

Let's *Talk!*[®]

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A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

Born Again in Christ

One of the great truths of our faith that we proclaim at Easter is that we are born again! Yes, all Christians—Catholics, Protestants, and all others—are born again to new life through faith and the waters of baptism. We celebrate this in a particular way during the Easter Season.

Our Easter Proclamation. Through the death and resurrection of Christ we die to sin and rise with him to new life. The Church proclaims this truth in the Easter Exsultet: "This is the night when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness."

Our entry into new life begins as we are united with Christ through faith and baptism. The new life grows and matures in us as we walk with Christ each day and seek to live in him. In his 2002 book *God and the World*, Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) wrote that "It is not for nothing that we talk of following Christ, of entering upon his way. It is a matter of *inner identification* with Christ....That is really what man is moving toward."

Changed hearts. Yes, we are born again to new life in Christ. But if we want our new birth to change us for the better, we need to *live* in a new way—the way of Christ. This calls us to live as his disciples and to do as he teaches. This is not something external—only following rules that we impose on ourselves. It comes from *inner change*, from a change in our hearts.

The Saints show us the way. Saint Francis of Assisi, before he decided to follow Christ, was an irresponsible playboy. St. Ignatius of Loyola was a soldier and adventurer. All the Saints were unique in how they changed in heart, but *all* needed to change for the new life to take root in them.

Dedicate yourself to Christ. Pope Benedict writes that we cannot just "cement" salvation on to ourselves, or "control it by the use of power." Rather, we follow Jesus and allow his word to change our hearts. God does not impose himself on us. Instead, he calls us to walk with him, learn his ways, and embrace his life. As we do, we will know the truth that we are born again in him. Let us rededicate ourselves to our walk with Christ and allow the new life to grow in us.



Ron Reaves ©

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Saints "were brimming with great hope." Their hope helped them to make the "great journey" of their lives in the way of Christ. Pope Benedict tells us this in his encyclical *On Christian Hope* (n. 39). Through faith and baptism we are born again in Christ and can live lives of hope.

We are filled with hope if we embrace Christ. This means walking with Christ and listening to him through each day—even while in prison. God loves each of us deeply. If you doubt this, ask the Holy Spirit to show you this love and be open to it. Little by little, your journey will be filled with hope.

Father Kenneth Boyack, CSP
President, PNCEA

Brings message of hope

Pope Benedict XVI Visits U.S.

It is not often that a pope visits the United States. So, Pope Benedict XVI's April 15-20 visit to the U.S. is an historic and important occasion. The theme of his visit is "Christ our Hope," following the topic of his 2007 encyclical *On Christian Hope*.

Pope Benedict will likely weave the theme of hope through his six-day visit. His time here includes an address to the United Nations General Assembly (April 18) and two large public Masses (in Washington on April 17 and New York on April 20). Other smaller gatherings include meetings with the Catholic bishops, leaders of other religious groups, youth and seminarians, children with disabilities, as well as with President Bush at the White House.

The popes of recent times have not only focused on pastoral and spiritual problems of people. They have also addressed economic and political issues that are at the heart of the way we live. We will likely see examples of both of these areas of concern during this visit.

A call for peace. Pope Benedict is the third pope to address the United Nations. Both Pope Paul VI (in 1965) and Pope John Paul II (in 1995) spoke to this important world body. Both earlier popes encouraged the member states of the UN to work together for the advancement of peace and the welfare of all people.

In seeking peace and the end of misery, the popes have spoken out for the end of violence in war-torn areas of the world. They have also come to the aid of people suffering after natural disasters. In addition, their teachings on many subjects draw people to think and act in ways which promote peace and justice and thus are causes of hope for God's people.

Building a just world. A good example of this is how the popes of the past century have promoted social justice. Beginning with
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April 2008

- 6 Third Sunday of Easter
- 7 St. John Baptist de la Salle, priest
- 11 St. Stanislaus, martyr
- 13 Fourth Sunday of Easter
- 20 Fifth Sunday of Easter
- 25 St. Mark, evangelist
- 27 Sixth Sunday of Easter
- 29 St. Catherine of Sienna

May 2008

- 1 Ascension of our Lord
(in some locations celebrated May 6)
St. Joseph the Worker
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop, doctor
- 3 Sts. Philip and James, apostles
- 6 Seventh Sunday of Easter or Ascension
of our Lord (if not celebrated May 1)
- 11 Pentecost
- 14 St. Matthias, apostle
- 18 Most Holy Trinity
- 25 Body and Blood of Christ
- 26 St. Philip Neri, priest
- 30 Sacred Heart of Jesus
- 31 Visitation of the Virgin Mary

June 2008

- 1 Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 3 St. Charles Lwanga and Companions,
martyrs
- 5 St. Boniface, bishop, martyr
- 8 Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 11 St. Barnabas, apostle
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest, doctor
- 15 Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 16 Immaculate Heart of Mary
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, religious
- 22 Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 24 Birth of John the Baptist
- 28 St. Irenaeus, bishop, martyr
- 29 Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles



Let's Talk!®

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Pope Benedict XVI Visits U.S.

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Pope Leo XIII in 1891, they have supported the rights of workers to just wages for their labors and the right of people to be free of oppressive government. They have also focused attention on the needs of the poor and vulnerable.

The popes have called for the richer nations of the world to help the poor nations. In particular, Pope Paul VI taught that “development is the new name for peace.” He also said that “if you want peace, work for justice.” Pope John Paul II continually taught of the right of people to live with dignity.

More recently, Pope Benedict has restated the call for the richer nations to help the poorer nations and for warring parties to work for peace. He promotes the efforts of the religious groups of the world—especially Christians, Jews and Muslims—to respect one another and work for peace.

Protecting and promoting life. Another area where the modern popes have taken the lead is in promoting the value of life. They stress that life needs to be protected and nurtured from conception to natural death. While this is often an unpopular message in our time, they still continue to teach it.

In recent years, Pope John Paul II taught that capital punishment should be abolished (except in very rare circumstances). The point he and the other popes make, including

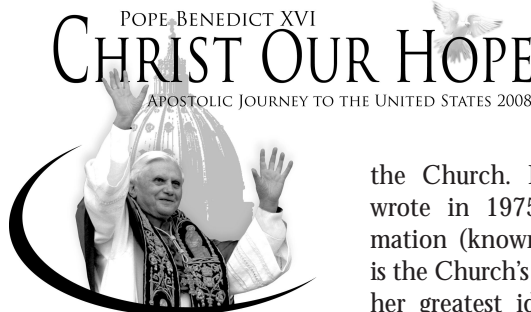
Benedict, is that people have a God-given dignity that must be respected.

Proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

The popes of the past forty years have taught ever more clearly and strongly that proclaiming the good news of Jesus is central to the mission of the Church. In fact, Pope Paul wrote in 1975 that this proclamation (known as evangelization) is the Church’s “essential mission... her greatest identity.” Pope John Paul II stressed this message, as does Pope Benedict.

The popes since Vatican II (1962-65) have also emphasized that the Christian churches are called to pray and work together to achieve unity according to the heart and mind of Christ. At the same time, they have reached out to our Jewish brothers and sisters, calling for dialogue and mutual respect. Pope Benedict is also opening the doors of dialogue with Islam to encourage understanding, respect, and peace.

Christ our hope. These many efforts of recent popes should give us hope, and help us to see that our hope is rooted in Christ. Pope Benedict on his visit to the U.S. is sure to give us many more reasons to be hopeful. In your daily prayer, especially during this special time of Pope Benedict’s visit, ask the Holy Spirit to give him wisdom and to open the hearts of all people to receive the message he brings.



Prisoner Saint

St. Vitus (d. c. 303) ✠ Vitus is a native of Sicily and martyr of the early Church. He likely converted to Christianity by the age of 12 through the influence of the household servants. His gift of conversions and miracles made him well-known. At one time, he prayed for the exorcism of an evil spirit in the emperor’s son. When Vitus refused to sacrifice to the gods in thanksgiving for the cure, he was accused of sorcery. Arrested and imprisoned, he was tortured along with others, but was later freed and eventually died. Vitus has inspired many across the ages. The nervous system disorder “St. Vitus Dance” is named after him, as is the great cathedral in Prague in the Czech Republic.

Feast Day: June 15

The Twelve-Step Program

It's like making a good confession...Steps 4 – 9

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: Now, it gets ugly, Deke! Step 4 is a killer!

Me: Yup. Time to start racking up the muck that's been so carefully ignored for all those years of using. However, being a practicing Catholic, you've got a big head start.

Peaches: I'll take all the good news you got.

Me: Well, you are already familiar with Steps 4 through 9. It's what we do in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Peaches: Man, that's half the whole 12 Steps! So how are Steps 4 through 9 like going to Confession?

Me: What do you do before you go to Confession?

Peaches: Examine my conscience. Go through the Ten Commandments and figure which ones I've broken and how often I broke them.

Me: That's pretty much Step 4: *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.* Of course, the focus here is on behaviors that resulted from our using.

Peaches: Step 5 says: *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

Me: And that would be like the actual telling my sins to a priest. Only in this case, it doesn't have to be a priest for Step 5 because it's not a sacramental confession, although many people do Step 5 with priests, deacons, or other clergy because they trust them to keep their secrets.

Peaches: Do you do Step 5, Deke?

Me: All the time. And I'm very good at it because I forget it all right after I hear it. I can't remember what I had for breakfast these days!

Peaches: Step 6 says: *We're entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

Me: Right. And Step 7 says: *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.* In the Sacrament of Reconciliation both of these would come under the idea of "firm purpose of amendment."

Run through the prayer of sorrow that you say at the end of your confession. What's the very last part of the Act of Contrition say?

Peaches: You mean the part that goes, "I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.?"

Me: That's it! "Amend my life?" Change my life? Firmly resolve or decide? Get it?

Peaches: OK. So "firm purpose of amendment" means that I'm not playing a game with God or myself. I really intend to do what it takes to change my behavior?

Me: Exactly.

Peaches: And Steps 6 and 7 are contained in the idea of "firm purpose of amendment." If I'm not ready to have my defects removed or I'm not humble enough to ask God's help in this area, then I really haven't made a true decision to change.

Me: And Steps 8 and 9 would be like the Penance part of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Step 8 says, *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

And Step 9 says, *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

Peaches: Oh, I see that! It's like if I stole \$50, as part of my penance, Father would tell me to give it back. That's "making a direct amends."

Me: Right, You can give the money back secretly too. It still makes it right again.

Peaches: And the prayers you say for your Penance, that's a way to make amends when you can't do it directly!

Me: So there you go, P! By being a practicing Catholic you are well experienced already in Steps 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9!

Peaches: So, Jesus and the Church have been doing these Steps for 2,000 years and we're just catching on to how powerful they are now?!

Me: That Holy Spirit is a pretty smart fella, huh?!

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 April/May/June

April

General.

Proclamation of the Resurrection: That Christians may not tire of proclaiming with their lives that Christ's resurrection is the source of hope and peace.

Missionary.

Future Priests: That the future priests of the young Churches may be formed to evangelize their nations and the whole world.

May

General. Human

Dignity: That Christians may use literature, art, and mass media to create a culture which defends and promotes the values of the human person.

Missionary. Mary's

Guidance: That the Virgin Mary, Star of evangelization and Queen of the Apostles, may still guide missionaries with maternal affection, just as she accompanied the Apostles in the early stages of the Church.

June

General. Friendship with Christ: That all Christians may cultivate a deep and personal friendship with Christ so to communicate the strength of his love to every person they meet.

Missionary.

International Eucharistic Congress: That the International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec may lead to greater understanding that the Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the source of evangelization.

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

Mary's Joyful Prayer...and Ours – Part 4

Be confident of God's love

Read and study: Luke 1:46-55

“He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

(Luke 1:54-55)

When you read and pray the Magnificat, do you notice how confident Mary is of God's love for his people Israel, and for her? And in her confidence, do you sense Mary's peace and hope? Peace in her heart, for she knows God has always come through, and will always come through. Hope in her heart, for she knows that whatever she faces, God is faithful and will always be there for her.

Mary stands as an example for us. She is not a distant figure from long ago frozen in stone, just a plaster statue. No, Mary is a living and loving woman who is both our mother and sister. Through her life, she shows us the way to confidence in God. She shows us that we too can have peace and hope in our hearts. Even in her hour of sorrow when grief pierced her heart (Luke 2:35; John 19:25-27), she remained confident in God's love. And so too can we.

God's love for his people Israel. Mary knew the history of her people. She rested in the truth that after chastisement for its sin, God always came to the aid of his people Israel. She knew the promise: “Fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed; I am your God.” And: “I will strengthen you, and help you, and uphold you with my right hand of justice” (Isaiah 41:10). God is not distant from his people. He was with them and showed them his love, through their joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties.

Mary knew that the promises God made to the spiritual fathers (the patriarchs) were real. God was their God and was with them always through all generations (Genesis 17:7; 18:18; 22:17). The promises God made to Abraham were for his descendants forever. And by Mary's time, those promises were 1,700 years old!

The Israel of God. Those promises are ours as well. Jesus fulfilled all God had promised. God did not abandon Israel to create a new people. Rather, those who embrace Jesus are gathered into the Israel of

God (Galatians 6:16). Through Jesus, we are God's adopted children (Galatians 4:4-7). Thus, all God promised to the patriarchs, and to Abraham and his descendants forever, is ours as well. We receive the blessing of life and love to the full (John 10:10).

Through faith and baptism, the fullness of life is ours through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). This is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead and empowered the apostles and the Saints. Through this Spirit we are a new creation. “The old things have passed away [and] new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God's love for us. How glorious is our heritage! How filled with the promise of life it is! How it should give us confidence in God and fill us with peace, hope, and joy. Do you sense peace, hope, and joy in your life? You should, because God never abandons us. He is always calling us back to him with open arms. He is welcoming us—you—just as the father welcomed back his lost son (Luke 15:11-32).

Trust that God wants this for you and then live to make it possible.

Other Scripture passages to study:

- Exodus 2:24; 32:13
- 2 Samuel 22:51
- Isaiah 41:8-10
- Psalm 98:3; 105:8-11, 42
- Micah 7:20

Ways to take action:

1. What in Mary's prayer makes you want to live confidently in God? What do you need to do to help make it happen?
2. Who are the Saints who especially inspire you? List the things in their lives that helped them receive God's gifts. How can you live more like them?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Letter from Prison

The Hope of Suffering

I'm a 49-year-old Catholic formerly from western Pennsylvania. I've been “saved” since 1992 when I experienced my “spiritual awakening” in my jail cell. Christ's personal invitation to me was “come” (Revelation 22:17).

During much fellowship and constant study of God's living word (Hebrews 4:12), I experienced that God replies in prayer in “confirmations” and can use any resource or person to convey his messages. Today, I rely upon his communication as a “lamp for my feet and light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

As our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI stated in his *Spe Salvi* encyclical: “In hope we were saved” (Romans 8:24).

“Suffering,” as I've experienced, truly is “a fundamental element of humanity.” It was when I avoided it in society that my difficulties arose, since I missed the beneficial training that would have been learned by it (Hebrews 12:7-11; 1 Peter 1:6).

It was my avoidance of suffering in life that caused me to “drift into emptiness,” in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment. This was like having a hole in my chest that could never be filled with drugs, promiscuity, or booze...but always searching in vain.

Godly hope doesn't disappoint us, according to Romans 5:5, for God has great plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11). But as we all affirm the goal of faith which is salvation, [we need to] be sure to help others get saved as well—we can do this through surrender over to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23-25). Remember though, be strong, for all who try to live righteously (religiously) in Christ will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12).

Peace be with you and grace sustain you.

~ A prisoner in Pennsylvania

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