

The first reading tonight is one of the most extraordinary scenes in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul and Silas have been beaten.

Publicly humiliated.

Dragged into prison.

Their feet locked in stocks.

And why?

For preaching Christ.

Now imagine the scene properly.

The prison is dark.

The wounds still fresh.

The humiliation real.

And then comes one of the most astonishing lines in Scripture:

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.”

Singing.

Not complaining.

Not despairing.

Not asking why God abandoned them.

Singing.

That is not human optimism.

That is supernatural life.

Because the resurrection has changed everything.

They know suffering is no longer empty.

Christ has entered suffering and transformed it from within.

And so even in prison, the praise of God rises.

Then suddenly the earth shakes.

The prison doors fly open.

Chains fall away.

It is like Easter breaking into the prison itself.

Because that is what Christ does.

He enters places that seem sealed shut.

Fear.

Sin.

Despair.

Death itself.

And He breaks chains open from within.

But the deepest moment is not the earthquake.

It is the jailer.

He wakes and sees the doors open.

Immediately he prepares to kill himself.

Why?

Because he believes everything is lost.

That is the world without hope.

One disaster—and life collapses.

One humiliation—and despair takes over.

And then Paul cries out into the darkness:

“Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

That line reveals the heart of the Gospel.

The Church does not stand watching the world destroy itself.

She cries out to save it.

And then comes the question every soul must eventually ask:

“What must I do to be saved?”

Not: How do I become successful?

Not: How do I become comfortable?

Saved.

Because deep down the human heart knows the real problem is not merely suffering.

It is separation from God.

And Paul answers with breathtaking simplicity:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”

Not merely believe that He existed.

Believe in Him.

Entrust yourself to Him.

Place your life beneath His lordship.

And then immediately the jailer and his household are baptised.

Because faith moves toward sacrament.

Toward incorporation into Christ.

Toward new life.

Now place beside this the Gospel.

Jesus says something difficult:

“It is better for you that I go.”

The apostles cannot understand this.

How could losing Christ possibly be good?

But Christ explains:

Because the Holy Spirit will come.

And the Spirit will reveal the truth.

Especially the truth about sin.

That is the striking part of the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit exposes the lie the world lives by.

A world pretending it can live without God.

A world pretending sin does not matter.

A world pretending salvation is unnecessary.

And suddenly the first reading becomes clearer.

The jailer reaches the edge of despair because the illusion breaks.

His worldly security collapses.

And only then does he finally ask the right question:

“What must I do to be saved?”

Sometimes grace begins there.

When false foundations collapse.

When the soul realises earthly things cannot save.

And this remains true now.

Many people only begin seeking God seriously when something breaks open.

Illness.

Loss.

Failure.

Fear.

The prison doors of illusion fall apart.

And the soul begins searching for something deeper.

But notice this carefully:

The Church does not offer vague comfort.

Paul does not simply calm the jailer emotionally.

He proclaims Christ.

Because only Christ can save.

Not distraction.

Not pleasure.

Not success.

Christ.

And perhaps this is the deepest contrast in the readings tonight.

Paul and Silas sit in prison singing.

The jailer stands outside freedom ready to die.

Outwardly, who looks free?

The jailer.

But inwardly he is imprisoned by fear.

Paul and Silas appear chained—

yet inwardly they are free.

Because Christ has already broken their deepest chains.

And that is the real question tonight.

What actually holds the heart captive?

Fear?

Sin?

Pride?

Despair?

Worldliness?

The risen Christ enters all those prisons.

And the Church still cries out into the darkness:

Do not destroy yourself.

There is salvation.

There is mercy.

There is freedom.

And that freedom becomes concrete in the sacramental life of the Church.

The jailer is baptised immediately.

Because grace is not an idea.

It is given.

Souls are truly reborn.

Chains truly fall.

Lives truly change.

So tonight the Church speaks with seriousness but also with immense hope.

No prison is too deep for Christ.

No soul too far gone.

No darkness beyond His reach.

Because the risen Lord still enters locked places.

And where He enters—

chains begin to fall.