

# Let's Talk!®

A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

## An Invitation to Hope

As you begin the new year of 2007, you may wonder what hope there is for you and your situation in prison. Even in the best of circumstances, people can lose hope. But when facing time in prison, holding on to hope can be even harder. You may face that challenge.

The life and example of Brother Jim Townsend, OFM Cap. will encourage you. Br. Jim is a professed brother in the Franciscan Capuchin order, and he has been for over 30 years. You may wonder what a Catholic religious brother has in common with you. After all, he lives such a different life.

**A hard life.** Br. Jim is a convicted felon. He received a sentence of life imprisonment at the age of 20 in 1948 for murdering his wife. As a child, his life was hard as his family struggled through poverty during the Depression (1930s). His mother died while Jim was still a young boy. And he grew up in an abusive household and knew very little love. Only six months into his marriage, he snapped.

Grief and guilt overcame Jim as he was sent off to prison. He lived in a black hole of depression. He felt his only hope was to escape prison and disappear...and he began

to plan for it. After several years, Jim was moved to another prison with lower security. His plan was to work his way to a prison job where he could drive unaccompanied in a truck through the prison gates never to return.



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**Stone cold toward God.** Jim played a game to get where he needed to be. He got a job cleaning the chapel, went to religious services, and tried to make himself look good. He even went to confession to try to impress the chaplain. All the while, his heart was stone cold toward God.

But something began to happen. Slowly his heart opened to God and his life and attitudes changed...without him noticing at first. The Scripture he read, the religious services he attended, and the words the chaplain spoke all began to sink in...and change him. God never gave up on Jim, nor did the chaplain.

**Slow growth and change.** The result was slow and steady growth. Jim made a conscious decision to turn to God and to change his life. He trusted that God could and would work in him. He began to take prayer and  
*(continued on page 4)*

## Q & A

### The way of life

**Q.** I've never read the Bible through. What is the best way to do that?

**A.** Reading through the Bible is a spiritual discipline that gives great rewards. Today the Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful . . . to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 133). It is so important that Pope Benedict XVI will meet with Catholic Bishops from around the world in 2008 to focus on the Bible in the life of the Church.

Prayer should be part of your Scripture reading. This helps you and God to talk together. Prayer helps you learn how God's word applies to your life. As you read and pray your way through Scripture, you may want to keep a notebook of what you are learning. This will help you continue to learn from his word.

To read through the Bible, *develop a plan that is realistic for you.* Know how much you can read each day. Do not take on so much that you get tired of the practice or can't remember what you have read. Perhaps start with two chapters a day, along with a Psalm or part of a longer one. At this pace, it will take about a year and a half to read through the Bible.

Some Bibles are set up to enable you to read through them in one year. Some pamphlets are also available with one-, two-, or three-year reading plans. They may help you, but you can also develop your own plan.

Some people suggest starting at the front of the Bible and reading through to the end. This is likely *not* the best way for a first-time Bible reader because it is too easy to get bogged down in difficult Old Testament books.

*(continued on page 2)*

### Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The new year begins and with it come many opportunities for grace! All of us are challenged to be open to God's gift of grace, and to become what God wants us to be. Let us pray for one another this year that we accept the gift God gives so generously and freely.

We hope the story of Br. Jim Townsend in this issue gives you hope for your life. He is truly an example of one who has risen from darkness to walk in the light of Christ. May his story be an example and inspiration to you. God is generous with us. May that truth strengthen you each day of your life.

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

January 2007

- 1 Mary, Mother of God
- 2 St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen, bishops and doctors
- 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
- 5 St. John Neumann, bishop
- 7 Epiphany of the Lord
- 8 Baptism of the Lord
- 14 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 17 St. Anthony, abbot
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 21 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 24 St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor
- 25 Conversion of St. Paul
- 26 Sts. Timothy and Titus, bishops
- 28 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 31 St. John Bosco, priest

February 2007

- 2 Presentation of the Lord
- 4 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 5 St. Agatha, virgin and martyr
- 6 St. Paul Miki and Companions, martyrs
- 10 St. Scholastica, virgin
- 11 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 14 St. Cyril, monk and St. Methodius, bishop
- 18 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 21 Ash Wednesday
- 22 Chair of Peter, apostle
- 25 First Sunday of Lent

March 2007

- 3 St. Katharine Drexel, virgin
- 4 Second Sunday of Lent
- 11 Third Sunday of Lent
- 17 St. Patrick of Ireland, bishop
- 18 Fourth Sunday of Lent
- 19 St. Joseph, Husband of the Virgin Mary
- 25 Fifth Sunday of Lent
- 26 Annunciation of the Lord



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**Q & A: The way of life**

(continued from page 1)

Perhaps a better way is to start with the Gospels and read through the New Testament, then return to the Old Testament. A variation on this is to read the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, then skip to St. Paul's letters. Then return to read Luke's Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. From there, read the Gospel of John and the three letters of John. Finish with the remainder of the New Testament. You may also want to read a Psalm or part of a Psalm each day as well.

Then you can turn your attention to the books of the Old Testament, starting at the beginning and working your way through. You could add some variation by reading some of the prophets along the way, and a Psalm and other Wisdom literature each day.

Make sure you have a Bible translation you like and understand. The New American Bible is a standard for Catholics that is used in the readings at Mass. An edition with some study notes can be very helpful. The Good News Bible is also approved in a Catholic edition. It uses everyday, natural language that is easy to understand. Many people use it.

To help remain faithful to the practice, you may find it helpful to set a certain time aside each day when you read the Bible. Then, stay with it. You are sure to find daily Bible reading a great blessing.

**Q. What is the Didache some people here talk about?**

**A.** The Didache (Greek for "Teaching") is a document from the early Christian period (around 70–160 A.D.). It contains teaching on life in the early church and is like a catechism. The Didache was lost for centuries but rediscovered in 1883 in an old collection of documents.

This short work (about 3,000 words) is in three sections. The first section contains instructions on the two ways: the Way of Life and the Way of Death.

It teaches that if you want life, love God and neighbor. And sin—including anger, adultery, and abortion—leads to death.

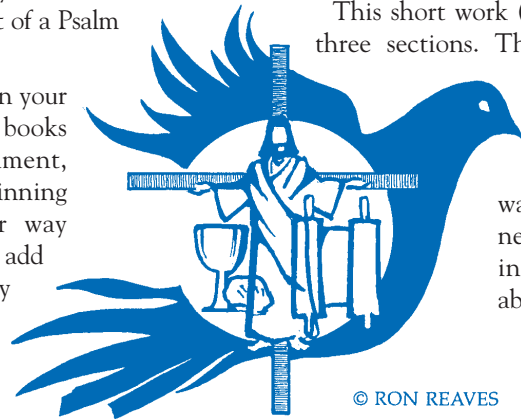
The second section is on sacraments such as baptism and Eucharist.

The third is on church organization, including bishops and deacons. This indicates to scholars that the sacraments and structure of the church we know today also existed in the very early church. To reject them is to reject what has been part of the church since the earliest days.

**Q. What is a monsignor?**

**A.** This is an honorary title given to a priest for faithful and/or distinguished service to the Church. It does not grant special privileges but is a sign of respect.

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 Saint**

**St. Fabian (d. 250)** ✠ Fabian was a simple and holy man, most likely a farmer. When the pope died in 236 A.D., Fabian went to Rome with others to pray. The young church then elected popes differently than we do today. While the church considered various noble people for pope, a dove descended on Fabian's head. This reminded the church of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10). Believing God was calling Fabian to be pope, they elected him. For 14 years he labored to build the church. St. Cyprian called Fabian "an incomparable man." During the persecution of Decian, Roman officials arrested Fabian and put him to death.

**Feast Day: January 20**

# Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness...

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

**Peaches:** Deke, how about those “persecuted for righteousness”? How can that be blessed or happy?

**Me:** OK. First, let's be clear that “righteousness” is justice. It is what God was after in the whole Old Testament. It's the message of the prophets—to act justly. Now, if you actually live the way of Jesus—and not just talk it to death!—you can expect to get some “push back” from what the Bible calls “the world.” The system of the world based on injustice isn't going to welcome justice.

**Peaches:** So if you live the beatitudes, you're going to get persecuted because you're messing with the system. I just don't get why God would let that happen to someone trying to do the right thing.

**Me:** Well, because God made us all free. And even though the folks of the world choose to persecute, that persecution works to further destroy the system!

Persecution is actually how the gospel is spread. When you are persecuted for justice, there are always people who can see that. The lines are clearly drawn between good and evil at that point. Some in the crowd, who are watching but saying nothing, are being touched by the truth of the gospel.

**Peaches:** That's when you're really being Christ-like, huh?

**Me:** Absolutely. The more the gospel is “driven out,” the more the evil of the system is exposed for driving the just person out. Then, the more the gospel takes root and spreads.

**Peaches:** Like the mustard plant in the parable?

**Me:** Yep. The more you cut it back the thicker it grows back in.

**Peaches:** So the “blessed” part is that you get your reward in heaven?

**Me:** Well, sure, that's true. However, you also get it even in the midst of the persecution as it's happening.

**Peaches:** How? Persecution doesn't sound like fun to me!

**Me:** No. It's not fun. But Jesus isn't promising fun. He's promising blessedness and happiness, which refers to deep down contentment and joy that is always there even in that difficult situation of persecution.

**Peaches:** Once again, how do you figure that?

**Me:** True happiness and joy like the beatitudes mean we are rooted in our relationship with God which doesn't change. Would you believe me if I told you that the average person in the U.S. never had it so good as they do today?

**Peaches:** Yeah, sure, but there's an awful lot of complaining going on.

**Me:** Exactly, because having a lot of stuff and happiness are not the same thing.

**Peaches:** Yeah. That's true. I guess after a certain point after the basics are covered, money and possessions don't buy happiness.

**Me:** Right. And those persecuted for the sake of justice or righteousness are blessed because we humans need to have meaning in our lives more than we need our extra stuff. That's where happiness comes from! Doing justice connects us to God, one another, and the truth of human existence that we are all in this together!

**Peaches:** So the satisfying happiness comes from the practice of justice.

**Me:** Right and even persecution can't take happiness away from those who live justly. And power, fame, and fortune can't give us satisfying happiness even without persecution. It's just a trick of the devil!

**Peaches:** Yeah. You know, sometimes I watch the rich and famous on “Access Hollywood” or read “People Magazine.” I always think that if they are so happy, why are they numbing up with drugs or alcohol? Why are they O.D.ing? Why can't they keep a marriage together? Why are they doing rehab? They've “got it all”! Shouldn't they be happy already with their fame and money?

**Me:** “By their fruits, you shall know them.”

**Peaches:** Yeah, happy should look happy. And no one going into rehab is happy no matter what they got, I can guarantee you that!

**Me:** There it is. Who are you going to believe: the media or your own eyes?

*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 January/February/March

### January

**General.** For peace: that in our violent time, bishops may continue to show the way of peace and understanding among peoples.

**Missionary.** For the Church in Africa: that the Church in Africa may be a witness of the Good News of Christ and be committed to the promotion of reconciliation and peace.

### February

**General.** For just distribution of resources: that the goods of the earth, given by God for all people, may be used wisely and in accordance with justice and solidarity.

**Missionary.** For the fight against diseases: that governments of all nations may cooperate to fight diseases and epidemics in the Third World.

### March

**General.** For hearing God's word: that the Word of God may be ever more listened to, contemplated, loved, and lived.

**Missionary.** For lay formation: that the training of catechists and lay people may be the constant concern of those responsible for the young Churches.

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

## THE BEATITUDES – PART 9

# Those persecuted for righteousness gain heaven

Read and study: Matthew 5:3-12

**“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**  
(Matthew 5:9)

What does it mean to be “persecuted for the sake of righteousness”? When Matthew uses the term “righteousness” in his Gospel, it usually means acting in accord with God’s will. Put another way, acting righteously means we love and do what is right and hate and reject what is wrong. Knowing this, it shouldn’t be too hard to figure out why people are persecuted for their righteousness...and why they are rewarded with heaven!

**Living righteously.** Scripture and Church teaching are filled with what it means to live righteously (or with justice, as some translations state). It is grounded in loving God and loving neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). Everything else flows from that. Jesus sums it up well at the end of his ministry. He tells us to care for the needy among us: Give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. Welcome the stranger and clothe the naked. Care for the ill and visit the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus puts it simply: “Love one another” (John 13:34).

John adds: “Keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). Paul brings it close to home: reject “immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, envy, drunken bouts, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21). In other words, we are to walk in the way of life and reject the way of death.

**God’s work in us.** It’s clear what we are to do to live righteously, but it’s hard to do. And we will fail if we try it on our own strength. But by faith and baptism, Christ is in us. He is our strength and hope of glory (see Colossians 1:27). It is Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who makes it possible to live righteously.

Day by day, with hearts and minds focused on God, we will grow in our ability to live in the way of righteousness. This helps us to turn from sin and turn toward God. It takes alertness on our part. We can’t live in a fog, playing with every temptation and sin that

comes our way. Jesus took our sins to the cross, and now free from sin, we can live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24). So now in our battle against sin we “stand fast...clothed with righteousness as a breastplate” (Ephesians 6:14).

**Walk in the light.** Our call is to live and walk in the light of Christ (John 12:35-36). But the world prefers darkness to the light (John 3:19-20). So all who live righteous lives can expect to be persecuted. But if we are persecuted for following the way of God, blessing will be ours. “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Peter 4:14).

We begin to share in this blessing now, and will know it in fullness in eternity. As we seek to live righteously—that is, to love and do what is right and hate and reject what is wrong—we will begin to experience the fruit of the Spirit in our lives more and more with the passing of time. The reward is clear: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). And who doesn’t want this?

### Other Scripture passages to study:

- Psalm 11:7
- Isaiah 11:5
- Matthew 21:32
- Ephesians 6:14
- Hebrews 1:9
- 1 Peter 4:14
- 1 John 2:29

### 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 can you grow in living in righteousness? In what ways do you resist?
3. Read more about the beatitudes in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 1716-1717).

~ Anthony Bosnick

## An Invitation to Hope

(continued from page 1)

religious services seriously. His reading of Scripture and fellowship with other like-minded prisoners made a difference.

Eventually, the chaplain gave him greater responsibility in the Catholic fellowship group. As Jim took that responsibility, he came to see God working in the lives of other prisoners as well. This further deepened his trust in God. It convinced Jim that God is real and loves his people...including himself!

After his release from prison in 1967, Jim experienced further healing as he began to trust people and realize that he wasn’t worthless and unlovable as he thought of himself. Steady and determined growth in the knowledge of God’s life and love now sustains him.

Br. Jim’s life shows that there is reason for hope. God never abandons his people. He pours out his love freely and generously. God gives hope to those struggling with life, who may believe that there is no hope for them. Br. Jim’s life shows that there is. It shows too that God has great surprises in store for those who open their lives to him.

Br. Jim’s life is recounted in the book *The Prisoner. An Invitation to Hope* by Paul F. Everett published in 2005 by Paulist Press. It is available online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## 2007 Calendars

If you would like a 2007 calendar, the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems (NCCA) has one for you. You can also receive their booklet “Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones” and their “Serenity Prayer Bookmark.” All material is available in English and Spanish. Their mailing address is: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 48360. You can also contact them by email at [ncca@guesthouse.org](mailto:ncca@guesthouse.org) or by toll free telephone at 800-626-6910, ext 200.

### Pray for our benefactors

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