



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



3031 FOURTH STREET, NE ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20017

Vol. 23, No. 2 – April/May/June 2016

Comrades stumbling along

Two shining stars in the Catholic Church in the twentieth century were Dorothy Day (1897-1980) and Catherine de Hueck Doherty (1896-1985). These two women devoted their lives to serving the poor and needy through works of charity they founded.

They shared a deep friendship and encouraged one another in their demanding work with the poor and needy. In a letter to Catherine, Dorothy wrote: "It is good to urge each other on to virtue, but remember, we are comrades stumbling along, not saints drifting along in ecstasies."

Urge each other on to virtue. These words point to how important they saw it was to support one another in their lives and work. They knew the challenge of helping others, especially in difficult circumstances.

We can all learn much from their example.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We continue our walk of faith during this Easter Season. And we do it in this special year of grace—the Year of Mercy. Because the gift of life and love God offers to us is so great during this year of special favor, we are focusing much of this issue on topics related to God's mercy to us.

We do this to support and encourage you on your faith journey to pray about and embrace the grace of forgiveness and mercy God is giving you. Let us not go through this year and at the end realize we have missed an opportunity.

Let us pray for one another that we will be open to God and his love, receive his mercy, and give it to those around us. In this Easter Season, let us know we can receive the gift which transforms us.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Too often we live as "loners" trying to get through life on our own. We fail to recognize that the friendship and support of others help us get through life better. Even though we are likely "stumbling along" through the challenges and trials of life, and through the joys and hopes, life goes better when we approach it together with friends, with companions, with "comrades."

The Year of Mercy. In this year when we reflect on the mercy of God, we should be more aware than ever that we need the support and encouragement of others. Life is challenging as it is. It is even more challenging in prison. Deacon Dolan in his article on page 3 of this issue reminds us that life in prison can be more than stifling boredom and the monotonous routine it often is.

God is giving us a great gift in his love and mercy. This can help give meaning to our



lives and change them for the better. Perhaps it is just a little each day or week, but those little things add up and life can become worth living, even during your time in prison.

Let God surprise you.

Pope Francis urges us in this Year of Mercy: "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). Be open to the surprise he has in store for you.

By the way, both Dorothy Day and Catherine de Hueck Doherty let God surprise them with his love and mercy. So changed were they that they are now being considered as possible Saints by the Catholic Church.

Year of Mercy Update

Expect a Special Gift

The Year of Mercy continues! God wants us to be extra aware that he has a gift for us—his "tender mercy" (Luke 1:78). And he wants us to give this tender mercy in abundance to those around us. Trouble is, we find this hard to believe and don't really expect anything new in our lives. For us, it often just doesn't connect. The danger in this is that we can go through the Year of Mercy not expecting anything new or different in our lives. And it will pass without us receiving the gift.

The Year of Mercy began on December 8, 2015 and continues until the celebration of the feast of Christ the King on November 20, 2016.

We Receive Mercy. The first thing to remember is that God wants you to experience and know his mercy in your life. Pope Francis writes: "Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us" (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 2). We often act as if of our relationship to God is one of having to face his disappointment with us. We somehow feel we have to pay God back for the sin we commit. We do need to be accountable to God for our sin and seek forgiveness, but it can't end with that. We need to know that God is a merciful Father who calls us to life and love in him.

continued on page 2

CHURCH CALENDAR

APRIL 2016

- 3 **Second Sunday of Easter**
(Sunday of Divine Mercy)
- 4 **Annunciation of the Lord**
- 7 St. John Baptist de la Salle, priest
- 10 **Third Sunday of Easter**
- 11 St. Stanislaus, bishop and martyr
- 17 **Fourth Sunday of Easter**
- 24 **Fifth Sunday of Easter**
- 25 **St. Mark, evangelist**
- 29 St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor

MAY 2016

- 1 **Sixth Sunday of Easter**
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop and doctor
- 3 **Sts. Philip and James, apostles**
- 5 **Ascension** (in many places celebrated May 8)
- 8 **Seventh Sunday of Easter** (or **Ascension** if not celebrated May 5)
- 14 **St. Matthias, apostle**
- 15 **Pentecost**
- 22 **Most Holy Trinity**
- 26 St. Philip Neri, priest
- 29 **Body and Blood of Christ**
(**Corpus Christi**)
- 31 **Visitation of Mary**

JUNE 2016

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 3 **Sacred Heart of Jesus**
- 4 Immaculate Heart of Mary
- 5 **Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 11 **St. Barnabas, apostle**
- 12 **Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest and doctor
- 19 **Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, priest
- 24 **Birth of John the Baptist**
- 26 **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 St. Irenaeus, bishop and martyr
- 29 **Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles**

Let's Talk!

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Year of Mercy **Expect a Special Gift**

(continued from page 1)

In Mass, we often pray the responsorial psalm, "The Lord is kind and merciful," which comes from Psalm 103:8. This comes to life in us through Jesus. St. Paul wrote: "God is rich in mercy; because of his great love for us he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead in sin" (Ephesians 2:4). God treats us like a loving father as in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). This parable relating the story of the two sons is also known as the parable of the merciful father. It shows the heart of the Father for us: he wants us and welcomes us back to him.

When we face sin, God responds with mercy. This is the mercy God gives us. Be open to it. Your life will change.

We give mercy. At the same time, we need to remember as well that just as God shows us with mercy, he calls us to be merciful to those around us: family, friends, those in prison or jail with us (both inmates and staff). Pope Francis writes that the mercy we receive compels us to look "sincerely into the eyes of [our] brothers and sisters on the path of life" and be merciful toward them (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 2).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said "Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs" (Matthew 5:7; also Luke 6:36). God gives us mercy, and we in turn are called to give mercy to others. "The gift you have received, give as a gift" (Matthew 10:8). And as we do, we will know mercy more fully in our own lives. A circle of love

and mercy flows to us and through us to others.

We all know that this is not easy, but it is the call we receive as followers of Christ. We are called to be holy, just as our heavenly Father is holy (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16).

Pray about and reflect on mercy. In this Year of Mercy, be extra attentive when you read scripture and attend Mass to listen for the promise of mercy. That shouldn't be hard because the word "mercy" or "merciful" (and its other translations) appears hundreds of times in scripture. Here are just

a few scripture passages that can help you learn more about mercy:

- 2 Samuel 24:14
- Psalm 86:5; 103:8; 145:9
- Matthew 5:7
- Luke 6:36
- Ephesians 2:4
- Titus 3:5
- Hebrews 4:16
- 1 Peter 1:3



Let God surprise you. Pope Francis urges us in this Year of Mercy: "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). So let us turn our hearts to God and be open to the gift he gives and wants us to accept. This means *both* receiving the gift of mercy and being merciful to others.

If you are open to God and make a path for him, you will surely be surprised by God. Be open to the surprise he has for you.

Prisoner Saint

First Martyrs of the Church of Rome (d. 64) + These martyrs, now known only to God, were the first to die under the hand of the brutal emperor Nero. When fire destroyed a large part of Rome in 62 A.D., Nero blamed the Christians for setting it. Some historians believe he ordered the fire set so he could rebuild the city. Christians were gathered together, held briefly, and then died by horrible means. St. Clement of Rome told of some wrapped in animal skins, hunted down, and set afire to light the road for Nero's chariot. The dignity with which they faced death and died inspired others to follow Jesus as disciples.

Feast Day: June 30

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for April/May/June 2016 in the Year of Mercy

APRIL

Universal. *Small Farmers:* That small farmers may receive a just reward for their precious labor.

Evangelization.

African Christians: That Christians in Africa may give witness to love and faith in Jesus Christ amid political-religious conflicts.

MAY

Universal. *Respect for Women:* That in every country of the world, women may be honored and respected and that their essential contribution to society may be highly esteemed.

Evangelization.

Holy Rosary: That families, communities, and groups may pray the Holy Rosary for evangelization and peace.

JUNE

Universal. *Human Solidarity:* That the aged, marginalized, and those who have no one may find—even within the huge cities of the world—opportunities for encounter and solidarity.

Evangelization.

Seminarians and Novices: That seminarians and men and women entering religious life may have mentors who live the joy of the Gospel and prepare them wisely for their mission.

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

Year of Mercy, Part 3

Mercy: Life's Reboot

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: So, where do we start with Pope Francis' Year of Mercy, Deke?

Me: Well, Pope Francis named a few of the specific roadblocks to Mercy that have to be cleared away.

Peaches: Like?

Me: First, Pope Francis points to a "monotonous routine."

Peaches: Hello! Prison?! We invented both "monotony" and "routine"!

Me: Think about it. Why are we lacking Mercy? Because we are kind of "walking dead"!

Peaches: Zombies!

Me: Sort of. A routine that never changes can deaden us! We shut down.

Peaches: Don't need to sell me, Deke. I'm living that nightmare every day!!

Me: And once dead inside, what does that leads to?

Peaches: The "f-its"!

Me: And that's next on the Pope's list!

Peaches: Pope Francis doesn't do jail talk, Deacon!

Me: No. He used the word "indifference."

Peaches: I know. You just start to not care. It's self-defense, really.

Me: Next Pope Francis says that indifference leads to cynicism.

Peaches: I kind of think I know what that means, Deke. Kind of "the heck with you and hurray for me"?

Me: Yeah, it's someone who believes all people only do what works for them so they're skeptical about everything and everyone.

Peaches: Dude, this is starting to sound like Pope Francis did some time himself!

Me: This stuff goes on everywhere, P. It is just harder to hide it in prison.

Lastly, the Pope says an obstacle to Mercy is the idea that Mercy is "weakness."

Peaches: Yeah, but isn't it, in fact, a weakness, Deke?

Me: No doubt many think so but it depends on which game we choose to play. If I see the world as a jungle, then, Mercy is a bad policy. If, on the other hand, I see the world as the place where the Reign of God is breaking in and I see myself as a soldier of Christ, then Mercy is my ammunition to overcome that jungle and build

the Kingdom of God.

Peaches: But you will get hurt.

Me: Yes, it's a risk all soldiers take when they join any army. And, by the way, you will get hurt without Mercy in the jungle too. I guarantee it! The only question that we all have to ask ourselves is which cause is worth the risk of getting hurt for? Because everyone gets hurt. No exceptions. We only get to choose what we get hurt for.

Peaches: So, Mercy is kind of like rebooting a computer. When the jungle gets stuck the only way forward is to hit the reset!

Me: Wow! That's a bumper sticker, P! "Mercy: Life's Reboot"!

Peaches: OK, so if all these roadblocks grow in a monotonous routine, how do we change a monotonous routine in here to prevent the other roadblocks from growing? It's not like we're in charge of the schedule in here.

Me: It's not the schedule. All people have a schedule. Monks have a set up similar to yours! It's the monotonous part that makes our routines deadly. We need routines! Brushing your teeth is a good thing!

Peaches: OK, but what do we do with the monotony?

Me: Monotony is an interior problem. As my mother used to say, "If you're bored, it's because you are a boring person." Meaning that creative, intelligent, alive people can always find new things to do.

Peaches: Such as?

Me: Develop a spiritual life! Read the lives of the Saints. Learn how to meditate. Take a class at the school. Have your cellie teach you Spanish! Learn to draw!

Peaches: "Do your time but don't let your time do you."

Me: Exactly! Refuse to die inside! Take back your soul from the institution. Then you can be merciful!

Peaches: Free on the inside!

Me: That's another bumper sticker, Peaches!

Peaches: I know! I'm on a roll! I'm thinking I have a future in marketing!

Deacon Dennis Dolan has retired as chaplain at York Correctional Institution in Connecticut. He continues his ministry with and for prisoners through his writing as he discerns where God is calling him in service.

The Works of Mercy, Part 1

Practicing Mercy in the Jubilee Year

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be like him. And one of the ways we do that is to bring his mercy to others—to be instruments of mercy. In the Catholic tradition especially, we do that through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Pope Francis says that it is his “burning desire” for all Christians to “reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of Mercy” (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 15). Why? Because it is our opportunity to heal the wounds of this suffering world and bring comfort to those suffering, especially on the margins of society.

He writes, “Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help!” (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 15). And what a better place to consider this and participate in the works of mercy than in prison! Yes, in prison.

So in the remainder of this year and into the next, we will reflect on the works of mercy and how you can embrace them and practice them in your life.

What are the works of mercy? Put simply, “they are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n 2447).

Let's begin by listing them. There are seven corporal works of mercy and seven spiritual works of mercy. The corporal works of mercy are the things we do to help those around us with their material and physical needs: 1) feed the hungry, 2) give drink to the thirsty, 3) clothe the naked, 4) shelter the homeless, 5) visit the sick, 6) visit the imprisoned, 7) bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are things we do to help those around us with their emotional and spiritual needs: 1) counsel the doubtful, 2) instruct the ignorant; 3) admonish sinners, 4) comfort the afflicted, 5) forgive offenses, 6) bear wrongs patiently, 7) pray for the living and the dead.

Rooted in scripture. Both the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are rooted in scripture. As we reflect on them in the coming issues, we will look at their biblical sources and where they are found in scripture. The words used in scripture for mercy—mercy, love, tenderness, pity, compassion kindness, clemency, grace, gift of God—are related.

From the beginning to end of scripture, we see God showing his mercy and love for his people. God does not want his people to suffer, and it is not God who causes the suffering. We most often cause it ourselves by turning from God through our sin and bringing suffering upon ourselves and others. At the same time, God calls his people to show this mercy to those around them.

It is a tall order, of course, but one that we are called to and one that we can seek to do. After Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he said “as I have done, so you must do” (John 13:15). And in scripture we also read: “The way we can be sure we are in union with him is for the man who claims to abide in him to conduct himself just as he did” (1 John 2:5b-6).

So it is clear, we are to follow the example of Jesus. Yes, it is hard for us mortals to do this, but as Jesus told St. Paul: “My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection” (2 Corinthians 12:9). And so Paul said, “I willingly boast of my weakness instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

We will be judged on the basis of love. Your challenge in prison will be to see how you can live out these works of mercy. How can this be done in the confines of prison or jail? It will depend in part on the level of your confinement, especially with some of the corporal works of mercy. Because of the nature of the spiritual works of mercy, it will likely be easier to live them out while in prison.

We can know for sure that God calls us to embrace these works of mercy and the Holy Spirit will show you how you can do that, even in prison. Pope Francis leaves us with some sobering words: “Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: ‘as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love’ ” (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 15).

~ Anthony Bosnick

Jubilee Year of Mercy

December 8, 2015 - November 20, 2016

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
to be merciful
like the heavenly Father,
and have told us
that whoever sees you
sees Him.*

*Show us your face and
we will be saved.
Send your Spirit and
consecrate every one of us
with its anointing,
so that the
Jubilee of Mercy
may be a year of grace
from the Lord,
and your Church,
with renewed enthusiasm,
may bring good news
to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives
and the oppressed, and
restore sight to the blind.*

*We ask this through
the intercession of Mary,
Mother of Mercy,
you who live and reign
with the Father and
the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.*

Amen.

Pope Francis

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.