



Let's *Talk!*[®]

A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

Grace is everywhere

One of the great truths of our faith is that grace is everywhere. Another is that grace is for every person and every thing. Nothing escapes God's outpouring of his life and love, which we know as grace. It is for you, even now in prison.

The word "grace" is common in our Christian speech. (It appears over 175 times in Scripture.) There is no one definition of grace. This is because it reflects the uncountable and many times unknowable ways God meets his people and shares his love and favor with us. God is generous, so grace is free. God is merciful, so grace is God's invitation to enter his mercy. God is forgiving, so grace is God's call to turn from sin and be forgiven. God is...and so too is grace.

God intends salvation. God promises us life and life to the full (John 10:10). Grace helps us enter into that life. Sin and darkness—experienced by us all—put up barriers in our lives to God's love. Grace breaks those barriers and leads us to life and a relationship with our loving God.

God intends that we be saved and is generous with us. "Where sin increased, grace

overflowed all the more" (Romans 5:20). Grace is greater than sin and darkness. Being saved and living in grace means we know even now some measure of the work of the Spirit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Our response to grace. Grace gives us freedom from sin...and freedom to love. It turns us from focus on self to wanting God.

In our daily lives then, we seek breakthroughs small and large—over our selfish tendencies. We turn from our isolation from others to community with them.

Grace draws us to lives of faith, hope, and love. To grow in grace, we seek to be ever more open to everything that

builds our faith...increases our hope...and nourishes our love for God and neighbor. This is possible because God wants the best for us and gives the grace to make it happen.

In these final months of 2007, especially as we celebrate Advent and Christmas, let us become ever more open to the grace that is everywhere.



Q & A

Talk with God

Q. The Bible tells us to not to "babble like the pagans" when we pray (Matthew 6:7). Doesn't this apply to saying the rosary?

A. We need to look for the meaning of this verse in the context of the teaching Jesus is giving on prayer (Matthew 6:5-8, 9-15; 7:7-11) in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Jesus is teaching what it means to follow him as a disciple.

The sense that arises from the verse in context is that Jesus invites his followers to pray to the God who loves them and cares for them. When we know God in this intimate and personal way, there is no need to rattle on in long-winded prayers. After all, God already knows what we need. He already wants the best for us. When we babble on in prayer, it is likely that we don't trust God's care for us and are trying to convince God to give us what we think we need! Thus, Jesus teaches us to pray with a sincere heart open to God and his love, to listen to God, and to align our lives with God.

In light of this, we can consider how we pray the rosary. The rosary should help us meditate on spiritual truths that save us. This requires that we pray the rosary slowly and meditatively to reflect on the mysteries. Praying the rosary this way helps us think about Jesus and his gift of life. It thus helps us to know and love Jesus more and to sense more deeply God's love for us. If our minds are blank when we pray the rosary or we sense that we are "babbling," we aren't praying it correctly. This goes for all types of prayer, since prayer should be a heartfelt conversation with God.

The Church dedicates the month of October to encourage the praying of the rosary. The Church also celebrates October 7 as the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

These last three months of the year are busy times. We end one church year and begin another. We finish up Ordinary Time, and move rapidly through Advent and into the Christmas season. We celebrate some great days such as All Saints, All Souls, Christ the King, the Immaculate Conception, Christmas, among others.

These months are a time of grace. Let us be open to the way God wants to work in our lives. Receive his love and share it with others, perhaps as a kind word to one who is struggling, or as time to listen. As the days pass by, you will know God is near.

Father Kenneth Boyack, CSP
President, PNCEA

October 2007

- 1 St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, virgin, doctor
- 2 Guardian Angels
- 4 St. Francis of Assisi, religious
- 7 **Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 14 **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 15 St. Teresa of Avila, virgin, doctor
- 17 St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop, martyr
- 18 **St. Luke, Evangelist**
- 19 St. John de Brébeuf and St. Isaac Jogues, priests, martyrs, and companions
- 21 **Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

November 2007

- 1 All Saints
- 2 All Souls
- 4 **Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 9 **Dedication of the Lateran Basilica**
- 10 St. Leo the Great, pope, doctor
- 11 **Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 12 St. Josaphat, doctor, martyr
- 13 St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, virgin
- 17 St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious
- 18 **Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 22 St. Cecilia, virgin, martyr
- 22 Thanksgiving Day in U.S.
- 24 St. Andrew Dung-Lac, priest, martyr, and companions
- 25 **Christ the King**
- 30 **St. Andrew, apostle**

December 2007

- 2 **First Sunday of Advent**
- 3 St. Francis Xavier, priest
- 7 St. Ambrose, bishop, doctor
- 8 **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 9 **Second Sunday of Advent**
- 12 **Our Lady of Guadalupe**
- 13 St. Lucy, virgin, martyr
- 14 St. John of the Cross, priest, doctor
- 16 **Third Sunday of Advent**
- 23 **Fourth Sunday of Advent**
- 25 **Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)**
- 26 St. Stephen, first martyr
- 27 St. John, apostle, evangelist
- 28 **The Holy Innocents, martyrs**
- 30 **Holy Family**



Let's Talk!

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Combined Federal Campaign #11877

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Q & A: Talk with God

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Q. Why do Catholics call Mary the Immaculate Conception? Only Jesus is without sin.

A. The Immaculate Conception holds that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. The Church declares: "the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin."

Note the phrase "in view of the merits of Jesus Christ." This is crucial as it means that it was *because of her Son Jesus*, that Mary was born free from the effects of original sin. She was conceived without sin for the sake of Jesus, not for herself. She too needed redemption and was granted it in a unique and privileged way.



Ron Reaves ©

The belief is not explicitly stated in Scripture, but one finds reflections of it there (Genesis 3:15; Luke 1:28, 30-31). The general holiness of Mary in Scripture (Luke 1-2) and the fact that God makes his saints according to his pleasure (Romans 8-9) guides the belief as well.

Over the centuries, as devout people reflected on the holiness of Jesus it was apparent that the Son of God would have needed a pure and sinless mother and for

this reason God prepared Mary with an immaculate conception. Thus, while the Immaculate Conception of Mary was declared the belief of the Church only in 1854, it had been there during centuries of reflection, clarification, and discussion.

Q. An old issue of Let's Talk! mentions the "Star of David." What is that?

A. The Star of David is a six-pointed star named after King David of ancient Israel. It first began to be used in the early Middle Ages, possibly around the year 1000. It is now a symbol of Israel, ancient and new.

The six points of the star surround a solid core. One meaning of the symbol is that God is at the center of all things. The six points show God's rule over the universe in all directions: north, south, east, west, up and down. There are other possible meanings as well.

The Star of David reminds Christians of our common religious heritage with the Jewish people. A beautiful mosaic featuring the Star of David is the central image in the "incarnation dome" in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Upon entering the Shrine, the Star of David reminds us of our common spiritual heritage with the people Israel.

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

Prisoner Saint

Bl. Rupert Mayer (1876-1945) ✠ As a young Jesuit priest, Fr. Mayer collected food and clothing for the poor and helped the unemployed find jobs. He later served as a chaplain in World War I and received the Iron Cross for bravery. His army career ended when a grenade shattered his leg and it was amputated. Returning home, Fr. Mayer was a popular preacher and friend of the poor. He was also a vocal opponent of Hitler and the Nazis. To silence Mayer, the Nazis imprisoned him three times. When his health began to fail while he was in a concentration camp, they moved him to a monastery so he would not die a martyr in prison. His health now broken, Fr. Mayer died while saying Mass on November 1, 1945.

Feast Day: November 3

The Twelve-Step Program

Believe that a greater power can restore us...Step 2

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: Lots of folks find Step 2 hard, Deke. It's the whole belief thing.

Me: That's interesting. We believe all kinds of things in our everyday lives. I believe my eyes. How do I know I'm not hallucinating? I believe that when I open that can of corn that I will actually find corn in the can because the label said so!

Peaches: OK, but this is different. This is supernatural.

Me: "I believe in order to understand."

Peaches: What?! That's whacked!

Me: St. Augustine said that.

Peaches: It's still whacked. You have to understand first.

Me: Not always. There are some things that you can only know from the inside.

Peaches: Like what?

Me: Lots of stuff. You can only really know a house from the inside. If you just walk around on the outside and look in the windows, do you really know the house like the people who live in it?

Peaches: No.

Me: That's true of lots of things. Don't we say that people can't know what we've been through if they haven't been through it themselves?

Peaches: OK. So there is knowledge that you can only know from the inside. What's that got to do with Step 2?

Me: It's inside knowledge. No one who stays on the outside is ever going to know it.

Peaches: Still belief is hard.

Me: The suffering should make it easier to believe. Only when we've had enough pain are we ready to change.

Peaches: That's what addicts call "hitting bottom." And "bottom" is different for different people.

Me: Exactly. One person loses a job and that's enough pain for her to change. Another person who has lost everything and is in prison still hasn't had enough suffering to change!

Peaches: Fortunately, I'm a big baby! I don't need a whole lot of pain to change.

Me: That's a great grace, P. I know because I have that gift too!

Peaches: You're not an addict or alcoholic, Deke! What are you talking about?

Me: It's just human nature. No human ever changes anything without sufficient pain. Why would we?

Peaches: Good point. But it seems like it's harder for addicts, don't you think?

Me: I do. I think that it's part of the disease of addiction.

Peaches: Stubborn.

Me: Immaturity. We stop developing emotionally at the age we start using. So emotionally, it's an adolescent response to the situation.

Peaches: Yeah, like a teenager who says "I'll show you!" and only ends up hurting themselves!

Me: Yup. An adult response is to cut your losses. Adults also don't have to "show" anyone else anything. Nothing to prove. They focus on "this is going to hurt me." That's what they make their decision on.

Peaches: Yeah, you know, if you walked into say a cancer ward at the hospital and told those sick people, "Follow these 12 steps

and the cancer won't kill you," they'd do the steps without a doubt!

Me: Beats radiation and chemo, I'm sure.

Peaches: OK, so Step 2 is an inside job. You have to *believe first and understand later*.

Me: Right. It's a leap of faith that doesn't take long to see that your faith is well-placed because you get the results. I guess people are afraid to look stupid by believing.

Peaches: If you did Step 1 right, you know that your "unmanageable" life has already made you look stupid! What have you got to lose?!

Me: It's a baffling disease!

Peaches: But none of this is my own personal problem with Step 2, Deke.

Me: Oh?

Peaches: Yeah, see, I've always believed in God so that's not my issue. When I was using, I prayed, really prayed a lot for God to help me and he never did. That's my problem. So, did I pray wrong or is there really no God or what?

Me: The answer to that question is in Step 3.

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 October/November/December

October

General. *Minority Christians:* That Christians who are in minority situations may have strength and courage to live their faith and persevere in bearing witness to it.

Missionary. *World Missionary Day:* That World Missionary Day may kindle a greater missionary awareness in every baptized person.

November

General. *Respect for Life:* That medical researchers and legislators may have a deep respect for human life from its beginning to its natural conclusion.

Missionary. *Peace in Korea:* That the spirit of reconciliation and peace may grow in the Korean Peninsula.

December

General. *Those suffering from AIDS:* That society may care for those stricken with AIDS, especially women and children, and that the Church may help them feel the Lord's love.

Missionary. *Asia:* That the incarnation of the Son of God may help the peoples of Asia recognize Jesus as God's Envoy, the only Savior of the world.

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

Mary's Joyful Prayer...and Ours – Part 2

God is mighty, holy, and merciful

Read and study: Luke 1:46-55

**“The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.” (Luke 1:49-50)**

The Magnificat is Mary's joyful prayer to God, and ours as well. Her prayer is uplifting and practical. “Uplifting” in that it helps us glimpse the wonder and glory of God, even though indistinctly (1 Corinthians 13:12). “Practical” in that it points to how we need to live if we want a share of God's peace and joy in our lives. When we sense God's glory and live in a way that honors it, our lives change.

In the first verses of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-47), we saw how Mary rejoiced in God and lived humbly and simply each day in his presence. In turn, she was blessed. And so too are we as we walk this same path. Now in these new verses, we see something more about the way Mary knew God. She saw him as the Mighty One, holy, and merciful (1:49-50).

God the Mighty One. Mary, in whose heart the words of Scripture were deeply rooted, knew the God of power and might. He is the “Mighty Lord” (Psalm 89:9), the “mighty savior” who lives with his beloved Israel, rejoicing over it with gladness and renewing it in his love (Zephaniah 3:17). Strong and mighty is God...yet present to his people and covering them with his love.

Mary knew that the Mighty One had done great things for her, making her the mother of the Lord. As we walk faithfully with God, we too can expect to know the Mighty One and the great things he does for us.

God who is holy. Mary knew the God “whose name is the Holy One.” Even while high and exalted, he dwells “with the crushed and dejected in spirit,” reviving them with life (Isaiah 57:15). The Holy One is the source of Mary's blessing. On our walk with God, we can know that he is not distant and removed from us, but that he shows his holiness through his special care for the needy. These are the ones he came to heal (Luke 5:31-32).

God who is merciful. Even in his might and holiness, God is a tender and merciful Father “to those who fear him” (1:50). God's kindness is forever to those who remain faithful to him (Psalm 103:17). He yearns to gather his people together and shelter them “as a hen gathers her young under her wings” (Matthew 23:37).

Mary's prayer rises from her thankfulness for what God has done for her personally, to thankfulness for what he has done for his people Israel. Her destiny is tied up with that of the people of whom she is part. On our pilgrimage of faith, we too need to know that our walk to and in holiness is with the people God is calling to himself. We are not spiritual lone rangers, but members of God's household.

Mary's prayer, and ours. As we pray the Magnificat, we can take courage in the truth that we do not walk alone. We walk in God's shadow as part of the people God is calling to himself for the glory of his name. The great men and women of Scripture, the saints who have come before us, and the faithful men and women who live today are all with us. We may be standing alone in prayer, but a cloud of witnesses surrounds and supports us (Hebrews 12:1). This is cause of great joy and hope!

Other Scripture passages to study:

- Deuteronomy 10:21; 11:7
- Judges 2:7
- Psalm 103:13, 17
- Psalm 111:9
- Hebrews 11:1-40

Ways to take action:

1. What in Mary's prayer inspires you to want to walk with God each day? What do you need to do to make that happen?
2. In what ways do you resist those who can support you and walk with you on your journey? How can you be open to them?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Letter from Prison

The Gift of Time

I am an inmate in a Georgia prison. I was introduced to your newsletter when another inmate, a Muslim, laid a copy on my bed. I am very glad that he did!

I began my journey back home to the Catholic Church after about twenty years away. It was about six months after my arrest and return to prison for a violation of parole. The parole board notified me I must max-out the remainder of my prison sentence.

I am not upset by this. God has given me a wonderful gift of time. I have time to focus on becoming closer to him and for spiritual growth and development. I have time to focus and work hard at developing further the talents, abilities, and skills that he has given me. Before I was locked up again last year, I wasted those gifts God has given me and prevented God from working through me to reach others.

Part of the problem was I didn't think I was worth anything. The chaplain and some of my buddies here helped me see that I have value. I pray now, read the Bible, and attend services. Gradually God is breaking through.

Let's all of us pray for each other that we use our time in prison to grow closer to God. Let us pray that we become what he wants us to be, even if we are here for a long time.

~ A prisoner in Georgia

2008 Calendars

New 2008 calendars are available, also the booklet “Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones,” and bookmark. In English and Spanish. Send your name and address to: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 48360.

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 PNCEA 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.