

## **AVOID PUNISHMENT THAT DEBASES HUMAN DIGNITY OF PRISONERS**

VATICAN CITY, SEP 6, 2007 (VIS) - In Castelgandolfo at midday today, the Pope received participants in the Twelfth World Congress of the International Commission of Catholic Prison Pastoral Care, which is currently being held in Rome on the theme: "Discovering the Face of Christ in Every Prisoner."

Addressing the group in English, the Holy Father acknowledged that the work of prison chaplains "requires much patience and perseverance. Not infrequently there are disappointments and frustrations," but "this ministry within the local Christian community will encourage others to join you in performing corporal works of mercy, thus enriching the ecclesial life of the diocese. Likewise, it will help to draw those whom you serve into the heart of the universal Church, especially through their regular participation in the celebration of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist.

"Chaplains and their collaborators are called to be heralds of God's infinite compassion and forgiveness. In cooperation with civil authorities, they are entrusted with the weighty task of helping the incarcerated rediscover a sense of purpose so that, with God's grace, they can reform their lives, be reconciled with their families and friends, and, insofar as possible, assume the responsibilities and duties which will enable them to conduct upright and honest lives within society."

Judicial and penal institutions, the Pope went on, "must contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders, facilitating their transition from despair to hope and from unreliability to dependability. When conditions within jails and prisons are not conducive to the process of regaining a sense of a worth and accepting its related duties, these institutions fail to achieve one of their essential ends.

"Public authorities must be ever vigilant in this task, eschewing any means of punishment or correction that either undermine or debase the human dignity of prisoners. In this regard," he concluded, "I reiterate that the prohibition against torture 'cannot be contravened under any circumstances'."

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