



# Let's *Talk!*®

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A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

## *You've got dignity. Live it.*

**G**od created all of us with personal dignity. This means we are *worthy of respect and honor*. It means we have value as persons. Our dignity is our birthright as Christians.

Prison life can destroy any small bit of dignity that a person may have. Crowded, impersonal conditions. Rude remarks. People trying to gain power over others and to use them for their own purposes. Lack of control over personal decisions. All prisoners, to one degree or another, know the loss of personal dignity. It is likely, too, that many prisoners didn't know their own dignity before entering prison.

**Our dignity is rooted in Christ.** Sin tarnishes us and makes us unaware of our dignity. But through Jesus' Easter victory, he restores our human dignity. Jesus' victory over sin and death gives us back meaning for our lives. (Pope John Paul II taught this in his first encyclical, the *Redeemer of Man*, in 1979, no. 10.)

This is who we are as Christians. If you are baptized into Christ, you have dignity. The Holy Spirit living in you guarantees it

through grace. The world is transformed by the resurrection of Christ...and so are you. Believe it. Embrace it. Live it.

**Living in dignity in prison.** What can you do to live in dignity and to promote dignity while you are in prison? You may suffer indignity daily. But do not let that overcome you. Instead overcome it by respecting the dignity of others. Depending on your own maturity in Christ, you may need to avoid those people and situations that are destructive of your dignity.

But even more, embrace the grace of Christ. Let it change you and make you strong. You are not alone. Christ is with you, and in you. He is your hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Seek out other like-minded people and support one another. Grow spiritually through daily prayer and Scripture reading. Receive the sacraments when you can, especially the Eucharist and reconciliation.

You will become more and more who you were created to be. You are a man or woman in Christ—filled with dignity and made whole by it. You've got dignity. Live it.



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### *Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

If you listen attentively at Mass during the Easter season, you may hear the priest pray in the Preface: "The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world." This Easter season (April 9 to May 27), enter into that joy and be transformed.

The transforming love of the resurrection is so great that we celebrate Easter for 50 days! Then we continue to live it the remaining days of the year. During the Easter season, and beyond, make a conscious decision to enter into the joy of the resurrection and let it transform you.

As you do, you will face the world with a renewed sense of your own dignity. You will know what it means to be renewed.

**Father Kenneth Boyack, CSP**  
President, PNCEA

## Q & A

### *Be merciful to others*

#### **Q. What is the Divine Mercy devotion?**

**A.** At the heart of the Divine Mercy devotion is the message that God loves all of us. His mercy is greater than our sins, no matter how serious they are. In the message of Divine Mercy, God asks us to go before him in prayer trusting in his love. He asks us to receive his mercy *and to let it flow through us to others*. In this way, we become instruments of God's mercy.

The devotion to Jesus as Divine Mercy began in the 1930s and gradually spread throughout the world. The message and devotion are based on revelations received by St. Faustina Kowalska, a young Polish nun who died in 1938. Pope John Paul II embraced the message and devotion long before he was pope. While he was pope, the popularity of the Divine Mercy devotion greatly increased.

An easy way to remember the message is through ABC: **A—Ask for God's mercy.** Approach God in prayer and ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask God to pour out his mercy upon you and upon the whole world. **B—Be merciful.** Receive God's mercy and let it flow through you to others. Love and forgive others just as God loves and forgives you. **C—Completely trust in Jesus.** The more we are open to Jesus and trust him, the more we will receive.

The Divine Mercy devotion includes the chaplet of mercy, the novena of mercy, and the hour of mercy. It also includes the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday. In the year 2000, the Vatican approved this celebration for the Second Sunday of Easter, which this year is April 15.

#### **Q. Why wouldn't Peter let Jesus wash his feet?**

**A.** In John 13:1-11, we read of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and of Peter's refusal to  
*(continued on page 2)*

April 2007

- 1 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion
- 5-7 Easter Triduum
- 5 Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)
- 6 The Lord's Passion (Good Friday)
- 7 Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday)
- 8 Easter Sunday
- 15 Second Sunday of Easter (also Divine Mercy Sunday)
- 22 Third Sunday of Easter
- 25 St. Mark, evangelist
- 29 Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 2007

- 1 St. Joseph the Worker
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop, doctor
- 3 Sts. Philip and James, apostles
- 6 Fifth Sunday of Easter
- 13 Sixth Sunday of Easter
- 14 St. Matthias, apostle
- 17 Ascension of the Lord (in some locations celebrated on May 20)
- 20 Seventh Sunday of Easter or Ascension of the Lord (if not celebrated May 17)
- 26 St. Philip Neri, priest
- 27 Pentecost Sunday
- 31 Visitation of the Virgin Mary

June 2007

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 3 Most Holy Trinity
- 5 St. Boniface, bishop, martyr
- 10 Body and Blood of Christ
- 11 St. Barnabas, apostle
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest, doctor
- 15 Sacred Heart of Jesus
- 16 Immaculate Heart of Mary
- 17 Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, religious
- 24 Birth of John the Baptist
- 28 St. Irenaeus, bishop, martyr
- 29 Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles



Let'sTalk!®

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**Q & A:** *Be merciful to others*

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allow Jesus to wash his feet (v. 8). Foot washing in that culture was a way to welcome guests. Their feet had likely become dusty from travel. The host offered water to the guests and they normally washed their own feet. Or, if the host had servants, they might wash the guests' feet.

The foot washing in John 13 is in the setting of the last supper, which ushers in Jesus' world-changing passion, death, and resurrection. It takes place in the context of the cosmic struggle between the powers of good and evil. Thus, there is more than meets the eye in this washing. Peter did not understand this. As we see elsewhere in Scripture, Peter sometimes misses the deeper meaning of events (Matthew 16:21-23). Here Peter is confused by Jesus the master acting like a servant.

Jesus tells Peter he doesn't understand (v. 7). For Jesus, this is not simply a question of providing hospitality to the disciples. Rather, Jesus is teaching them deep truths. By washing their feet, Jesus is showing that he the master is entering into a new relationship of deeper intimacy with them. This intimacy will be complete in the coming kingdom which is on the horizon. In addition, Jesus is teaching them about being disciples: Those who follow Jesus are to be servants to all (v. 15).

We can't blame Peter too much for not understanding. After all, a new age was dawning and the world order would undergo

profound change (Easter Preface IV). When the Holy Spirit comes, Peter will come to understand.

There is a profound message for us in this seemingly simple story. First, we too should keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and know him as the one whose death and resurrection changed the world. He is more than a good storyteller, a charismatic leader, or a prophetic healer. He is the Son of God who redeems the world and gives life to the full (John 10:10). Secondly, we also learn that Jesus calls his followers to serve one another, and others. Just as Jesus has done, so too should we.



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**More on reading Scripture**

In our last issue, we gave ideas about how to read through the Bible. We now add a further suggestion about reading the 13 letters attributed to St. Paul. Try reading them in the order they were likely written: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1& 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus.

When you read them in this order, you can see how Paul's understanding of Christ and the Church developed over time. The Holy Spirit leads even great church leaders like Paul to deeper insights and understanding.

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 Saints**

**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**

# They persecuted the prophets before you

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

**Peaches:** Well, your guiding me through the Beatitudes was special. Thanks, Deke!

**Me:** We're not done yet. There are still two more verses to the Beatitudes: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:12).

**Peaches:** Um, Deke? We just did the persecution thing.

**Me:** I know.

**Peaches:** And I get the "rejoice, great is your reward" part already so...?

**Me:** So, did you notice that Jesus is saying *you* are a prophet?

**Peaches:** No way!

**Me:** Way! You are persecuted like a prophet because....?

**Peaches:** You are a prophet! Wow! Talk about a promotion! It's never entered my mind that I was a prophet! That's huge!

**Me:** Anyone who lives the Beatitudes is a prophet. They receive a prophet's persecution and a prophet's reward.

**Peaches:** Dude, I'm gonna be hangin' around with Moses and Jeremiah and all the bigees in the Kingdom!

Wait a minute now, Deke. All prophets have a message from God. I don't have a message from God. How can I be a prophet?

**Me:** The prophets are always sticking up for the little guy: the widows, orphans, and strangers. They see reality from the bottom of the pile—from the viewpoint of the folks at the bottom of society. Right?

**Peaches:** Right! If we live the Beatitudes, we will be standing with the poor in spirit, the lowly, the meek, and the peacemakers.

**Me:** So?

**Peaches:** So then we will see for ourselves how the system really works from the bottom! We won't be taken in by what the "spin doctors" at the top are saying to justify it!

**Me:** Clever girl!

**Peaches:** And my prophetic message will be...?

**Me:** You're message will be "Don't do that!" Your message to the folks on top of the system will be the same as all the other prophets before you: **Justice!**

**Peaches:** And the "blessed" and "great reward" part?

**Me:** That you are free! You are saved! You get it! You are no longer impressed by possessions, power, or prestige! You're not hypnotized by "the system" anymore.

**Peaches:** Hmmmm.... Not exactly what I had in mind, Deke.

**Me:** What did you have in mind, P?

**Peaches:** I don't know, really...just something "nice," I guess.

**Me:** The word "nice" never even made it into the Bible, girlfriend.

**Peaches:** I know. I know. I'm thinking like a consumer again.

**Me:** It's hard not to. Since we were babies, we've all been trained to get and use things for our enjoyment.

**Peaches:** But not *spirituality!*

**Me:** Why not?

**Peaches:** 'Cause spirituality is God and God is not a thing. God is a person. And it's wrong to use persons.

**Me:** Sounds like the message of a prophet to me! Jesus lived with the people at the bottom and you can find the truth there.

**Peaches:** Yeah, the staff doesn't feel like they have to "pretend" in front of us nobodies. That's why inmates know more about what really goes on in the prison than the warden does!

**Me:** And the students know more of what goes on than the principal. The maid knows more of how things really work in the hotel than the manager. The priest knows more than the bishop.

**Peaches:** OK. Stop right there before you tell me that the deacon knows more than anybody! I get it. The people at the bottom of every organization know more of what's really going on in the organization than the people at the top.

**Me:** You find the truth at the bottom and at the edges. Justice for those on the edges and the bottom is the message of the prophets.

**Peaches:** This is that whole, "Jesus turned the world upside down" thing again, isn't it?

**Me:** It is. It's always that or it isn't really Jesus.

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## Pope Benedict XVI's Prayer Requests for April/May/June

### April

**General.** *Call to holiness:* That guided by the Holy Spirit, each Christian may respond enthusiastically and faithfully to the universal call to holiness.

**Missionary.** *Vocations:* That the number of priestly and religious vocations may grow to meet the needs in North America and countries of the Pacific Ocean.

### May

**General.** *Attentiveness to God:* That, like the Virgin Mary, all Christians may be guided by the Word of God and remain attentive to the signs of the Lord in their own lives.

**Missionary.** *Seminary Teachers:* That in mission territories there may be good and enlightened teachers in the major seminaries and institutes of consecrated life.

### June

**General.** *Sailors:* That the Lord may protect sailors and all those involved in maritime activities.

**Missionary.** *North African Church:* That the Church in North Africa may bear witness to God's love for every individual and all peoples.

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

## The Beatitudes – Part 10

# Rejoice and be glad. Your reward will be great in heaven.

Read and study: Matthew 5:3-12

**“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

(Matthew 5:11-12)

Jesus becomes very personal. For the first time in the Beatitudes, he speaks *directly* to you. In these two verses, he says “you” or “your” six times. In the previous eight verses of the Beatitudes, Jesus spoke of “they” or “theirs.” Read over the Beatitudes and see for yourself. The Beatitudes aren’t just abstract ideas. Nor are they something just for others, for “good” people. They are for all Jesus’ followers—saints and sinners, and all those in between. They are for you!

**Living prophetically.** If we follow Jesus and live as he teaches, we will be persecuted. We are a light in the darkness, but people prefer darkness to the light (John 3:19). Thus, we can expect to be treated badly and harshly. This is what persecution is. It can be minor, like when we are brushed off and not taken seriously. Or it may be more and involve physical pain, or death like the martyrs. In all of this, we are like the prophets who suffered persecution for their words of truth.

Even so, Jesus says we are *blessed*. And he calls us to rejoice. We are blessed and rejoice because we are walking in the way of holiness, like the prophets.

**Be a blessing to others.** Our reward is greater ability to serve God. As we grow in our ability to follow Jesus and serve, we see how pleasant this is. It brings us joy and truly is a reward. Our reward, however, is not something just for ourselves. It gives us the ability to reach out to be a *blessing to others*. We become an instrument of grace for others, bringing light into the darkness of the world.

The Beatitudes frustrate many people. This is likely rooted in our knowing how hard it is to live them. We know how weak we are and how often we have failed. By now we should know we can’t live the Beatitudes on our own. Living them means yielding our hearts and minds to Jesus. We need to trust

that his grace is enough for us. The truth is that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more (Romans 5:20).

**Imperfectly now; in fullness later.** We experience the blessings of the Beatitudes imperfectly in this life. But in the life to come, we will know them in fullness. It should not come as a surprise to us that in heaven we will be blessed. But how can we experience the blessings of the Beatitudes in this life, if only imperfectly?

St. Thomas Aquinas tells us we can expect a “certain beginning” of the rewards in this life. After all, we are *consoled* by the Holy Spirit (called the Comforter). We are *filled* with the Bread of Life. We receive God’s *mercy*. We see divine realities through the gift of understanding. And as *children of God*, we have peace in our souls. We have a measure of all of these now, but as Thomas says, “they will be realized more perfectly in heaven” (*Summa Theologica*. 1a2ae. 69.2.3).

So, it remains up to us—with God’s abundant help—to receive the promise of blessing! Let’s go for it.

### Other Scripture passages to study:

- Matthew 5:44
- John 15:20
- Acts 22:7; 26:15
- 2 Corinthians 4:9; 6:10
- Philippians 3:1; 4:4;
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16

### Ways to take action:

1. What do you have to do to understand and live out this beatitude? Make a plan to help that happen.
2. How are you blessed when persecuted?
3. Read more about the beatitudes in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 1716-1717).

~ Anthony Bosnick

Letter from Prison

## *I am now awake*

Jesus, Holy Ghost, and Father...Jesus, Holy Spirit, God...As you bait your hook with joy...cast your line into despair...Angels walk at your side...you have reason to declare...He lights his light in you...leave that place you loved to hate...take a step in holy faith...it doesn’t take a lot of time for Christ to drive out fear.

When the world you made is gone, each complaint is silenced...No more is there much to say...You rest in peace and show it. Strife explodes around you...while you dream of heaven...With no thought in mind...see beauty around you...Could you choose a better dream to dream...mind continue calling on his name...We take our stand together...God is the ruler of all minds.

You have no other source...Call men to freedom...You can change your mind again...Do not allow the world to destroy truth...free your brother from sin’s grasp...No more are you under the power of men...receive the gift of perfect joy...You have withdrawn faith in worldly things...be led back into paradise...Fearful guilt has been forgotten...My son is now awake...He has risen from the dead.

Continue to celebrate...Appearances they come and go...Holiness drives away sin...Call what you see beautiful...bring no worldly ways with you...let every dream be new...You are receiving what you want...The world cannot give you peace...Good is what you shall behold...My voice is hiding underneath your praises...the dove flies overhead looking for a place to land...right here now he is leading you...the tempter will have you doubt his love...Stand fast...Do not be moved...You have chosen me...I stand in perfect liberty...Jesus set this captive free.

~ An inmate in Pennsylvania

Do you have a story of God working in your life you would like to share with others? Send your witness of 350 words or less to Let’s Talk!; PNCEA; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017.

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