

## Getting to know our Faith and our Church

This month I'm responding to the question: *"Why do we pray for people in prisons?"*



I begin by reflecting on the light in one of the South Aisle windows depicting St John the Baptist in prison: Just as John the Baptist in his generation was unjustly held in prison, so there are many in our world today who are unjustly held in prisons and detention centres, abroad and in our own country.

Justice and Mercy are two key themes in shaping prayer for those in prison. Some are justly there, some are not. Some should be elsewhere in terms of their personal history and needs in terms of physical and mental health.

John the Baptist preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins – when we pray for those in prison who are justly there we can pray in hope of their discovering a better way of life – of a real repentance and reformation in their lives.

Alongside those unjustly detained there are families who suffer as well for whom we can pray, and alongside those who are justly detained there are families some of whom suffer significantly because of what their family member has done.

And there are the victims of crime for whom we should also not cease to pray – for some the consequences are life long and traumatic.

Bishop Thomas Ken who is buried at St John's went to visit the prisoners held after the Monmouth Rebellion and pleaded for a balance of justice and mercy in the way they were dealt with – in the face of the notorious Judge Jefferies.

Jesus speaks of the last judgement in Matthew 25 – the passage that inspired the familiar song by Sydney Carter 'When I needed a neighbour were you there?' written for use by Christian Aid – and in verses 39-40 we read "When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

The work of Amnesty International, Prison Chaplains and staff, the Mother's Union, the Howard League, NACRO and many related groups are all part of what we can hold in our prayers as we pray for those in prison. Please pray also for our own parishioners who work in prisons, both employed and in voluntary capacity, and for our parishioners who have family members in prison or have themselves been there...