

I will never forget the first time I saw the inside of a county jail.

Nothing anyone had told me about it could prepare me for the feeling of being inside the building. From the parking lot, you saw a building with a lot of narrow windows – windows you could peek out of, but not really look out.

I was assigned with a group of other men to the maximum security wing. There were usually two or three of us. We had been selected because we were big enough guys who could handle ourselves. But we didn't come as security guards. We had come to sing songs, recite prayers, and give communion to the men who were on the inside who were Catholic. Me, and Mike, and Mike.

Mike and Mike tried to give me some idea of how it was going to be. They said that when you got inside, after you were searched – that you entered a little hallway. And automatically, behind you, the barred door on the side you came in would close. Then, you had to wait until you were recognized through a camera, and the barred door on the side you would exit from would slowly open.

But for those few seconds, or even minutes – until somebody in a control room noticed you – you were trapped in a little cage.

Mike's comment to me was that how we felt for those few seconds, or minutes – was what the men in the jail experienced every single day.

We walked through a maze of hallways, and in and out of several of those little cage rooms at the end of the hallways, until we got to the maximum security wing. There, we'd set up a dozen chairs, a small table, and a crucifix. I'd tune the guitar, and then the men would come in groups of two or three. The guards would wait until they sat down, and then they'd bring in the next few men. We'd run down the list of names, and then we'd start.

And when we finished, we'd walk out, again through the hallways and the little caged sections.

Once we were back outside, for some reason, the grass seemed greener ... the air cleaner. And we'd look back at that building with its tiny slit windows and wonder about the men we'd served, who lived there.

Saint John tells us in the second reading, "In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins."

And Jesus says a similar thing in the Gospel, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you ..."

But the world tells us differently. The world tells us that being chosen isn't freedom – rather, the world tells us that "to fear [God] and [act] uprightly" isn't freedom. But the

freedom the world offers us, this false freedom of the world is like that little caged hallway. You walk in, the door shuts, and then ... only then ... do you realize that you don't like being there. Even for a few seconds.

Or even, God forbid, you may end up deeper inside. And instead of a few seconds ... or minutes ... inside of a cage, you're looking at hours, days, weeks, or more.

As adults, we like to think that we are in charge ... that we are free ... free to choose ... that we get to determine who it is, and what it is that we love ... or like ... or hate.

Yet we did not choose God, rather God chose us. And once we understand that – deep in our bones – then we will truly understand our role as God's beloved sons and daughters, called by God ... and chosen by God to “love one another, because love is of God; [and] everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.”

True freedom, real freedom comes through knowing Jesus Christ ... and by living in the Father's love.

God's love calls us to freedom in Jesus Christ. The world tries to lure us into little cages by enticing us to bad choices ... our choices.

In the waters of Baptism, we are chosen by God. And while God has made the choice – this isn't a passive role. As God's chosen sons and daughters, we are called to receive His Love, and take His love out to the world. But first we have to bring God's love into our hearts ... into our minds ... into our lives, and the lives of those we touch.

And this is the commandment that Jesus calls us to obey – LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. Any other commandment, any other choice is a lie and leads us away from true freedom into the cages of sin.

Jesus calls us to REMAIN IN HIS LOVE ... SO THAT OUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE.

And so, my brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ – this is our homework. Remain in God's love ... love one another as God has loved us in Christ ... and receive the joy of Christ. These are our marching orders ... this is how we are made free as adopted sons and daughters, filled with the Holy Spirit, poured out upon us through Jesus Christ, and abiding in the Love of God the Father.