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AMDG

Jesuit Inmates

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Three years ago I went to the most famous prison in England, the Tower of London. It's a castle-like building on the Thames River in London, surrounded by multiple walls. Although it now houses the crown jewels, used for the queen's coronation, in the 16th and 17th century many Jesuits were imprisoned there. Their crime? Being Catholic.

I wanted to see the cell where Father Edmund Campion, SJ was jailed. He scratched his name in the stone wall, which is still visible. He also scratched a cross on the wall, before which he prayed.

One thing about all these Jesuit prisoners -- each to a man was *betrayed*. Someone had turned them in for money (like Judas Iscariot) or lied on the witness stand to convict them. The amazing thing is that these Jesuit prisoners were not bitter or angry or hateful. Instead they were loving. So loving that they were later declared saints. How's that? In the Jesuit seminary they had been taught a prayer by St. Ignatius Loyola, which is still taught to young Jesuits in training today. It goes like this: "Eternal Lord of all things . . . I profess that it is my earnest desire and deliberate choice . . . to imitate You in bearing all wrongs . . . should you choose and admit me to such a state and way of life."

Christ was wronged. Christ was betrayed. Christ was in prison. Christ was beaten up. Yet Christ's prayer on the cross was "Father forgive them." He turned His betrayal into love. So did these Jesuit saints.

We can choose to love or to hate. To forgive or to hold sins against people. The choice is ours. The cells of the prison in Tower of London became a place where love triumphed. It still does. My friends and I knelt in St. Edmund's cell and asked for some of that Love.