

Let's *Talk!*[®]

A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



PNCEA Prison Ministries • 3031 Fourth St., NE • Washington, DC 20017

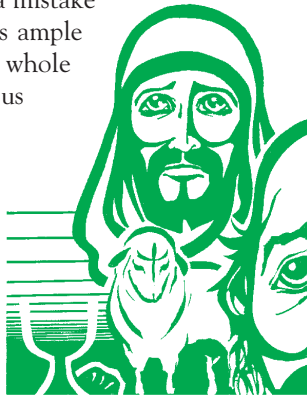
Jesus. Friend or Foe?

Strange question? Unfortunately not. Too many people think of Jesus as someone who is watching them, just waiting for them to stumble so he can get them. One false move, and it's all over.

Yes, Jesus does judge (see Matthew 25: 31-46), there is no doubt about that. But he is not waiting for us to make a mistake so he can punish us. He gives us ample time to respond to his love—our whole lives—and is constantly calling us to himself. Let his words melt into your heart: “Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The Good Shepherd. Jesus is not out to get us, as many fear. He tells us: “I am the good shepherd” and he lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15). What greater love can he have for us than to lay down his life so that we might have life? And that life begins right now, in this life. Jesus came that we “might have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Jesus calls those who follow him his “friends” (John 15:13, 15). We, in turn, can be friends of Jesus. In a homily in 2005 shortly before he became pope, Benedict XVI said “A mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good....”



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Friends with Christ. Are you a friend of Christ? Do you have a friendship with Jesus? One way to tell is if you want the same things he wants. He says that his friends are those who do “what I command you.” And his commandment is this: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:14, 12).

Yes, we all fail. We all fall short. But is the desire of your heart to know and love Jesus and walk in peace with him and your neighbor? Pope Benedict states the result beautifully: “The more we love Jesus, the more we know him, the more our true friendship develops and our joy in being redeemed flourishes.”

May the prayer of our hearts be that we become true friends of Jesus.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The only thing that can bring us true and lasting peace and joy anywhere we are—including prison or jail—is friendship with Jesus. He brings light to the darkness, fills the emptiness, and gives purpose and meaning to life. The challenge we *all* face is to meet Jesus and grow in friendship with him.

We hope that the articles in this issue help you in your search for Christ. As you read them, see how they might guide you on your faith journey. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to Christ. Take Jesus at his word that he came to give us life and life to the full (John 10:10). This promise leads to the peace and joy we all seek.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President, PNCEA

Q & A

Never Cease Praying

Q. When I pray, nothing seems to happen. What do you suggest?

A. What you are writing about occurs with many people, even the most faithful Christians. The Christian life, and prayer, is not about feeling, but is about faith in the truth of God. So no matter how Christians feel when they pray, they continue to pray and to serve God, trusting in faith that God hears them and loves them. Even Mother Teresa, one of the most faithful and loving Christians of our time, suffered from “dry” prayer. But she continued on, loving God, and living a life of great holiness and service to others.

This question comes to *Let's Talk!* as we are beginning two series on prayer. Deacon Dennis Dolan on page three is starting a series on prayer. And on page four, we are beginning a second series on *lectio divina*, a special type of prayer and meditation on Scripture.

So we will be answering this question in many articles over the coming issues. For now, keep in mind two things. First, do not give up. Persevere in prayer. As St. Paul says, “Never cease praying” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Remember that prayer is a matter of faith, not of feeling. Second, as the Fathers of the Church (the greatest saints of the early Church) tell us, prayer is our longing for God. When we desire God and want to love God above all else, our hearts enter into prayer.

We show our longing for God by our love for God and for neighbor. When we want to live for God and for neighbor—despite the setbacks we face as humans—that is when we are right toward God. No matter how we feel at the time, this is true prayer, and this is what we are aiming toward. If we remain faithful, the “feelings” may follow our acting in obedient faith.

(continued on page 2)

July 2009

- 3 St. Thomas, apostle
- 5 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 11 St. Benedict, abbot
- 12 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 14 Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 St. Bonaventure, doctor
- 19 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 22 St. Mary Magdalene
- 25 St. James, apostle
- 26 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 29 St. Martha
- 31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, priest

August 2009

- 1 St. Alphonsus Liguori, bishop, doctor
- 2 Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 4 St. John Mary Vianney, priest
- 6 The Transfiguration of the Lord
- 8 St. Dominic, priest
- 9 Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 10 St. Lawrence, martyr
- 11 St. Clare, virgin
- 14 St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, priest, martyr
- 15 Assumption of the Virgin Mary
- 16 Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 20 St. Bernard, abbot, doctor
- 21 St. Pius X, pope
- 22 Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 23 Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 24 St. Bartholomew
- 27 St. Monica
- 28 St. Augustine, bishop, doctor
- 29 Martyrdom of John the Baptist
- 30 Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 2009

- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope, doctor
- 6 Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 8 Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 9 St. Peter Claver, priest
- 13 Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 14 Triumph of the Cross
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian, bishops and martyrs
- 20 Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 21 St. Matthew
- 23 St. Pio of Pietrelcina
- 26 Sts. Cosmas and Damian, martyrs
- 27 Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 29 Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels
- 30 St. Jerome, priest and doctor



Let's Talk!®

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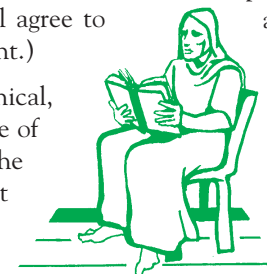
Q & A: Never Cease Praying

(continued from page 1)

Q. Why do some Bibles have more books in them than other Bibles?

A. The difference in the number of books in the Bible reflects what different religious traditions—Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—include in what Christians generally call the Old Testament (abbreviated OT). (The Christian churches all agree to the 27 books in the New Testament.)

Without becoming overly technical, the answer stems from the practice of most Protestant churches around the time of the Reformation to accept as authentic only those OT books (or parts of OT books) that were believed to have been written in Hebrew. By most counts, there are 39 of these.



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Catholics, however, had long accepted 46 books in the Old Testament. This is because they were included in the Greek translation of the OT known as the Septuagint, which includes some books that were originally written in Greek. The 7 additional books of the Septuagint Catholics accept as authentic (or canonical) are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Sirach (sometimes called Ecclesiasticus), and Baruch. In addition, parts of Daniel, Esther, and other books fall into this category.

In Catholic Bibles, these books are placed throughout the Old Testament, following the tradition of the Septuagint. After a time, Protestants tended not to include them at all. Thus, some “Protestant” Bibles are shorter. In more recent times, some Protestants include these 7 books and the various parts of

others, in a separate section at the end of the Bible and call them “Apocrypha.” Some newer translations, however, include them between the Old and New Testaments.

Among people, quarrels over the value of these books are now largely a thing of the past. The tendency in recent years among Protestants is to see these books as valuable for the spiritual life and thus more are reading them. Catholics have always considered them part of the inspired word of God. Thus, like all Scripture, they are “useful for teaching—for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). As you read them, you are most likely to find them inspirational for your spiritual life.

Q. Why is “Ordinary Time” called that?

A. “Ordinary Time” refers to the 33 (or sometimes 34) Sundays and weeks of the church year that are not part of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Before the liturgy was revised after Vatican II, this time was identified as “after Epiphany” or “after Pentecost.” Now known as “Ordinary Time,” this time in the church year takes on an importance of its own, celebrating the events of Jesus’ life beyond his birth and his death and resurrection.

Let's Talk! responds to prisoners' questions about the Catholic faith. Send us your questions to the address on the front of this newsletter.

Prisoner Saints

Sts. Andrew Kim Taegōn and Paul Chōng Hasang (d. 1864) ✠ Andrew Kim Taegōn was the first Korean-born Catholic priest. Paul Chōng Hasang was a lay catechist and seminarian. Practicing Catholicism was prohibited in nineteenth century Korea. Persecution was common. Between 1839 and 1867, 103 Koreans were martyred for their faith. In addition, 10 French priests and bishops were killed for preaching Christ. In 1864, less than a week apart, both Andrew and Paul were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. Andrew was only 25. Paul was 45. Their faithful witness to Christ helped the Church to take root and grow rapidly in Korea. In 1984, Pope John Paul II canonized the 103 Korean martyrs, including Andrew and Paul. Ninety-two of the martyrs were lay people.

Feast Day: September 20

Growing in Prayer, Part 1

The Spiritual Life is First of all A Life

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: What exactly is the spiritual life? I'm kind of confused.

Me: I'm not surprised. The word is used in many different ways depending on who is using it. Also, the ancient Catholic wisdom tradition is a very big spiritual buffet. Lots of choices in spirituality. After 2000 years and billions of members, the Church knows that "one size does not fit all!" So it's easy to be confused.

Peaches: So what do you say, Deacon?

Me: As a Catholic Christian, I would say that first of all, everyone has a "spiritual life" whether they know it or not because we are spiritual beings by our nature.

Peaches: Bad people too?

Me: Right. Evil is a spiritual choice as much as love is. So, I would say that a spiritual life is first of all a life.

Peaches: Where did you get that?! Sounds pretty weak to me.

Me: From Thomas Merton.

Peaches: Oh...

Me: And I think it's important because we Catholics are a "Keep it Real" kind of people. We know we are not angels so we are suspicious of any kind of "spiritual" that doesn't include the body, matter and reality. And what "The spiritual life is first of all a life" reminds us is that the spiritual life is not something other than this life right here that I am living. It's not up in the sky or far away. My spiritual life will have its "ups" and "downs." It also includes my work, eating breakfast, and how I handle my money.

Peaches: Got it. Spiritual life is real not the magical, mystery tour. But that's what it's not. What is it?

Me: The spiritual life is *Life*...

Peaches: This life...

Me: Yup. This life lived in a certain spirit.

Peaches: That's it!!!! A life lived in a certain spirit!!!

Me: Disappointed? Hoping for the "Magical Mystery Tour"!

Peaches: Well, kinda. This is like pulling teeth! You're not giving me much!

Me: I'm giving you what's real and therefore what is of God who is the "Really Real."

Peaches: God is the "Really Real"? That's deep, Deke!

Me: St. Thomas Aquinas, P.

Peaches: Oh, well then, he's really deep.

Me: He is.

Peaches: OK, so?

Me: So, a spiritual life is a life lived in a certain spirit. For a Christian, the spiritual life is a life lived in the Spirit of Jesus. What else could it be?

Peaches: What about the buffet?

Me: Just as there are many "dishes" on a buffet, there are many approaches or styles of Christian spirituality in Catholicism. A married man with a family cannot act like a monk, can he? A married woman does not have the freedom that a single woman has to do service. They have a different approach.

Peaches: So we can find a spiritual approach based on our vocations?

Me: Yes. And based on our personalities. We are all different. We each have to discover

our own unique way of living the Christ life. It's often a matter of emphasis.

Peaches: Cool! What about people who distinguish between the "spiritual" and the "religious"? As in "I'm spiritual but not religious"?

Me: If we are saying that religion is like the "outside" and spirituality is like the "inside," that's fair.

Peaches: But in *reality* there is no such thing as an inside without an outside!

Me: Right. The outside carries and protects the inside. For example, if there were no Christian religion, no one today would know anything about the spirituality of Jesus.

Peaches: What about from the Bible?

Me: The Church wrote and edited the Bible.

Peaches: So gotta have that outside, huh?

Me: Only if we're not on the Magical Mystery Tour.

Peaches: No, I think I prefer reality!

Deacon Dennis Dolan is chaplain at York Correctional Institution, Niantic, Conn. and is a member of the Diaconal Mission Service Team of the Diocese of Norwich.

Pope Benedict XVI's Prayer Requests for July/August/September

July

General. That the Christians of the Middle East may live their faith in full freedom and be an instrument of peace and reconciliation.

Mission. That the Church may be the seed and nucleus of a humanity reconciled and reunited in God's one and only family, thanks to the testimony of all the faithful in every country in the world.

August

General. That public opinion may be more aware of the problem of millions of displaced persons and refugees and that concrete solutions may be found for their tragic situation.

Mission. That Christians who are discriminated against and persecuted in many countries because of the name of Christ may have their human rights, equality and religious freedom recognized.

September

General. That the word of God may be better known, welcomed and lived as the source of freedom and joy.

Mission. That Christians in Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, who often meet with great difficulties, may not be discouraged from announcing the Gospel to their brothers, trusting in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Benedict XVI invites all people to join him in praying for these intentions.

Lectio Divina, Part I

An Ancient Form of Prayer for Today

We all yearn for God. Our lives are a constant search for meaning. We can try to ignore that deep inner yearning through money and material things, alcohol, drugs, disordered sexual relationships, or mind-numbing work or entertainment. You can probably add to the list. Many times, our search for happiness apart from God's plan for our lives leads us into deep trouble. Some get caught and pay the price. Others don't get caught, but remain empty.

St. Augustine put it well: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you O Lord" (*Confessions* 1.1). Augustine said that over 1600 years ago. But we still know how true it is today. Whether we know it or not, we are seeking something more in our lives. And that more is God.

God's Word is living and effective.

One of the ways that we connect with God and learn from God is through reading Scripture—God's word to his people. If we are at all serious about the Christian life, we read or listen to Scripture. If we do that, we likely sense from time to time that a passage in Scripture has a special meaning for us.

This should not surprise us. The letter to the Hebrews puts it well: "God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

St. Paul identified it for Timothy: "You have known the sacred Scriptures, the source of the wisdom which through faith in Jesus Christ leads to salvation. All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching—for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Lectio Divina. We are beginning a series about a form of prayer called *lectio divina*. (The two words are Latin for "divine word" or "divine reading.") *Lectio divina* is the practice of meditating and praying with the divine word of Scripture.

This is an ancient prayer form in the church. In particular, it was practiced in

monasteries by those who had the time and quiet to devote to prayer. Thus, it became the special practice of those who separated themselves from the world in monasteries and convents. Even parish priests didn't often practice *lectio divina* because they were more active in the world. And certainly, lay people living and working daily in the world did not have the time free of distractions to practice this type of prayer, even if they had the inclination!

But now it is recognized that *lectio divina* is a true grace for *all* people. It was even recommended at the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God held in Rome in October 2008. And it was recommended there because it is known as a way that people can hear from God and experience God's direction for their lives and his love in a very real way.

Four Steps. As we will see as this series unfolds, *lectio divina* involves four steps or movements. First, we listen to or read a biblical text. Second, we meditate on or reflect on the text. Third, we pray with the text to see what deeper meaning God reveals. Fourth, we open ourselves to God to contemplate deeply on what God speaks to us.

Practicing *lectio divina* means setting aside a time and place for it. Once a week is a good goal. It may mean asking some of your friends to help you find a time and place somewhat free of distractions. You will likely find that it is worth the effort as the fruit of *lectio divina* is great and rewarding. We grow in recognizing God's tender mercies toward us, to God's presence with us. We sense a direction for our lives, a meaning for us even now. *Lectio divina* will help you satisfy your yearning for God.

Questions for Prayer and Discussion:

1. Do you want a deeper sense of God's presence with you? Why or why not?
2. Are you willing to act on what God may show you, even if it means changing areas of your life?
3. Where can you find a time and place for *lectio divina* in your routine, perhaps once a week, if not more?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Letter from Prison

"From the Heart"

The ministry can't administer physical conditions
 It is a catalyst from God, to uplift spirits
 As a human of habit, at times, it's lonely
 Divinity of my Lord comforts me, Him being Holy
 Satan might test me, disrupt my sense of direction
 The winds of God push me forward,
 leading me back to my shepherd
 I'm spiritually at peace, mentally calm,
 and money free
 The Bible scripture I remember
 most vividly is Psalm 23
 Most people know that life happens,
 but still suffer from disasters
 I learned to be strong—my Lord will be there
 before the storm, during hard time...and after...
 I'm far from perfect, so I practice
 all my ways with faith
 Putting my trust in Him, so all my days are great
 The Devil tries—the room is there,
 but God raises the gates
 I'm so in tune with my savior, I can't take his place
 Mind over matter—considering
 all the destruction paved
 While following the decrees of the Most High,
 until Judgment Day
 Reading the Bible breathes life in the Spirit,
 instead of death
 I'll continue to follow his commands,
 until my last breath
 The human eye is vulnerable,
 the Devil tries to impress
 Ditch the manipulative nature of Satan,
 and praise God
 He is the best!
 Trust that he loves you, it comes naturally
 He sent His only son, Jesus Christ
 To die on the cross, at Calvary...
 Believe, and make sure your priorities are straight
 Make Christ your Lord and Savior,
 before it's too late
 And walk upright, straight forward in life...
 lest you fall
 The Armor of God is upon everyone,
 I pray that he bless us all!
 Amen.

~ A prisoner in New York

Pray for our benefactors

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