



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



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Remember what God has done for you

The Year of Mercy continues and Pope Francis urges us to remember all the good things God has done for us. In a homily given shortly after Easter this year, the Pope said we should ask ourselves, “What has my relationship with the Lord been like? [Let us recall] our memories of the beautiful and great things that the Lord has carried out in the lives of each of us.”

Yes, let us remember. Why? Pope Francis said that remembering God’s loving kindness, his mercy, helps us expect and anticipate that God will continue to act in his most generous way toward us. In the course of our days, especially in prison, but outside as well, we easily become dull and lose the sense of God’s love and care for us. Every moment he showers us with his love. We need to be aware of it and be open to it.

It is not uncommon for us not to have good memories of God’s work in our lives because we have often closed ourselves off to God and his work of mercy and love. Especially if we’ve been hurt by life, it may be difficult to see God’s mercy.

Think big and small. So begin with the kindness of God in creating all things good and letting us share in them. Think biblically, about how he called and saved his people, the Israelites. Think how he sent his Son Jesus to save us and set us free. Think of his establishment of the Church and the Eucharist. And of the many ways he has blessed his people abundantly over the millennia.



Then turn closer to home, to your own life. Look at ways you have experienced God’s love through family, friends, and whatever else you recall with gladness. We all know suffering, but we also know joy. So all of us have at least a glimmer of God’s love in the good and in the bad.

Pray and be thankful. Pray about these things and reflect on them. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you God’s loving mercy through them. In this year when we reflect on the mercy of God, we should more than ever remember “the beautiful and great things that the Lord has carried out in the lives of each of us.” And be grateful and expect even more blessings. It is our heritage as sons and daughters of God.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are now about half way through the Year of Mercy. We hope that you are sensing more of God’s love and mercy for you. Above all, this year is about *experiencing* the truth that God loves you and covers you in his mercy. Remember, God wants what is best for you!

In this issue we continue looking at different aspects of mercy. We hope that this truth of God’s love is making a difference in your life. This is what God wants.

We need to walk with Jesus every day of our lives. This can lead to a “personal encounter with Jesus” where on our daily pilgrimage he touches our hearts and changes us. While we will likely still have doubts and questions about what it means to follow Christ, in some way we will sense more and more that something wonderful is happening in us.

Let us allow God to surprise us with the gift of mercy he gives to us.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Q&A

Talk with God

Q. You write we should talk with God when we pray. Most of the time, I don’t think anyone is listening.

A. We need to think about a couple of things here. First, what does it mean to talk with God when we pray? Second, what should we do if we don’t think God (“anyone”) is listening?

One of the great saints says this: “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (St. John Damascene, quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2559). We raise our hearts and minds to God in many ways—through formal prayers like the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary, through the prayer of the Mass (the liturgy), and through simply opening our hearts to God and telling him what is of concern to us.

All of these ways to pray are good and important and should be part of the way we pray. Let us focus though on the last suggestion of simply talking with God and opening our hearts to him with our thoughts and concerns. Here, we are thinking of the example of Jesus where Scripture says, “Jesus looked up to heaven and said . . .” (John 17:1). Then the rest of the chapter is what Jesus says to the Father as he pours out his heart to him.

All prayer when done with a sincere heart, brings us closer to God. Through that we sense more deeply his love and mercy for us. But prayer where we are talking with God as with a

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CHURCH CALENDAR

JULY 2016

- 1 St. Junipero Serra, priest
- 3 **Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 10 **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 11 St. Benedict, abbot
- 14 St. Kateri Tekakwitha, virgin
- 15 St. Bonaventure, bishop and doctor
- 17 **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 St. Mary Magdalene
- 24 **Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 25 **St. James, apostle**
- 29 St. Martha
- 31 **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

AUGUST 2016

- 1 St. Alphonsus Liguori, bishop and doctor
- 4 St. John Vianney, priest
- 6 **The Transfiguration of the Lord**
- 7 **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 8 St. Dominic, priest
- 10 St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr
- 11 St. Clare, virgin
- 14 **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 15 **Assumption of the Virgin Mary**
- 20 St. Bernard, abbot and doctor
- 21 **Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 22 Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- 24 **St. Bartholomew, apostle**
- 27 St. Monica
- 28 **Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 29 Passion of St. John the Baptist

SEPTEMBER 2016

- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope and doctor
- 4 **Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 8 **Birth of Mary**
- 9 St. Peter Claver, priest
- 11 **Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 13 St. John Chrysostom, bishop and doctor
- 14 **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
- 15 Our Lady of Sorrows
- 16 St. Cornelius, pope and martyr; St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr
- 18 **Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 20 Sts. Andrew Kim and Companions, martyrs
- 21 **St. Matthew, apostle**
- 23 St. Pius of Pietrelcina, priest
- 25 **Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, priest
- 29 Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels
- 30 St. Jerome, priest and doctor

Let's Talk!

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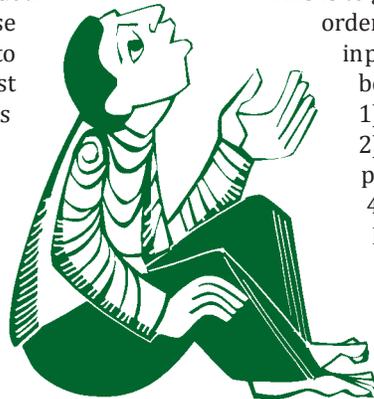
Q&A Talk with God

(continued from page 1)

friend or a loving parent is a special prayer where we know a special comfort that God ("someone") cares enough to listen.

The second thing you say is that most of the time, you do not think anyone is listening. Maybe we think God doesn't listen to us because we are so poor at listening to God. What does it take to just sit in silence and let God's presence come to us? With this sense of God, we come to interact with God in a very different way, speaking and hearing without any words, as we do with a friend.

We all struggle with this—some more so and some less. The wonderful thing is that the more we act in faith, the more we sense the truth that God is listening to us in love. But we also need to respond to God and do what we sense God is telling us, in what will likely be a quiet and gentle voice. As we grow in this, we come more and more to know that God is with us and wants to share his life and love with us.



Q. Pope Francis said the Year of Mercy is a good time to make a pilgrimage. How can I do that in prison?

A. Pope Francis did suggest we make a pilgrimage in the Year of Mercy: "The practice of pilgrimage has a special place in the Holy Year because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a *viator*, a pilgrim traveling along the road, making his way to the desired

destination" (*The Face of Mercy*, para. 14). Pope Francis also said we should make this pilgrimage "according to our ability."

So in jail or prison, you make your pilgrimage as you can: First, know your destination.

This is to grow closer to Jesus. Second, order your days so that you walk in pilgrimage with Jesus. Remember our spiritual resolutions: 1) Read the Word of God; 2) worship and pray; 3) be part of the community of faith; 4) care for and serve others.

In these ways, you will encounter Jesus and this is the heart of making a pilgrimage. (These resolutions are discussed more in the pamphlet "Conversion and Commitment to Christ." It is available through Paulist Prison Ministries. Your chaplain should be able to get a copy for you.)

Finally, know that God is giving you the grace to make this pilgrimage and to grow closer to him this year. He wants this for you. It is part of his mercy to you.

A Year of Mercy reminder: Let God surprise you.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis encourages us: "Let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us" (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 25). So let us turn our hearts to God and be open to the gifts he gives and wants us to accept. This means *both* receiving the gift of mercy and being merciful to others. If you are open to God and make a path for him, you will surely be surprised by God. Be open to the surprise he has for you.

Prisoner Saint

John Boste (1543-1594) ✚ John Boste was a devout English Catholic who suffered and died for the faith. During his time, the Protestant Reformation took a particularly ferocious turn in England when Queen Elizabeth decided to suppress and destroy Catholicism once and for all. After serving as headmaster of a school, John went to France to study to become a priest and was ordained there. Returning to England in 1581, he secretly and faithfully ministered as a priest for nearly fourteen years. In the end he was betrayed and arrested. He was imprisoned and "racked" (a brutal torture where a person was pulled until his cartilage and ligaments snap) and then hanged. He was canonized in 1970.

Feast Day: July 24

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for July/August/September 2016 in the Year of Mercy

JULY

Universal. *Indigenous Peoples:* That indigenous peoples, whose identity and very existence are threatened, will be shown due respect.

Evangelization. *Latin America and the Caribbean:* That the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, by means of her mission to the continent, may announce the Gospel with renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

AUGUST

Universal. *Sports:* That sports may be an opportunity for friendly encounters between peoples and may contribute to peace in the world.

Evangelization. *Living the Gospel:* That Christians may live the Gospel, giving witness to faith, honesty, and love of neighbor.

SEPTEMBER

Universal. *Centrality of the Human Person:* That each may contribute to the common good and to the building of a society that places the human person at the center.

Evangelization. *Mission to Evangelize:* That by participating in the Sacraments and meditating on Scripture, Christians may become more aware of their mission to evangelize.

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

Year of Mercy, Part 4

Just do it . . . (or not)

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: So, I guess, all that's left on this subject is to just start being merciful!

Me: Or not.

Peaches: There's more? I thought we covered it by now.

Me: Well, mercy has to be an action or it doesn't exist. But there is one thing left to consider or mercy won't ever actually happen.

Peaches: What's that?

Me: Religious Experience – Meeting God. That's why I have all these retreats here. I'm hoping for people to meet God.

Peaches: How does that specifically fit in with mercy?

Me: Remember the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14)?

Peaches: Sure.

Me: Did the Pharisee have or show mercy to the tax collector sinner?

Peaches: No.

Me: What was the Pharisee's first mistake?

Peaches: Judging.

Me: Before that.

Peaches: Thinking he was better than the other guy.

Me: Before that. Why could he think himself better and therefore able to judge rather than have mercy?

Peaches: Religious experience?

Me: Actually, it's *not* having religious experience. *Not* having met God. All he has is rules that he's learned.

Peaches: But I thought the rules were important.

Me: They are – just not the most important. The rules are for people not the other way around (Mark 2:27). If you've met God – had a religious experience – you *cannot* judge others. It's impossible.

Peaches: How come?

Me: Because when you meet God, you see that he is so good beyond your imagining and you then *know* what a mess you are! They are two sides of the one experience of meeting God (Luke 5:8). You *know* that you need mercy. You know you are not in a position to judge.

Peaches: How does that work?

Me: We can all find someone who's a bigger mess than us, right? Does that mean I'm not a mess?

Peaches: No. Especially, if you hang out with a lot of "hot mess" types.

Me: So, if a person meets God, they experience two things at once: God's goodness and that they are a much bigger "mess" than they ever thought before (Isaiah 6:5). They also see that the size of their mess compared to God is *so huge* that the difference between them and another sinner is hardly anything!

Peaches: So, you feel mercy for the other person.

Me: Correct. Christianity is a relationship with God. Rules cannot substitute for that no matter how well we know the rules and keep them (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Peaches: I get it. So the Pharisee can judge without mercy because he has a relationship with a rulebook.

Me: Yes. It's the same as the older brother in the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The father is talking relationship. His younger brother is back! The older brother is talking about rules and fairness. He has no real relationship with his brother and therefore no real relationship with his father beyond the rules.

Peaches: A lot of folks fall in love with the rules.

Me: Well, it's easier than having a real relationship. A relationship is about love. Religiously, the Holy Spirit is the love flowing between the Father and the Son. Having that flow within you is greater than the rules (John 14:26). It's where mercy comes from.

Peaches: So, how do you meet God? How do you have religious experience?

Me: First prayer. There is *no* relationship possible with anybody that you don't spend time with and talk to. Second, humility. This is a word that means "of the earth." It means "keeping it real," "keeping your feet on the ground." It's largely a matter of self-awareness. Remembering you're not perfect.

Peaches: You are *no* bargain!

Me: Right.

Peaches: You are *no* "day at the beach," Mister!

Me: OK, now.

Peaches: You are *no* "box of chocolates," Pal!

Me: OK! I'm "aware" already! Geez! Leave me a little self-esteem!

Peaches: OK, Deke. I'll have mercy!

Deacon Dennis Dolan recently retired as chaplain at York Correctional Institution in Connecticut. He continues his ministry with and for prisoners through his writing as he discerns where God is calling him in service.

The Works of Mercy, Part 2

Let there be light

We bring light to the world and to those around us as we participate in God's work of love and mercy. As we wrote in Part 1 of this series, the works of mercy "are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2447).

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis says that it is his "burning desire" for all Christians to "reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of Mercy" (*The Face of Mercy*, n. 15). As we do, we share in the work of God to be light to the world. Our prayer and actions help heal this suffering world and bring comfort to those in distress, especially on the margins of society. Even in prison now, you have a unique opportunity to do this.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be like him. And one of the ways we do that is to bring his mercy to others—to be instruments of mercy. In the Catholic tradition especially, we do this through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

In this series, we will look at the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Space limits us in how deeply we can go into them, so this series is just a short introduction to them. Think and pray about them to see how they apply in your life. We will start now with three spiritual works of mercy and in later issues take up the remaining ones.

Counsel the doubtful. "Counsel" means to direct or guide someone. A way to do this is to share your faith with others. We all have times of doubt on our faith journeys. When people sense that you are a person of faith—even if you struggle with it—they may come to you with their questions. When we are talking with someone about faith, our goal should be to turn their minds and hearts to Jesus. Remember that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), the answer to all our yearnings.

Keep Jesus in mind and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. As you are speaking or later thinking about what you said, you may wonder, "Where did that come from?" You will likely be amazed at what came to mind. This is a sign of the Holy Spirit speaking through you, guiding you! This is a sign of God's love for that person and for us. Rejoice in it.

A Prayer for the Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees God.

Show us your face and we will be saved.

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy; let the Church be your visible face in the world.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. Amen.

~ Pope Francis

Spiritual Works of Mercy

Counsel the doubtful

Instruct the ignorant

Admonish sinners

Comfort the afflicted

Forgive offenses

Bear wrongs patiently

Pray for the living

and the dead

Corporal Works of Mercy

Feed the hungry

Give drink to the thirsty

Clothe the naked

Shelter the homeless

Visit the sick

Visit the imprisoned

Bury the dead

Instruct the ignorant. This is similar to counseling the doubtful, but focuses more on people who have little or no personal faith or knowledge of Christian truth. You will likely find many people in this situation. The greatest thing you can do for them is to help them learn about Jesus and the Catholic faith.

First, set out to learn more about the faith yourself. (Perhaps study *Invitation: The Search for God, Self and Church*, which your chaplain should be able to obtain for you from Paulist Prison Ministries.) Then, if possible in your situation in prison, volunteer to help teach the faith to others. Talk with your chaplain to see if this is possible. Another way to help a person learn the faith is to accompany a person to Mass and be present to them when they have questions. A special blessing for you in this is that it will help you too learn more about your faith.

Admonish sinners. We all know how easy it is for us as people to accept and live in deep personal sin. But God calls us to be holy as he is holy (see 1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44). God gives us the grace to overcome sin and Catholics also have the grace of the sacrament of Reconciliation (also called confession).

Admonishing the sinner is not about coming down hard on people and telling them to straighten up their lives. Rather, it is to be a witness to the freedom and love we receive when we ourselves turn from sin. We all struggle with sin, but if we are able to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation and do so, we can honestly tell others about the grace of that sacrament.

These are the first three of the seven spiritual works of mercy. Think about them and see how you might be a light to others and an instrument of mercy through your practice of them. In our next issue, we will consider the remaining spiritual works of mercy and then turn to the corporal works of mercy.

~ Anthony Bosnick

Pray for our benefactors *Let's Talk!* and its Spanish translation *¡Hablemos!* are supported by donations. They are given free of charge to prison chaplains for distribution to inmates by Paulist Prison Ministries. Please pray for our benefactors. To help support this ministry, please send your donation to the address on page 2 of this newsletter.