



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



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It's about More than Rules

Being in prison or jail has likely taught you something about the importance of following the rules. They are here for a purpose, and when we break them there can be serious consequences. Rules are important. Even so, life—especially the spiritual life—is about more than following the rules.

Rules and laws are important. Rules and laws teach us how to order our lives and to live in ways that promote good in ourselves and between us and others. The Bible teaches us these wise words: “Let your heart hold fast to my words: keep my commands, that you may live” (Proverbs 4:4). And Jesus says, “You will live in my love if you keep my commandments” (John 15:10).

So rules and laws teach us ways of acting and relating that lead to holiness. The judgment of the Psalmist is this: The

law of the Lord “is sweeter also than syrup or honey from the comb” (Psalm 19:11). They help us to get to where we should be heading.

It's about holiness! We are all called to be holy. St. Paul says that “It is God's will that you grow in holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Indeed, in Christ we are called to be “holy and blameless” (Ephesians 1:4). This applies to us all—whether in prison or free. Your life is not over now with your incarceration. Your circumstances are different but this is not a time to waste. Put it to good use to change and to become the kind of person you were created to be . . . to be the kind of person in your best thoughts you want to be.



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We are called to be saints. So, “Make the most of your present opportunity” (Ephesians 5:16) Ask God for the grace each day to live for him . . . to be drawn closer to him. The article “Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year” in this issue of *Let's Talk!* gives you some advice on how to grow spiritually.

Ask God to help you. With God all things are possible (see Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37). We should know by now that on our own, we are doomed to failure. Look at this year with hope. Know that in these twelve months you can do more than follow the rules. You can grow in holiness. Life can change! You can change!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A new year is beginning. What an important time this is for all of us. The days and years go by quickly and before we know it, our time on earth is coming to an end. That is why it is so important to live each day aware of our opportunity to make a difference. A kind word of hope. A helping hand to another. A prayer for the discouraged and for the world.

Through these seemingly small ways we encounter Christ in our lives and through others. No matter where we—in prison or out—our lives are important and have meaning. Remember this and let your time in prison make a difference for the better.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

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 try to 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 pray 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, even in prison or jail. Your level 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. But 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 the Paulist Prison Ministries pamphlet “Conversion and Commitment to Christ.” Your chaplain or 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.

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CHURCH CALENDAR

JANUARY 2012

- 1 **Mary, Mother of God**
- 2 Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, bishops and doctors
- 4 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious
- 5 St. John Neumann, bishop
- 8 **Epiphany of the Lord**
- 9 **Baptism of the Lord**
- 15 **Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 17 St. Anthony, abbot
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 21 St. Agnes, virgin and martyr
- 22 **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
- 29 **Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 31 St. John Bosco, priest

FEBRUARY 2012

- 2 **Presentation of the Lord**
- 5 **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 6 St. Paul Miki and Companions, martyrs
- 10 St. Scholastica, virgin
- 12 **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 19 **Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 **Ash Wednesday**
- 23 St. Polycarp, martyr
- 26 **First Sunday in Lent**

MARCH 2012

- 3 St. Katharine Drexel, virgin
- 4 **Second Sunday in Lent**
- 7 Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs
- 9 **Ash Wednesday**
- 11 **Third Sunday of Lent**
- 17 St. Patrick of Ireland, bishop
- 18 **Fourth Sunday of Lent**
- 19 **St. Joseph, Husband of Mary**
- 25 **Fifth Sunday of Lent**
- 26 **The Annunciation of the Lord**

Q&A Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

(continued from page 1)

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, Mass provides a good time to hear the Word proclaimed. Listen to it and try to pick up something you can remember afterward to guide you.

It can sometimes be 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. 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 is at most once a week for

an hour or less. Thus, in addition, have a time of personal prayer each day. 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 none of this is possible, take time during a quiet time of the day 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."



Third, be part of a community. If there is a Catholic fellowship or church at your prison

or jail, participate in it if you can. (If it is a general Christian fellowship, make sure that they aren't "Catholic bashers" out to 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 community can provide fun and fellowship that encourages us, and that supports us in hard times. They can be good people to talk with and grow with, and provide positive relationships. A community of believers is a place where we live out our faith, so it doesn't remain something just in our heads. It has to be in our hearts 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

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Let's Talk!

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Change of Address: Please help us keep our mailing list accurate. Send all changes in your name and/or address to: Paulist Prison Ministries; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017; or by email to: info@pemdc.org.

Thank you for your help.

PMLTH1201

Prisoner Saint

You (your date of birth goes here) + Yes, You! For you are called to be a saint...we all are. While in prison, our saint invited God into his/her life. S/He asked God for the strength to change. S/He began to pray and talk to God and to find ways to care for others in prison. His/Her life began to change in a quiet and mysterious way. S/He was often not aware that anything was happening, but then began to see change! Others did too. The love of God moved him/her to seek God's will more each day. Without realizing it, s/he became a saint!

Feast Day: Make it a daily celebration!

**Pope Benedict XVI's
Prayer Requests**
for January/February/
March

JANUARY**General.** *Victims of*

Natural Disasters: That the victims of natural disasters may receive the spiritual and material comfort they need to rebuild their lives.

Missionary. *Dedication to Peace:* That the dedication of Christians to peace may bear witness to the name of Christ before all men and women of good will.

FEBRUARY**General.** *Access to Water:*

That all peoples may have access to water and other resources needed for daily life.

Missionary. *Health*

Workers: That the Lord may sustain the efforts of health workers assisting the sick and elderly in the world's poorest regions.

MARCH**General.** *Contribution*

of Women: That the whole world may recognize the contribution of women to the development of society.

Missionary. *Persecuted*

Christians: That the Holy Spirit may grant perseverance to those who suffer discrimination, persecution, or death for the name of Christ, particularly in Asia.

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

Fruit of the Holy Spirit, Part 4

Happiness is an Inside Job

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: OK, so the “fruit of the Spirit” just sort of happen?

Me: Right. You can't rush fruit to ripen. Its own internal laws determine that but . . .

Peaches: But we have to prepare the soil, fertilize, water, and set it in the sun, right?

Me: Correct. We are making a distinction here. The fruit of the Spirit ripens on it own like all fruit does. We can't make that happen but we create the conditions for it to happen.

Peaches: So in the spiritual life we work on the conditions not the fruit itself?

Me: Exactly.

Peaches: OK. Now tell me about the fruit of the Spirit. I have it here in *Galatians 5*: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Me: Let's see . . . well first this is only a partial list of the fruit.

Peaches: Because the Holy Spirit is infinite, right?

Me: Yes. So we can never fully know or understand the depth of this. Like all mysteries, we understand only in part. What we call the fruit is the effect of God in a person. After a certain level of maturity, the virtues that we practice in trying to be like Jesus become good habits and produce the fruit. Fruit is tasty. So, we are experiencing a “taste of heaven,” so to speak, in the fruit. Now, the amount that these fruit occur varies over a wide range. Many of us reach some level while the Saints reach the heights of this.

Peaches: Wow! It must be nice to have it together like that.

Me: And that's a good description of what it is too. Holiness is “having it together.” Meaning all of our pieces now fit. All of our parts are working together without working against ourselves, God, or other people and things. This wholeness is part of what the word “salvation” means.

Peaches: OK, tell me about the first one, Love.

Me: It is not an accident that it's first on the list.

Peaches: Because it's what Jesus taught and what God is.

Me: Right. St. Thomas Aquinas called Love “the Mother of the virtues” and the most important fruit of the Spirit. But Love must be understood correctly.

Peaches: Agape!

Me: Yes. “Charity.” The love of God flowing through us because we make a choice to allow it to flow.

Peaches: Not a feeling of “liking” someone.

Me: Correct. And charity is the glue that “gets it together” and keeps it together. Or, in church words “holiness” and “salvation.”

Peaches: Must be nice to have all your pieces fit!

Me: “Heaven” actually. And notice the list St. Paul gives us. It works from the inside out.

Peaches: What does that mean?

Me: Well, if holiness means “having it all together,” what would be the “it”?

Peaches: That would be me, I guess.

Me: Right. So, if we are talking about you being “all together,” what would that mean?

Peaches: It means I would have myself together with everything and everyone, thus the “all” in “all together.”

Me: Yes. You would be in right relation to God, yourself, other people and things.

Peaches: Cool!

Me: But notice the first three fruit on the list are “love, joy and peace.” St. Thomas says that these fruit get together our internal life—our soul.

Peaches: Oh, right! I can see it in the list of the fruits! Love is the basis and that fruit means that I have it together with God, myself and other people! Love always produces joy which is next on the list and then if you have love and joy that will give peace!

Me: And the ancient Catholic wisdom tradition has always said that peace and joy are the sure signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Peaches: So what they say in the program is true: Happiness is an inside job!

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.

The Fruit of the Spirit, Part 5

Gentleness and Self-Control: Bedrock of Good Relationships

You may have heard the expression that someone acts “like a bull in a china shop.” That means that the person acts roughly and without control. He or she has little regard for others and barges ahead trying to get his or her own way. Whether it is through the person’s words or acts—and most likely both—that person is often not very pleasant to be around. If you think for a moment, many such people may come to mind, perhaps even yourself!

St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians writes about the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). These fruit are those wonderful characteristics that grow in us as God works in our lives. So as we invite God into our lives and seek to follow Christ, we can hope to see these fruit, including gentleness and self-control, become more apparent in our lives.

The eighth fruit: gentleness. This word is also translated as “meekness.” Many people see both of these words in a negative way. They think of weak people who don’t stand up for themselves. This is not their biblical meaning. After all, if both Moses and Jesus are said to be meek (gentle) (Numbers 12:1; Matthew 11:29), there must be something good about it! Jesus says that the meek are blessed and will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

People who are meek and gentle listen to God and submit to his will, not raging on in their own willfulness and self-centeredness. This shows forth in their being considerate of others, respecting others, and recognizing the God-given dignity of others. As you walk daily with Christ and learn from him, God’s ways become more appealing and you grow in meekness and gentleness. It is really a wonderful fruit of the Spirit which helps make life worth living.

The ninth fruit: self-control. In many ways, this fruit is the culmination of the Christian experience as we allow God through his Holy Spirit to transform us. Changed or transformed people grow in self-control over their emotions and actions so that they become friends of God and of those around them.

The person with self-control is master over his or her own self. Such a person can truly be a friend who cares for others and does not act out of self-centered desires regardless of the other person’s needs. This person does not want to use others but wants to be a friend and servant of other people even though it may be a struggle.

God does not impose himself on us, so if we want to experience these fruit of the Spirit we have to invite God into our lives, cooperate with his grace, and allow him to work in us. As Christians, we are most fully free and whole as we share in the love of Christ and become as he is. Jesus is the meek and gentle one who seeks the will of the Father. If we want to become more like him, we too will want to grow in gentleness and self-control. As we do, we will more fully love God and neighbor, and that is what this walk as disciples of Jesus is all about.

~ Anthony Bosnick

Q&A Spiritual Resolutions for the New Year

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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 and you can better know when to be involved with another 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.

2012 Calendars

New 2012 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. To request this material, send your name and address to: NCCA, 1601 Joslyn Road, Lake Orion, MI 28360.

Stories about Reading the Bible

We are looking for stories from prisoners about how reading the Bible helps you spiritually. We hope to use some of them in the pamphlet on reading the Bible we are planning for later this year.

Please focus your story on how reading the Bible helps you grow spiritually in prison. Keep it to 300 words or less.

To protect your privacy, we do not print your name or prison, but do give your location by state. We are not able to pay for your submissions. Your reward is knowing that your story may help and encourage others. We may not be able to use all the stories sent to us.

Please send your story to *Let's Talk!*; Reading Scripture, Paulist Evangelization Ministries; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017.

Thank You.

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