

Myra Hindley was one of the most notorious names in Britain in the 1960s, and for many years after that was a name that people thought about with disgust. It was over a two year period, from 1963 to 1965, that she and the man whom she was seeing took the lives of five children. When the two were apprehended, the press labeled her the most evil woman in Britain.

Obviously the public outcry over these crimes was intense, and were it not for the work of an English Lord, the name probably would have been forgotten, as the sentence of life had been handed down. However, her name would come up again and again over the years that followed, because a man by the name of Frank Pakenham, or Lord Longford, refused to see just a murderess, but a human being.

Longford, by all accounts, should have led the good life and not have much to worry about in the 1970s. He was born into a prosperous family, and while he had a difficult childhood in the shadow of an older brother and not receiving much affection from his mother, he went on to go to Oxford and graduate with honors. He went on to a career in politics, taking a seat in the House of Lords and working in government as a member of the Labor Party, including being a part of the cabinet from 1964 to 1968. In 1971 he was knighted. He also enjoyed a beautiful marriage to Elizabeth, who was apparently one of the most sought-after undergraduates at his college.

By the time the 1970s rolled around, he should have been entering retirement, but he refused to slow down. And while he could have probably gotten good publicity for doing social work and found safe projects that would have no controversy, that, apparently, just wasn't his way. Instead, he became focused on something that no one really cared about: reforming the prison system and ministering to the convicted.

He first began to visit prisons in the 1930s, and well into late life he would go two to three times a week to visit people who had been abandoned. Tabloids called him an eccentric who got a kick out of contact with infamous killers, but more than likely it was his Catholic faith (to which he converted) that served as a reason for him doing this work. In the late 1980s, for instance, he was contacted by the solicitor for a young man who was convicted of a drug offense, who was dying in jail from Aids; his family wouldn't even visit him. Longford was the only person to do this on multiple occasions, but he of course never got any headlines for that.

What did get him headlines, however, was his involvement with the notorious Hindley, which perplexed many people then and still does to this day, especially when one considers that when Hindley didn't think he could secure her release, she really didn't want much to do with him. He began visiting her, and part of what he worked for in prison reform was to turn the public's attention away from just punishment, but to looking at the underlying causes of what led someone to commit a crime. In Hindley's case, she suffered from a horrific childhood of abuse, where she learned violence and learned that violence was in some cases the only response. In one case, when a neighborhood 8-year old boy hurt her, her own father told her to go out and do the same to him. He got to know her story, and became gradually convinced that she had been rehabilitated and was no longer a threat to society. For this, he was labeled "Lord Wrongford" by the media, but he wouldn't be bullied by the media. In fact, he fought

back. He also met with the victims families, and felt the media was just fueling a hunger for revenge.

Hindley never was released. In fact, she was declared insane in 1985, and lived the rest of her years in a mental hospital, and while both her and Longford did meet, eventually she did not want to meet with him any longer. No one can say for certain whether or not she had been rehabilitated or was in fact, as some suggested, using Longford to secure her release; she died in 2002. And by in large, while there were some changes in the prison system, he was not successful in making the changes he had hoped for.

At a deeper level though, when I read his story, I have to wonder what is it that drove him on? The tabloids and British Press certainly were not his friends, and making friends with a convict certainly caused him troubles. On top of this, it's at a point in his life where he could be enjoying retirement and no longer has to be involved in politics. But yet despite fierce opposition and even public ridicule, Longford remained firm in his convictions, because he believed in doing the right thing, even if it might not be the most popular message. Perhaps he was following the guidance of a monarch other than his queen, Elizabeth.

Today we celebrate Christ the King. It ends the liturgical year, as a new one begins next week, but what do we mean when we speak of Christ's kingship? I think what it comes down to is the kind of kingship that Christ shows us – one not of glory for oneself, but one that seeks glory for others through forgiveness, sacrifice and service. The key is to live each day trying to grow in living that kind of life, but that takes work, because the image of royalty tends to focus more on anything but those three things. Through Christ, we are a priest, prophet and king which we affirm at our Confirmation.

In Ezekiel from our first reading, we get a sense for the kind of King Jesus is. Ezekiel lives around 600 BC, and sees the calamities befall Israel; the people are exiled, the Temple destroyed; catastrophe is all around him. In his book he reflects on what has happened, how Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations. But what has happened have been bad shepherds, people who have not led people to God, but who instead have become greedy, vain and caring not for others. We get the prophecy of who Jesus will be and what God will do; he will be a good shepherd who tends the flock, who "finds himself among his scattered sheep" and rescues them from where they are scattered, and give them rest. Jesus will say the same thing when He comes, calling Himself the Good Shepherd, and inviting us to come and follow Him for He knows His sheep. It's a beautiful message of hope. Jesus though will go out and try to find the most lost of sheep, seeking out the 1 lost sheep while leaving the 99 because of His incredible love, echoing what we hear in Ezekiel: "The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal..."

What Longford realized is we follow in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd. Jesus gives us a job to do: to go and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus raises up shepherds after his own heart who continue the work. It's what happened at Pentecost when the Spirit descends upon the apostles, and it's what happens to us on our baptism and confirmation days, where when we come of age we say "yes" to our Lord that we will follow.

What that looks like in action is described in our Gospel. Jesus speaks about being hungry, thirsty, naked, ill and in prison; those listening to Him ask when they saw Him like that, and He has that powerful line that what we do for the least of these brothers of mine, we do for Him. And there is also that powerful line too, that when we ignore the needs of others and do not help one another, we also do not help our Lord.

How often Jesus is in our midst but in disguise. We can lose sight of the fact that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. And faith, on the one hand, entails growing on our own spiritual journey with the Lord, but it also entails being people of action; being people of hope; like Longford, changing the world for the better.

So, then, how can we know how to do this? I'd return to what I noted a few weeks ago, namely the Corporal and Spiritual works of Mercy. As I said then, they are great to print out and keep a copy of and look at often, because they make for a great examination of conscience. God is going to have people cross paths with us all the time, so how are we going to change them?

Looking at a few of them, feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty. Certainly there are physical needs we can meet by assisting in packing meals or at homeless shelters. But maybe over the holidays you'll run into people who are hungry for a few moments of your time; or who could use a deeper conversation, or just your presence with them. Maybe there are people who are thirsty for love, kindness and friendship because they have no living relatives left, or deal with difficult people, even bullies at work or school. Like Longford, we can visit people in prison; certainly through prison ministry, but maybe we know someone who is in a prison of self-hate, of anxiety or mental battles, or addiction. How can we help set them free. Maybe there are people who need to be clothed; physically when we donate clothes, but also spiritually, people who need shelter from attacks and gossip. These are concrete things we can do. They all entail sacrifice; but as Mother Teresa would often say "Love until it hurts." Longford sacrificed pride and good press because he wanted to show people that forgiveness was possible and there could be goodness in even people who society might say have no redeeming quality, and for it he got no thanks save for a kind obituary in the Times of London. But over our lives, we can set such an example by helping people understand what matters most when we sacrifice for them, whether it's your kids or people in the extended family or people you just cross paths with. We need to open our eyes to see the need that is all around us, Jesus in disguise.

And on top of them, there are the spiritual things we can do - the spiritual works of mercy challenge us to give instruction to the world, to give hope, to forgive and to call out sin. This was what Longford was doing too; he took his faith so seriously, he wasn't just going to pose for a camera and dish out food at a shelter, which itself is a noble thing to do, but he was going to do the things that would challenge people. We do that too when we aren't afraid to challenge others to think differently, to make better choices, and to live better lives, calling out sin but doing so with love, trying to get people to look at themselves and find true happiness. The spiritual works of mercy also challenge us too to forgive - and how hard that can be. Perhaps that is why there was such anger by some at Longford, because we as humans forget we are all at times a sheep and a goat, and do such cruel things to one another. Sitting with those spiritual works of mercy will challenge us to look at how we treat others and help them spiritually, but also

challenge us with respect to how we see Christ in even the most unlovable of people, realizing that deep down there is potential there for true change when it is met with love. The Amish are incredible at living this out. Marie Roberts is the wife of Charles Carl Roberts, the man who took the lives of five children when he went into an Amish school in Pennsylvania before taking his own life. In the midst of this tragedy and their pain, the Amish community reached out to Marie, and publicly forgave her husband. In a statement, she thanked the Amish community for what they did. In her words, **“Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community, and is changing our world.”** Such is the incredible power of mercy.

Through His kingship, and how He lived, Christ changed the world by laying down His life for us, but also through showing us how to live – in a way where the focus is on the other person and helping one another to become better through lives of love and service even when both are difficult. Christ does not physically walk this earth anymore, and while He is there in the Eucharist and present in the world, many people choose not to see Him. William Longford, having everything in life, decided he needed to bring God’s love to a prison cell to a person whom everyone in the world seemed to despise, and for it he got no praise during his lifetime, rumors spread about him in the tabloids, and even little thanks from the person who he was trying to help. But through his forgiveness and reaching out, he also did something that’s so important for anyone who claims to be a Christian to do: he showed that he served first not the Queen of England, but the King of Heaven, and did exactly what Christ did for the Good Thief through the testament of His life. Hopefully our lives are led trying to do the same thing for one another, mindful that the most incredible thing we can do for someone isn’t to make the perfect turkey or find the perfect gift, but help them to find the way to heaven. Let us do that through sharing in the Kingship of Christ, truly going forth as people of hope and making a difference in our world.