



Let's *Talk!*[®]

A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

Go and Make Disciples

Jesus called his disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). These words are part of what some Christians call the “Great Commission.” Jesus called his disciples to share the Good News with others and to build the kingdom of God by carrying out all he has taught (vv. 16-20).

The Great Commission is for us too!

Jesus’ inspiring words and the call to build the Church and advance the kingdom of God is for *all* his disciples—for *all* who follow him. That means that God calls *us* to participate in the work of the Church to make new followers of Jesus. By the grace of the sacrament of Baptism, Christians are empowered to participate in the work and ministry of Jesus. It is not just for some “special people.” It’s for all Christians...including you! (The Church calls bishops, priests, and deacons in a unique and special sacramental way to do this work through ordination.)

Go and Make Disciples. God calls us to participate in the mission of Jesus right where we are in our lives at a particular time. If you are reading this issue of *Let's Talk!*, it is

likely that you are now in jail or prison. Does that mean that your call to participate in the work of making disciples is suspended? Most decidedly *not!*

You are to participate in this work right where you are. God calls you to bring the Good News to other prisoners through the witness of your holy life. Of course, this is a big call and a challenge. But you need to know that God relies on you to witness to the truth of Christ and the work of the Church through the words and deeds of your life. And this is important work.



“I am with you always.” Impossible? *No!* Difficult? *Yes!* But it is always this way. And it is especially so when you are in jail or prison. Talk with a chaplain or volunteer serving you about how you can grow in your ability to do the work of God and live out your baptismal call to share the Good News and make disciples of others. And recall and rely upon the promise Jesus made to his disciples: “Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Matthew 28:20).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each new day presents us with opportunities if we live in hope. As Christians, our hope is rooted in Christ who gives meaning to our lives and a reason to live. Even now while incarcerated, you can live in hope and accept the call you have received from Christ. And that call is one all baptized Christians have received to bring others along to walk with Christ.

The witness of our lives is so important. In good times and bad, remember you are not alone. Christ is with you and the Holy Spirit dwells in you. This can strengthen you so that you are able to embrace your call and be a witness to others. May you know the presence of Christ in your life each day!

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President, PNCEA

The Liberating Word, Part 1

Here Comes the Judge

by Rev. Frank DeSiano, CSP

In today’s thinking, the word “judge” means someone who can make a decision about someone else—someone who decides who wins and who doesn’t. While we typically think of judges as people in courts who send others to jail, or who decide about property when people suffer divorce, we actually know of many different kinds of judges.

Sometimes you don’t fit in! We find the book of Judges in the Bible, right after the book of Joshua. But we can easily get the wrong impression. The larger-than-life characters of this book were not judges as we might think of them; rather, they were leaders in a rather chaotic time, woman and men whose force of personality, whose skill and whose faith helped keep the Jewish people together when times were crazy.

After the Jewish people began to settle in the Promised Land, there doesn’t seem to have been clear leadership under one strong personality. Rather, as the Jewish people settled in, they were constantly tempted to adopt the pagan practices of their new neighbors. And they were frequently threatened by the ability of their stronger neighbors to test their strength. You can think of it as someone moving to New York or Chicago or Los Angeles from a foreign country; sometimes you fit in, and sometimes you don’t.

A famous prisoner. The most famous prisoner of all the Judges was Samson. You can read his whole story in the book of Judges, starting with chapter 13. Samson, like many Bible characters who do God’s will, is born in a special way. An angel (a messenger) of God announces to Samson’s

(continued on page 2)

July 2010

- 3 St. Thomas, apostle
- 4 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 11 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 14 Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 St. Bonaventure, doctor
- 18 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 22 St. Mary Magdalene
- 25 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 26 Joachim and Anne
- 29 Martha
- 31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, priest

August 2010

- 1 Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 4 St. John Mary Vianney, priest
- 6 The Transfiguration of the Lord
- 8 Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 9 St. Edith Stein
- 10 St. Lawrence, martyr
- 11 St. Clare, virgin
- 14 St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, priest, martyr
- 15 Assumption of the Virgin Mary
- 20 St. Bernard, abbot, doctor
- 21 St. Pius X, pope
- 22 Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 24 St. Bartholomew, apostle
- 27 St. Monica
- 28 St. Augustine, bishop, doctor
- 29 Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 2010

- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope, doctor
- 5 Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 8 Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 9 St. Peter Claver, priest
- 12 Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 13 John Chrysostom, bishop, doctor
- 14 Triumph of the Cross
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian, bishops and martyrs
- 19 Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 20 Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang, and companions, martyrs
- 21 St. Matthew
- 23 St. Pio of Pietrellicina, priest
- 26 Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 29 Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels
- 30 St. Jerome, priest and doctor



Let's Talk!®

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The Liberating Word, Part 1

Here Comes the Judge

(continued from page 1)

mother that she will bear a child. Her husband doesn't quite believe her. When the angel comes a second time, she goes and gets her husband. They both realize that this messenger comes from God.

Samson did not live what might be called a normal, quiet life.

He initially chose a woman of the Philistines for a wife—that is, a woman of the enemy of his people, for the Philistines were a group of people who held sway over the land during that time. He also was a man of unusual strength, killing a lion with his bare hands. Sure enough, he used his strength to battle the Philistines, showing them the power behind the Jewish people, God.

When he went to see his wife, he found out that she had been given to another man. In his anger, he set the fields of the Philistines on fire, burning up grain and vineyard. He then went and hid. But the Philistines came to Samson's people and asked for him; the Jews then gave them Samson. They said, "No, we will only bind you and give you into their hands; we will not kill you." So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock" (Judges 15:13). As you might guess, once he was taken prisoner, he got free from

his ropes and killed those who imprisoned him with the jawbone of a donkey.

The secret of Samson's strength.

Samson was also quite a ladies' man, and he met a woman named Delilah, from Gaza, near the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. He fell for this woman, but she colluded with Samson's enemies, trying to find out, at their urging, what was the secret to Samson's strength. After several false leads, he finally tells her the truth: his hair is a sign of his consecration to God. If his hair were ever shaved, then he would lose his famous strength. When Samson fell asleep, Delilah had Samson's hair shaved from his head, and he lost his strength (Judges 16:19).

You obviously have to watch out what you tell your girlfriend, especially if she's working for your enemies!

Samson was captured and blinded. He was made fun of by the Philistines. He was kept prisoner for a long time—long enough for his hair to grow back, long enough for him to gain his strength. One day when the Philistines had Samson brought out for mocking, they tied his hands to the main pillars of the temple where they were having a feast.

(continued on page 4)



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Prisoner Saint

St. Oliver Plunkett (1629–1681) ✠ The saints of Ireland are many in number, including many who died as martyrs for the Catholic faith. Oliver Plunkett studied for the priesthood in Rome. He remained there until permitted to return to Ireland in 1657 after a fierce persecution ended. His task was to instruct the laity who had been without religious services and teaching, and to renew the priesthood devastated by persecution. As archbishop, Plunkett was successful in his work. But in 1679, he was arrested and imprisoned during a new persecution. He was taken to England where he was found innocent. A second trial ensured his conviction. On July 1, 1681, Plunkett suffered a gruesome death by hanging, drawing and quartering.

Feast Day: July 1

Growing in Prayer, Part 5

Gas and Go . . .

Peaches: OK. So the spiritual life is this everyday life that we are living, right?

Me: Correct.

Peaches: And we live our daily life in the Spirit of Jesus, right?

Me: Yup.

Peaches: And the way we live this life like Jesus is by acting in love that includes everybody.

Me: Right again.

Peaches: And that way of acting in love for everybody is sometimes called “service” because it has to do with actions not feelings.

Me: And?

Peaches: And you need to belong to a community in order to grow and to keep yourself grounded in reality.

Me: Excellent!

Peaches: So, next?

Me: So, first up from the ancient, Catholic wisdom buffet of spiritual practice is... *spiritual reading.*

Peaches: Why is that first on the menu?

Me: If someone comes to me and tells me they're having problems in the spiritual life, the first question that I ask is, “What are you reading?”

Peaches: Why?

Me: Well, if you came to me and said “My car won't run,” the first question would be “Is there gas in it?”

Peaches: So, spiritual reading is like gas in a car?

Me: A spiritual life needs fuel to run on too.

Peaches: Nothing in – nothing out, huh?

Me: Exactly.

Peaches: So, read the Bible.

Me: Yes. But not just the Bible. There are also many other good spiritual books on ways to pray and meditate. There are lives of the Saints.

Peaches: Why read lives of the Saints?

Me: You find a Saint that you admire and read his or her life story. It's a good study.

Peaches: Study of what?

Me: How they lived a life like Jesus in their

own situation, time and place in history. We can learn from those in similar situations to ourselves. And even from those who are quite different from our situation! There are kings and hermits among the saints! How's that for variety? They are all great for picking up “pointers.”

Peaches: For instance?

Me: Well, there are saints of every race, social level, both sexes, every nation and time in history, different jobs – you name it!

Peaches: OK. What Saint's life should a lawyer read?

Me: St. Thomas Moore.

Peaches: A mother?

Me: St. Monica of Hippo.

Peaches: A gambler and a drunk?

Me: How about St. Camillus? Where'd you come up with that combo?

Peaches: Old boyfriend...

Me: (Awkward!)

Peaches: OK. I get it but where do you find these lives of the Saints?

Me: It's not hard. Ask your chaplain. On the outside, just google what you want. I would

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

suggest more recently written lives because they tend to be more realistic and so they are more helpful. The old traditional lives tend to be very idealistic. They don't show the realistic struggle in the Saints' lives as well as the newer books do.

Peaches: I get it. But I'm not a big reader, Deke.

Me: I'm not talking about being a book worm, P. A little goes a long way if it's done on a daily basis. For example, I do spiritual reading in bed before I go to sleep. Usually less than 15 minutes. I've read a library that way over the years!

The trick is not to read like you usually do. Read slowly. In the presence of God and wait for one idea to hit you. That's the Holy Spirit!! Then close the book. One idea. Think about it. Apply it to your life. Talk to the Lord about it.

Peaches: Sounds like a nice way to fall asleep, Deke.

Me: Yeah and a good way to keep the engine humming!

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 July/August/September

July

General. *Justice in Electing those who Govern:* That in every nation of the world the election of officials may be carried out with justice, transparency and honesty, respecting the free decisions of citizens.

Mission. *An Urban Culture of Justice, Solidarity and Peace:* That Christians may strive to offer everywhere, but especially in great urban centers, an effective contribution to the promotion of education, justice, solidarity and peace.

August

General. *The Unemployed and the Homeless:* That those who are without work or homes or who are otherwise in serious need may find understanding and welcome as well as concrete help in overcoming their difficulties.

Mission. *Victims of Discrimination, Hunger and Forced Emigration:* That the Church may be “home” for all people, ready to open its doors to any who are suffering from racial or religious discrimination, hunger, or wars forcing them to emigrate to other countries.

September

General. *The Word of God as Sign of Social Development:* That in less developed parts of the world the proclamation of the Word of God may renew people's hearts, encouraging them to work actively toward authentic social progress.

Mission. *The End of War:* That by opening our hearts to love we may put an end to the numerous wars and conflicts which continue to bloody our world.

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

Lectio Divina, Part 5

A Relationship of Faith and Love with God

This is the fifth part of a six part series on the method of prayer known as *lectio divina*. We will review quickly for those who have missed earlier parts of this series.

Lectio divina is the practice of reading, meditating on, and praying with Scripture. (The two words are Latin for “divine word” or “divine reading.”) As we prayerfully read and reflect on Scripture, we meet God and hear his word for our lives. We develop a sense of God’s loving care for us and how he wants to lead us on our walk with him. This is because “God’s word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Four steps or movements are involved in *lectio divina*. First, we listen to or read a biblical text. Second, we meditate on or reflect on the text. Third, we pray with the text to see what deeper meaning God reveals. In this article, we will consider the fourth step—what it means to open ourselves to God to contemplate deeply on what God speaks to us.

Harvesting the fruit of our prayer. Contemplation is what we have been moving toward in our practice of *lectio divina*. This is not to say that the previous three stages are not fruitful in themselves. They are. How wonderful it is to read Scripture, meditate on it, and to pray with the text to find its deeper meaning. These three stages are also real gifts from God because they bring us into deeper understanding of God’s Word in Scripture.

Now, in contemplation, we seek to enter into a deeper relationship with God through Christ Jesus. (This contemplation is different from the spiritual ecstasy which the great saints like Teresa of Avila or Ignatius Loyola knew, and which is not the experience of many people.) Rather, the contemplation of *lectio divina* means we enter into a relationship of love, joy, and faith in God. We come to know him in a personal way. We grow in what Catholics often refer to as an intimate relationship with the living God.

Joy centered on Jesus. Those skilled in this contemplation speak of a sense of joy and friendship with Jesus. They sense his

loving kindness and his personal care for them and those they love. They see their sin and indifference to God more clearly, but sense that Jesus is leading them out of it to new life as they follow him. And there is a desire to follow him and live as his disciple. They sense that God has a word for them that lovingly guides them into an ever deeper relationship with him.

When we reach the place of contemplation in our prayer, we come to believe that nothing else matters in our life except that we walk with Jesus as a faithful disciple and know his love more deeply. We begin to see that the things of the world that attract us are empty, and we lose our desire for them. Material things, the use of anger and harsh words to get our way, and the desire to dominate others for our pleasure gradually no longer appeal to us.

True, the road to change can be rocky and slow, but as we meet Jesus and learn from him, we find a new sense of peace and joy in our hearts. This is the wonderful fruit of *lectio divina* and the special fruit of contemplation. We can honestly say: “I give thanks to the Lord with all my heart in the company and assembly of the just” (Psalm 111:1).

Practicing *lectio divina*. If you want to make *lectio divina* part of your spiritual practices, set aside a time and place for it at least once a week. If necessary, ask some of your friends to help you find a place somewhat free of distractions. You will likely find that it is worth the effort as the fruit of *lectio divina* is great and rewarding. You will see that it helps you grow in your commitment to Christ and that your spiritual life deepens.

Questions for Prayer and Discussion:

1. Have you tried the practice of *lectio divina*? What challenges and/or blessings have you found in it?
2. Do you experience contemplation in your prayer; that is, do you sense God’s presence with you in a loving and life-giving relationship?
3. Has your prayer led you to the point where you can say with the psalmist: “I give thanks to the Lord with all my heart in the company and assembly of the just” (Psalm 111:1)?

~ Anthony Bosnick

The Liberating Word, Part 1

Here Comes the Judge

(continued from page 2)

“Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. Then Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines’” (Judges 17:29-30). Samson then pulled down the temple, killing his enemies and himself.

What is the lesson of Samson? The essential idea behind the story of Samson is faithfulness. Samson was dedicated to God in a special way from his birth. As a “nazirite”—one dedicated to God in a public way, showing this through one’s dress and one’s diet—Samson had his strength only when he was faithful to this dedication. When Samson lost his focus, when he “lost his hair,” he lost his strength. He could not be a leader in ancient Israel when his strength was dissipated.

Baptism consecrates and dedicates us to God. In baptism we pledge, and we are pledged, to live as disciples of Jesus, and to show that dedication by living special lives—of prayer, of worship in Church, of caring for others, or listening to God’s word, of living for the Kingdom.

Samson’s life shows how essential faithfulness is. Christ, God’s true “strong man” because he destroys sin and death, invites us to be identified with him, to share in his messiahship by following him. There believers find true strength. There believers share in Christ’s victory over evil.

Rev. Frank DeSiano is President of PNCEA Prison Ministries.

Pray for our benefactors

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