

A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



3031 FOURTH STREET, NE ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20017

Vol. 21, No. 1 – January/February/March 2014

The Gospel brings us Joy

Here is some good news for all of us: The Gospel brings us joy! Pope Francis is teaching us this important age-old truth in a new message to all in the Church, and to all people of good will willing to hear. The message is called *The Joy of the Gospel* and was issued on November 24, 2013. It is a message of truth and vital importance to all, including people in jail or prison.

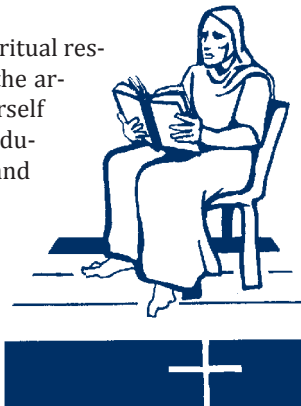
A joy ever new and shared. Pope Francis writes: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (n. 1). Each day we need to strive to live in a way that brings us joy.

We experience this joy as we encounter Jesus in our lives each day . . . in all of our joys and hopes, in our griefs and anxieties. How do we do this when life can be so chal-

lenging? Take a look at the “spiritual resolutions” for the New Year in the article on this page. Commit yourself to them. As you do, you will gradually—even at times suddenly and powerfully—encounter Jesus and the life and love he gives. This brings us joy.

God’s voice is often not heard. Why is this so hard? Pope Francis tells us that in today’s world many things stand in the way—desire for possessions, mean personalities, using pressure and violence to get our own way.

They cause “desolation and anguish” in our hearts. “Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no



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longer felt, and the desire to do good fades” (n. 2).

Invite Jesus into your life. For all of us, whether behind bars or outside, experiencing this joy means making daily decisions to live differently. It is sometimes painful and difficult, but God gives us the grace, the power, to do it. Seriously consider committing yourself to the spiritual

practices which are described in the article “Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year” below. These practices open us to God and his wisdom and power.

They change our lives. Be patient and persistent and you will see change. You will experience the joy of the Gospel. It is worth living for!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Another New Year is here. Let’s take advantage of this time for new beginnings to refocus our lives on becoming more the people Jesus wants us to be. We give many suggestions for that in this issue. As you read and reflect on these articles, ask the Holy Spirit to help you change.

Remember, your life is important. No matter if you are released tomorrow or will spend many years more in prison, you can become a new and better person. Jesus wants that for you. And he gives the grace for it to happen. This New Year, rededicate yourself to that.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Practical ways to help you grow in faith

Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

We face another New Year! Another year to grow deeper in our faith. But growing in faith doesn’t happen automatically. We have to do our part.

Many spiritual directors recommend that if we want to grow spiritually, we need to develop our own “spiritual discipline.” At the heart of this is that we try to do what we can, not what we can’t. By this they mean that if you don’t have an hour a day of quiet for prayer, don’t attempt to pray an hour a day in quiet prayer. It won’t happen and you’ll just end up frustrated. Thus, seek to build a realistic spiritual life that suits your present circumstances.

Everyone’s circumstances differ, even in prison or jail. Your level of confinement and the number of others around you will affect the amount of distractions you face and the time you get for some quiet. But even your own personality will impact what you can and should try to do. Here are some suggestions for “Spiritual Resolutions” for this special year. (You can read more about them in the Paulist Prison Ministries pamphlet “Conversion and Commitment to Christ.” Your chaplain or volunteer may be able to get a copy for you.)

A good spiritual discipline consists of several parts. Here are some to consider: 1) Read the Word of God. 2) Worship and pray. 3) Be part of a community. 4) Care for and serve others. Let’s take a look at them.

First, the Word of God. Read Scripture. Listen to Scripture being read. Since every Catholic Mass consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Mass

continued on page 2

CHURCH CALENDAR

JANUARY 2014

- 1 **Mary, Mother of God**
- 2 Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, bishops and doctors
- 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
- 5 **Epiphany of the Lord**
- 12 **Baptism of the Lord**
- 17 St. Anthony, abbot
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 19 **Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 St. Agnes, virgin and martyr
- 24 St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor
- 25 **Conversion of St. Paul**
- 26 **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor
- 31 St. John Bosco, priest

FEBRUARY 2014

- 2 **Presentation of the Lord**
- 5 St. Agatha, virgin and martyr
- 6 St. Paul Miki and Companions, martyrs
- 9 **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 10 St. Scholastica, virgin
- 14 St. Cyril, monk & St. Methodius, bishop
- 16 **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 **Chair of Peter**
- 23 **Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**

MARCH 2014

- 5 **Ash Wednesday**
- 7 Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs
- 9 **First Sunday in Lent**
- 16 **Second Sunday in Lent**
- 18 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop, doctor
- 19 **St. Joseph, Husband of Mary**
- 23 **Third Sunday in Lent**
- 25 **Annunciation**
- 30 **Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Let's Talk!

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Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

(continued from page 1)

provides a good time to hear the Word proclaimed. Listen to it and try to pick up something you can remember afterward to guide you.

It can sometimes be difficult to attend religious services while in prison or jail. Thus, it is also good to develop a daily habit of reading something from the Bible. You might want to follow the daily Mass readings. Or you might want to work your way through books of the Bible (starting with the New Testament), and perhaps the entire Bible itself.

It is important to remember that reading Scripture isn't a speed-reading contest. Read slowly and reflect on what you read. Perhaps write down in a notebook something that strikes you. Remember, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Second, worship and pray. Attend Sunday Mass if you can. If it isn't available on Sunday, attend when it is offered. The Eucharist is the great sacrament of life and love. Participate with an open heart and mind, with the desire of meeting Jesus and learning from him, growing in him, being healed by him.

For most people, the liturgy is at most once a week for an hour or less. Thus, in addition, have a time of personal prayer each day. Set aside a time and place when you can talk with God. A little such time is better than none. If possible, read Scripture during this time as well. If none of this is possible, take time during a quiet time of the day to turn your mind and heart to God and talk with him. This is an example of "Pray as you can, not as you can't."

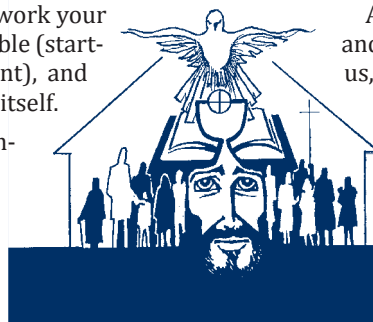
Third, be part of a community. If there is a Catholic fellowship or church at your prison or jail, participate in it if you can. (If it is a general Christian fellowship, make sure that they aren't "Catholic bashers" out to tear you down.) When Jesus formed a body of followers known as his disciples, he was setting an example for us. It is important to be part of a community.

A community can provide fun and fellowship that encourages us, and that supports us in hard times. They can be good people to talk with and grow with, and provide positive relationships. A community of believers is a place where we live out our faith, so it doesn't remain something just in our heads. It has to be in

our hearts too, and participation in a community with other Christians challenges us to live out our faith.

Fourth, care for and serve others. This follows closely on number three above. Our faith isn't just about ourselves. It is about caring for and serving others as well. So look for ways you can do that while in prison or jail. Of course, be prudent and don't get entangled with people who will use and/or abuse you. That is why community is so important. When two or three are gathered together Christ is with you and you can better know when to be involved with another and when not to.

A Personal Encounter with Christ. At the heart of these spiritual resolutions that you can make part of your spiritual discipline is a "personal encounter with Christ." All of these things help you to encounter Christ, and when that happens you will grow spiritually. And that's something worth making the goal of our spiritual resolutions for the New Year.



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Prisoner Saint

St. Margaret Clitherow (d. 1586) + Faithful Catholics living in England in the late 1500s faced fierce treatment, and often died for their faith. Margaret Clitherow, wife and mother of two children, was one of them. Margaret's life was comfortable until she converted from Protestantism and became a Catholic. Then, at age 30, she was arrested and imprisoned for hiding Catholic priests, which the law required be turned in for punishment and death. In prison, Margaret refused to deny her Catholic faith, a way to be set free. Instead, she stood firm and chose martyrdom. Margaret's torture was so extreme that she died within 15 minutes. Her death took place on Good Friday.

Feast Day: March 26

Talking about Religion, Part 6

What's this about Lent!?!

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests
for January/February/
March**JANUARY**

Universal. *Authentic Economic Development:* That all may promote authentic economic development that respects the dignity of all peoples.

Evangelization. *Christian Unity:* That Christians of diverse denominations may walk toward the unity desired by Christ.

FEBRUARY

Universal. *Older People:* That the Church and society may respect the wisdom and experience of older people.

Evangelization. *Working together for Evangelization:* That priests, religious, and lay people may work together with generosity for evangelization.

MARCH

Universal. *Women:* That all cultures may respect the rights and dignity of women.

Evangelization. *Young People:* That many young people may accept the Lord's invitation to consecrate their lives to proclaiming the Gospel.

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

With Lent beginning on March 5th, we offer this to you now!

Peaches: OK, Deke. We've hit the "mother lode" with Lent!

Me: "mother lode"!? Are you trying to start something?

Peaches: No. Just saying. Dude, my Fundamentalist cellie is losing her whole mind!

Me: See. That sounds like you're starting something! You're still praying for her and doing respectful dialogue, right?

Peaches: Of course. I'm being a good Catholic!

Me: Bueno! So "Lent" means "Spring" and it started in the early Church as the time people were prepared for Baptism at Easter.

Peaches: See . . . "early Church." . . . Karen says Lent isn't in the Bible.

Me: She's right. The word "Lent" isn't there. But the example of Jesus spending 40 days after his baptism in the desert to prepare himself for his ministry is.

Peaches: Oh, so that's why its 40 days before Easter!

Me: Yeah, 40 is a popular number in Scripture: 40 days in the desert for Jesus, 40 years for Israel, 40 days and nights of rain for Noah, etc. Its symbolic meaning is "change."

Peaches: And of course, the people getting baptized are certainly going into a change. But why does the whole Church do Lent instead of just the newbies?

Me: Well, the sponsors . . .

Peaches: Godparents!

Me: Right. They went through it with their catechumen.

Peaches: Cata-what?

Me: Catachumen. "Newbie." It means "learner." It's where we get the word Catechism.

Peaches: Right!

Me: Anyway, the rest of us started to do it as well in order to be in solidarity with the catechumens and to imitate Jesus. Plus, we found a spiritual "spring house cleaning" to be not only beneficial but absolutely necessary!

Peaches: OK, so Karen says that ashes are wrong because Jesus says no one should know that you are fasting (Matthew 6:16ff).

Me: True, but he also approves of ashes as a sign of repentance (Matthew 11:21) and he says, "Let your good works shine" (Matthew 5:16). By the way, ashes as a sign of repentance are all over the Bible.

Peaches: So, how can you do both?

Me: Well, the Church tends to agree with Karen so we let our works shine on only one day a year—Ash Wednesday. The other 364 days we fast in secret.

Peaches: Cool. And giving up stuff for Lent?

Me: It's a form of fasting. Fasting is a world wide spiritual practice. You can't love others without saying "no" to yourself. So, we exercise our "no muscle" during Lent by giving up things that have some kind of hold on us. In order to become more free to love like Jesus did. And then there's "almsgiving."

Peaches: "Works! Righteousness!", Karen says.

Me: Only if you do it to *gain* grace. Not if you do it as a form of self-discipline, which is another way to fast, or as a response to the gift of God's love which we are not trying to earn.

Peaches: Because it's already given to us, right?

Me: Yup.

Peaches: And any love requires a response of love. So we love God by loving others in need.

Me: Besides, Jesus praises the widow for giving all she had in alms (Mark 12:43) and recommends it in other places.

Peaches: So, let's see, Lent, fasting, alms . . . Oh, yeah! Worshipping the crucifix!

Me: We only worship God. We "honor" the cross. Just like we "honor" the flag by saluting it. We don't worship the flag.

Peaches: Well, Deke, she's got this thing against statues in general, you know, she thinks they are idols.

Me: That one always puzzled me. Biblically, an idol is not a representation of the god. It IS the god! So, do I think that piece of wood and metal IS Jesus?!

Peaches: Of course not, my dog knows the difference between a real bone and a statue of a bone!

Me: And the problem is not the image—it's worshipping the image. Exodus 20:5 ends with "in order to worship them." Otherwise, you could not have pictures of your children or stained glass windows with images, etc. (Exodus 20:4)

Peaches: Karen doesn't buy that interpretation.

Me: Well, God orders the Ark of the Covenant to be built with graven images (Exodus 25:18-19) so either that's a correct reading or . . .

Peaches: Or God is dumber than my dog!

Me: OK. See now, you're starting something!

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.

The moral virtues really do matter!

Over the past six issues of *Let's Talk!* we have been reflecting on the moral virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These virtues help us live better lives, positive lives of joy and hope. They help us live the good life. This is the final article in this series on the moral virtues, so we want to help make it clear once again why they are important.

The moral virtues do matter. Let's start with this true story. Shortly after Thanksgiving I received a phone call from a man who said he had just been released from prison in Kentucky. He was returning to our area where his family lived. He had been sentenced for stealing from his previous employer.

He desperately wanted to see his three young children, but didn't have a car to drive the hundred or so miles to do that, and didn't have any money either. I said I'd see what could be done and checked with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in my parish, and they agreed to meet him and hear his need. They agreed to rent a car for him for two days and would also pay for some expenses. He was thrilled and greatly appreciative.

I called the Society a week or so later to see how things went. They said that the man had broken the agreement he had made

with them. He kept the car for a week and didn't have any receipts. The man didn't act prudently or act with justice toward those helping him. The Society members were upset by this, but said they would keep their agreement to rent a car a second time so he could make a Christmas visit to his children. They had already bought some Christmas presents for the children. How good God is as he acts through the wonderful people of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, one of the great charity societies of the Catholic Church!

The moral virtues help us do the right thing. The Society member also told me that the man "has little social skills." That is, he doesn't know how to relate to others in a socially-acceptable way. He broke the agreement he made with the Society members. And there were some other issues as well! Wow, what a mess, especially for someone trying to resume a life in society. He was doing all the wrong things.

Fortunately, many people learn something of the moral virtues as they grow up. We might not know them by name, but in

The Moral Virtues

- **Prudence** helps us decide in every situation which action is the best for us and to decide to do that. Sometimes it may mean "tough love" is necessary!
- **Justice** is the virtue which leads us to be honest and true to God and neighbor and to give what is due to them.
- **Fortitude** (also called courage) helps us to overcome fear or indifference and do what is called for in any situation.
- **Temperance** helps us to be moderate with bodily pleasures so that we don't drink or eat too much, or too little for that matter.

a good family environment, we learn them by practice. And as we learn them more by name and what they mean, we are more aware of them in daily life and want to live them.

Building social skills. So, the point in all of this is that the moral virtues do matter. They help us build the social skills to live in society in a respected way. They help us be trustworthy and noble people. They truly do make life worth living!

If you have found this series of articles helpful, please write to us and let us know. That helps us write about things helpful to you.

~ Anthony Bosnick

TIME magazine names Pope Francis "Person of the Year"!

Can you imagine that! Pope Francis is named "Person of the Year," an honor given to one person out of the seven billion people living on Earth. Why? His message of God's mercy, care for the poor and suffering (including those in prison), and example of kindness has touched the hearts of many. He reflects Jesus and lives out his faith.

This should give all of us hope. People who live as Jesus teaches are attractive. They do what the world sees as extraordinary—they live for others, not just themselves. Pope Francis does this. And we can

too, in ways that are right for us. Think about what it would take you to be seen as "Person of the Year" by those around you—even those whom you have disappointed and hurt in the past. Pope Francis shows us that the Gospel has the power to change our lives for the better

The honor of "Person of the Year" has been given to only two other popes: John XXIII (pope from 1958 to 1963) and John Paul II (pope from 1978 to 2005). Both of these popes will be declared saints on April 2 of this year.

2014 Calendars

New 2014 calendars are available, also the booklet "Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones." And a bookmark. In English and Spanish, all from the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems.

To request this material, send your name and address to:

NCCA
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