

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/12/25/santa-was-in-prison-and-jesus-got-the-death-penalty/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | December 25, 2010

As Christmas is celebrated in Incarceration Nation, it's worth remembering certain things about the two figures who dominate this holiday.

As more than [3,000 Americans sit on death row](#), we revere the birth of a godly man who was arrested, tried, sentenced, and put to death by the state. The Passion is the story of an execution, and the Stations of the Cross trace the path of a Dead Man Walking.

Less well known is the fact that Saint Nicholas, the early Christian saint who inspired Santa Claus, was once a prisoner, [like one in every 100 Americans](#) today. Though he was beloved for his kindness and generosity, Nicholas acquired sainthood not only by giving alms, but in part by performing a miracle that more or less amounted to a prison break.

As we described in [one of our earliest posts](#) on Solitary Watch, Nicholas was the 4th-century Greek Bishop of Myra (in present-day Turkey). Under the Roman emperor Diocletian, who persecuted Christians, Nicholas spent some five years in prison and [according to some accounts](#), in solitary confinement.

Under Constantine, the first Christian emperor, Nicholas fared better until the Council of Nicaea, in 325 A.D. There, after having a serious theological argument with another powerful bishop, Nicholas became so enraged that he walked across the room and slapped the man.

It was illegal for one bishop to strike another. According to an account provided by the [St. Nicholas Center](#): The bishops stripped Nicholas of his bishop's garments, chained him, and threw him into jail. That would keep Nicholas away from the meeting. When the Council ended a final decision would be made about his future.

Nicholas spent the night praying for guidance, and was visited by Jesus and Mary. When the jailer came in the morning, he found the chains loose on the floor and Nicholas dressed in bishop's robes, quietly reading the Scriptures. It was determined that no one could have visited or helped him during the night. Constantine ordered Nicholas freed and reinstated as the Bishop of Myra, and his feat would later be declared one of many miracles performed by the saint.

Saint Nicholas lived on to serve the poor during the devastating famine that hit his part of Turkey in 342 AD. He is reported to have anonymously visited starving families at night and distributed gold coins to help them buy scarce food.

But here in America two thousand years later, Christians go to church to worship an executed savior and shop to commemorate an incarcerated saint, with little thought to their 2 million countrymen who are spending this Christmas behind bars.

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James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, Blood in the Face. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets [@solitarywatch](#).

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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you got read the one bout dads reading to thare kids all i can say is the opening remarks yes i realy understnad reading the dichnary to keep from going nuts lol boy do i ever did that at my old school oakhill no joke lol like read that and i like holy crap i get that way to well he right solitary dose that to you lol ones read a dam book on trees thare yes like the boring shit like age and time lines of foests and crap like that lerned one word meaning dead on relutend hestent or not willing lol boy did i lol pray you never get that dam bord that you got read the dichnary to keep your mind from going lol not that reading it is boring but you know lol

you know i feel the same way lol odd thing a old frend of mine who was at one time a a CO that is now dead told me a story bout a yong inmate who had brout a stick in from the yard and raped it in TP leaned it on the bars and that was his crismes tree well he siad to me that he tell me other storys one day but sadly he never got to this is my first crismes without ed lol and my mom for the past at least 2 years has not put a tree up so i was allways joking with my frends that i was going make a prison crismes tree like in the story edd told me lol well this year i did lol it is sticking out a box lol yes

Thank you for this great reminder of how insular we have become in our age I shall use this thought in future writings, and I thank Jean and Jim for their foray into what ought to be self-appearant to those of us who profess Jesus Christ as Lord

And thank you, Chaplain Mary, for your kind words and courageous work

Blessings in Prison Reform,

Stan Moody

<http://www.stanmoody.com>

we have heard mci norfolk is in lockdown 10 prisoners injured maybe some brought to local hospitals anyone have any knowledge of this situation??? thanks

Not the War Widows whose husbands suffered and gave their lives so we can abolish the Death Penalty; and private prisons.

Help us start the first Veteran Cooperative alternative Veterans Village so we can birth John 14:12 Great works will you do than I (TRUTH) because I go to Our Father

Mary Murphy former VA/Prison Chaplain/Marshal OklaCtCriminalAppeals

mmurphy@veteeranschcamberofcommerce.org

and praise God for Dr. Stan Moody; a Pastor of Pastors; an Author unlike any other (except Life of Christ 1923, Giovanni Papini translated from Italian Harcourt, Brace & Co

AMEN!

These things are exactly true that is why my lifes verse is matthew 25:36-40 which says in part

I was in prison and you came to visit me

whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me

I wish more people would just give something a letter or card costs just .44 cents.

I write someone evryday, I give money to at least 3 prisoners a month. Such a very small thing. But I take those verses seriously.

P.O. Box 11374

Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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Solitary Watch News

