

## The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

"Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith?" James 2:5.

In August of 2010, the administration of the Mississippi Department of Corrections began allowing the prisoners at Parchman's Unit 26 to organize, conduct and lead their own weekly one-hour worship service on Sunday afternoons. Approval for this inmate-led church service came about through the MDOC Chaplain's Department through the leadership of two Inmate Religious Assistants who are both graduates of the Parchman Campus of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Faith Based Initiative.

The September 19, service had a total of 25 prisoners in attendance. The IRAs published a bulletin for the service which contains an order-of-worship. The service began with a welcome, followed by an opening prayer by one of the NOBTS IRAs. This was followed by a congregational song, "This Little Light of Mine," which was led by a current FBI student. There was a rendition by another prisoners of the song, "I Want to Be in the Meeting," which was sung as a solo during the verses, with the congregation joining in during the chorus. Yet another FBI IRA then sang "I Can't Even Walk Without You Holding My Hand."

The singing was followed by the testimony of another former FBI student. He spoke of trust in God, divine assurance and surrender in the face of hospitalization and impending surgery brought about by a life of willfulness and drug use.

Next in the order of worship was a didactic homily by the prisoner who was selected to preach that week. The text was from the first six verses of the fourteenth chapter of the Holy Gospel according to St. John. The sermon was Trinitarian in nature, simple in construction, winsome in appeal, evangelistic in design, emphasizing Jesus Christ, and was presented in a warm atmosphere with the focus on the message and not the messenger.

The homilist spoke of salvation in Christ alone, with Jesus as the architect and builder of the household of God. Themes included seeing departed loved-ones again in heaven, comfort in the hour of need, future rewards and the importance of continuing with God to the end.

The writer knows most of these men personally. We have spent many decades in various prison camps in the MDOC. We are the offscouring of all things, the refuse of the world; some of the men originally were sentenced to death. We all have suffered many changes and chances over the years due to poverty, abandonment, personal failure due to sin, and the failure of many of our cherished institutions.

We have come to discover, through our faith, that God alone is faithful, that we can count only on Jesus to be a constant in life and rest in His eternal changelessness, and that we can safely trust, rely and depend on God alone.

The writer says this in order to say that it was a privilege to witness events such as this inmate-led church service; events which many sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and theologians would like to witness.

The service concluded with an altar call. All of the men in attendance have trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior, but 23 of the 25 approached the podium in order to present prayer-requests.

The service then ended with a closing prayer, and the men went forth with renewed strength and courage in order to love and serve God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Amen!

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Ambassador for Christ  
September 20, 2010

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