

Let's Talk!



A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners

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

You are the Church of Christ

Some good news. And some challenging news. You are the church of Christ. Even in prison—and perhaps especially in prison—you are the church who helps to make Jesus and the love he has for his people present and real.

The church isn't just a building. It's not just the priest or other religious leader who comes to minister to your needs. The church is you! You are part of the people God calls to be his own. For most of us, that is a big calling. But it is also one we can embrace through the love that God sends to us by the Holy Spirit.

God gathers a people to himself. From east to west and from the rising of the sun to its setting, God is gathering a people to himself. This means that in all places and at all times, God is calling his people together. The church is throughout the world, and it is in your local gathering in prison. You gathered together in prison are part of the church throughout the world.

The church draws its life from Jesus, the Word of God and Body of Christ. Across the

world it is so. And in prison it is so as well. You are part of something greater than those gathered together in your prison assembly. You are part of all believers in Christ throughout the world, in all settings, in and out of prison.

All Christians have work to do. Even in prison, as part of the church, you have work to do. As a follower of



Christ, and that is what you are if you are baptized and live in faith, you are called to spread God's love and truth. This love and truth free people from bondage to sin and emptiness of heart. *Through the simple example of your life and the words you speak you fulfill the mission God gives to his people.*

That doesn't mean you have to be perfect, or know all things. None of us could be followers of Christ if that were required. But it does mean that you have to be willing to let God work in you and through you. That is good news and challenging news. It is also life-giving news. Embrace the call and you will know what real joy and true life is!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Blessings in the New Year. May you grow closer to the Lord this year and be filled with hope. To help make that a reality, I'd like to suggest that you look over the spiritual resolutions you will find in this issue on this page and commit yourself to them. Our lives are a journey. We are on pilgrimage with the Lord. Thus, we can make a decision to walk more closely with the Lord Jesus each day. If you do, you will be blessed every step of the way.

Our prayer for you is that you will encounter Christ more deeply in your life this year. May your growing relationship with him bring you joy and hope.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President, PNCFA

Q & A

Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

Q. Can you give some advice that will help me grow spiritually while I'm here in prison? I don't feel like much is happening in my spiritual life.

A. Many spiritual directors recommend that if we want to grow spiritually, we need to develop our own "spiritual discipline." At the heart of this is that we do what we can, not what we can't. By this they mean that if you don't have an hour a day of quiet for prayer, don't attempt to spend an hour a day in quiet prayer. It won't happen and you'll just end up frustrated. Thus, build a realistic spiritual life that suits your present circumstances.

Everyone's circumstances differ, including those in prison or jail. Your type of confinement and the number of others around you will affect the amount of distractions you face and the time you get for some quiet. Even your own personality will impact what you can and should try to do. Since it is now the beginning of the New Year, and people often talk about making "New Year's Resolutions," here are some suggestions for "Spiritual Resolutions" for the New Year. (You can read more about them in our new PNCFA Prison Ministries pamphlet "Follow Me. Conversion and Commitment to Christ." Your chaplain or ministry volunteer may be able to get a copy for you.)

A good spiritual discipline consists of several parts. Here are some to consider: 1) Read the Word of God. 2) Worship and pray. 3) Be part of a community. 4) Care for and serve others. Let's take a look at them.

First, the Word of God. Read Scripture. Listen to Scripture being read. Since every Catholic Mass consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist,

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January 2011

- 1 Mary, Mother of God
- 2 Epiphany of the Lord
- 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
- 5 St. John Neumann, bishop
- 9 Baptism of the Lord
- 16 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 17 St. Anthony, abbot
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 21 St. Agnes, virgin and martyr
- 23 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 St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor
- 30 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 31 St. John Bosco, priest

February 2011

- 2 Presentation of the Lord
- 5 St. Agatha, virgin and martyr
- 6 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 8 St. Jerome Emiliani, priest
- 10 St. Scholastica, virgin
- 13 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 20 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 22 Chair of St. Peter
- 23 St. Polycarp, martyr
- 27 Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

March 2011

- 3 St. Katharine Drexel, virgin
- 6 Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 7 Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs
- 9 Ash Wednesday
- 13 First Sunday of Lent
- 17 St. Patrick of Ireland, bishop
- 19 St. Joseph, Husband of Mary
- 20 Second Sunday of Lent
- 25 The Annunciation of the Lord
- 27 Third Sunday of Lent



Let's Talk!®

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Q & A: Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

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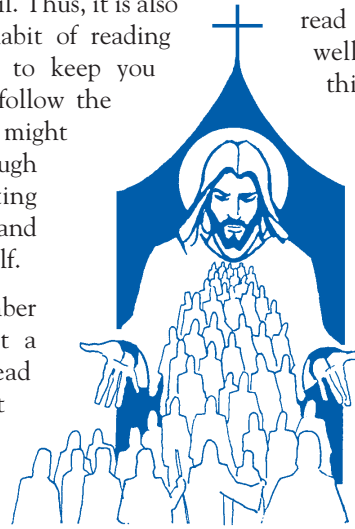
Mass provides a good time to hear the Word proclaimed. Listen to it and try to remember something to reflect on later.

For some, it is difficult to attend religious services while in prison or jail. Thus, it is also good to develop a daily habit of reading something from the Bible to keep you going. You might want to follow the daily Mass readings. Or you might want to work your way through books of the Bible (starting with the New Testament), and perhaps the entire Bible itself.

It is important to remember that reading Scripture isn't a speed-reading contest. Read slowly and reflect on what you read. Perhaps write down in a notebook something that strikes you. Remember, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Second, worship and pray. Attend Sunday Mass if you can. If it isn't available on Sunday, attend when it is offered. The Eucharist is the great sacrament of life and love. Participate with an open heart and mind, with the desire of meeting Jesus and learning from him, growing in him, being healed by him.

The liturgy at most for many is once a week and for an hour or less. Thus, in addition to Mass, pray daily. Set aside a time and place when you can talk with God. A little such time is better than none. If possible, read Scripture during this time as well. If your schedule doesn't make this possible, during a quiet time of the day take time to turn your mind and heart to God and talk with him. This is an example of "Pray as you can, not as you can't."



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tear you down.) When Jesus formed a body of followers known as his disciples, he was setting an example for us. It is important to be part of a community.

A faith community can be a place of fun and fellowship that encourages us and supports us in hard times. There can be good people there to talk with and grow with, who provide positive relationships. A community of believers is a place where we live out our faith, so our faith doesn't remain something just in our heads. It has to be in our hearts

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Prisoner Saint

St. Sebastian (d. c. 288) ☩ The young soldier Sebastian was highly regarded by his superiors and even the emperor! He was also a Christian. During an early time of persecution under Emperor Diocletian, who is known for his brutal persecution of Christians, Sebastian went to Rome. Because of his honored status, he was allowed to visit prisoners. His witness to the faith strengthened Christians who would soon be martyred. He was discovered, arrested, tied to a tree, and shot with arrows. Sebastian was left for dead, but the widow Irene tended him back to health. He returned to preach the Good News of Christ to Diocletian, who had Sebastian beaten to death.

Feast Day: January 20

Growing in Prayer, Part 7

Making the Day Holy... A Habit of Gratitude

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: So, let's see if I've got this, so far. You offer God your day before you get out of bed. Pray the news with your first cup of coffee. Thank God for food by saying grace before breakfast, lunch and dinner. You use little triggers in your daily environment to remind you to pray—like you pray, “Come, Holy Spirit,” whenever you hear a radio.

Me: Right. I also use waiting for a door to be opened as prayer time. I used to get mad waiting at a gate, but now I use it to learn patience and I say a little line from Ps. 70, “O God come to my assistance. Lord hurry up and help me.” That's all-purpose. It fits every situation.

Peaches: And you pray for God to help people who have bad news or whenever you hear a siren. And you do a little spiritual reading before you fall asleep at night. What else?

Me: I also offer a lot of little gratitude prayers as I go along.

Peaches: How do you do that?

Me: Well, if you are truly grateful—you just say, “Thanks.” Not much to it. For example, I always say, “Thanks,” when I'm in the shower. A hot shower is something most people on this planet never have! Most people don't even have clean water to drink, never mind hot water for a shower! I feel like God's spoiled brat that I have that luxury every day. I try to be at least a grateful, spoiled brat. I'm grateful to feel clean and refreshed and so I just say, “Thanks!”.

Peaches: You do that for other things too or just the shower?

Me: No. Other things as they strike me. I'm thankful for a job that I like. I'm thankful for my ministry. I'm thankful for heat on a cold winter day or A/C on a hot day, like that...just as it comes.

Peaches: OK, so these little prayers of gratitude are just sprinkled through your day as they occur to you?

Me: Exactly. I have a lot to be grateful for. So to me, not be grateful is a very big sin. Ever “prayed” an orange?

Peaches: Don't get snakey on me now, Deke!

Me: Really, a monk once showed me. He said you really look at the orange. You smell it as you peel it. Then pay attention and enjoy every bite. What a miracle an orange is! What a gift!

Peaches: Another prayer of gratitude, huh?

Me: Correct. Ever pray a walk?

Peaches: Dude, you gotta quit talking to the monks!

Me: No really! Just walk slowly and appreciate it. Feel your feet making contact with the ground. Think about what a miracle it is just to be able to get up and walk.

Peaches: Got it. Gratitude. Appreciate the little things.

Me: Are they “little things”? If you couldn't walk would it be a “little thing”?

Peaches: I get it. But you could do that with almost anything! You could do that all day!

Me: Yup, sure can.

Peaches: This is kind of like “count your blessings”, isn't it?

Me: Pretty much. And being grateful is what makes you happy. That “When I'm happy then I'll be grateful” approach, doesn't work.

Peaches: Dude, I've been figuring this out as we go along. You have managed to figure out how to use snatches of dead time, on the fly to stay centered in God all day! By my calculation, you're spending maybe half an hour a day in honest prayer and the rest is grab and go!

Me: You say that like it's a bad thing.

Peaches: I knew you were slippery but now I can prove it!

Me: “Slippery” is such an ugly word, shall we say “smart” instead?

Peaches: I'll meet you half way, how about “lazy”?

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. *Protect the Environment:* That the riches of creation be preserved, valued, and made available to all, as a precious gift of God to mankind.

Missionary. *Christian unity:* That Christians may achieve full unity, bearing witness to the universal fatherhood of God to the entire human race.

February

General. *The Family:* That the family may be respected by all in its identity and that its irreplaceable contribution to all society be recognized.

Missionary. *Christian witness to the suffering:* That in the mission territories where the struggle against disease is most urgent, Christian communities may witness to the presence of Christ to those who suffer.

March

General. *Faithfulness to the Gospel in Latin America:* That the nations of Latin America may walk in fidelity to the Gospel and be bountiful in social justice and peace.

Missionary. *Persecuted Christians and Communities:* That the Holy Spirit may give light and strength to the Christian communities and the faithful who are persecuted or discriminated against because of the Gospel.

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

The Fruit of the Spirit, Part 1

Make a Choice for Life

What kind of life do you want to live? St. Paul gives us two ways we can choose to live: in the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) or in the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The contrast is stark.

In the flesh: “The works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like.”

In the Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

Two Ways. Which way appeals to you? That of the flesh or that of the Spirit? That of death or that of life? The Psalmist made the choice clear as well: “The way of the wicked leads to ruin” (Psalm 1:6), but those who follow the way of the Lord will “prosper” (Psalm 1:3). Joshua made a clear choice: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

We face the same choice—to choose life or to choose death. If we choose life we will know the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: most likely not all at once; most likely in small amounts; but most likely in a way that will make life worth living. Through the quiet and gentle work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our lives will change and we will taste of the fruit of the Spirit.

This is the first article in a series of articles in *Let's Talk!* that will look at the fruit of the Spirit and what it means in our lives.

Signs of God's presence in us. The fruit of the Spirit are signs that God is working in our lives. The nine fruit given by St. Paul in Galatians are marks of the saints of God. All of us are called to be saints, so all of us can expect to experience the fruit of the Spirit. But we have to make a decision to want this fruit. They are

freely-given gifts, but they come only to those who want them. That does not mean we have to be perfect. Nor does it mean that we will never fail. But it does mean that in our humanness with all our sin and failures in the spiritual life, we make a decision to choose God, to live for God, and to walk each day with God.

We are on pilgrimage as disciples of Christ, followers of Christ. We will experience trials and failure, but we also know that God gives us grace in abundance. We choose that grace and grow in it. As we do, we will gradually experience the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

The first fruit: love. St. Paul begins with love. The Greek word used here (*agapē*) is the same word which describes God's love for his people. [Jesus said,] “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love” (John 15:9; see also John 15:10, 13, 26). This is no feeble and half-hearted love. This love is deep, powerful, and rich. It is truly a sign of God's presence in us.

Love as a fruit of the Spirit is a sign that our lives are changing and that we are becoming Christ-like. Just how Christ-like depends on how deeply we choose to follow Christ and to be like him. Remember these words of hope: “With God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Questions for Prayer and Discussion:

1. Which appeals to you more, life in the flesh or life in the Spirit?
2. Have you made a conscious decision to choose life?
3. Here are some more Scripture verses using the same Greek word (*agapē*) Paul uses in Galatians 5:22: Romans 5:5, 8; 8:35, 39; 13:10; Ephesians 2:4, 3:19; 4:2, 15, 16. What do they tell you about the love you can expect as a fruit of the Spirit?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Q & A:

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too, and participation in a community with other Christians challenges us to live out our faith.

Fourth, care for and serve others. This follows closely on number three above. Our faith isn't just about ourselves. It is about caring for and serving others as well. So look for ways you can do that while in prison or jail. Of course, be prudent and don't get entangled with people who will abuse you. That is why community is so important. When two or three are gathered together, Christ is with you (see Matthew 18:20) and you can better know when to be involved with another person and when not to.

A Personal Encounter with Christ. At the heart of these spiritual resolutions that you can make part of your spiritual discipline is a “personal encounter with Christ.” All of these things help you to encounter Christ, and when that happens you will grow spiritually. And that's what it's all about.

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

2011 Calendars

New 2011 calendars are available, also the booklet “Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones,” and a 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.

Pray for our benefactors

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