

Pastoral Reflection

Fifth Sunday of Lent

This past week I had a very unique and heart-wrenching experience. I testified in a Capital Case Trial. I spoke during the penalty phase to offer mitigating circumstances to avoid the death penalty of a person I have been visiting in prison the last 7 years. I also knew him when he was a child in Our Lady of Guadalupe School. It just so happens that this weekend we have the familiar Gospel story of Lazarus coming out of the tomb. We also have the passage from Ezekiel about "God putting the spirit in you so that you may live". These scriptures offer a fitting background for my courtroom experience. The person on trial was convicted of three counts of murder (and one of the victims was seven years old!). In preparation for the trial I viewed over 600 autopsy photos. They were the most gruesome and most horrific pictures I have ever seen. The victims were stabbed to death and one other person was injured, his estranged wife. In spite of the nature of these crimes I want the perpetrator to "come out alive". I want God "to put in him a new spirit". Families of the victims and the prosecuting attorney want him executed.

He has been reading the Bible and receiving spiritual books and prayers since he entered prison. He knows that no matter what he will never be free again. While in prison his Father and Mother died. I preached at his Mother's funeral in January. Immediately following the funeral I visited the son in prison. Obviously he was not allowed to be present. He did send a message to be read. He is being punished quite severely in my estimation. He knows what he did is horrendous and criminal but I don't believe we need to pile up deaths. I do not believe in the death penalty nor does the Catholic Church (although many Catholics do!).

This person will be living "Lent" as long as he lives, but I pray that his tomb is not in an execution chamber. Please pray with me.

—Fr. Jack (he/him)