

A CATHOLIC MINISTRY  
TO PRISONERS

# Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



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## We will serve the Lord

It's a wonderful blessing to serve the Lord. And it can be done no matter where we are, how old we are, or any other personal circumstance. It can be done even in prison!

The challenge is that we need to *move from* being passive and wanting God to give us everything we yearn for and *move toward* being thankful for God's gifts. From this thankfulness, we will grow in our desire to serve the Lord. A "give me" dependency on God makes us passive in our lives and in our faith. Too often if we are not satisfied, we turn from God in indifference. To serve the Lord, we need to be active in our faith. From this comes great blessings and joy.

### Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus calls us to be changed, to be transformed in him. He wants the best for us, and this is the best. In our transformation, we are called to serve the Church and each other. The articles in this issue give us much to think about what it means to follow Jesus.

As we move toward the celebration of Christmas in late December, we should recall the special calling we have received. We are called to something special: transformation and life in Jesus. It is the goal of our lives, even while in prison.

We can begin that change even now. It takes a decision to respond to and follow Jesus. No matter how many times we falter and fail, let's get up and start again. You will be surprised what you will find at the end of a day, a week, a month, a year!

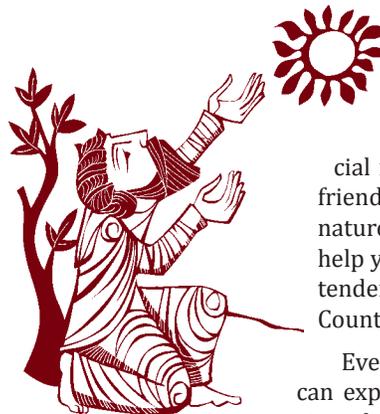
Let us pray for one another. Receive God's mercy and give it to others.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP  
President,  
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

**"As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** The Old Testament leader Joshua proclaimed these words (Joshua 24:15). He wanted to encourage the Israelites to remain faithful to God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Joshua was the successor to Moses and carried on the work of Moses to inspire and lead the people in faithfulness to God. The book of Joshua is dedicated to remembering his life.

Joshua gathered together the tribes of Israel and reminded them of God's gifts to them (see Joshua 24:1-13). The list is long and shows God's love, grace, and strength demonstrated among his people. The people remembered and were inspired to faithfulness.

**The same should be true with us.** When we *know* and *remember* God's love and kindness that gives us the memory and desire to serve the Lord. So recall God's "tender mercies" to you (see Luke 1:78). This may be through the love of a



parent, a spouse, or a child. It may be a special memory of a particular friendship. Or of the beauty of nature. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recall times of God's tender mercies in your life. Count them as gifts.

Even now in prison, you can experience the blessing of serving the Lord through loving God and those around you. In prison, it may be helping a new and scared inmate. It may be looking after an older or sick inmate. It may be sharing with others. These are ways you can serve the Lord now.

**Make the most of these days.** The time you spend in prison can be fruitful. Serving God changes our lives and attitudes for the better. Use this time now to 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. As you serve the Lord and those around you, you will make a difference for the good.

Ask God to help you begin now. You will see the difference it makes in your life.

## Q&A

### Be transformed in Christ

**Q. You write that we can be something in life even in prison. Can I really expect anything more out of this life?**

**A.** Yes, you can! We know that is easy to say, but many people in Scripture and many of the Saints faced the same thoughts you have of unworthiness and uselessness. But God uses those he chooses, and he chooses all of us for amazing things. It is not that we are great in the world's eyes, but we are great in God's eyes. The challenge for us is to use the gifts God gives us and the grace he gives to empower us.

We are called to be transformed and to become like Christ. This is really the goal of our lives. True, we often seek the minimal—trying to get by with the least change and the most sin possible so we might just squeak by into heaven.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us this about transformation: "The Word became flesh to make us 'partakers of the divine nature.' . . . 'For . . . the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving

*continued on page 2*

## CHURCH CALENDAR

### OCTOBER 2017

- 1 **Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 2 Guardian Angels
- 4 St. Francis of Assisi, religious
- 7 Our Lady of the Rosary
- 8 **Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 15 **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 17 St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop, martyr
- 18 **St. Luke, evangelist**
- 19 Sts. John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, priests and martyrs, and companions, martyrs
- 22 **Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 Sts. Simon and Jude, apostles
- 29 **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### NOVEMBER 2017

- 1 **All Saints**
- 2 All Souls
- 4 St. Charles Borromeo, bishop
- 5 **Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 9 Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
- 10 St. Leo the Great, pope, doctor
- 11 St. Martin of Tours, bishop
- 12 **Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 13 St. Francis Xavier Cabrini, foundress
- 17 St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious
- 19 **Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 Presentation of Mary
- 22 St. Cecelia, virgin, martyr
- 23 Thanksgiving Day in U.S.
- 24 St. Andrew Dung-Lac, priest, and Companions, martyrs
- 26 **Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**
- 30 **St. Andrew, apostle**

### DECEMBER 2017

- 3 **First Sunday of Advent**
- 7 St. Ambrose, bishop
- 8 **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 10 **Second Sunday of Advent**
- 12 **Our Lady of Guadalupe**
- 13 St. Lucy, virgin and martyr
- 14 St. John of the Cross, priest
- 17 **Third Sunday of Advent**
- 24 **Fourth Sunday of Advent**
- 25 **Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)**
- 26 St. Stephen, first martyr
- 27 St. John, evangelist
- 28 Holy Innocents, martyrs
- 31 **Holy Family**

## Let's Talk!

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

Editor: **Mr. Anthony Bosnick**

Layout Editor: **Mrs. Joann Sullivan**

Art: **Steve Erspamer, SM**



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## Be transformed in Christ

*continued from page 1*

divine sonship, might become a son of God.' *'For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.'*" (para. 460). We are called to much more than just getting by!

We have two quick examples to illustrate this.

First, God called Gideon (see Judges 6:11-24) to deliver the Israelites from their enemy the Midians. But Gideon said, "How can I save Israel? My family is the smallest in Manasseh and I am the most insignificant in my father's house" (v. 15). In other words, Gideon believed he was not great or good enough to do God's work. But God replied, "I shall be with you . . . and you shall cut down Midian to the last man" (v. 16). And, with the help of God, Gideon did.

Second, Walter Ciszek, SJ (1904-1984), as a young boy growing up in a coal mining town in Pennsylvania, considered himself to be a "goof-off." He was prone to fighting and disobedience to his parents and in school. But God touched his heart and he became a priest and served in Russia from 1939 to 1963.

Ciszek was falsely arrested in 1941 as a Vatican spy. After serving his long term in Siberia workcamps, he was sent into internal exile in Russia. Everyone outside Russia thought he was dead, but Fr. Ciszek continued to quietly serve and witness to God's love. Wherever the Russians sent him, he was such a witness to the love of God that people soon who came to him for

spiritual help, even Muslims! Today he is being considered by the Catholic Church as a Saint.

These two "insignificant" people show us what God can do. Ask God for more. Ask him to transform you.

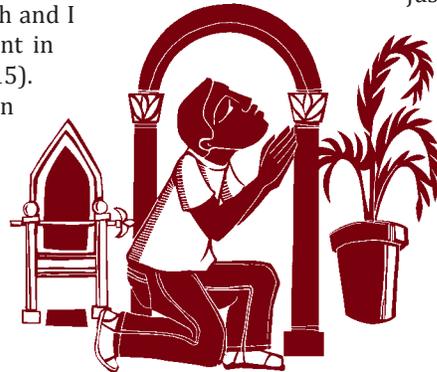
### Q. *Transformed in Christ. What's that?*

**A.** Our calling is higher and richer than just being better people. Yes, this is a good goal. But God has so much more in store for us, and for you. He calls us to be transformed or transfigured. We are called to become "little Christs." (Theologians call this "deification.") Transformation calls for dedication in living the Christian life. It calls us to grow in spirituality. (This has been the topic of the five-part series on spirituality ending in this issue.)

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!*.

Transformation doesn't happen overnight. It is a life-long effort! Let's get on with it.

*continued on page 4*



## Prisoner Saint

**Boethius (480 - 524) +** Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius—known as Boethius—was a sixth century philosopher and Roman public official. Born into a prominent Roman family, he followed in the footsteps of his elders. Greatly intelligent, he held many high government positions from a young age. After faithfully serving the Emperor Theodoric, the emperor turned on him, falsely accusing Boethius of treason. He was arrested on these false charges and sent to prison to await execution. In his despondency, Boethius wrote his most famous work: *The Consolation of Philosophy*. It was a well-read, popular and influential work for about one thousand years, and was still commonly read up until about two hundred years ago. In it Boethius writes that Lady Philosophy teaches that fame and fortune are fleeting, but one thing is important: Love and serve God and God alone. These are important words for all time, including us today!

**Feast Day: October 23**

## Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for October/November/ December 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.

### OCTOBER

**Workers and the Unemployed:** That all workers may receive respect and protection of their rights, and that the unemployed may receive the opportunity to contribute to the common good.

### NOVEMBER

**Christians in Asia:** That Christians in Asia, bearing witness to the Gospel in word and deed, may promote dialogue, peace, and mutual understanding, especially with those of other religions.

### DECEMBER

**The Elderly:** That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations.

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

## Living Out Your Faith, Part 5

# Become a saint!

**W**e began this series of articles on spirituality in January. We now conclude this series with two short truths on spirituality.

### First: "The spiritual life is first of all a life."

These wise words come to us from Fr. Thomas Merton (1915–1968). Merton was a great twentieth century American spiritual writer, theologian and mystic. He wrote much, and wrote these words in *Thoughts in Solitude*.

Merton was saying that the spiritual life is not something else. It is not up in the sky. It is this same life that we are living right now, *but lived in the Spirit of Jesus*. Because of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, when you eat breakfast, Jesus is eating breakfast with you. When you are working, Jesus is working with you. Jesus is with you always.

Fr. Merton also warned us to remember that as we learn from and admire the Saints who have gone before us, we are not called to be a copy of St. Francis or St. Ignatius or St. Teresa. *We are called to be our own unique version of Christ*. All the Saints are different but they are all Christ-like!

This is our own necessary task on behalf of the Reign of God on earth: *to be the most Christ-like us that we can be*.

**Second: The only real tragedy in life is not to become a saint.** When the spiritual journey gets dark, empty and demanding (as it will!), we should always bear in mind the words of the French spiritual writer and poet Léon Bloy

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

(1846–1917). In *A Study in Impatience*, he wrote, "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is *not* to become a saint."

Saints, you will find, are just sinners who let themselves be loved by God into the dream that God had for their lives when he created them. You too can become a Saint. This is what spirituality is all about.

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

### Please send us your thoughts.

We hope to print these five articles on spirituality in a new pamphlet for the Paulist Prison Ministries Pamphlet Series. Before we do, we would like to hear from you.

Please tell us about your own growth in the spiritual life while in prison. You can also let us know what you have learned from this series and how it has helped you grow in the spiritual life.

We hope to print some of these comments in the pamphlet, so please keep your comments to approximately 150 words. To protect your privacy, we identify the state you write from but do not give your name or prison.

Send your comments to:

Spirituality Series  
Paulist Prison Ministries  
P.O. Box 29121  
Washington, DC 20017

## Words from Pope Francis

***None of us is useless. In Jesus, we are precious.***

Jesus asks His disciples the question He has most at heart . . . : "But who do *you* say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13-20, v. 15). . . .

They were inspired by the heavenly *Father* (v. 17), who revealed to the first of the Twelve Jesus' true identity: He is the Messiah, the Son sent by God to save humanity. From this answer, Jesus understands that, thanks to the faith given by the Father, there is a solid foundation on which He can build His community, His Church. Hence, He says to Simon: "You, Simon, are Peter – namely stone, rock – and on this rock I will build my Church" (v. 18).

Also with us today, Jesus wishes to continue to build His Church, this house with solid foundation but where cracks aren't lacking, and which has continuous need of being repaired, always. The Church is always in need of being reformed, repaired. We certainly don't feel like rocks, but only like small stones.

However, no small stone is useless, rather, in Jesus' hands it becomes precious, because He gathers it, looks at it with great tenderness, works on it with His Spirit, and puts it in the right place, which He has always thought of and where it can be more useful to the entire edifice.

Each one of us is a small stone, but in Jesus' hands we participate in the building of the Church. And all of us, in as much as small, have been made "living stones," because when Jesus takes the stone in His hand, He makes it His, He makes it alive, full of life, full of life by the Holy Spirit, full of life from His love, and thus we have a place and a mission in the Church: she is a community of life, made up of very many stones, all different, which form one edifice in the sign of fraternity and communion. . . .

*Pope Francis spoke these words before the Angelus Prayer on Sunday, August 27, 2017 in Rome. This is edited for space. © Translation by ZENIT, Virginia M. Forrester – copyright 2017.*

## The Examen, Part 2

# Place yourself in God's presence and thank him

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 on the first "step" of the examen—to place yourself in God's presence and give thanks for his great love for you.

**A**s you begin the examen, the first step you take is to quietly put yourself in God's presence. Ask him for the grace of a quiet heart. And thank him for his love for you and the gifts he has given you.

**God is generous and fulfills our needs.** The examen is a time to express gratitude to God, not to get down on ourselves for how we have failed *again*. We are not to "wallow" in guilt, but to rejoice in God's love and what he has and is doing in our lives. There is much to be grateful for if we look to the positive. We will have ample time later in the examen to see and ask forgiveness for the failures of the day!

**In history.** Scripture is filled with reminders of God's graciousness to his people throughout history. God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, protected them as they crossed Sinai, and shepherded them into the Promised Land. A good reminder of God's loving care for his people is found in Joshua 24:1-28, where Joshua reminds the people of all God has done for them.

Another is found in the New Testament in the Letter to the Hebrews (11:1-40). The inspired author writes that the ancients "were searching for a better, heavenly home. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16). This is our heritage too and should make us deeply grateful to God. Search the Scriptures and you will be overwhelmed with God's generous love for his people.

**In our lives.** And closer to home, we can look in our personal lives to see God's graciousness. We can start with Scripture where Paul writes to the Romans: "I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature,

### 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>

will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord" Romans 8:38). From here, we can look personally and see the many times God has touched our lives in love—even *this very day*. Take some time to do that and remind yourself of God's generous gifts.

As you look at your life each day, the examen will help you to see signs of God's graciousness in your life that day.

**Be thankful for what God has done this day.** As we quiet ourselves and examine our day, we should be aware of a profound *gratitude* and *thankfulness* for God's seen and unseen work of kindness in our lives each day. The psalmist proclaims: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise; Give thanks to him; bless his name, for he is good: the Lord whose kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations" (Palm 100:4-5).

This is the kind of joy that should fill us and we take this first step in the examen as we are reminded of the bigger picture of God's presence in history and in the intimacy of our lives. Then we can move on to the next steps in the examen.

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. No matter how hard it is for us and no matter how much we need to change, 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).

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

~ Anthony Bosnick

## Be transformed in Christ (continued from page 2)

### Q. How can I get ready to celebrate Christmas?

**A.** Christmas will be upon us before we know it. This is the celebration of God becoming man to live among us. A good way to prepare for Christmas could include the following: 1) Spend some time in prayer each day during Advent (the four weeks before Christmas). Ask God to bless the Advent season for you that you would learn and experience more of God's love in your life. 2) Try to read the Scripture readings from Mass as often as you can and meditate on them. 3) Find ways you can care for and serve others. 4) Seek to be more joyful, for joy is a sure sign of the Holy Spirit in your life.

May your celebration of Christmas be a true blessing in your life.

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.

## 2018 Calendars Available

New 2018 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 Addictions. To request this material, send your name and address to: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 28360.

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