholics who have civilly remarried after divorce to receive Communion not only violates church law but is an affront to Catholics who live according to the law, the Vatican said.

"The reception of the Body of Christ when one is publicly unworthy constitutes an objective harm" to the church and to the faithful who obey it, said a declaration issued by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts.

The only situations in which such couples may receive the Eucharist are if they separate or if they are committed to refraining from sexual relations, said the declaration released July 6 at the Vatican.

The declaration was signed by Archbishop Julian Herranz, council president, and Bishop Bruno Bertagna, secretary.

Reaffirming the prohibition of Communion for divorced and civilly remarried Catholics, the declaration chastised "some authors" who have tried to show that the prohibition is not called for by canon law.

According to the canon in question, those "who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion."

Because divorce is not recognized by the church, civil remarriage is not recognized either, and the couple is considered to be living in adultery.

Some authors, the declaration said, have argued that simply being divorced and civilly remarried is not enough to invoke the law.

For example, the declaration said, some authors have said, "given that the text speaks of those who 'obstinately' persist in that sin, it would be necessary to verify an attitude of defiance on the part of an individual who had received a legitimate warning from the pastor." The Vatican declaration said those writers were making "improper use" of the canon's wording, "relativizing the precepts or emptying them of their substance."

"The phrase 'and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin' is clear and must be understood in a manner that does not distort its sense so as to render the norm inapplicable," Archbishop Herranz wrote.

His declaration said the canon should be

invoked when an objective judgment would lead to the conclusion that the individuals are engaged in serious sin and that the situation is "obstinately persistent" because the individuals do not act to end it.

Divorced and remarried Catholics who have gone to confession after making a commitment to "living in full continence, that is, abstaining from the acts proper to spouses," may receive Communion in most cases, the declaration said.

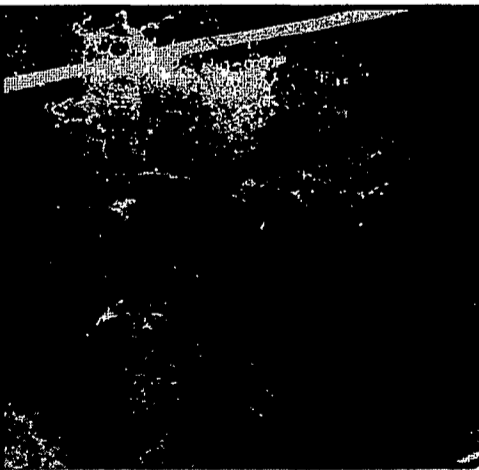
However, it said, because their civil status as a married couple is publicly obvious but the fact that they are not having sexual relations is not, "they will be able to receive eucharistic Communion only 'remoto scandalo,'" that is, if scandal can be avoided.

The declaration said creating scandal is

not necessarily the same thing as doing something which shocks people. When divorced and civilly remarried people receive Communion "that scandal exists even if such behavior, unfortunately, no longer arouses surprise," the declaration said.

"In fact it is precisely with respect to the deformation of the conscience that it becomes more necessary for pastors to act with as much patience as firmness" to protect the sanctity of the sacraments, defend Christian morality and educate the faithful, it said.

The declaration said that priests should try to explain in private to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics why they cannot receive the Eucharist, avoiding "public denial of Holy Communion."



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