

Let's *Talk!*[®]



A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners

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

It's fun to be Catholic!

Have you ever thought that being Catholic is too hard? Or that following Jesus takes away the fun of life? Nearly all of us have, including St. Teresa of Avila who once said to God after falling into a cold stream, "If this is the way you treat your friends, it's no wonder you have so few!"

Years ago, while stumbling along on my faith journey, a priest friend, Fr. Tom Weinandy, OFM, Cap. told me to have courage and to remember that "It's fun to be Catholic!" Over the years, I've found that it is.

A cloud of witnesses.

The saints surround us, this cloud of witnesses who are among the most interesting people you could ever hope to know. There are saints for all seasons. The great founders such as Dominic, Francis, and Ignatius of Loyola put aside their worldly desires to follow Jesus. Great reformers such as Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila called Jesus' followers to straighten up and return to their first love. Catherine even told the Pope to leave the comfort of France and return to Rome where he belonged!

People with great love for children like Angela Merici and John Baptist de la Salle founded schools for rich and poor alike.



Priests like John Vianney brought countless people back to God. Selfless missionary Damien of Molokai went to the Pacific Islands to minister to lepers, and died one. And likely saints such as Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa still teach us to care for the poor and neglected.

All that is good and human. We are inspired by and take joy in the Catholic way that sees God's goodness in creation. Countless people go on pilgrimages each year to the Holy Land, Lourdes, Fatima, and the Guadalupe Shrine in Mexico to be close to places especially loved by God and to walk in the footsteps of the saints.

Holy water, saints' relics, beautiful churches, humble chapels, stations of the cross, rosaries, and scapulars. All inspire us on our journey to God. They show us that God is present with us. We do not worship these material things. We worship God alone. They simply help us remember God and return to him.

The Catholic faith is not a religion of doom and gloom. Rather, it rejoices in the many ways God touches our lives in body, mind, and spirit. Heaven is paradise, and the Catholic way of getting there is great fun. Practice your faith and join the fun!

~ A. B.

Q & A

God still speaks to us through Scripture

Q. I would like to know a bit about why just 8 of Jesus' apostles wrote about him and the rest didn't. They all must have had something interesting to say.

A. We are unsure how you came up with 8 as the number of Jesus' apostles who are the authors of the 27 books of the New Testament. Various people see the number of authors of the NT ranging from less than 9 to over 15, or even more. How many were actually from among the 12 apostles is unclear.

The Gospels originated with stories from Jesus' life told and retold in the early church. The apostles likely had a part in relating these stories, but so too did many others. Just as different people today tell the same story in various ways, the same happened with the Gospels. The four Gospels relate Jesus' life and mission in different ways. This should not surprise or shock us. The Gospels arose out of different communities of Christians. Some consisted largely of Jewish Christians, some of Gentile Christians. They understood Jesus and his call differently. Their written texts express his life and teachings accordingly. It is the same today. Fox News reports differently than CNN!

The important thing to remember is that God is the author of Scripture. God worked through human instruments and we received the written text. The early church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, discerned what reflected the hand of God and what reflected purely human work. That is why we have the four Gospels of Scripture and not others. That which was determined to be authentic was included in the New Testament.

What is important is that God speaks through Scripture. We need to be attentive to his word. As we read Scripture aware of

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

You may have heard the words of a hymn sung by many Christians: "There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea; There's a kindness in his justice, which is more than liberty.... For the love of God is broader, than the measure of our mind; And the heart of the Eternal, is most wonderfully kind."

This hymn describes our God...generous in mercy and loving beyond all bounds, kind even when calling us to justice. Our loving God is calling all of us to a relationship of love with him. Our prayer is that this newsletter will help you say yes to God's call to you.

Father Kenneth Boyack, CSP
President, PNCEA

July 2007

- 1 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 3 St. Thomas, apostle
- 8 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 11 St. Benedict, abbot
- 14 Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 22 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 25 St. James, apostle
- 26 Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of Mary
- 29 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, priest

August 2007

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

September 2007

- 2 Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope, doctor
- 8 Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 9 Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 13 St. John Chrysostom, bishop, doctor
- 14 Triumph of the Cross
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 20 Sts. Andrew Kim Taegŏn, Paul Chŏng Hasang and companions, martyrs
- 21 Matthew, apostle, evangelist
- 23 Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, priest
- 29 Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels
- 30 Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Let's Talk!®

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Combined Federal Campaign #11877

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Q & A: God still speaks to us through Scripture

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how we received it, we can more intelligently apply it in our lives.

Q. Who is the woman in Revelation 17:9?

A. The book of Revelation is one of the most difficult to understand in the Bible. Much symbolism unfamiliar to both ancient and modern readers fills the book. The book relates to its readers visions received by John. Some believe this John was the author of the Gospel by the same name. Others—among them some of the great Church Fathers—question this.

The book is not intended to be a guide to history, ancient or modern. Trying to identify the woman with a particular person or empire is largely a fruitless task. Some do say, however, that the woman *could* represent the Roman Empire which was persecuting the early church. They see her as leading Christians astray by the alluring things of the world. These things could be wealth, self-focused desires, and immorality. As such, the woman represents what Christians must avoid. If they do not, sin will destroy them and they will lose eternal life.

The author of Revelation was trying to relate a message to the church of his day. This church was being persecuted and the message was to stay faithful to God and to follow Christ into life. The author is warning readers to avoid the attractions of the world

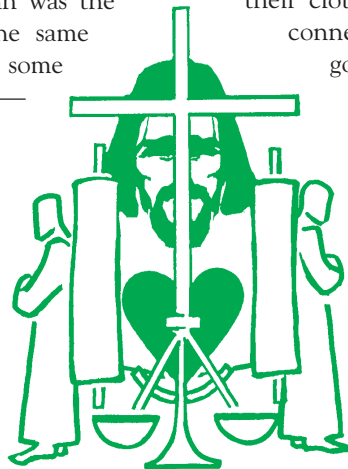
and to let grace fill us. This warning and advice applies across the ages. It is still solid advice for Christians today. That is a helpful way to understand this passage.

Q. What is the scapular?

A. The scapular worn by laypeople consists of two small pieces of cloth with pictures or biblical verses on them. People wear it under their clothing. The pieces of cloth are connected by small strings which go over the shoulders so that one is over the chest and one over the back. The type worn by laypeople came from the much larger scapulars worn by monks as a sign of devotion.

Wearing the scapular is to remind one to live a devout life and to follow in the way of Jesus. Spiritual promises are associated with them such as that the wearer will not die without the opportunity to receive the Last Rites. There are several types, including the “brown scapular” of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the “green scapular” of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the “red scapular” of the Passion. The scapular is not magical. Wearing one doesn’t guarantee salvation. But the pictures and Bible verses on them should remind wearers to live daily with eternal life as their goal.

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



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Prisoner Saint

St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) ✠ Fr. Maximilian Kolbe taught devotion to Mary as a way to Christ. He had great success in Poland. Then he went to Japan in 1930 with the same mission. Poor health forced him to return to Poland in 1936. Following the Nazi invasion in 1939, they arrested, released, and then rearrested Kolbe. In 1941, the Nazis sent him to Auschwitz prison. When a prisoner escaped, the guards chose ten men to die. Kolbe volunteered to take the place of one of them, a married man with young children. For three weeks, the Nazis withheld food and water. Finally they killed him with a lethal injection. Pope John Paul II canonized Kolbe in 1982 as a martyr of love.

Feast Day: August 14

The Twelve-Step Program

No place to go but up...Step 1

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: Shame on you, Deacon Dolan! Bad Chaplain! Bad!

Me: What I did!!!

Peaches: You of all people should back me up on that one! Where's your faith?!

Me: P, it's not a lack of faith to go to a 12-step meeting!

Peaches: But I go to Mass and Bible study. I have faith that God is going to heal me of my addiction.

Me: Yeah, but maybe he's going to heal you through the 12-step program. God works in many ways. We shouldn't be dictating to him how he does it!

Peaches: But, N.A. is not Christian...

Me: The 12 steps came out of a Christian organization called The Oxford Group. Its principles can all be found in the New Testament. As time has gone on and people with different religious backgrounds also wanted recovery, A.A. changed some wording so that other folks besides Christians could benefit from the program. One of Bill Wilson's sponsors was Father Ed Dowling. He was OK with it. Sister Ignatius opened the first alcoholic ward in a hospital. She was OK with it. There have always been many Catholics in the program. The Church has no problem with it.

Peaches: So, it's not a lack of faith?

Me: If it's a lack of faith to go to a 12-step program, then so is going to a doctor for medical reasons. God cures through doctors and prayer. Making it "either/or" is a false choice. Besides, I think the 12 steps are just applying the teachings of Jesus to addiction. Which means if you turn it around from an "either faith or 12 steps" decision to a "faith and 12 steps" decision, your recovery will be even stronger.

Peaches: I see. So it's kind of like a rope. If it has two strands it is stronger than a single strand of the same rope.

Me: Exactly! And it's so easy for a Catholic to combine the two strands that you'd have to be crazy not to!

Peaches: How is it easy?

Me: OK. Let's look at Step 1: "*We admitted we were powerless over (alcohol, drugs, food, sex, whatever!)*—that our lives had become unmanageable." Now, what's the first thing we do every time we go to Mass?

Peaches: Tell God that we're sorry for our sins?

Me: Right! The Penitential Rite.

Peaches: How is that admitting that we are powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable?

Me: Because it's built into the Mass!

Peaches: I'm not getting this.

Me: OK. Ever been to a Mass where everybody does *not* admit that they've messed up? A Mass that does not begin with the Penitential Rite?

Peaches: No.

Me: OK. So if at every Mass, at all times, regardless of who is there, the first order of business is to admit that we have sinned...?

Peaches: Oh, right! If you had to build that in it's because you know everybody needs to do it and if everybody needs to do it all the time then that's "powerless."

Me: Right, or sometimes you'd do it and sometimes you wouldn't. And what step are we talking about?

Peaches: Step 1.

Me: And when do we do this in the Mass?

Peaches: First thing...Gotcha! It's Step 1 for the Mass too! Cool.

Me: Very.

Peaches: Where's the "our lives had become unmanageable" part?

Me: You tell me. If I lie, cheat on my wife, steal, hate, envy, etc. without regularly repenting and putting on the brakes, what will my life eventually become as the consequences of those choices catch up with me?

Peaches: "Unmanageable."

Me: It's just a matter of time. It's like sin and addiction are trains on the same track, headed for the same place. The only difference is in the time it takes to get to "unmanageability."

Peaches: Yeah, and addiction is the express train!

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. *Common good:* That all citizens may participate actively in working to achieve and maintain the common good.

Missionary. *Help for missionaries:* That all Christians, aware of their missionary duty, may actively help those engaged in the evangelization of peoples.

August

General. *Those suffering inner turmoil:* That those who are suffering inner difficulties and trials may find in Christ the light and support that leads to authentic happiness.

Missionary. *Church in China:* That the Church in China may grow in unity and in visible communion with the Pope.

September

General. *Romanian Assembly:* That the ecumenical assembly in Romania this month may contribute to the growth of unity among all Christians.

Missionary. *Missionaries:* That, following Christ joyfully, all missionaries may know how to overcome the difficulties they meet in everyday life.

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

Mary's Joyful Prayer – Part 1

A Way to Live Each Day

Read and study: Luke 1:46-55

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; and my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on all ages call me blessed.”
(Luke 1:46-47)

Mary's heartfelt prayer known as the Magnificat has inspired countless Christians for almost 20 centuries. The prayer and Mary's way of living show us a way to live our lives. The first word in the Latin text gives its name to the prayer. People translate “magnificat” as “proclaims,” or “glorifies,” or “magnifies.” Through Mary's kind heart and honest life, God's glory shines for all to see. This is the first of a four-part series on the Magnificat to see what it can teach us about how we can live so that God's love shines through us, even while in prison.

Mary lived her life as God asks of all of us. She began doing this long before she said yes to God to be the mother of his Son Jesus (Luke 1:38). Her faithfulness in the things of daily life showed her ready to bring Christ to the world. When we too welcome the Word of God in our hearts, we bear Christ to the world. God makes himself known through us. If you want to live this way, these articles will hopefully help you.

Our daily lives. Life is a struggle for many people. Those in prison know this better than most. We are a people created by God, and deeply loved by him. While we are freed from the power of sin through faith and baptism, sin has left its mark on us. Our appetites and desires remain disordered due to the impact of sin. This produces a tendency to further sin.

Even the saints experienced and struggled against sin. And since they did, we can know it is our lot as well! Common to them, however, was that they knew their weaknesses and opened their hearts to God for the grace to resist sin. And since we will never be free from sin in this life, our hope can be that our sins will not always be the same.

Rejoicing in God. Mary recognized the greatness of God. This opened her to the love and strength that comes from living according to God's way. True, it was easier for Mary than it is for us. After all, as St. Jerome

wrote, Mary received her grace all at once, while we receive ours “in dribs and drabs”! But we still receive it. It opens us to the beauty of life with God. This can give faithful ones the desire to say to God: yes, I want more, and I will live to receive more. This is the first decision we need to make each day, and then to make again and again. As we do, we begin to rejoice in God and to say yes to him more often.

Mary lived humbly and simply. She rejected pride and did not stand on her “rights.” This attitude of heart guided her as she lived each day in the shadow of God and sought to follow him faithfully. And in this all generations have called her blessed (v. 47).

Not for Mary alone. While Mary has a unique and privileged place in God's plan of salvation, she is still a model for us. She shows us how important it is to welcome the Word of God into our hearts...again, and again, and again. We will always struggle on the way until that day when we cross over and live in the presence of God. Even so, the promise is real. While we share partially in the blessings now, we will experience them in fullness when we enter eternal life.

Other Scripture passages to study:

- Psalm 16:7-11
- Isaiah 66:10-13
- Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Zechariah 9:9
- Matthew 5:11-12
- 1 Peter 1:6-9

Ways to take action:

1. What in Mary's prayer inspires you to want to live more fully for God? What do you need to do to make that happen?
2. In what ways do you resist living so that God's love shines through you? What stands in the way?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Letter from Prison

Where the Holy Spirit Dwells

“We are called to be a caring community.... Where peace, joy and unity prevail. Where we are one body ministering to God's people. Where God's forgiveness, love, grace, mercy and the guiding light of salvation can be found. Where everyone is welcome.”

So proclaims the mission statement posted by the entrance of our prison chapel... I am a lector for the Catholic community in a Texas penitentiary. We, the Church, consider each member as family. When the family comes together in our special place, the Holy Spirit dwells within. Visiting chaplains and RCIA volunteers tell us, “We have come here to recharge our spiritual batteries; we feel the Lord's Spirit working powerfully in your Church community.”

On Friday mornings, our chaplain allows us a time of Adoration. In the quiet darkness of the chapel, men gaze upon the golden monstrance holding the Body of Christ, illuminated by candlelight. The smoke of burning incense slowly rises. Sometimes, men shed tears of sorrow for wasted lives. Sometimes they are tears of joy for new-found strength. No one is in a hurry to leave; it's a place where peace, joy, and unity prevail, where the Spirit dwells.

When a brother's time to leave is near, with his debt to society paid, he may feel tremors of trepidation, a fear of leaving this place of solace. He may ponder the question, “Will I find a caring church family out there in the hardhearted world? Will they accept me as I am, without judgment?”

Someday, I'll leave this prison life. And I'll be searching for a new church home; one that teams with love and is filled with the Holy Spirit. If I were to visit the church in your hometown, will I find it there?

~ A prisoner in Texas

Pray for our benefactors

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