

# Let's Talk!



A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners

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

## Do you follow Jesus, or just admire him?

This is a good question to ask ourselves, especially as we begin a new year. Many people *admire* Jesus. Fewer people actually *follow* him. It's easy to see why people admire Jesus. After all, he is a good man with good ideas. What person of good will wouldn't find what he says about peace and love and forgiveness appealing?

But it is harder to follow him! This means that we *take seriously* what Jesus says about peace, love, and forgiveness—for example—and try to *live it out* in our lives. We know that what he teaches is meant for us personally and calls us to a new way of life. Following Jesus is harder than just admiring him.

### Deciding for Jesus.

Following Jesus is a decision we make in our hearts and in our minds. This will certainly mean a new direction for us. St. Ignatius of Loyola put it this way in his *Spiritual Exercises*: "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All I have and call my own. Whatever I have or hold, you have given to me. I restore it all to you and

surrender it wholly to be governed under your will. Give me only your love and grace and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more."

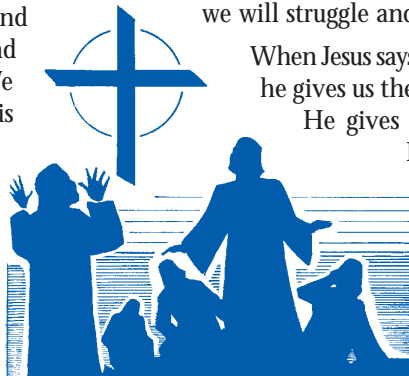
**Entrust yourself to Jesus.** If we want to follow Jesus and not just admire him, we need to entrust our lives to him. He becomes more important to us than *our* wants, *our* rights, *our* way of thinking. What Jesus says, we are willing to do, even though many times we will struggle and fail.

When Jesus says "Follow me" (Mark 2:14), he gives us the grace and power to do it. He gives us Scripture to teach us.

He gives us the Church and the sacraments to sustain us on our way. He gives us brothers and sisters to support us and help set us straight.

### Follow me.

Do you hear Jesus calling you to follow him? Say yes to him and be true to your word. You will find that his love and grace are enough to satisfy the longings of your heart. In this new year, let us say yes to Jesus and follow him. You will see that this is a decision you can make even in prison.



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## Q & A

### May they all be one

**Q.** In the Church Calendar in *Let's Talk!*, you list the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity." What is that?

**A.** The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a time when many Christians pray especially that the divisions among them would end according to the plan of Christ. It is celebrated every year from January 18-25.

This year of 2008 is the one-hundredth anniversary of the prayer. It was first celebrated in 1908 by a society of Episcopal priests at Graymoor, N.Y. When those priests became Catholics as a group later in 1908, the Church Unity Octave (as it was then called) received approval for Catholics. Since then, it has gradually been embraced by Catholics, Orthodox, and many Protestant churches all around the world. Many "independent" Christian churches, however, do not participate.

Jesus' prayer to the Father inspires the prayer for unity. He prayed, "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21). The Catholic Church taught at Vatican II in the *Decree on Ecumenism* (n. 8) that prayer is central to all efforts to find unity. Thus, this week of prayer has taken on great importance in the effort to promote unity among Christians.

The *Decree on Ecumenism* (n. 5) says that restoring unity is the concern of all in the Church. For most people, it is "exercised in daily Christian living." Thus, how you act in charity and respect toward other Christians in your daily life is how you will most likely live your call to help restore unity.

Since prayer is at the heart of restoring unity, perhaps the chaplain(s) or volunteer(s) serving you could celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in some way

(continued on page 2)

### Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Blessings for this new year. This is a time when many people like to make resolutions to better their lives. We wish to propose a resolution which comes from Scripture. In this new year, let us resolve "to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Our prayer is that you will embrace this three-part resolution as your own. Practice it faithfully. Ask God for the grace to persevere, especially when it seems too hard and even impossible to do so. You will soon see that God is generous in the help he gives. You will see victories in your walk with God.

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

**January 2008**

- 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
- 6 **Epiphany of the Lord**
- 13 **Baptism of the Lord**
- 17 St. Anthony, abbot
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 20 **Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 St. Agnes, virgin and martyr
- 24 St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor
- 25 **Conversion of St. Paul**
- 26 Sts. Timothy and Titus, bishops
- 27 **Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 31 St. John Bosco, priest

**February 2008**

- 2 **Presentation of the Lord**
- 3 **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 5 St. Agatha, virgin and martyr
- 6 Ash Wednesday
- 10 **First Sunday of Lent**
- 14 St. Cyril, monk and St. Methodius, bishop
- 17 **Second Sunday in Lent**
- 22 **Chair of Peter, apostle**
- 24 **Third Sunday of Lent**

**March 2008**

- 2 **Fourth Sunday of Lent**
- 3 St. Katharine Drexel, virgin
- 9 **Fifth Sunday of Lent**
- 15 St. Joseph, Husband of Mary
- 16 **Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion**
- 20-22 Easter Triduum
- 20 **Mass of the Lord's Supper (Holy Thursday)**
- 21 **The Lord's Passion (Good Friday)**
- 22 **Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday)**
- 23 **Easter Sunday**
- 30 **Second Sunday of Easter (also Divine Mercy Sunday)**
- 31 **Annunciation of the Lord**



Let's Talk!®

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**Q & A: May they all be one**

(continued from page 1)

with you. They can find many good ideas at this web site: [www.weekofprayer2008.org](http://www.weekofprayer2008.org). If that is not possible, you can still make the prayer your own. The Holy Spirit will likely surprise you with many blessings from such prayer.

**Q. Who did Cain wed if there were only three people on earth at the time—Adam, Eve, and Cain?**

**A.** The story of Cain (Genesis 4) is in a section of the Bible known as “prehistory.” This includes the first 11 chapters of Genesis, which are about theological truths, not history. Taken as a whole, they help us better understand God and our relationship to him. These chapters are thus not to be read in the way we read a history book.

The person whom Cain married is not what Genesis 4:1-16ff is trying to get at. The passage is likely trying to help us see that after sin entered the world, evil flourished and even led to killing one’s brother. This is the point that we need to consider. Another is that while the tendency to sin is powerful, we can master it. “Sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master” (v. 7).

Catholics (and many Protestants and Jews) read and understand Scripture differently than do fundamentalist Christians. Catholics and similar-thinking people see the Bible as a collection of many books inspired by the

Holy Spirit. These books—law, history, theology, poetry, prophecy—have different purposes. They are best read according to the type(s) of biblical literature they are.

Thus, we do not read the story of Cain as history or about marriage. Rather, we see it as a reflection on the spread of sin. This is different from fundamentalist Christians who tend not to see the various ways in which the Bible is written.

**Q. What is the “Great Commission”?**

**A.** This is the term some Christians use for Jesus’ command to “go...and make disciples of all nations.” This is the work of the Church to which we are all called. The Great Commission includes the command to baptize and to teach all that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20; see also Mark 16:15-16).

Catholics of course embrace this commission. It was once understood to be the work almost exclusively of priests and religious sisters and brothers. Today, after Vatican II (1962-65), we understand more clearly that lay people also participate in it. You might look at the Great Commission and see how you can participate in it even while in prison.

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. Vincent (d. c. 304)** ✠ The deacon Vincent is the first Christian martyr of Spain. In 303 A.D., the emperor Diocletian began persecuting Christians. Eventually, nearly 3,500 suffered torture and death. During this time, the Roman authorities arrested and imprisoned Vincent. While in prison, they subjected him to multiple and unspeakable tortures. They offered him his freedom if he would renounce Scripture and burn the sacred texts. Vincent refused. His torturers then tended his wounds to prolong his life for further torture. Before that began, Vincent died firm in his faith. The example of his faithfulness under torture strengthened the Church in Spain. His example especially inspires many Hispanic and Portuguese people to this day.

**Feast Day: January 22**

## The Twelve-Step Program

# Decide to turn our life over to the care of God...Step 3

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

**Peaches:** Step 2 says, "Came to Believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." Now, I don't have a problem with that. I've always believed in God and that he has the power to do whatever he wants! But, it didn't work. I prayed and nothing happened! And I've got to tell you, that's a big letdown for me! It's all I can do to keep it from becoming a "deal breaker"!

**Me:** That's all good, Peaches, as far as it goes. There is one more piece needed to start the change that will restore a person to sanity and that piece is Step 3.

**Peaches:** Step 3 is "Made a decision to turn our life over to the care of God as we understand Him." How is the prayer I prayed not that?! I asked him to fix me and my life!

**Me:** Was that prayer a wish or a decision?

**Peaches:** I don't follow.

**Me:** Step 3 calls for a *decision*. The word refers to "cutting with a sword." It's like taking a stand; burning your bridges; no turning back. Is that how you prayed? Or was it more like a wish where we ask God to "bless our mess" and continue with business as usual?

**Peaches:** When you put it that way, I guess it was more of a wish. So, God wouldn't help me based on a technicality?

**Me:** No, not on a technicality, but because you didn't give him what he needed to work with.

**Peaches:** I didn't know he needed anything.

**Me:** Didn't Jesus ask for a decision when he called on people to "repent"?

**Peaches:** Yes.

**Me:** Did anything change for people until they repented?

**Peaches:** No.

**Me:** God respects us and our freedom. He is not going to make us robots. He has decided to work through people and those people have to say "yes," like Mary did to the angel Gabriel. Or like Jesus waiting for someone to offer the few fishes and loaves, then he could feed the 5,000 people with them.

**Peaches:** So, I didn't invest in this? That's why it didn't work?

**Me:** Well, yes, and the investment is to turn your life over to the care of God.

**Peaches:** Isn't that what I prayed for?

**Me:** No. You turned your addiction over. You have to turn your whole life over for this to work. Like addiction, recovery is an all or nothing thing.

**Peaches:** Well, it's true that you can't be just a little addicted. You either are or you aren't.

**Me:** Exactly. And you can't be in just a little recovery either.

**Peaches:** But why do you have to turn over your whole life?

**Me:** Because you are you and how you do things is how you do things.

**Peaches:** What?!

**Me:** We are only one person. This one person is made up of certain strengths and weaknesses. It doesn't matter if I am praying or dating or working. I'm doing those things and they are going to be done the way I am.

**Peaches:** Oh, so if I'm an impatient person, I'm going to be impatient in my spirituality, dating, or at work.

**Me:** Right. So, Step 3 calls for a *decision*—not a wish. It calls for action to be taken on our belief in the Higher Power of Step 2. That action is to let the Higher Power run our life. *All of it*. Then the changing begins.

**Peaches:** I've been at meetings where I've heard them say that we "apply these principles in all of our affairs." And "all of our affairs" is just another way of saying our life.

**Me:** There you go.

**Peaches:** This really is similar to being a practicing Catholic, isn't it, Deke?

**Me:** Yup. Same thing only different.

**Peaches:** So, believing without action is just wishing.

**Me:** Or "Faith without good works is dead" (James 2:17).

**Peaches:** Same thing only different!

*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.

**Christian Unity:** That the Church work for full visible unity that better manifests a community of love which reflects the Blessed Trinity.

**Missionary. Church in Africa:** That the Church in Africa, preparing for a special Synod, may be an instrument of reconciliation and justice.

#### February

##### General. Mentally

**Handicapped:** That the mentally handicapped may not be marginalized, but respected and lovingly helped.

**Missionary. Institutes of Consecrated Life:** That the Institutes of Consecrated Life in mission countries may rediscover the missionary dimension and generously proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth.

#### March

##### General. Forgiveness:

That all may understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals and peoples and that the Church may spread Christ's love.

##### Missionary.

**The Persecuted:** That Christians who are persecuted because of the Gospel may be sustained by the Holy Spirit and continue to bear witness to the Word of God.

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



## Mary's Joyful Prayer...and Ours – Part 3

# God upsets the proud, lifts up the lowly

Read and study: Luke 1:46-55

**“He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.”**

(Luke 1:49-50)

**M**ary's joyful prayer is ours as well. In reflecting on this prayer, we have already seen that Mary rejoiced in God and was blessed (Luke 1:46-47). And as we rejoice in God, we too know God's blessing. We have also seen that Mary knew God as the Mighty One who is holy and merciful (vv. 49-50).

This God is personal to us. He is not distant and indifferent. And even though he is mighty, he is the God who loves his people with “tender mercy” (1:78). We take courage in the truth that God is with us and that we do not walk alone. Now we look at how our mighty, holy, and merciful God works in our midst (vv. 51-53).

**God displays his might.** Mary knew that God protects the people he loves, scattering the proud of mind and heart (v. 51). Perhaps the words of the psalmist were in her heart: “with your strong arm you have scattered your enemies” (Psalm 89:11). Mary knew that God had acted this way among his people Israel, and in her own life. God's love and protection are not just a promise for the future but a reality now.

The arrogant act as if God does not exist or does not care what is going on. They plot and scheme against God and against his people. In seeking their own way, they ignore God and walk over those around them. They may seem victorious now, but in the end the emptiness in their hearts leaves them numb to life and love. Too much of this and they die.

**God lifts up the lowly.** Mary knew that the proud and arrogant may hold forth for a time, but in time they topple and fall. God lifts up the lowly (v. 52). She knew this to be true in Israel's history, and we see it played out countless times over the ages. One after another, prideful ones rise to power, abuse it, and crumble into dust. Wise people take note of this warning even today.

In our own lives, we may have even bet on the powerful and laughed at the lowly and powerless. But in the end, we ultimately see the humble and lowly ones lifted up while those who rule through lawlessness and power fall.

**God fills the hungry.** Mary knew that God fills the hungry and the rich he sends away empty (v. 53). God reverses the fortunes of the poor and of the rich. God loves those who rely on him. These are the ones who are truly poor and trust in his mercy. The rich go away empty because they care for nothing other than themselves. Those who have much and give of their abundance to others are themselves filled.

**Are these promises true?** Looking around us, we may wonder how these promises could be true. If they are, why do we so often see the arrogant victorious, the lowly oppressed, and the rich proud in their wealth? The truth is that the more faithfully we walk with Christ each day, the more we see these promises fulfilled. Right now, we may see this dimly. But at the end of time when all is fulfilled in Christ we will see them fulfilled clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12). We taste of the promises now through the Holy Spirit who is with us. In the end, however, we will experience them in fullness.

### Other Scripture passages to study:

- Psalm 68:2
- Psalm 103:17-18
- Sirach 10:14-15
- Jeremiah 5:27-28
- Job 22:7-9

### Ways to take action:

1. What in Mary's prayer amazes you about the way God works in our midst? Why?
2. In what ways do you not believe that God works as he promises? How can you grow in your openness to God's promises?

~ Anthony Bosnick

## Special Prayers

### Act of Spiritual Communion for when you are unable to receive Holy Communion

My Jesus, I believe you are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things and I desire you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you are already there, I embrace you and unite myself wholly to you. Permit not that I should ever be separated from you. Amen.

### Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds hide me. Suffer me not to be separated from you. From the malignant enemy defend me. In the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you. That, with your Saints, I may praise you forever and ever. Amen.

## 2008 Calendars

New 2008 calendars are available, also the booklet “Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones,” and bookmark. In English and Spanish, all from the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems. Send your name and address to: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 48360.

## Letter from Prison

Our Letter from Prison column will continue in our next newsletter. Do you have a story of God working in your life you would like to share with others? Send us your witness of 325 words or less. Please send it to Let's Talk!; PNCEA; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017.

## Pray for our benefactors

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