

# Corporal Work of Mercy To Visit the Imprisoned

Excerpts from: Kamm, Henry. "Pope Meets in Jail with His Attacker."  
*New York Times*, December 28, 1983.



Pope St. John Paul II

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*The State's effort to contain the spread of behaviors injurious to human rights and the fundamental rules of civil coexistence corresponds to the requirement of watching over the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime. The primary scope of the penalty is to redress the disorder caused by the offense. When his punishment is voluntarily accepted by the offender, it takes on the value of expiation. Moreover, punishment, in addition to preserving public order and the safety of persons, has a medicinal scope: as far as possible it should contribute to the correction of the offender. (CCC 2266).*

## *Sacred Scripture*

*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body (Hebrews 13:3).*

**ROME, Dec. 27**— Pope John Paul II and the gunman who gravely wounded him in 1981 sat in a prison cell for 20 minutes today, alone, in quiet conversation.

"What we said to each other is a secret between him and me," the Pope told reporters after the meeting. "I spoke to him as I would speak to a brother whom I have forgiven and who enjoys my confidence."

A Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Pierfranco Pastore, said the assailant, Mehmet Ali Agca, knelt and kissed John Paul's ring as the Pope rose to leave. Mr. Agca is a 25-year-old Turkish Moslem. Prison guards and papal officials observed the meeting from a corridor outside the open cell, but the two men spoke with such low intensity that they could not be heard.

The Pope publicly forgave his assailant, who is serving a life sentence, from his sickbed four days after the shooting in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981. Mr. Agca has publicly expressed his repentance. But the two men had not been so close to each other since that day when the gunman struck the Pope with two bullets fired from a pistol at close range as John Paul was driven through a crowd of 10,000 people attending his weekly general audience. Speaking to inmates in the women's section of Rebibbia Prison after his meeting with Mr. Agca, the Pope said:

"I have been able to meet the person whose name is known by all who in the year 1981, on May 13, made an attempt on my life. But providence guided matters in its way - exceptional, I would say, marvelous - so that today, after more than two years, I could meet my assailant and repeat my pardon, which I had offered immediately and also offered publicly as soon as it became possible in the hospital."

*"Pray for my brother [Agca]...whom I have sincerely forgiven."*

# To Visit the Imprisoned Pope St. John Paul II

## Fast Facts:

Born	• May 18, 1920
Feast Day	• October 22
Canonized	• April 27, 2014 by Pope Francis
Quote	• "The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man."

## His Life:

- Pope St. John Paul II was born as Karol Jozef Wojtyla in Wadowice, Poland.
- He was the youngest of three children, though his eldest sister Olga had died before his birth, and his older brother Edmund would die in 1932.
- His mother, Emilia, died in childbirth in 1929 when Wojtyla was only eight years old.
- As a boy, Wojtyla was athletic and very active in his community.
- In 1938, Wojtyla moved to Krakow with his father, where he enrolled in Jagiellonian University.
- During his time at University, he worked as a librarian, performed with theatrical groups, and even worked as a playwright.
- When the Nazi occupation forced the university to shut down from 1940 to 1944, Wojtyla worked as a messenger and as a laborer in a limestone quarry.
- Wojtyla's father, Karol, died in 1941 of a heart-attack, leaving Wojtyla the last surviving member of his family.
- Wojtyla began very seriously discerning the priesthood at this point, and in October of 1942 he knocked on his Bishop's door and asked to enter the priesthood.
- He then began classes in a clandestine underground seminary run by Archbishop Adam Stefan Cardinal Sapieha.
- After finishing his tumultuous studies in the Nazi-occupied Poland, Wojtyla was ordained to the



Pope St. John Paul II  
visits Mehmet Ali Agca, his would-be assassin, in jail.

priesthood on All Saint's Day in 1946.

- His first assignment was in the village of Niegowic in 1948. He served the Archdiocese of Krakow faithfully, often taking groups of students hiking, skiing, bicycling, camping, and kayaking – always accompanied with prayer, Masses, and theological discussions.
- On July 4, 1958, he became Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow.
- In 1962, he participated in the Second Vatican Council.
- In January 1964, he became the Archbishop of Krakow.
- After the sudden death of John Paul I in 1978, Wojtyla was elected into the pontificate and took the name John Paul II.
- During his papacy he wrote 14 encyclicals, wrote his "Theology of the Body," travelled to 129 countries, ordered the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and established World Youth Day.
- After 26 years in the pontificate, Pope St. John Paul II died on April 2, 2005.

## How is Pope St. John Paul II a model for living out the Corporal Work of Mercy – Visit the Imprisoned?

Pope St. John Paul II was a man of great depth, compassion, and tenderness. He went so far as to visit his would-be assassin in prison. They spoke at length and John Paul II offered him his forgiveness. Later, Mehmet Agca would visit the tomb of John Paul II to pay him homage.

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## *Practices to Foster growth in how to Visit the Imprisoned*

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- Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Visiting the Imprisoned*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.
  - Matthew 25:34-40
  - Mark 2:17
  - Acts 12:6-19
  - Romans 12:10-16
  - James 2:1-5
  - Galatians 6:1-2
- Catechetical Texts that speak to *Visiting the Imprisoned*:
  - Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called 'to practice mercy' towards others: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practice mercy. All the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount indicate the way of conversion and of reform of life, but the one referring to those who are merciful is particularly eloquent in this regard. Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor ([\*Dives in Misericordia\*](#): Pope St. John Paul II, 1980).
  - Jesus, who himself was a prisoner, calls us to visit the imprisoned and to take care of the sick (including victims of crime), the homeless, and the hungry (Mt 25). His mission began with proclaiming good news to the poor and release to captives (Lk 4). In our day, we are called to find Christ in young children at risk, troubled youth, prisoners in our jails and on death row, and crime victims experiencing pain and loss ([\*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice\*](#): USCCB, 2000).
  - It is painful when we see prison systems which are not concerned to care for wounds, to soothe pain, to offer new possibilities. It is painful when we see people who think that only others need to be cleansed, purified, and do not recognize that their weariness, pain and wounds are also the weariness, pain and wounds of society. The Lord tells us this clearly with a sign: he washes our feet so we can come back to the table. The table from which he wishes no one to be excluded. The table which is spread for all and to which all of us are invited ([\*Address of Pope Francis to Detainees at Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility\*](#): September 2015).
- Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Visit the Imprisoned*.
  - Examples: (St. Dismas, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp)
- Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Visit the Imprisoned*.