

Let's *Talk!*[®]

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A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners

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

Live Out Your New Divine Nature

The Easter Season is upon us. The truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus is once again set before us. What does this mean for our lives? How should it change us? Easter is a celebration of new life—Jesus' new life *and ours!* Yes, that's right, *our new life.*

Jesus' Easter victory over sin and death is meant to change us. Through faith and baptism, Jesus' victory becomes our victory over sin and death as we receive the new life he came to give us.

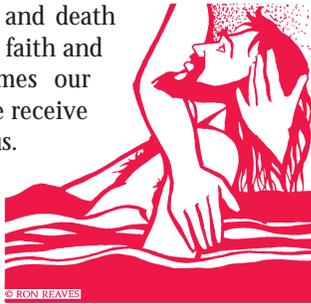
The Church teaches us a great truth: "*The Son of God became man that we might become God.*" And: "*The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods*" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 460).

Contemplate the Truth. St. Peter writes that the divine power of Jesus is given to us that we might become "sharers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4). This is a long-taught truth of the Church. A host of Saints believed and taught it from earliest times. They set their lives on a course to embrace it and live it out.

We need to take this truth to our prayer and reflect on its many dimensions: We are to become "like Christ" as we share his

divine nature. We are to become Christ-like, holy. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what it means and to live it.

Live the Truth. At the Easter Vigil, the Church sings: "The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy; it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride." This is what it means to become like Christ.



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We know from hard experience that we cannot do this on our own. But as we embrace Christ and grow in our relationship with him, we begin to change. As we participate in the liturgy and receive the sacraments, as we pray and read Scripture, as we grow in fellowship with other Christians, we open our lives to the transforming grace of God. That is how we become like Christ, to be what we were created to be.

Rejoice in the Truth. At the Easter Vigil, the Church sings: "Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory! The risen Savior shines upon you! Let this place resound with joy." The world is transformed through Christ's death and resurrection...*and that means us too!*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in this time of blessing! This newsletter is for use during the second half of Lent and for the whole Easter season, and beyond. This is a time of deep spiritual blessing centered on the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is only the beginning, for the blessing is for us now.

Whether your incarceration is about to end or you still face many years in prison, let this be a time of blessing and spiritual growth as you deepen your relationship with Jesus. You are on pilgrimage with God as your guide—we all are. Let God's abundant grace help you become more Christ-like as you walk with him each day.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President, PNCEA

Q & A

A Living Relationship with Jesus

Q. You wrote in *Let's Talk!* about "a personal encounter with Christ." I've heard of having "a personal relationship with Jesus." Is it the same?

A. You may have heard some Protestants talk about having a "personal relationship with Jesus." This expression is similar to "a personal encounter with Christ," which is used more often by Catholics, including Pope Benedict XVI. But it is not totally the same, and the difference is important. Protestants tend to understand a "personal relationship" in individualistic terms. Catholics understand it as something both personal *and* communal.

Catholics recognize that when we have a relationship with Jesus, it is more than just a "Jesus and me" relationship. Our understanding is that our relationship with Jesus is much more fruitful in a community of believers. Our encounter is personal, but it involves a community of believers—the Church. Jesus came to save us and to call together a Church to be his living presence in the world. Our encounter is nurtured by this community of the Church.

Members of the community of believers are often the ones who share the Good News with us that brings us to Jesus. We celebrate Mass and the sacraments with the Church. The Bible we read is the book of the Church. We are supported in our faith by other believers who teach us and support us on our journey. Thus, you can see that the Catholic understanding is centered on Jesus, but the Church is very important in our faith journey.

We encounter Christ when we meet Jesus through the Mass and sacraments, through

(continued on page 2)

April 2011

- 3 Fourth Sunday of Lent
- 7 St. John Baptist de la Salle, priest
- 10 Fifth Sunday of Lent
- 17 Passion (Palm) Sunday
- 21-23 Easter Triduum
- 21 Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)
- 22 The Lord's Passion (Good Friday)
- 23 Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday)
- 24 Easter Sunday

May 2011

- 1 Second Sunday of Easter (Mercy Sunday)
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop and doctor
- 3 Sts. Philip and James, apostles
- 8 Third Sunday of Easter
- 14 St. Matthias, apostle
- 15 Fourth Sunday of Easter
- 22 Fifth Sunday of Easter
- 26 St. Philip Neri, priest
- 29 Sixth Sunday of Easter
- 31 Visitation of Mary

June 2011

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 2 Ascension (in some places celebrated June 5)
- 3 St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs
- 5 Seventh Sunday of Easter (or Ascension if not celebrated June 2)
- 10 St. Damian of Molokai, missionary
- 11 St. Barnabas, apostle
- 12 Pentecost
- 13 St. Anthony, priest and doctor
- 19 Holy Trinity
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, religious
- 23 Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)
- 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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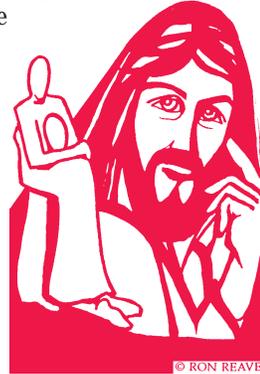
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Q & A: A Living Relationship with Jesus

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prayer and scripture, and through other Christians. But Catholics understand that our faith is not just personal, just between Jesus and me. Thus, when Catholics talk about a personal encounter with Christ, we believe it is personal but that it goes from that to those around us. We are not called to be "loners" in our faith, but part of the community of faith. That is the big difference between a personal relationship with Jesus as understood by many Protestants and the personal encounter with Christ as understood by Catholics.



Recall how God calls us through his Son, Jesus: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and by burden light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

These are not the words of a God who seeks punishment, but of a God of love and mercy who calls us back to him. Accept Jesus' words at face value and return to him in his love and mercy. He welcomes the repentant sinner with open arms.

Q. When can I be sure that God is satisfied that he has punished me enough for my sins that got me here in prison?

A. Our God is a God of love and mercy. He calls us to account for our sins, to turn to him to seek his forgiveness and the forgiveness of those we have sinned against and harmed. Sometimes, because of the nature of our sin and offense, we can only do the later in our hearts. God is not out to torture us with punishment, but wants us to seek forgiveness and enter once again into his life and love.

The Church celebrates God's mercy on the wonderful feast of "Mercy Sunday," the Sunday after Easter. (This year it is May 1st.) On this day we focus on God's tender love and mercy toward us. Remember how Jesus' "heart was moved with pity" when he saw the hungry and empty crowds (Matthew 14:14).

Q. Can you recommend something for me to learn more about the Catholic faith? I was raised Catholic but haven't practiced in a long time.

A. First, we recommend you talk to a Catholic prison chaplain or volunteer and tell them of your interest. They might have a group you can join to study the faith or be able to lead you in your study.

Second, ask the chaplain or volunteer to ask PNCEA Prison Ministries for a copy of Invitation. The Search for God, Self and Church. This is an adult question-and-answer format study guide for adult learners and has proven helpful to many. It's free of charge when requested by a prison chaplain or volunteer. Best of luck in your study!

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 Saint

St. Joan of Arc (1412-1431) ✕ The English invaded France during the Hundred Years' War. The young French peasant Joan had visions giving her the mission to save France. Most people thought her deranged. But when Joan recognized the king in disguise, people were convinced of her great gifts. She led a French army to victory over the English in 1429. Later she was captured and sold to the English who imprisoned her and put her on trial. Joan was convicted of heresy and sorcery and burned at the stake. In 1456, her conviction was reversed and in 1920 she was declared a Saint. She is known for her devout life and obedience to God no matter the consequences.

Feast Day: May 30

Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Part 1

In the Fuzzy Flow

Peaches: I need some clarification, Deke.

Me: On . . . ?

Peaches: The Holy Spirit. I've been talking to some of the Charismatics on the tier and I realize I'm kind of fuzzy on this whole area.

Me: Well, the Holy Spirit is, by nature, a fuzzy concept. It's hard to talk about because God is beyond our understanding.

Peaches: Heck, people are beyond our understanding at times!

Me: Exactly. "Things" we can know for certain. "Persons" have the ability to surprise us because of their freedom.

Peaches: This is that "mystery" thing again, isn't it?

Me: Don't say it like that! It's not a trick, you know. A mystery just says our knowledge only goes so far and then . . .

Peaches: . . . we're over our heads.

Me: Right. And that is true in dealing with ourselves or others. We say, "I can't believe I did that!" Think about it. I'm surprised by ME! And I live in MY head! So, I don't even have "ME" all figured out and nailed down, do I?

Peaches: And so we certainly don't have God nailed down and figured out, I know. I just don't like it.

Me: Yeah, I feel your pain but there it is.

Peaches: So, give me the limited, fuzzy info we have on the Holy Spirit.

Me: Well, like getting to know any person, we can only really know them if they open up to us and let us in. When God does that it's called "revelation."

Peaches: OK. So God has revealed to us and "let us in" on the fact that he is One God but Three Persons.

Me: Right.

Peaches: I can't figure that 3 but 1 thing.

Me: Well, the Trinity is not a math problem. Personally, I think, it is designed to keep us aware of the Mystery of God. Even though he reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he's still One! So, we have more insight into God and at the same time we don't lose the mystery! I think it's supposed

to short circuit your brain when you try to figure it out. I actually have come to like that.

Peaches: So, about the Holy Spirit . . . ?

Me: OK. God the Father loves the Son *completely* because he's God. He holds nothing back. The Son gives all he has back to the Father in love. Holding nothing back. So the love that flows back and forth between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit.

Peaches: Oh, I get it! And that love is a Person!

Me: Right. So God is a community of Persons whose love for each other is so perfect that they are One.

Peaches: Cool! I've got this picture of electricity flowing between two circuits.

Me: I like that. Now, what's in all of this for us?

Peaches: My favorite question!

Me: Yeah, it's a real crowd pleaser. Completely self-centered, of course, but definitely popular.

Peaches: Hey, you've got to give the people what they want, Deke!

Me: If you can dial back the egomania for a minute . . .

By Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: Dialing back . . .

Me: If the Holy Spirit that flows back and forth between the Father and the Son also flows through you . . .

Peaches: Wow! I get it! The Holy Spirit is our connection to God! That's why the Bible says, "the Holy Spirit lives in us" and that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit!

Me: Exactly. You are not just "close to God"—you are "in God" and "God is in you." You are actually in the middle of that electricity that you pictured.

Peaches: In the flow!

Me: Right. What greater gift can God give than himself? And yet in our baptism the Spirit living in us gives us gifts.

Peaches: The "seven gifts"?

Me: That's them. And if we use the gifts, in time we develop "the fruit" of the Holy Spirit.

Peaches: Now we're really getting into the "what's in it for me" part!

Me: You're killing me, here. You know that?

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. *Proclaiming the Gospel:* That the Church may offer new generations, through the believable proclamation of the Gospel, ever-new reasons of life and hope.

Missionary. *Christ-centered missionary activity:* That missionaries, with the proclamation of the Gospel and their witness of life, may bring Christ to all those who do not yet know him.

May

General. *The Media:* That those who work in the media may always respect truth, solidarity and the dignity of each person.

Missionary. *The Church in China:* That the Lord may grant the Church in China the capacity to persevere in fidelity to the Gospel and to grow in unity.

June

General. *Priests:* That priests, united to the Heart of Christ, may always be true witnesses of the caring and merciful love of God.

Missionary. *Missionary vocations:* That the Holy Spirit may bring forth from our communities numerous missionary vocations, willing to fully consecrate themselves to spreading the Kingdom of God.

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

The Fruit of the Spirit, Part 2

Joy and Peace: Fruit from Faithful Discipleship

When we think about the fruit of the Spirit, we have to ask ourselves what kind of life we want to live. St. Paul essentially gives us two visions for life: living in the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) or living in the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul wrote of the fruit of the Spirit which become apparent in the lives of those who decide to live in the Spirit—to life for and with God. The fruit include: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

The presence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is a sign that God is working in us. While the fruit of the Spirit are freely given, experience shows us that they come to us only when we want them. This doesn't mean that we have to be perfect before we experience the fruit, nor does it mean that we will never fail. What it does mean is that even with all our sin and failures in the spiritual life, God is so generous with his love that he gives the fruit of the Spirit to all who are sincerely trying to live for him. In terms of the Easter promise, we become “like Christ” as we share his divine nature. And the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of that.

In this second article in the series, we will consider the fruit of joy and peace.

The second fruit: joy. This joy is rooted in God. It is not something that comes from earthly things or earthly fulfillment. It comes from desiring and seeking God and living his will for us. Sad experience has likely shown us that if we think that we will have joy when we get a new car, or more money, or a new girl/boyfriend, we will soon be mistaken. The joy that is a fruit of the Spirit comes for walking with God and following his teachings. It comes from a relationship with him.

The letter to the Hebrews puts it well: “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith.” Jesus took

the hard way: “For the sake of joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame” (Hebrews 12:2). As we faithfully follow God, we learn this truth: “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

The third fruit: peace. The same is true with peace. Like love and joy, it is rooted in God. We do not experience the fruit of peace in our lives unless we are following God and seeking after his ways. Peace does not just mean the absence of strife in our lives. It is that quietness of heart that comes when we put our lives into God's hands.

If we want true peace, we cannot hold on to our lives and dictate to God what we want. St. Paul put it well: We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). And “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

So the question is ours. If we want these gifts, are we willing to follow Jesus as faithful disciples!

Questions for Prayer and Discussion

1. Are there times in your life when you sense that you experienced the joy of God? Do you want to live in a way that produced the fruit of joy?
2. Can you describe times when you sense that you have experienced the fruit of peace? Does this fruit appeal to you?
3. Here are some more Scripture verses about joy and peace: Joy—Romans 14:17; 15:13; Philippians 1: 4, 25; Peace—John 14:27; Ephesians 1:2-6; Philippians 4:7. What do they tell you about the joy and peace you can expect as fruit of the Spirit?

~ Anthony Bosnick

A Prayer for Easter

Jesus is the true Lamb who took away the sins of the world.

By dying he destroyed our death; by rising he restored our life.

The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world, While the choirs of heaven sing for ever to your glory.

Jesus has made us children of the light, rising to new and everlasting life.

He has opened the gates of heaven to receive his faithful people.

His death is our ransom from death; his resurrection is our rising to life.

The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world,...

Jesus is still our priest, our advocate who always pleads our cause. Christ is the victim who dies no more, The Lamb, once slain, who lives for ever.

The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world,...

In Jesus a new age has dawned, the long reign of sin is ended, a broken world has been renewed, and man is once again made whole.

The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world,...

As Jesus offered his body on the cross, his perfect sacrifice fulfilled all others.

As he gave himself into your hands for our salvation,

He showed himself to be the priest, the altar, and the lamb of sacrifice.

The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world,...

Loving God, you restored us to life by raising Christ from the dead. Strengthen us this Easter season that we might walk in the joy of the resurrection that renews the whole world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Adapted from the Easter Prefaces)

Pray for our benefactors

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