

**Mass for Criminal Justice Ministry Day of Reflection
January 26, 2019**

It is fitting to celebrate the Feast of Sts. Timothy and Titus during this day of reflection. They were companions of St. Paul, who was incarcerated several times and knows life in prison all too well. Timothy himself was incarcerated during his ministry. These champions of the faith are powerful intercessors for those you serve, and they speak to us even now as the apostles they truly are.

And what better message for this occasion could there be than the one St. Paul shares in his letter to St. Timothy? “I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God!” This is the challenge and the motivation for you all as you start another year of ministering to our brothers and sisters who are incarcerated, moving through or working in the criminal justice system. Remember the gift of God you have received. Remember that his Spirit has been placed in you and that this Spirit has guided you to this ministry.

Remember the nature of that Spirit. Again we hear from St. Paul: “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God.” You do not go into our jails, prisons, or justice centers as social workers. That is an important job, but it is not your ministry. “Do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,” nor of those incarcerated that you serve. You are sent as disciples alive in the Spirit. Stir into flame the gifts of that Spirit. Stir into flame the zeal for souls and the

love you have for those forgotten and often hated by our society. These are sinners in need of mercy, hope, and love.

My sisters and brothers, I ask you to recommit yourselves to being missionary disciples to those who are imprisoned. Bear with them their hardships and their pains. Help them in their moments of clarity and sorrow for their sins and their crimes. Serve there not just as caring fellow human beings – this is beautiful in itself. But be there as a part of the Body of Christ inviting them back into communion with the people of God, the Church.

You are missionaries of hope and mercy. It is my honor to send you as laborers into the harvest of the Lord. You are the ones who will proclaim peace to those who are separated from their household. May the peace you bring come to rest on those you will visit. They deserve the peace of Christ like each of us do. Pope Francis reminds us of the nature of our Lord, when he spoke to inmates in a prison in Philadelphia during his visit in 2015. He said: “The Lord goes in search of us; to all of us he stretches out a helping hand.”

My friends, go in search of those to whom the Lord is reaching out. Be his helping hand. Ask for the intercession of St. Timothy, St. Titus, and St. Paul for those you serve. Entrust them also to the loving arm of Our Lady of Guadalupe, their beloved mother. Do not grow cold in your zeal. Stir into flame the gifts you have received from God, and give thanks to the master of the harvest who has sent you to his people in need.