

A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



3031 FOURTH STREET, NE ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20017

Vol. 21, No. 3 – July/August/September 2014

Simple people make the difference

Do you ever think that this Christian thing is good, but all you can do is take a back seat? Perhaps you think that you don't have the training or background to do anything but follow at a distance? Or that your past is too bad to overcome?

Pope Francis would have you think about this.

Simple people pave the way. The pope says that "simple" people make the difference. By "simple" people, the pope means most of us. They are people without special training, who know hurt and sorrow and broken relationships, who have sinned... and sometimes big time! It is these "simple" people who built the Church from nothing to a world-wide presence ministering to the needs of the suffering and needy across the continents.

This is what Pope Francis said: "Let us not forget that the apostles were simple

people; they were neither scribes nor doctors of the law, nor did they belong to the class of priests. With their limitations and with the authorities against them, how did they manage to fill Jerusalem with their teaching (see Acts 5:28)? It is clear that only the presence of the Risen Lord and the action of the Holy Spirit can explain this fact" (Address, April 14, 2013).

You are needed. Listen to Jesus in your life. Answer his call to open your heart to others and share with them what the Lord has done for you. We all struggle and face challenges, but if you know the spark of the Holy Spirit even a little, do something with it. Especially while you are in prison, you are needed by others to be an instrument of peace and hope to those struggling.



© RON REAVES

Jesus uses the lowly, the insignificant and the sinful for his plans. Ask God each day to help you overcome those things that prevent you from serving him freely and with confidence. He wants to use you.

It happens in prison.

Take a look at the account below of the woman in prison who forgave the woman who murdered her sister. Powerful things do happen in prison. And of course, smaller things too. How can you prepare? In the Q&A column on page 2, commit to the four spiritual practices that will help you grow as a follower of Jesus.

Don't waste time thinking it can't happen to you. It happens all the time, even in prison. And it can happen to you!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Life is filled with opportunities for joy and hope, grief and anxiety. We can embrace the grace and hope Jesus gives us, or be dragged down by our sorrows and anxieties.

Let us choose the way of joy and hope! Life is worth living, and when we decide to follow Jesus each day, and the many times during the day, we see that this is true. So let us commit ourselves to the way of joy and hope.

Each day, ask Jesus to be with you and with those around you. Give in to his love for you. You will know a measure of joy and hope and will know that life is worth living, whether in prison or out.

May God bless you and keep you in his care.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

An Easter Miracle in Prison

Forgiving a Murderer

Deacon Dennis Dolan

On Easter 2014 at the conclusion of the Maximum Security Communion Service, an inmate approached me. She asked if I could do her a favor. I said that I would if I could. "Will you come stand with me?" "What? Why?"

She pointed at one of the women in my choir. "That is the murderer of my sister." I thought, "Oh, crap! There's going to be a fight!" Before I could say anything she continued, "I'm going home this week. This is my last Mass here. I want to forgive her before I leave."

Standing toe to toe with her hand grasping the other's arm, her forgiveness was profuse and unconditional. "Neither I nor my family hate you. We want you to go on with your life and not carry this around. You have a beautiful little daughter at home. She needs you."

That's when we all started "puddling up." Her, me, all the other choir women standing around who by now were tuned into what was unfolding. But particularly, the woman on the receiving end of this magnanimous gesture. She was being visibly unburdened. It was shown clearly in her face and posture.

The three of us ended up in a group hug (a real correctional "no no" ordinarily). I said to the on-looking congregation that milled around us, "This is it, Ladies. This is 'the program!' Take a good long look at what Jesus was talking about!"

continued on page 3, column 1

CHURCH CALENDAR

JULY 2014

- 1 Bl. Junipero Serra, priest
- 3 **St. Thomas, apostle**
- 6 **Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 11 St. Benedict, abbot
- 13 **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 14 St. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 St. Bonaventure, bishop and doctor
- 20 **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 St. Mary Magdalene
- 25 **St. James, apostle**
- 26 St. Joachim and St. Anne, parents of Mary
- 27 **Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 29 St. Martha
- 31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, priest

AUGUST 2014

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

SEPTEMBER 2014

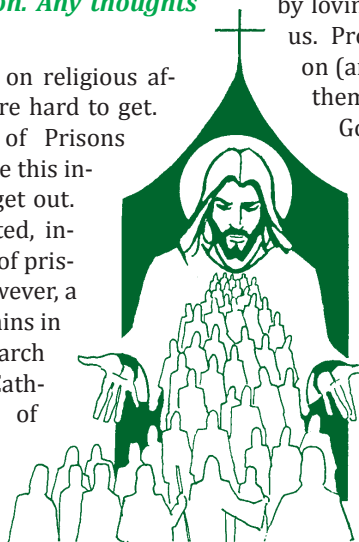
- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope, doctor
- 7 **Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 8 **Birth of Mary**
- 9 St. Peter Claver, priest
- 13 St. John Chrysostom, bishop, doctor
- 14 **Triumph of the Cross**
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 St. Cornelius, pope, martyr and St. Cyprian, bishop, martyr
- 19 St. Isaac Jogues and St. John de Brebeuf, priests and martyrs, and companions, martyrs
- 20 St. Andrew Kim Tae-gön, priest and martyr, St. Paul Chông Hasang, martyr, and companions, martyrs
- 21 **Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 23 St. Pius of Pietrelcina, priest
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, priest
- 28 **Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 29 Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels
- 30 St. Jerome, priest, doctor

Q&A

Jesus came to give us freedom

Q. Every once in a while us Catholics joke that there sure are a lot of Catholics in prison. Any thoughts on this?

A. Accurate statistics on religious affiliation of prisoners are hard to get. The Federal Bureau of Prisons doesn't officially release this information, but things get out. Their figures, now dated, indicate that about 39% of prisoners are Catholic. However, a survey of prison chaplains in 2012 by the Pew Research Center indicates that Catholics are about 15% of prisoners. (Catholics make up about 23% of the general U.S. population.)



© RON REAVES

It's helpful to look at what it means to be "Catholic." Is this a person who has tried to live the Christian life each day and to follow Jesus? Or is it someone who may have been baptized a Catholic, but really hasn't lived out the faith? It is likely that there is more of this kind of Catholic in prison than the type who is striving to follow Jesus each day.

We are not Catholic just because our saintly mother or grandmother was. Remember, God has no grandsons...or granddaughters. God has only sons and daughters. (David DuPlessis, a holy Pentecostal pastor, reminded us of this.) When we know and follow God as our loving Father, as his son or daughter, it makes a big difference in our lives.

Jesus called God, "Abba" (Mark 14:36),

which means "Daddy." When we know God as our Dad or Daddy, we try to please him by loving him and doing what he teaches us. Probably many of the people in prison (and outside of prison too!) who call themselves "Catholic" do not follow God this way. They do not seek to follow him in loving faithfulness.

How do we follow God more faithfully and let him change us? We've said this a lot of times in *Let's Talk!*: 1) Listen to God by reading Scripture and hearing it proclaimed at Mass. 2) Worship and pray. Go to Mass when you can, and have a daily time of prayer. 3) Be part of a Christian community or fellowship if one exists in your prison. 4) Care for and serve others, even in prison. These are the ways that we encounter Christ and grow in faith and faithfulness. Catholics who follow Jesus this way are less likely to be in prison.

If you want to know more about how you can grow strong in the faith, read the Paulist Prison Ministry pamphlet "Conversion and Commitment to Christ." Your prison chaplain or volunteer may be able to get a copy for you.

Q. Do Catholics believe in the Devil?

A. We sure as hell do! At least that is the teaching of the Church, but as with many things today, some people do not believe or accept this teaching. But Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) (paragraph 391-395, and others), teaches belief in the devil.

continued on page 4, column 2

Let's Talk!

PEM President: **Rev. Frank DeSiano, CSP**

Editor: **Mr. Anthony Bosnick**

Layout Editor: **Mrs. Joann Sullivan**

Art: **Mr. Ron Reaves**



Visit us at www.pemdc.org

©Paulist Evangelization Ministries

All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Bible*. Used with permission.

Change of Address: Please help us keep our mailing list accurate. Send all changes in your name and/or address to: Paulist Prison Ministries; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017; or by email to: info@pemdc.org.

Thank you for your help.

PMLTH1403

Prisoner Saint

St. Louis of Toulouse (1274 - 1297) ✚ St. Louis was related to three other saints! In a strange turn of events in his life, Louis and his two brothers were held as prisoners for seven years in exchange for their father's release from prison. During this time, they were taught by Franciscan friars. Louis was so moved by the friars' lives that he took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Franciscan. He renounced all worldly titles and was named Archbishop of Lyons. Louis rapidly gained a reputation for serving the poor, feeding the hungry, and ignoring his own needs before dying at age 23. The good example of his relatives and the friars taught him to live well. Perhaps this can teach us the importance of being a good example to our family and friends. Something great may come out of our lives as well.

Feast Day: August 19

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for July/August/September

JULY

Universal. *Sports:*

That sports may always be occasions of human fraternity and growth.

Evangelization. *Lay Missionaries:*

That the Holy Spirit may support the work of the laity who proclaim the Gospel in the poorest countries.

AUGUST

Universal. *Refugees:*

That refugees, forced by violence to abandon their homes, may find a generous welcome and the protection of their rights.

Evangelization. *Oceania:*

That Christians in Oceania may joyfully announce the faith to all the people of that region.

SEPTEMBER

Universal. *Mentally disabled:*

That the mentally disabled may receive the love and help they need for a dignified life.

Evangelization. *Service to the poor:* That Christians, inspired by the Word of God, may serve the poor and suffering.

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

Forgiving

(continued from page 1)

I wished the departing inmate well. I told her it was the most dramatically good thing that I have seen in my correctional career of over 20 years.

I told her, "I want to be like you when I grow up."

I left the house that morning prepared to give a homily on Resurrection. I returned home having seen one.

The Joy of the Gospel, Part 2

At least try to "Look Redeemed"!

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: So, Deke, you really like this *Joy of the Gospel* thing that Pope Francis wrote.

Me: There's a lot in it and it gives you a peek into Pope Francis' mind as to where he wants to lead the Church.

Peaches: So what else do you like about it?

Me: I like the way it's written. Anyone can understand it, which is not true of many past documents. The way the thing is written is unusual for a Pope. He just tells it like it is! If I were the Pope, even I'd be less blunt!

Peaches: And you are the King of blunt, that's for sure!

Me: That's why I'm assigned to prison ministry, Ms. Smith! We all have our "gifts."

Peaches: Well, it works for us! Prison is no place for subtle anyway. Tell me about the holy blunt?

Me: The Holy Father is calling all of us out on behaviors which go against the mission to evangelize that Jesus gave us. I guess you could call it anti-evangelizing behavior. He criticizes priests who are not warm and welcoming in confession. He says they're scarring people away from the sacrament.

Peaches: He said that?!

Me: Yup and he talks about the average church-going Catholic looking like they lived in a never ending Lent with no Easter!

Peaches: Like you're always telling us, Deke: "Look Redeemed"!

Me: Yeah, that's a start. He also points a finger at all the people who are focused on many rules and forget the good news of a Gospel of Mercy.

Peaches: Well, you know it must be true when the Boss says it in public! No "PR" value in that!

Me: And not only that but he says this stuff regularly in other talks! It's not just this one time.

Peaches: Kind of like "taking inventory" for the whole group, right?

Me: Good example, P!

Peaches: I was thinking that this whole evangelization and mission deal reminded me of Step 12: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Me: Interesting! Connect the dots for me, P.

Peaches: Well, you need to help the next person. They are suffering like you.

Me: OK. That's also a reason for evangelization given by the Popes – everyone is entitled to hear the Gospel.

Peaches: It also helps strengthen your own recovery too.

Me: Sharing your faith with others also strengthens your own faith so that's another connection. Tell me, what would it say about a person who was working the Steps and refused to do the 12th Step?

Peaches: That they haven't had a "spiritual awakening." Which means they aren't really in Recovery because if you did have a "spiritual awakening" you would want to "carry the message."

Me: Bueno! Did you know that at one time or another in the past forty years, two other Popes have said exactly that about Evangelization? You know you're evangelized – having a spiritual awakening to Jesus – if you evangelize others.

Peaches: So Pope Francis' is really "doubling down" on evangelization then. He's moving it from an "extra" for a few people to a "required" for all Catholics.

Me: That's how I read it. He even calls the Church "the entire people of God which evangelizes"! That's his own original phrase. The phrase from the Second Vatican Council is simply "People of God." He added "entire" and "evangelizes" himself. Which makes sense because the mission of evangelization is why there is a Church in the first place! I think Pope Francis is saying that "membership" is not "discipleship."

Peaches: And "discipleship" can start just by simply "looking redeemed"!

Me: "Act as if"!

Peaches: "Fake it till you make it!"

Me: Why do I have a sudden craving for a cup of coffee and a doughnut?

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

The Seven Deadly Sins, Part 2

Pride goes before the fall

You have probably heard it said that “Pride goes before the fall.” This expression comes from the Old Testament book of Proverbs (16:18). There we see it as “Pride goes before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” In this second article in the series on the seven deadly sins, we will look at pride and its impact on our lives.

But before we do that, a word of caution. In the first article in this series we stressed that grace is more powerful than sin. While we might suffer from the sin of pride, God is more powerful than this sin, and every sin. God forgives our sins and changes our hearts. We are not held captive by pride or any other sin.

Pride is a deadly sin. Pride is a deadly sin, those sins that impact our lives so deeply that they lead us into further sin. When we are proud and overconfident, we make decisions and act in ways that lead to our downfall...sometimes in small ways, sometime in big ways. But it always happens. We recognize pride in ourselves and in others by the “I – I – I” focus – my world, my relationships, my things. Everything is about me. This self-focus is dangerous.

Pride is dangerous because it turns us in on ourselves and breaks our relationships with others. It deadens us to God and it deadens us to our fellow human beings. We need those relationships to survive and thrive. Pride breaks down the community of the family, the home, the work-place, the prison. We need community to be whole and healthy. We lose perspective about the importance of a good relationship with God and with others to be whole and happy people.

Where does pride come from? Pride is seen in the sin of our first parents Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3). Not satisfied with the gifts showered on them by God, they were tempted by the devil to be “like God” (Genesis 3:5). Pride is rooted in this sin against God. We grasp for more. We are not satisfied with our God-given gifts and blessings. We want more possessions. More talents. More people to give in to us. And we will treat God and people badly in our pride to get those things.

It looks like this: We become bloated and fall flat on our faces, sometimes to such an extent that we can end up behind bars. In writing of sin, including pride, Mark says, “All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man” (Mark 7: 22, 23). Pride makes us impure.

Pride in your life. Examine your own life to see if pride is a great sin for you. It may not be, we are all different. But if it is, remember what we wrote in the first article on the deadly sins. St. Paul wrote to the Romans that life is in and through Christ. Paul hoped that all people would know life in Christ. For Paul, it comes to this: Life is in Christ; death is in sin. “If death began its reign through one man because of his offense, much more shall those who receive the overflowing grace and gift of justice live and reign through the one man Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

So do not give up or even despair if you see pride ruling in your life. Paul’s words should inspire us as we seek to follow Jesus: “despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it” (Romans 5:20). Or, to put it another way, “grace is greater than sin.” Or, “where sin abounds, grace super abounds.”

When we see pride ruling us, we need to know that we are not powerless. By his cross and Resurrection, Jesus has conquered sin and death. Grace is greater than sin. Grace is greater than pride. Talk with Jesus and ask him for this abundant grace to begin to deal with pride in your life.

Our human nature is so strong that we will not see immediate change. It will likely take years of constant desire and effort to overcome pride. But little by little, through the power of grace and the love of Jesus experienced in our lives, we will change. This pilgrimage we are on is life-long, but Jesus is with all the way. There is a lot of hope in that.

~ Anthony Bosnick

Q&A

Jesus came to give us freedom

(continued from page 2)

The *Catechism* says, for example: “Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called ‘Satan’ or the ‘devil’ ” (CCC, para 391). In the Bible, Jesus is tempted by the devil at the beginning of his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). In John 8:44, Jesus calls the devil “a liar and the father of lies.”

Many people note that Pope Francis speaks often about the devil. For example, in a homily on October 11, 2013, he said, “The presence of the devil is on the first page of the Bible, and the Bible ends as well with the presence of the devil, with the victory of God over the devil.” Pope Francis said “we should not be naïve” about sin and the devil. He said that it is not “exaggerating” that Jesus came to conquer the devil and “to give us the freedom” from “the enslavement the devil has over us.”

When we look at the world around us, can we doubt that all the evil we see is a sign of the devil’s presence: violence in our cities, the way prisoners are treated, family breakdown, the capture of 200 young girls in Nigeria to be sold into marriage or slavery, 9/11, drug cartel murder and violence in Mexico, abuse of drugs, sex, and alcohol.

Catholics believe that “The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite.” Satan is a creature “who cannot prevent the building up of God’s reign” (CCC, para 395). When we walk faithfully with Christ each day, the devil’s power over us diminishes for we open ourselves up to the power of grace. And grace is more powerful than sin and the devil.

Pray for our benefactors

Let's Talk! and its Spanish translation *¡Hablemos!* are supported by donations. They are given free of charge to prison chaplains for distribution to inmates by Paulist Prison Ministries. Please pray for our benefactors. To help support this ministry, please send your donation to the address on page 2 of this newsletter.