

Have You Ever Heard Of Dismas?

- *brother Elias*

ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURAL MEMORY RELATING TO HIS DEATH, JESUS WAS crucified between two thieves as we are told in the Gospel that comes from the hand of the Evangelist Luke. A non-scriptural memory attributes the name “Dismas” to one of the men co-crucified with him. The Gospel relates that, on the cross, Dismas asked Jesus to remember him when he would come into his kingdom. Jesus replied: “I tell you this day you will be with me in Paradise”.

We brothers are blessed to know and support a group of committed persons that bear the name of this good thief. Their passion is to offer transitional housing to former prisoners in the context of a supportive community where reconciliation is fostered between former prisoners and society, and between society and former prisoners. Dismas Houses have taken root in Vermont since 1985 in widely diverse locations: Burlington, Rutland, Winooski, and Hartford (White River Junction). Into these loving and supportive contexts former offenders are welcomed into a safe place where their requests for help, understanding, compassion, and love are welcomed, honored, and responded to.

“Remember me”. “You will be with me in Paradise”. Staff, volunteers, and supporters of Dismas may hardly consider that Dismas Houses can be compared to “Paradise”. On the other hand when someone has lost almost everything that they hold dear, including their reputation and their prospects for a bright future, the Dismas family experience is an opportunity to begin again and know deep within that we are



Dismas House in Rutland, Vermont.



Dinner at Dismas House, Rutland, Vermont.

loved without condition. At Dismas residents are offered a second chance without judgement. New beginnings become possible in the context of acceptance, friendship, and trust.

It was in a garden called Paradise that all of us had our very first communal memory as human beings. It was there that we felt deeply loved by God, and in that place, again and again, “God saw that it was good”. At Dismas the iconic image of Paradise is a reminder that we are, each and every one of us, blessed and made in God’s likeness. Communal practices such as common evening meals, shared chores and responsibilities, group bonding activities, support strategies, and shared decision making all are part of a beautiful fabric of human lives being interwoven to make a divine-like human tapestry. It’s all about living and relating in a family setting—staff, students, and volunteers from the wider community—with an emphasis on the common good. Have you ever heard of Dismas? ■

see: www.dismasofvt.org