

Let's Talk!



A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners

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

Listen to Jesus and Follow Him

When Jesus stood before Pilate at his trial, Jesus said he was born to witness to the truth. And then he said, "Everyone committed to the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). As we all know, this is often easier said than done!

But in this new year, let's resolve anew to listen to Jesus and follow him. Of course we will struggle. We will find it difficult.

This should not surprise us.

Even Peter, the great follower of Jesus and first of the disciples, was often confused and in the end denied Jesus three times (see Matthew 16:22-23; 26:75).

Listen to Jesus. The wonderful truth is that when we listen to Jesus and follow him, we begin to experience new life—life that has deeper joy and peace. We will taste the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). The more we listen and follow, the more we will experience life and "life to the full" (John 10:10).

Your time in jail or prison can be a time of spiritual growth. Some will choose to waste that time. You can decide to use it for good purposes...including growth as a follower of Jesus. The more you listen to him, the more

you answer his call and follow him, the more you will find that "he is gentle and humble of heart" (see Matthew 11:28-30).

Spiritual resolutions for the new year.

We can take practical steps each day that help us listen to Jesus and walk in faith

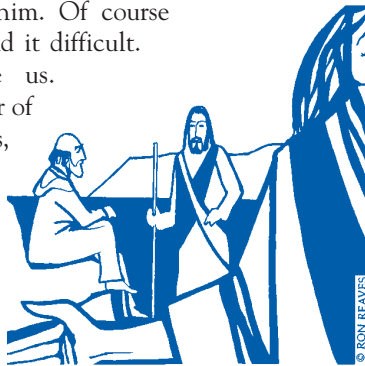
with him. These spiritual resolutions will help you do that:

- Receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and reconciliation, as often as possible.
- If you can't, ask a chaplain or volunteer to bring you communion.
- Pray each day. Talk to Jesus as to a friend.
- Read Scripture daily. This will comfort you as it leads you to Jesus.

• Fellowship with other

Christians and learn how to support one another in your faith. You may have to avoid some people for your own security or to avoid sin, but pray for them. (Match these resolutions with the four principle guides given in the article "Conversion... and Commitment to Christ" in this issue.)

Make these spiritual resolutions your own this year. In good times and in bad, your faith will grow. You will know that Jesus is with you, giving you life, love, peace, and hope!



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Conversion...and Commitment to Christ

By Rev. Frank DeSiano, CSP

Are we converted? That can be a pretty intimidating question. It makes us wonder. Do I really follow Christ? What am I living for?

What does it mean to be converted? For Catholics, conversion is *not* a one-time thing. Rather, it happens again and again throughout life. We are pilgrims on a journey which is never complete here on earth. This does not mean there are not breakthroughs. There are. But any breakthroughs we experience are the *start*, and not the end, of our journey and our Christian task.

Jesus and Conversion. In the gospels of Mark (1:15) and Matthew (4:17), Jesus' first words come out like this: "Now is the appointed time. Convert! The Kingdom of God is at hand." There are two things to reflect upon in these simple words.

The first is the word "convert." It is often translated as "repent," in the sense of having regrets about past deeds. But the word in its Greek root means more than this. It means: Change your mind. Turn your brain upside down! Start seeing the world differently.

In this sense, conversion is about the vision we have in life, what we think life is about, what we think is important and essential. Jesus is asking us to flip over the usual values we normally have so that we can see God's values.

The second point regards "conversion." Conversion is about the Kingdom of God. We are converted when we change our lives in such a way that we can see the values that Jesus brings to us. Until this happens, we think that life is about getting ahead, making money, having as much pleasure as we can, and being able to beat up on weaker people. Not so! says Jesus. When we experience conversion, we begin to see life as God intends it.

(continued on page 2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A new year is here again! It is a good time to look at our relationship with Christ and resolve to walk more faithfully with him each day. The challenge we *all* face is to meet Jesus and grow in friendship with him. We hope the articles in this issue will help you do that.

We'd like to hear from you about your conversion and commitment to Christ. How have you met Christ while in jail or prison? How have you grown in your commitment to him? We want to publish some of your letters in our summer issue, and then to publish a pamphlet on conversion and commitment while in prison. See page four for details. We hope you will consider sending us your story.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President, PNCEA

January 2010

- 1 Mary, Mother of God
- 2 St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishops and doctors
- 3 Epiphany of the Lord
- 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
- 5 St. John Neumann, bishop
- 10 Baptism of the Lord
- 17 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 21 St. Agnes, virgin and martyr
- 24 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 25 Conversion of St. Paul
- 26 Sts. Timothy and Titus, bishops
- 28 St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor
- 31 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 2010

- 2 Presentation of the Lord
- 5 St. Agatha, virgin and martyr
- 6 St. Paul Miki and Companions, martyrs
- 7 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 8 St. Jerome Emiliani, priest
- 10 St. Scholastica, virgin
- 14 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 17 Ash Wednesday
- 21 First Sunday of Lent
- 22 Chair of St. Peter
- 23 St. Polycarp, martyr
- 28 Second Sunday of Lent

March 2010

- 3 St. Katharine Drexel, virgin
- 7 Third Sunday of Lent
- 14 Fourth Sunday of Lent
- 17 St. Patrick of Ireland, bishop
- 19 St. Joseph, Husband of Mary
- 21 Fifth Sunday of Lent
- 25 Annunciation of the Lord
- 28 Passion Sunday



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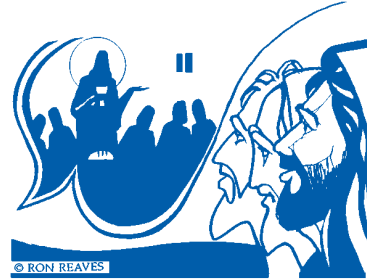
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Conversion...and Commitment to Christ

(continued from page 1)

Breakthroughs. Many people are baptized as children and grow up in the faith of Jesus. Their experience of faith comes as a steady growth. They never got in trouble, messed around, got addicted, or did terrible sins.

Many others, however, need a breakthrough. They are stuck, trapped in destructive patterns, addicted, inclined to use and abuse others, with hearts turned away from God. They need a radical change. When that change comes, it is felt like "relief."



But, after the breakthrough, what happens next? This appears to be the crucial question for believers. The breakthrough is only the start. We get the insight, we see the message, we hear the Word, we make a decision. But then what?

Either we do the things necessary to sustain our conversion, or else we "back slide" as so many Protestants put it. We revert back to where we were. We see this so often in the criminal justice system. People "get saved" in jail, but then, once back on the streets, return to what they did before, and get sent back to jail again.

True Conversion. So conversion is not primarily about breakthroughs. Rather, it concerns our living as disciples, and our doing things that we need to do to maintain our discipleship. We remember the parable that Jesus gives us in the Gospels of Mark

(4:1-20) and Matthew (13:1-23) about the Sower and the Seed. The seed (God's Word) is widely scattered. But it falls on different kinds of soil. Some experience conversion, but get absorbed in one thing or another, and fall away. Not everyone stays on the path of conversion.

Conversion means being committed to living as a disciple, whether one has experienced one breakthrough, many breakthroughs, or no breakthroughs. God has given us all a path to walk. A path has four principle guides: Word, Worship, Community and Service.

- **Word** means that I read the Word of God in such a way that I hear what it is asking of me and respond through my relationship to God in Jesus and the Spirit.
- **Worship** means that I express this relationship by personal prayer and by praying with others at the Eucharist (the Mass) on Sunday.
- **Community** means that I realize the sincerity of my conversion is shown by how I love and care for others—we must live without hate!
- **Service** means that I know discipleship is not about me but what I do for others, how I serve them in the name of Jesus.

So that's the choice. It's not only whether to be converted or not. It's whether we will stay on the road of conversion and one day attain salvation's fullness.

Rev. Frank DeSiano is President of PNCEA Prison Ministries.

Prisoner Saint

St. Jerome Emiliani (1481 - 1537) ✠ Jerome Emiliani lived in Venice, Italy during a time of warfare between the Italian city-states. He became a soldier and while commanding the men protecting a fortress, he was captured and imprisoned. Jerome previously had not thought much about God... or anything else except what gave him pleasure. Now in prison, he found his life empty and without meaning. Locked in a dungeon, he called out to God for help and let God touch his life. His life changed and when he got out of prison, he became a priest and devoted himself to caring for the sick and poor. His selfless service to the sick and needy weakened him to the point that he fell ill and died, a happy and changed man.

Feast Day: February 8

Growing in Prayer, Part 3

Preferential Option for the Poor... The Bottom of the Pile

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: OK. So the spiritual life is this everyday life that we are living, right?

Me: Correct. What else can we live but the life God gave us? This one right here. Right now.

Peaches: And we live this life in the Spirit of Jesus, right?

Me: Yup. We live out of his mind, his heart, his attitudes and example.

Peaches: And the way we live this life like Jesus is by acting in love that includes everybody.

Me: Right again.

Peaches: And that way of acting in love for everybody is sometimes called "service" because it has to do with actions not emotions.

Me: Right. We do loving actions, whether we "feel" it or not. Especially to the folks on the bottom of the pile...

Peaches: Oh? We're adding another layer to this warm up? I can see that we're not going to get into any prayer or meditation just yet, are we?

Me: Not yet! Prayer and meditation are only a part of the spiritual life.

Peaches: Right, but you said that service is our acts of love that includes everybody... so why do you specifically mention the folks "at the bottom of the pile"?

Me: Because that is who Jesus specifically points to in Matthew 25. I guess he figured that if we are concerned with the people that were most left out, the other people nearer to us will also be taken care of as well.

Peaches: Makes sense. Of course, from a justice or fairness point of view, you would have to serve those *most* in need, right? I mean, that would be more loving and fair than serving those *less* in need?

Me: Can you give me an example of what you mean?

Peaches: Well let's say there's a tidal wave that wipes out a community on the coast. Shouldn't my concern be for those who have no place left to live in before I worry about

the rich folks who lost their summer cottage in the disaster?

Me: Very good distinction. And there is a name for that distinction of yours, P.

Peaches: What?

Me: The Church calls that the "preferential option for the poor."

Peaches: Isn't preferring one group over another unjust?

Me: Not in the kind of situation you describe. If both groups have the same level of need then it would be unjust to prefer one over another. For example, if after the tidal wave we helped only the Catholics in the village and not the homeless Hindus, that would be unfair.

But to choose to help those who are most in need or in danger is always more just. And the folks at the bottom of the pile are always the most in need and the most in danger. That's what being at the bottom means!

Peaches: So it's kind of like when you go to the emergency room. No one likes to wait

their turn but if someone is going to die and you're not, they take them first for treatment even if they got to the hospital after you.

Me: Same. Same.

Peaches: Of course, an example closer to home would be tougher.

Me: They always are!

Peaches: I mean usually the choice is not between the Hindu and Catholic disaster victims. We really have to choose between ME and any disaster victims. Do I keep my money for myself and my family or do I give it away? That's tougher!

Me: Yes. That's where a good prayer life shows itself in the real world.

Peaches: Speaking of which, are we ever going to get to that?! These beads are burning a hole in my pocket!

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 January/February/March

January

General. *Young people and Social Communications*

Media: That young people may learn to use modern means of social communication for their personal growth and to better prepare themselves to serve society.

Missionary. *Christian Unity:*

That every believer in Christ may be conscious that unity among all Christians is a condition for more effective proclamation of the Gospel.

February

General. *Scholars:*

For all scholars and intellectuals, that by means of sincere search for the truth they may arrive at an understanding of the one true God.

Missionary. *The Church's Missionary Identity:*

That the Church, aware of its own missionary identity, may strive to follow Christ faithfully and to proclaim his gospel to all peoples.

March

General. *World Economy:* That the world economy may be managed according to the principles of justice and equity, taking account of the real needs of peoples, especially the poorest.

Missionary. *The Churches in Africa:* That the Churches in Africa may be signs and instruments of reconciliation and justice in every part of that continent.

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

Lectio Divina, Part 3

Meditate or Reflect on the Biblical Text

Lectio divina is the practice of reading, meditating on, and praying with Scripture. (The two words are Latin for “divine word” or “divine reading.”) Through this practice of prayerfully reading Scripture, we meet God and hear his word for our lives. Thus, it is a great way to help us deepen our commitment to God. We develop a sense of God’s plan for us and how he wants to lead us on our walk with him. This is because “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).

Four steps or movements are involved in *lectio divina*. 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. In this article, we will look at what it means to meditate or reflect on the text.

Meditate and reflect on Scripture. Meditating on Scripture means taking the short passage of Scripture we have chosen, slowly reading it and considering its meaning, phrase by phrase, perhaps even word by word (see part 2 of this series). Remember, *lectio divina* is not a speed reading contest. We are not trying to get through the passage as soon as possible and on to something else! We are waiting on God to hear his word to us.

This means patient reflection and deeper study of the words. It means trying to get “into” their meaning, to think more deeply about them. Some Bibles have study notes that will be helpful to you. You may also want to use a dictionary to help you understand more fully as well. You will likely want to take some notes in a journal or notebook on the thoughts that come to mind as you are reflecting so you don’t forget what you are learning. These notes will come in handy as you move on to steps three and four (praying and contemplation).

Open a space in your heart...and receive. Let the words enter your heart. In biblical understanding, your heart is that interior space where in faith, hope, and love,

we open a wider space for God. We leave behind our anger and prejudices, bitterness and impurity—the things of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19-21). We let God in.

Here we *receive the words* as a gift from God. We don’t fight them or resist them. Rather, through the gift of grace from the Spirit of God, we seek a deeper understanding of them. Through these words, God is trying to lead us deeper into himself. They are a way that we gain a new understanding of God and what he wants to give us.

Opening and receiving is part of a process. It leads to understanding, but it doesn’t come all at once. It takes time—sometimes years, and really, the rest of our lives. But each time we open our hearts and receive, our walk with God continues and we grow in our commitment to him. Slowly, but surely, our lives change and are renewed through the living word of God touching and changing our hearts and minds.

Pray and contemplate. Meditating and reflecting are part of the movement of *lectio divina*. In coming parts of this series, we will look at the place of prayer and contemplation in *lectio divina*.

For now, we need to remember that practicing *lectio divina* means setting aside a time and place for it at least once a week. 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. You will likely see that it helps you grow in your commitment to Christ and that your spiritual life deepens.

Questions for Prayer and Discussion:

1. Do you want to grow in your commitment to Christ? Do you see things that stand in the way of a deeper commitment and ways you can overcome them?
2. How can you slow down enough in your life so that you can open a space for meditation and reflection?
3. How can you cultivate your inner space to prepare a place for a word from God to you?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Stories about Conversion and Commitment

Do you have a story about God working in your life while you have been in prison or jail that you would like to share with others? **We are specifically looking for stories about conversion and commitment while in prison.** We hope to print as many of those stories as we can in our summer 2010 issue of *Let's Talk!* and *¡Hablemos!*. We will also include them in a pamphlet about conversion and commitment we plan on publishing this year.

Please focus your story on the role that Word, Worship, Community, or Service played in your conversion and commitment. Keep it to 325 words or less.

Please include a note from your chaplain stating you are in good standing at the prison. To protect your privacy, we do not print your name or prison, but do give your location by state. We are not able to pay for your submissions. Your reward is knowing that your story may help and encourage others. We may not be able to use all the stories sent to us.

Please send your story to *Let's Talk!*; PNCEA; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017.

Thank you.

2010 Calendars

New 2010 calendars are available, also the booklet “Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones,” and bookmark. In English and Spanish, all from the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems. Send your name and address to: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 48360.

Pray for our benefactors

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