

# Let's *Talk!*<sup>®</sup>

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A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

## *You are not alone*

Perhaps there is no greater cause of our fear and loneliness than that we believe we are alone. We think that we have no one to turn to, no one to talk to, no one to support us. While this is true for people on the outside, it is even more so on the inside.

**No longer alone.** Jesus receives life and learns its meaning from the Father. In Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, we share in this very same life. Whoever becomes a son or daughter of the Father through faith and baptism no longer stands alone. We enter into a relationship with God and with all who call God Father.

As we draw near to Christ, we enter into relationship with all those others who also draw near to him. We are not alone in this world, left to face sin and darkness by ourselves. We are members of the Body of Christ and can face the challenges of life together.

**Called to serve others.** Long before he became pope, Benedict XVI gave some sermons that were collected in a book called *What it Means to Be a Christian* (1965). He said that being a Christian is not just something for us as individuals so we can "pocket it and keep our distance from . . . others." "No," he states, "One does not

become a Christian for oneself at all; rather one does so for the sake of the whole, for others, for everyone."

Not one to leave us wondering what this means, Benedict writes that "The movement of becoming a Christian, which begins at baptism and which we have to pursue through the rest of our lives, means being ready to engage in a particular service that God requires from us in history."



### **Live for others.**

Pope Benedict concludes with these words: "Becoming a Christian does not mean grabbing something for oneself alone. On the contrary, it means

moving out of that selfishness which only knows about itself and only refers to itself and passing into the new form of existence of someone who lives for others."

Living for others brings us joy and hope. It helps heal our fear and loneliness. The way to find if this is true is to try it. During this Easter season, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how and where you can serve others—even while you are in prison or jail. Perhaps a chaplain can help you see ways you can reach out to others in love and service.

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

During this time when we celebrate with joy the resurrection of Jesus at Easter, you can take courage that you are not alone. Even while you are in prison or jail, Jesus is with you. He wants you to be a part of the people he calls together as his Church. And he wants you to be a productive member of the Church.

Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to empower us—to empower you! Are you ready to accept the calling he gives you? Talk to God and then to a chaplain about ways you can grow in your faith so you can live out your calling to love and serve others even while you are in prison.

**Father Frank DeSiano, CSP**  
President, PNCEA

## Q & A

### *The risen Savior shines upon you!*

**Q. Our chaplain tells us to be a light in the darkness of this prison. Any tips on how to do this?**

**A.** Jesus tells us he is "the light of the world" and that "No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life" (John 8:12). He says, too, "You are the light of the world. . . . Your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:14, 16). Your chaplain is right. Be a light in the darkness.

As you know, that is easier said than done! But this is where the truth of Easter is so important for us to remember. Jesus is the light that enters the world and conquers the darkness. Jesus' death and resurrection change everything.

The Church proclaims this truth at the Easter Vigil in the Easter Proclamation or Exultet: "Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness vanishes for ever!" The song continues: "Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory! The risen Savior shines upon you! Let this place resound with joy, echoing the mighty song of all God's people!"

Trying to bring light to the darkness through our own power is fruitless. It is the light of Christ—shining through us in our renewed lives—that brightens the darkness. Trust in St. Paul's words: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself up for me" (Galatians 2:19-20).

You can be a light in the darkness, but through Christ who lives in you. For tips on how to do this read the question and answer below.

*(continued on page 2)*

April 2009

- 6 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion
- 9-11 Easter Triduum
- 9 Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)
- 10 The Lord's Passion (Good Friday)
- 11 Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday)
- 12 Easter Sunday
- 19 Second Sunday of Easter
- 25 St. Mark, evangelist
- 26 Third Sunday of Easter
- 29 St. Catherine of Siena, doctor

May 2009

- 1 St. Joseph the Worker
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop, doctor
- 3 Fourth Sunday of Easter
- 10 Fifth Sunday of Easter
- 14 St. Matthias, apostle
- 17 Sixth Sunday of Easter
- 21 Ascension of Our Lord (in some locations celebrated May 24)
- 24 Seventh Sunday of Easter or Ascension of Our Lord (if not celebrated May 21)
- 26 St. Philip Neri, priest
- 31 Pentecost

June 2009

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 3 St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs
- 5 St. Boniface, bishop, martyr
- 11 St. Barnabas, apostle
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest, doctor
- 14 Body and Blood of Christ
- 19 Sacred Heart of Jesus
- 20 Immaculate Heart of Mary
- 21 Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 24 Birth of John the Baptist
- 28 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 29 Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles



Let's Talk!®

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**Q & A: The risen Savior shines upon you!**

(continued from page 1)

**Q. How do I receive the Lord as my Savior, and how do I know if it worked? I never feel anything.**

**A.** This is an important question for all of us. So even though we answered a similar question not too long ago, we will do so again. A point we made in that previous answer is that becoming a Christian is not about feelings. It is about belief that when we are baptized into Christ Jesus, we receive new life. And as we live by faith, seeking Jesus each day, little by little our lives change and we experience a new joy and hope.

If you are not already Catholic, see if you can receive instructions for baptism. If that is available and done well, you will learn much that will ground you in the faith after you are baptized. If you are already Catholic, perhaps you need a refresher course. A chaplain or volunteer may be able to arrange that with you and others.

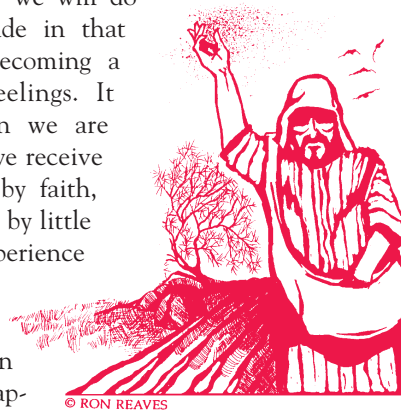
Once baptized, we need to remember a spiritual truth Jesus taught in the parable of the seed (Matthew 13:4-23). While the seed of faith is sown, only some of it sprouts and flourishes. That is not because the seed is bad or ineffective. Rather it is because some of it is stolen away by the evil one. Some does not take root because a person finds it too hard to change. In some cases, the cares of the world smother it. Some does bear fruit—and in some cases in great amounts.

There are many reasons we may not “feel” anything or see change. St Paul gives us a good list to start with when he writes about the sins of the flesh (see Galatians 5:19-21). And the Church reminds us of the “seven deadly sins”: pride, wrong desires, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and spiritual laziness. All sin destroys the work of God in us.

Spiritual laziness is a real destroyer of our new life. To grow spiritually, commit yourself to these four spiritual resolutions we often recommend in *Let's Talk!* **1)** Receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and reconciliation, as often as possible. **2)** Pray each day. Talk to Jesus as to a friend. **3)** Read Scripture daily. It will comfort and teach you, and lead you to Jesus. **4)** Fellowship with other Christians and learn how to support on another in your faith.

Even the great Saints went through periods of darkness and discouragement. But they remained faithful to God and in time experienced the blessings God promises. Let St. Paul's words guide you in your life of faith: “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13 RSV).

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



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**Prisoner Saints**

**Sts. Peter and Paul (d. c. 67)** ✠ Today commemorates the martyrdom of the two great apostles Peter and Paul. Both were arrested during a time of persecution. They fearlessly proclaimed their faith in Jesus Christ as they built up the church through word and deed. They were arrested and held in the notorious Mamertine prison, which was reserved for high profile prisoners. Peter was crucified upside down on a cross. Paul was slain by the sword. This feast is now the day when newly-appointed Catholic archbishops travel to Rome to receive the pallium, a primary symbol of their office and of their unity with the Pope. In recent years, Catholic and Orthodox church leaders have also come together on this day to pray for unity of their two great churches.

**Feast Day: June 29**

## The Twelve-Step Program

# Apply these principles in all our affairs...

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

**Peaches:** So, for Catholics, there is nothing in the 12 Steps that goes against our religion.

**Me:** Not only doesn't it go against it, but the 12 Steps actually go along with our faith.

**Peaches:** How so, O Holy One?

**Me:** Thomas Merton once said, "The spiritual life is first of all a life." If what anyone calls their "spiritual life" is not a daily, hourly thing, it isn't a "life" at all! A life can only be lived daily, including any "spiritual" life.

**Peaches:** So it's not a Church on Sunday deal.

**Me:** Right. It's just your everyday life lived in a certain spirit. That's what a spiritual life is.

**Peaches:** In our case it's living our life in the spirit of Jesus, right?

**Me:** Exactly! Now, let's look at the "principles" that we are supposed to "apply in all our affairs" and see if they look like what Jesus taught. First, powerlessness, which is admitting that you're a creature not the all powerful Creator – God! Do you think Jesus would have a problem with that?

**Peaches:** No because it's also the Truth. It's being humble. It makes you open to truth and "teachable."

**Me:** OK. So, then there's the principle of having a faith that relies on God. Problem?

**Peaches:** Let's see, we're talking believing, hoping, and trusting God. I'm pretty sure Jesus is OK with that too.

**Me:** How about the principle of turning your life and will over to God?

**Peaches:** Well, since that's in the Lord's Prayer, I think Jesus would sign off on that.

**Me:** What about the principle of taking your inventory?

**Peaches:** Let's see, "changing the things that I can change"? Being a better person. No problem.

**Me:** And the principles of daily prayer and meditation?

**Peaches:** Jesus did it all the time.

**Me:** And the principle of practicing gratitude?

**Peaches:** That was what St. Paul meant when he said, "Give thanks in all situations." So "Roger that!" I get what you're saying: the 12 Steps and our Catholic faith go together to help us in recovery.

**Me:** Yes, it's like a rope. The more strands there are to a rope, the stronger it is.

**Peaches:** So one strand is the 12 Steps and the other strand is our Faith to make our recovery "rope" twice as strong! So, practicing our Faith will make us better recovering, grateful addicts!

**Me:** I'm also saying that the 12 Steps will make us better Catholics. Pay attention to the prayers at Mass sometime and see how many of the 12 Steps are right there in it!

**Peaches:** Wow! That's a new one! I've never looked at it like that before.

**Me:** Sure. "Recovery" is a term for first steps of spiritual growth. But the spiritual does

not stop at recovery. It goes past recovery all the way to holiness. And the 12 Steps provide a daily plan of action to grow spiritually. It's not a coincidence that some of the holiest priests that I've ever met were in recovery themselves.

**Peaches:** You're starting to make me feel bad for non-addicts that the 12 Steps are not for them!

**Me:** We are all powerless over something. We are all self-centered and self-willed. We can all use the Steps if we want to.

**Peaches:** So, Deke, are you starting Sinners Anonymous?

**Me:** That's already been done, it's called the Church.

**This concludes our series on the Twelve-Step Program.**

*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 April/May/June

### April

**General.** *World hunger:* That the Lord may bless farmers with an abundant harvest and sensitize the richer populations to the drama of hunger in the world.

**Missionary.** *Signs of hope:* That Christians who work in areas where the conditions of the poor, the weak, and women and children are most tragic, may be signs of hope, thanks to their courageous testimony to the Gospel of solidarity and love.

### May

**General.** *Promoting vocations:* That the laity and the Christian communities may be responsible promoters of priestly and religious vocations.

**Missionary.** *The newer churches:* That the recently founded Catholic Churches, grateful to the Lord for the gift of faith, may be ready to share in the universal mission of the Church, offering their availability to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

### June

**General.** *Relief for poorer countries:* That international attention towards the poorer countries may give rise to more concrete help, in particular to relieve them of the crushing burden of foreign debt.

**Missionary.** *The Church in violent areas of the world:* That the particular Churches operating in regions marked by violence may be sustained by the love and concrete closeness of all the Catholics in the world.

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

## Year of St. Paul—Part IV

# Empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as church

**F**or St. Paul, there is no question about it. It is worth following Jesus. Indeed, Paul “made [himself] a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible.” And he ran the race “so as to win” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 24). Paul knew he was not alone in his effort. He knew he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit which strengthened him. And he knew that God calls all believers together in the Body of Christ, the Church, for God’s glory.

In these last days of the Year of St. Paul (which concludes on June 29, 2009), we look at what moved Paul in faith, hope and love, and seek that for ourselves. Our hope is that in ways small and great, we will become more fully alive for the glory of God.

**The Spirit, source of new life.** God had already promised that the Spirit would be poured into every heart (Ezekiel 36:26). The Spirit would ensure that there would be a new creation as promised (Ezekiel 39:29). Paul took God at his word and opened his heart to the Spirit, and experienced new life and power.

Paul came to understand that it is the Spirit who pours love into our hearts (Romans 5:5). And it is the Spirit who prays in us (Romans 8:26-27; Galatians 4:6) and is the pledge of our hope (2 Corinthians 5:5). Paul came to know too that the Spirit recalls the words of Jesus to us and enables followers to witness to the love of God (John 14:26; 16:4-15). Is it any wonder Paul could endure imprisonment, beatings, shipwreck, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure for the sake of the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:23-28)?

**The Spirit and the Church.** Paul also came to know the great truth that the new creation born of the Spirit and promised by God is the Church. He came to know that the Church and Spirit are inseparable. God did not send the Spirit to empower “lone ranger” Christians to stand on their own. Rather, God sent the Spirit to empower the Church, a communion of believers.

The Spirit brought to life those images of the Church revealed in Scripture: the

temple, sheepfold, cultivated field, Bride of Christ, Body of Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 753-757). The Church is endowed with four “marks”: one, holy, catholic (universal throughout the world), and apostolic (built on the foundation of the Apostles). This is the Church Paul knew and from which we draw life for it is the sacrament of salvation.

**The Year of St. Paul and you.** Pope Benedict declared the Year of St. Paul to celebrate the 2,000 anniversary of Paul’s birth. He sees it as a way to help us learn from Paul’s life and witness to Christ. The Church and world today need men and women who live and share their faith in Christ. And as Paul gave all for the gospel, even his life, so too do the Church and world today need people willing to sacrifice so that the Good News of Christ will touch people’s lives.

The Church needs you to witness to the love and life of God wherever you are. Now while in prison or jail, you can still seek ways you can contribute to the life of the Church. Look for ways to grow in your faith. Try to live it each day. God is with you, loves you, and wants you in his service.

### Scripture passages to study:

- Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1
- John 14:15-31
- 1 Corinthians 12:1 – 14:25
- Galatians 5:22-26
- Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:1-6
- Philippians 2:1-4

### Ways to take action:

1. In what ways do you experience the power of the Spirit as a source of life?
2. In what ways do you receive life and power through the Church?
3. What place does the Holy Spirit and the Church play in your hopes for yourself?

~ Anthony Bosnick

### Letter from Prison

## When I am weak, then I am strong

**I** consider myself fortunate to be able to share some of my innermost thoughts and feelings about what Christ has done in me and my life.

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Presently I am incarcerated again for well over the hundredth time. It all began when I came home from college December 23, 1983....

The first week home from college, New Years Eve 1983, I caught my first criminal case. And within six months, I caught my second. The indictment sent me to prison for the first time and it’s been like that up till now.

Today I’ve been tried and convicted and sent to prison nine times. I’ve did a life bit on the installment plan, with about 20 years on the inside.

Yes, I have literally walked through the “valley of the shadow of death.” But, “thou are with me”! I know this because today I am physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight, and spiritually enlightened.

My Lord, my God has really blest me to go through all that I’ve been through, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and many life threatening situations and today be able to share this with whom it may concern.

The Lord has been good to me! I must be about my Father’s business today.

This reminds me of Paul when he said, “I will brag only about how weak I am” (2 Corinthians 12:5, 7-10). Because “my grace is sufficient to thee”—my Lord’s answer. “For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

~ A prisoner from Ohio

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