



The Monsters in Prison

After a particularly raw and intense Prayer and Share session, "CW," one of the Men in White, asked me, "*How did you get into prison ministry?*" I told the men in my small circle that I vowed never to get involved in prison ministry. I did not believe that they deserved my time, and others were worthier. At some point, I realized that if I was going to grow in my faith, I had to go outside my comfort zone. If I was going to be obedient, I had to say, "Yes," to something that I did not want to do. For me, that was going into prisons.

We are called to serve the sick and poor. We all personally know sick people. One cannot drive through a city without seeing the poor. We don't see people in prison because there are walls between us. We forget them because it is so easy to do so.

I told the group what people on the outside often tell me- that those in prison are, "monsters," who, "cannot be rehabilitated," and are not fit to join society. Last night, "Donnie," proudly told me his grandson won his age group for the National Spelling Bee. "Lon," sadly told me he just lost his last surviving family member- his uncle. "CW," got to have a meal with his daughter. At 62 years of age he had a Subway sandwich for the first time. They are not monsters, they are children of God.

I told them I share their stories with you, and that through these reflections you get introduced to them. You get a glimpse of their human dignity, a dignity revealed in small things like the joy of children and grandchildren, mourning the loss of loved ones, and the delight of new experiences. I told them their stories are shared so that they will not be forgotten.

When I finished, the group was quiet. "John," who was across from me, got up, walked over to me, and shook my hand without saying a word. One by one, everyone in the group did the same. The silence seemed to amplify the intensity. They know that people on the outside call them monsters- that was not news to them. They were humbled by the idea that you might be interested in their stories.

Be honest. Chances are you do not want to meet someone in prison. You do not want to encounter them. You may even think of them as monsters. If you prayed with them, laughed with them, or cried with them, you might feel otherwise.