



*"San Quentin, I hate every inch of you." Johnny Cash*

On February 24, 1969, Johnny Cash performed at San Quentin for the fourth time. He wrote a song for the occasion entitled, "*San Quentin*." Before performing, he tells the men that he tried to capture what he thought were some of their feelings about San Quentin. The response to the song was subdued until he sang the line quoted above. The men broke out in wild cheers. The performance was recorded and "Johnny Cash Live at San Quentin," went on to become the second largest selling live album of all time- topped only by, "Johnny Cash Live at Folsom Prison."

Johnny Cash, the Man in Black, was giving voice to them. The cheers were not so much about the lyrics, but that he devoted attention to their circumstances and their situation. Those inside the walls are forgotten people. When they are seen and heard, it is something to cheer about.

Last weekend, a group of us from across the country met at San Quentin to discuss prison ministry. We were able to attend Mass inside the unit Sunday morning and visit with inmates beforehand.

I spoke with Brandon, a 21-year-old, who is four years into a 15-year sentence. He has a wife and a two-year-old son. We talked about his training and his plans for the future, but mostly we talked about his wife and son. I asked their names and promised to pray for them, which made him very happy.

Then, I asked Brandon for a favor. I told him about a friend, Kate, who is 25 years old and has advanced breast cancer. She has not responded well to treatment and had surgery. She has an 18-month old son, Otto. I told Brandon that Kate was discouraged and frightened about her future and the future of Otto. I told him she and Otto needed his prayers.

My request caught Brandon totally off guard and I could tell no one had ever asked him for prayers before. It was not just a sign of respect, it was an act of communion, and confirmation he is not forgotten.

I had to rush after Mass in order to catch a plane. Brandon and I saw each other at a distance. I raised my arm high and waved at him. He waved back and shouted, "Kate and Otto."