

A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



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You can make a difference

You can make a difference for the good! Even now while you are in prison or jail, you can have a positive impact on those around you. No matter how long or how short a time you will be incarcerated, make it a time for the good that makes you a better person. As you become better, you can make a difference for the good.

Consider what this means. The Catholic faith is about knowing the love of God and being changed by God. The great call we have is to love God and love neighbor (see Mark 12:30-31). When we grow in this, our lives change and we can make a difference for the good.

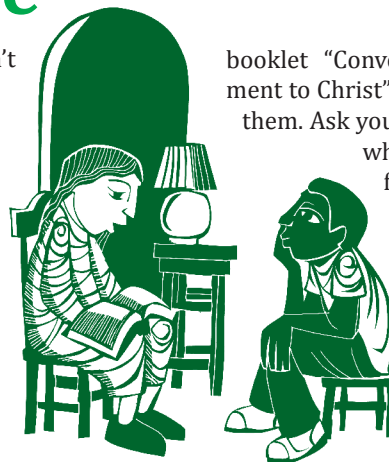
Through the love and grace of God, our lives *can* and *do* change. We can turn from those things that got us into trouble and *begin* to live differently. We say “begin” because this is a process. We are on a journey,

on a pilgrimage. Change doesn't come automatically. It is a process. Most often it is a slow and painful process. But it will come as we turn to God and persist to follow the way of God.

Develop your spirituality. Deacon Dolan in his article on page three of this issue writes that “prison or jail are actually good places to develop your spirituality.” Two important words: *Develop. Spirituality.*

To *develop* is a process where we grow, change, and mature. We get better. So during this time in jail, use it as a time to develop. Make a plan and follow it. Grow in a *spirituality*, which is a way that you follow Jesus. Make it your own. Do what you can, not what you can't.

A good, basic spirituality that works for people includes these things: 1) Read the Word of God each day. 2) Worship and pray. 3) Be part of a community of faith. 4) Care for and serve others. We write about these four points frequently in *Let's Talk!*. The



booklet “Conversion and Commitment to Christ” tells you more about them. Ask your chaplain for a copy, which he or she can get from *Let's Talk!*.

You can make a difference. Pray for the grace to be open to the work of God in you. You can make a difference beginning now by how you respond daily to

Jesus. Change begins *now* in our daily lives if we allow it and work for it. Yes, we will fail. And probably many times. But with faithfulness, success will come.

Pope Francis says, “Let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us” (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 25). Ask Jesus to help you and be open to the surprise he has for you.

Yes, you can make a difference! Begin now.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you ever wonder if your life can have meaning and purpose while you are in jail or prison? Do you ever think that it is over for you, especially if your sentence is long? No matter what your circumstances, your life has meaning and you can still make a difference for the good.

This issue has several articles intended to help you live the Christian life at this time. You walk with Jesus now while in prison. Commit yourself to the spiritual practices that will help you grow as a Christian and disciple of Jesus.

Recommit your life to Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom and all good gifts. Know that God is most generous in the gifts he gives and in what he wants for your life. Use what you are given to change yourself and to be an instrument of good to those around you. You and God can do it.

Let us pray for one another!

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Q&A

Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith.

Q. *I'm trying to change and live more like a Christian. I really struggle. Why is it so hard?*

A. You are experiencing the age-old challenge! From the beginning of Scripture, we read of the challenge, starting in Genesis 3. But let's turn to St. Paul who wrote: “I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Romans 7:19). To put it simply, what you are facing is the challenge all people face, even the Saints.

Let's look at two people who tried to live for God and see what we can learn from them. One is St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556). The other is the Dorothy Day (1897 – 1980). Ignatius was a Spanish saint, the founder of the Jesuits. His young life was pretty much filled with the pursuit of adventure, pleasure, and sin. He was injured by a cannon ball which badly broke his leg. While recovering, Ignatius gradually saw that he was happiest when he was thinking of the things of God. He saw too that he was more despondent when he fell again to his old thought patterns of pride, selfishness, and disordered pleasure.

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CHURCH CALENDAR

JULY 2017

- 1 St. Junipero Serra, priest
- 2 **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 3 **St. Thomas, apostle**
- 9 **Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 11 St. Benedict, abbot
- 14 St. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 St. Bonaventure, bishop and doctor
- 16 **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 St. Mary Magdalene
- 23 **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 25 **St. James, apostle**
- 29 St. Martha
- 30 **Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, priest

AUGUST 2017

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

SEPTEMBER 2017

- 3 **Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 8 **Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 9 St. Peter Claver, priest
- 10 **Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 13 St. John Chrysostom, bishop and doctor
- 14 **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 St. Cornelius, pope and martyr; St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr
- 17 **Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 20 Sts. Andrew Kim and Companions, martyrs
- 21 **St. Matthew, apostle and evangelist**
- 23 St. Pius of Pietrelcina, priest
- 24 **Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, priest
- 29 **Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels**
- 30 St. Jerome, priest and doctor

Q&A Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith. *(continued from page 1)*

Over a lifetime of effort, he gradually allowed Jesus to transform his life. One of those ways was through his Spiritual Exercises, now an age-tested way of giving one's life to God. Another was through the Examen. Beginning with this issue, we will see how the Examen can help us in our spiritual journey. (See part one of the series on page four of this issue.) Eventually Ignatius became much better at following Jesus. But he also understood he remained a "pilgrim," one who has to walk the narrow way (see Matthew 7:13-14) every day to enter into the life of God.



The other person we can consider is Dorothy Day, an American who is not yet officially declared a Saint. She lived a life of love, service, and care for the poor and needy in such a faithful way that the U.S. Catholic bishops, at their annual meeting in 2012, unanimously recommended she be declared a Saint. Dorothy once said to Catherine Doherty, one of her saintly friends doing similar work with the poor, that "we are comrades stumbling along, not saints drifting along in ecstasies." Even Dorothy Day as she lived faithfully for God found it challenging and a struggle.

So too will you. But we have a lifetime to walk with the Lord, every day asking for God's grace to help us, for Jesus to love and guide us, and for the Holy Spirit to inspire us and bring us to holiness. As St. Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). And remember, Jesus promised, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit

comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8).

On your pilgrimage, embrace spiritual practices which will help you live faithfully, such as those given in the article "You can make a difference" on page one of this

issue. Deacon Dolan also recommends you develop spiritual practices to follow in his article on page three. Consider these practices for your life. But most important, be patient and keep the faith. As you do, little by little you will experience change in your life and see that this pilgrimage becomes easier.

This is a life-long effort!

Q. Where can I get a Bible?

A. Paulist Prison Ministries, which publishes this newsletter, makes Bibles available to chaplains and volunteers who request them. They, in turn, can give them to you. Ask your chaplain or volunteer if one is available for you to have. If they are short of copies or do not have any on hand, they can write us requesting more.

If there is not a chaplain or volunteer in your prison or jail, you can write to us at the address on this page and request one. They are available in English and Spanish.

Q. What is the Morning Offering?

A. This is a prayer which is recommended you say each morning as a way to offer your day and all its activities to God. In this prayer, you "unite" yourself through the intention of your heart and mind with the intentions of God for his people.

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Let's Talk!

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Visit us at www.pemdc.org

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Change of Address: Please help us keep our mailing list accurate. Send all changes in your name and/or address to: Paulist Prison Ministries; PO Box 29121; Washington, DC 20017; or by email to: info@pemdc.org.

Thank you for your help.

PMLTH1703

Prisoner Saint

Bl. Titus Brandsma (1881-1942) ✠ Fr. Titus was a priest and Carmelite friar. He lived in Holland where he served as a professor of philosophy and mysticism at a Catholic university he helped establish. Fr. Titus also worked as a journalist. By 1935 he was the adviser to Catholic journalists. Fr. Titus was known for meeting any and all who came to him. He strongly opposed the rising Nazi ideology in Germany and Europe and spoke out against it many times. When the Nazi Germans invaded Holland, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Dachau concentration camp. He died on July 26, 1942, from a lethal injection as part of the Nazi program of medical experimentation on prisoners. Pope John Paul II beatified Fr. Titus in 1985 as a martyr of the faith. In 2005, the residents of Nijmegen named Fr. Titus as the greatest citizen to have ever lived there.

Feast Day: July 27

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for July/August/September 2017

Starting in 2017 Pope Francis is presenting only one prepared prayer intention per month, rather than the two presented before this year. He plans, however, to add a second prayer intention each month related to current events or urgent needs. The urgent prayer request will help mobilize prayer and action related to the urgent situation.

Because of our production schedule, *Let's Talk!* is not able to present these second requests, but you could ask your chaplain or volunteer to get them for you.

JULY

Lapsed Christians:

That our brothers and sisters who have strayed from the faith, through our prayer and witness to the Gospel, may rediscover the merciful closeness of the Lord and the beauty of the Christian life.

AUGUST

Artists: That artists of our time, through their ingenuity, may help everyone discover the beauty of creation.

SEPTEMBER

Parishes: That our parishes, animated by a missionary spirit, may be places where faith is communicated and charity is seen.

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

Living Out Your Faith, Part 4

A way forward

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Me: Prison or jail are actually good places to develop your spirituality. Jesus, St. Paul, St. Francis, St. Ignatius all spent time behind bars along with many other giants of the Spirit!

And saints who were *not* incarcerated tried to find ways to recreate two spiritually helpful conditions of prison in the outside world: more time and fewer distractions.

Peaches: So, the difference between a prison and a monastery is attitude?! The monks want to be there and are nice to each other.

Me: Yes, and monks' rooms are called "cells." No bars though! Also, the word "penitentiary"—a place of penance—was first based on the model of a monastery in many respects. So, prison has no real barriers for growing spiritually because spiritual growth is about being free on the *inside*.

Peaches: You know, I read the book called *Fr. Arseny*. He became a saint in a Soviet prison that makes this place look like Club Med!

Me: St. Paul, while a prisoner said, "the word of God is not imprisoned" (2 Timothy 2:9). And neither is the Spirit.

Peaches: So, how do you approach this variety of ways to follow Jesus in your own life?

Me: The entire spiritual life can be summed up as "Love God. Love your neighbor" (Mark 12:30-31). All of the spiritualities do both of these. Some emphasize loving God. Monks do this. Some emphasize neighbor. This is the way of Franciscans, Paulists, Jesuits, Catholic Workers, among others.

And even then, the neighbor is loved for God's sake, not the neighbor's.

You could argue that both kinds of approaches actually are centered on the love of God. It's just that one group of spiritualities aims to love God *directly* and the other aims to love God *by means of* loving our neighbor as Jesus taught.

Peaches: I'm thinking that the monastic/monk approach may be the easiest to try as a guest of "Holy Mother State" in prison. (Hey, I've already got the cell, right?!)

Me: Sure. And you may find many things in the Benedictine monastic spirituality that would fit you now in your present situation.

However, don't write off the love of neighbor type of spirituality too quickly. It may be an even better fit for your personality. Also, you may want to consider what you will be better able to use once you are released.

Peaches: How would you work that kind into a prison situation?

Me: The active or "apostolic" kinds of spirituality generally focus on serving God by serving our neighbor who is God's child. You can go this route generally by helping others daily in a general

way. Be helpful and kind in all situations to everybody.

Peaches: I've been thinking also that I could develop my own apostolate or ministry inside the institution. For example, I was thinking that I could look out for new inmates who have never been inside and mentor them. Show them the traps of prison. Things like that.

Me: Great idea, too!

Peaches: What about working it into your job?

Me: Absolutely. This is where the *Lives of the Saints* often come in. You find Saints who did a job like yours, and read their lives to see how they did it in a holy way.

Peaches: Right! Then you can imitate them!

Me: For example, let's say you work in the kitchen and have a very busy job but you feel attracted to a more contemplative or monastic approach.

Peaches: I see what you're doing there! You're mixing a monastic and monk spirituality with an active job!

Me: Well, monks got to work too! You may think, "Can't be done." But it's been done! This is where that whole 2000-year thing comes into play! Read the small book called *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence and see how this busy cook in a monastery combined a hectic life with deep contemplation!

Peaches: In Confirmation class, they had each of us write to a different Order of nuns, brothers or priests and request information on their spirituality. We all got big packages of information for free! Learned a lot in that class.

Me: It doesn't matter what you decide to start. The Holy Spirit will lead you! The great, ancient Catholic spiritual buffet will sustain you also no matter what you may need for spirituality! But, in general, you should check out a wide variety. It's like dating, in a way.

Peaches: (singing) *My Momma told me, "You better shop around!"*

Me: Don't quit your day job, Peaches.

Peaches: Ha, Ha. Deke, you should organize a class on spirituality for us. You could invite nuns, brothers and priests to present the spirituality of their own order and work once a week!

Me: Interesting idea, P! You could also begin by reading *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, which gives a page or so of an overview of many Saints' lives. See which story strikes a chord with you and then investigate their spirituality.

Deacon Dennis Dolan is a retired chaplain from York Correctional Institution in Connecticut. He continues his ministry with and for prisoners through his writing.

The Examen, Part 1

True followers of Jesus love God and neighbor

The “examen” is a form of prayer “discovered” and then developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) about 500 years ago. So it has been around a long time and has proven to be helpful to people as they seek to follow Jesus more faithfully. In earlier times the *examen* was used mostly by priests, sisters and brothers who had made a deeper commitment to follow Jesus. This article is the beginning of several which will introduce you to the *examen* and help you pray it.

All people are called to holiness. In recent years, particularly after the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the *examen* has been taken up by lay people, that is, people living out their daily lives working jobs, raising families, and doing the ordinary things of life. This is because Vatican II encouraged *all people*, not just priests and nuns, to live holy lives—including laypeople.

Vatican II proclaimed “the universal call of holiness” in its great document “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” called in Latin *Lumen Gentium* (LG), in paragraphs 39 to 42. It teaches that “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation” (LG, para. 40). That means *us*—every one of us on the outside *and on the inside*.

Love of God and neighbor. Holiness isn’t about living sheltered lives removed from the world. It is more than just living “clean” lives, not cursing, or stealing, or living immoral lives. These are all important, of course. That is why God has given us the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21) and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). As *Lumen Gentium* says: “It is the love of God and of neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ” (para. 42).

Jesus teaches, “You are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). You are probably thinking: No way. Easier said than done. So how do we do this? This is all about living “spiritual lives.” And we can do that as we follow a simple path through life. We already wrote that in the article “You can make a difference” on page one of this issue. Four of the very practical parts of living a spiritual life include: 1) Read the Word of God each day. 2) Worship and pray. 3) Be part of a community of faith. 4) Care for and serve others.

Five Steps of the Examen

1. **Place yourself in God’s presence.** Give thanks for God’s great love for you.
2. **Pray for the grace to understand** how God is acting in your life.
3. **Review your day** — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time.
4. **Reflect on what you did, said, or thought** in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away?
5. **Look toward tomorrow** — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God’s plan. Be specific, and conclude with the “Our Father.”

Source – <https://goo.gl/5SKCrQ>

The examen is a helpful way to pray. So we try to do those things, stumbling along seemingly without progress. This is where the *examen* comes in. This easy five-step prayer helps us look at our lives in the light of God, see the good things we have done each day and see the places where we have failed. We are grateful for the good things—and *there will be good things, more and more as time passes*. We ask for forgiveness of the failures and for the grace to change.

The chart on this page shows the five steps of the *examen*. Look them over now to get an idea of what the *examen* entails. In coming issues, we will look at each of these five steps in more detail and see how they apply in our lives. Vatican II says that “All of Christ’s followers . . . are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their proper state” (LG, para. 42).

Why do this? No matter how hard it is for us and no matter how much we need to change, followers of Christ soon learn that one of the great gifts we receive when we follow Jesus is the joy of walking and living with him each day. As time passes, we begin to experience the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22).

Followers of Jesus know that if Jesus asks something of us, doing it brings us life and love. He freely gives this new life to us and gives us the grace so we can live it. It is his free and generous gift. It is his desire for us.

Let’s embrace it and see how the *examen* can help us live it!

~ Anthony Bosnick

Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith.

(continued from page 2)

The Morning Offering is a good part of a person’s personal spirituality, as it is a reminder that everything in the day is done for and through God. This includes all those things which bring us joy and hope, grief and anxiety. They are all the things that we face and experience as Christians trying to follow Jesus more faithfully.

We have printed a popular Morning Offering for you to pray.

Let’s Talk! responds to prisoners questions. Write to us at the address on page 2 of this newsletter. We like hearing from our readers.

Morning Offering

*O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day
for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart,
in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
throughout the world,
for the salvation of souls, the reparation of sins,
the reunion of all Christians, and in particular
for the intentions of the Holy Father this month.
Amen.*

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.