



*Prisoners are Pilgrims, too.*

I knew the Men in White would enjoy hearing about my pilgrimage to Lourdes. Prisoners are pilgrims, too.

Stories of travel break the tedium of prison life- the more exotic, the better. Lourdes is where thousands of people from around the world bring the sick and infirm to a remote village in the Pyrenees, where the mother of Christ appeared to a young peasant girl. Even those who have lived hard lives of violence can relate to a visit from a Blessed Mother. The Blessed Mother didn't appear to important people- she appeared to one of them.

A pilgrimage is more than the physical travel from one place to another- it is also a spiritual transformation to a new place. Men in prison earnestly want to be transformed. They know they are in need of healing. One of the most profound things I have learned from going in prison is how much the men want to grow spiritually.

They listened intently when I told them about the sick, called, *malades*, and their companions. They understood the shared suffering from seeing a loved one suffer. Many have faced their struggles alone and they long for the comfort one gets from accompaniment.

However, the Lourdes tradition of healing and miracles is what really captured their attention. The Men in White formed a bond with the *malades* forged on the anvil of a struggle against long odds. I don't know that there is any quality more essential to survival in prison than hope. Hope is more than the sudden and unexpected reversal of fortune. It embraces a trusting acceptance of God's will. Still, if a sudden and unexpected reversal should occur...

It strikes me that prisoners live in community, not by choice, but by order of the state. As brothers in Christ, their community reaches beyond the walls that separate them from us. We are on the journey together. Prisoners are pilgrims, too.