

Let's *Talk!*

A Catholic Ministry to Prisoners



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

Have Courage: Do Not be Afraid

While crossing the stormy Sea of Galilee one night, the disciples saw Jesus walking across the water to meet them. Terrified at the sight, they cried out in fear. Seeking to calm them, Jesus called out to them: "Take courage; it is I; do not be afraid" (Matthew 14:27).

Jesus still speaks these words to each of us today. We may be at the end of our rope, discouraged, without hope. We may be afraid and overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness. Such feelings—sometimes small, sometimes great—can face many in prison. They can be especially difficult at this time of year when those on the outside celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. It is just at such times that Jesus calls out to us to have courage and to not be afraid.

Children of God. We are all God's children, and brothers and sisters to Jesus. God wants the best for us. Even at this time when you are in prison or jail, God has a plan for your life. Perhaps it is a time for repentance for past sins and acts. It may be a

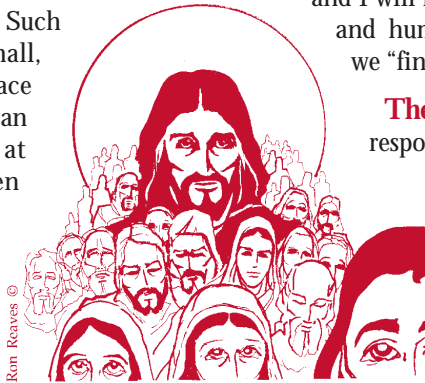
time for healing and reform. Or a time to learn to forgive and love. God knows what it is, and if you are unsure, ask him in prayer. The Holy Spirit will help you understand. Perhaps a chaplain or a mature Christian can help you discern the answer.

Our lives are journeys. We can take the road to Jesus and life, or to sin and death. Jesus calls out to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you." Jesus is "gentle and humble of heart" and in him we "find rest" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The grace of Christ. As we respond to the call of God to us on our journeys, we do not need to be perfect already. Jesus meets us where we are, and calls us to go forward with him. Our sin and imperfections need not stand in the way. They can

even help us be more aware of the fact that we need the redeeming grace of Christ.

When you feel discouraged and without hope, remember this truth. Jesus is with you and he says to you, "Take courage; it is I; do not be afraid." These are truly words of hope!



Q & A

Say Yes to Jesus

Q. What do you say is the "real meaning" of Christmas?

A. Christmas for many people has become largely a social event. When people say that we need to remember the "real meaning" of Christmas, they mean that Jesus needs to be at the center of our celebrations. We need to recall that Christmas is all about New Life. Jesus came to give us "life, and life to the full" (John 10:10). We enter into this life through baptism and faith. We become a "new creation." "The old things have passed away... [and] new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Through and in Jesus, God associates with us, his creatures. When we are open to God—and want God—this means a totally different way of living. It opens us to a transformed life. Thus, the "real meaning" about Christmas is more than just Nativity scenes and wishing people "Merry Christmas." It is about our hearts being changed and living differently. It's about saying yes to Jesus.

Christmas is so important that we celebrate it for 12 days, from Christmas Day until the Epiphany (traditionally January 6). This gives time to reflect on and celebrate the truth that Jesus came to save us and set us free from sin and darkness. This is cause for celebration. Thus, it is natural and right to have parties and family gatherings which enable us to enjoy family and friends. Perhaps you can work with your chaplain to find ways to celebrate this great event.

Q. I don't think I hear God when I pray. What is my problem?

A. All Christians experience "dryness" in their prayer from time-to-time. Some even feel a sense of abandonment for extended periods of time. We all have to find the answer to this in our own lives.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus as we encounter him in the liturgy in these coming months. We will learn from him as we walk with him and his disciples to Jerusalem. We will celebrate him as Christ the King who serves the poor and vulnerable. We anticipate his coming during Advent and celebrate his birth during Christmas.

Jesus is the One who can calm your fears and give you hope and joy. Some reading this issue may be released soon. Others may have many long years ahead in prison. Whatever your situation, let Jesus be your friend. He will lead you to the Father of Mercy and fill you with the Holy Spirit. He will give meaning to your life.

Father Kenneth Boyack, CSP
President, PNCEA

October 2008

- 1 St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, virgin, doctor
- 2 Guardian Angels
- 4 St. Francis of Assisi, religious
- 5 **Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 7 Our Lady of the Rosary
- 12 **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 15 St. Teresa of Avila, virgin, doctor
- 17 St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop, martyr
- 18 **St. Luke, Evangelist**
- 19 **Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 26 **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 **Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles**

November 2008

- 1 All Saints
- 2 All Souls
- 4 St. Charles Borromeo, bishop
- 9 **Dedication of the Lateran Basilica**
- 10 St. Leo the Great, pope, doctor
- 11 St. Martin of Tours, bishop
- 12 St. Josaphat, doctor, martyr
- 13 St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, virgin
- 16 **Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 17 St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious
- 21 Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 22 St. Cecilia, virgin, martyr
- 23 **Christ the King**
- 24 St. Andrew Dung-Lac, priest, martyr, and companions
- 27 Thanksgiving Day in U.S.
- 30 **First Sunday in Advent**

December 2008

- 3 St. Francis Xavier, priest
- 7 **Second Sunday of Advent**
- 8 **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 12 **Our Lady of Guadalupe**
- 13 St. Lucy, virgin, martyr
- 14 **Third Sunday of Advent**
- 21 **Fourth Sunday of Advent**
- 25 **Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)**
- 26 St. Stephen, first martyr
- 27 St. John, apostle, evangelist
- 28 **Holy Family**



Let's Talk!®

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Q & A: Say Yes to Jesus

(continued from page 1)

We know that Jesus has promised us that if we ask, we will receive (Matthew 7:7-8). God wants the best for us. Sometimes, however, we do not know what that "best" is. It may even be contrary to what we want. What we want may not be the best for us. It also may be in conflict with what others want. Our suffering and illnesses may be leading us to our ultimate end—union with God in heaven. Sometimes this may not be according to our schedule or immediate desire. Ultimately we need to keep in mind that God is not a handyman who will make life easy every time we want something.



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The end is this: Pray always (Ephesians 6:18) and for one another (James 5:16). Set a time and place to pray and be faithful to it. Make short prayers during the day that turn your heart to God so you become aware of his loving presence. You will likely become aware that you begin to experience more of God's peace that is a sign of his presence. Rejoice in that gift and be thankful. That is another way you say yes to Jesus!

Q. It seems like every time I pray to make Jesus my Lord and Savior, nothing works. How do I receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior? How do I know if it worked?

A. This is not about feeling good. It is about trusting in God's love for you. It's about believing that God wants you as his

child and no matter how you feel at the time, you are a beloved child of God.

You can begin by telling Jesus that you are his and that you want to follow him. He will bless your desire to follow him as Lord and Savior. If there is a Catholic chaplain or volunteer at your institution, ask that person to help you receive instruction to learn about the Catholic faith. The more you know, the more you will grow. Again, God will bless your desire.

These four spiritual practices will help you grow in the Lord. They are ways that we meet Jesus and learn from him:

- Receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and reconciliation, as often as possible.
- Set aside time each day to pray.
- Read some Scripture each day.
- Fellowship with other Christians and learn how to support one another in your faith.

In all these ways, you are saying yes to Jesus. And in all these ways you are making him your Lord and Savior. And remember, following Jesus is not a one-time deal. It is a decision you make each day for the rest of your life.

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

Prisoner Saints

The 498 Spanish Martyrs (d. 1930's) ✠ Being a Catholic in Spain in the 1930's called for sacrifice. Some even faced death for their faith. It was a time of great unrest, a result of many long-term tensions. The turmoil culminated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) that tore the country apart. These 498 martyrs were bishops, priests, men and women religious, and lay people. They gave their lives for love of Jesus Christ as heroic witnesses to the Gospel. These martyrs were declared "Blessed" in October 2007. They are among over 6,800 Catholics imprisoned and killed in Spain in the 1930's specifically because they were faithful to their faith and the Church. The message of these martyrs is one of faith and love. Their example calls us to examine our lives and to resolve that our faith and love shine forth—even heroically.

Feast Day: November 6

The Twelve-Step Program

Keeping it Green...Step 11

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Peaches: I can see a lot of tie-ins between practicing our faith and Step 11.

Me: That's great, but the ability to make those connections would only apply to Catholics who have an adult version of their faith. Some Catholics stopped learning about their faith in grade school and have no clue about the things mentioned in Step 11.

You can't teach meditation to seven year olds! There are people who have never gone to places like retreat houses or joined adult faith formation programs. These are where adults can grow in their faith and learn adult things like meditation and what it means to seek God's will. Most retreat houses even offer actual 12- Step Retreats!

Peaches: I know from the classes here that there are many different ways to pray and meditate in the Catholic tradition. It's hard sometimes to know where to show people how to start.

Me: Well, in its simplest form a person could meditate on a Bible reading, lives of the Saints, or The Big Book. You just read until something "hits you." Think about it, talk to God about it, and decide how to make it a real part of your life. That's one form of meditation. In the 12-Step Tradition, the Prayer of St. Francis is the 11th-Step Prayer. That's a good first step. Meditate on that prayer.

Peaches: I don't exactly get the "conscious contact" part of the Step though, Deke.

Me: It would seem to me that when you choose to make time in your life for prayer and meditation, you are choosing (consciously!) to make contact with your "Higher Power." Just like if you call a friend on the phone—that is a "conscious" contact.

Peaches: But what about doing his will? How do you learn to do God's will exactly?

Me: Pain. At least, that's how I learned it. I noticed that whenever I tried to run my life by what I wanted to do (my will), things went poorly. And whenever I let God have his way (God's will), I was much happier. So, just let God "drive the bus."

Peaches: And quit grabbing at the wheel before you get us all killed!

Me: Precisely.

Peaches: But aren't you afraid of turning the bus over to him sometimes?

Me: Used to be. But I've learned that he is smarter than me and he wants me to be happy so now it's fairly easy.

Peaches: What about the power to carry out his will?

Me: That's his side of the deal. He always gives us that. Sort of a package deal: He gives you the inspiration to do his will and the power to do it comes with it, as long as we are willing and open.

Peaches: But isn't that the problem? Being willing and open? How do you get over those two hurdles?

Me: Well, if you are praying and meditating daily that's being willing and open. Then you will eventually see in your life that the

"happy" comes from doing his will and you learn to trust him. Even though at first, you can be pretty sure that you're not going to like where he's leading you.

In the end, you realize that you are always wrong about that. Then you laugh because you always knew he was smarter than you and loved you more than you love yourself! At least, that's how I got to be a prison chaplain! But you don't really get that until you put it into practice.

Peaches: So, I got to quit giving God advice on how to run his universe?!

Me: No. You don't have to quit. Eventually, it just gets too ridiculous for you to keep doing it.

Peaches: "Life on life's terms!"

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 October/November/December

October

General. *Synod of Bishops:* That the Synod of Bishops may help all those engaged in the service of the Word of God to transmit the truth of faith courageously in communion with the entire Church.

Missionary. *Participation in the Church's Universal Mission:* That in this month dedicated to the missions, every Christian community may feel the need to participate in the universal mission with prayer, sacrifice, and concrete help.

November

General. *Love of God and Neighbor:* That the testimony of love offered by the saints may fortify Christians in their devotion to God and neighbor, imitating Christ who came to serve and not to be served.

Missionary. *Church in Asia:* That the Christian communities of Asia, contemplating the face of Christ, may find the most suitable ways to announce him, in full faithfulness to the Gospel.

December

General. *Culture of Life:* That, faced with the growing expansion of the culture of violence and death, the Church may courageously promote the culture of life through all her apostolic and missionary activities.

Missionary. *Fraternal Witness:* That, especially in mission countries, Christians may show through gestures of kindness that the Child born in Bethlehem is the Hope of the world.

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

Year of St. Paul—Part II

You are a new creation!

St. Paul was a devout and learned Jew, who had taken it upon himself to persecute the early Church. On his way to Damascus to find followers of Jesus to bring back to Jerusalem and punish, a light from the sky flashed around Saul (his name at the time) and he fell to the ground. He heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" It was Jesus who spoke to him (Acts 9:1-5).

After his conversion, Paul went to Arabia for about three years. During this time, God taught Paul. As Paul says, he did not learn the Gospel from men, but "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12, 16, 18). Through Jesus, Paul learned about God's plan to reconcile all people to himself. Through the grace of Christ, God invites sinful humanity back to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), and we become a new creation. This is the heart of the Good News of Jesus, and is what Paul taught.

Dying with Christ. God reaches out to us with his love, and wants us as friends united to him. Sin destroyed our unity with God, but God wants us reconciled to him. At the heart of our reconciliation to God is our union to Jesus in his death. Paul writes, "If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:8).

Through Christ's death we are made right (reconciled) with God. This is hard to grasp, but it is how God worked. Paul learned the truth of it from God, through the Holy Spirit. And so too can we. The first step to understanding is accepting it. That is, we believe it, not doubt it. That allows the Holy Spirit to lead us to understanding.

Saved by Christ's life. Paul further teaches, "Indeed, if, while we were enemies [of God], we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). Even as we die with Christ, we rise to new life in him. Paul writes: "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of

the Father, we too might live in newness of new life" (Romans 6:4).

Again, this is something we first need to accept. The Holy Spirit will help us to understand it. Also, as we experience this new life in our lives, we know it is true. We know it as we begin to have victory over sin patterns, as we begin to know joy and grow in hope. Most of all, we will know it as we begin to love those we have not loved in the past.

A new creation in Christ. During this Year of St. Paul, we can take to heart these great truths Paul taught so we can become a new creation in Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ will make a difference in our lives. Pope Benedict does not intend this Pauline Year to be just a historical remembering. He wants it to be something that will help us pause and think about the truths of our faith so that we will live changed lives.

Recall this great truth: "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Yes, you are a new creation! Believe it. Live it. Rejoice in it. Even now, and especially, in prison.

Scripture passages to study:

- Romans 5:1, 6-9
- Romans 8:29
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-58
- 2 Corinthians 5:12
- Colossians 1:18

Ways to take action:

1. In what ways have you experienced power in your life through your belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus?
2. In what ways do you need to change so that the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus is more evident in your life?
3. If you have been baptized and live by faith, can you see ways you are growing as a new creation?

~ Anthony Bosnick

Help with addictions

Every day is an opportunity to grow into the type of person we want to be. We are all on a pilgrimage in this life. We can use each day wisely and take a step toward our goal. Or we can sit and let time pass us by. God gives us the grace to take that step forward. Our challenge is to accept the grace as freely as God gives it.

While on their walk through life, many people struggle with addictions of different sorts. If that is your burden, the National Catholic Council on Alcoholism and Related Drug Problems (NCCA) offers you help. Their approach is spiritual, which you can add to support your personal efforts and any programs you may be attending.

Write to them for their booklet "Prayers for Addicted Persons and Their Loved Ones," their "Serenity Prayer Bookmarks," and their 2009 calendar. 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 or by toll free telephone at 800-626-6910, ext. 1200.

Take advantage of this free offer. You'll be glad you did.

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 350 words or less. Please send it to *Let's Talk!*; PNCEA; 3031 Fourth Street, NE; Washington, DC 20017.

Please include a note from your chaplain stating you are in good standing at the prison. 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.

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