

A CATHOLIC MINISTRY  
TO PRISONERS

# Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES

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## Don't push God away

**I**t is so easy while in prison to go through the motions of life and not really live. We can give up hope for our lives each day . . . and for the future. God wants you to have life and life to the full (John 10:10). Be open to him; don't push God away and out of your life.

**Times can be tough.** There's no doubt about it; life in prison can be tough. There can be little hope for the future. Little to help us experience joy in our lives. Prison is often a place of grief and anxiety.

Do not give up hope. God is with you and wants you to know his life and love in your life. This is his promise, *and it is*

### Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What a journey we are on through this issue. We start in Lent, travel through Easter, and end up in Ordinary Time. Easter holds pride of place.

St. Augustine reminds us why: "We are an Easter People. And Alleluia is our song." Did you know Augustine started his saintly life as a pagan, seeking honors and pleasure? But he became one of the great leaders of the early Church, arguably the greatest. Writer, bishop, evangelist. He fought all the way, at one point writing, "Make me chaste, O Lord. But not just yet!" Have you ever felt that way?

His saintly mother Monica prayed him to holiness. She prayed for him without ceasing. Do you have someone who prays for you? Let us make a commitment: Let us pray for one another!

May you know in a special way the power of the resurrection of Jesus in your life!

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP  
President  
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

*your hope.* God is the sea of mercy. Approach him with great trust. Do not give in to the temptation to turn away from God. Seek to be the person God wants you to be—a person who loves God and those around you.

**Jesus, I trust in you.** Sunday, April 28—the Second Sunday of Easter—is "Divine Mercy Sunday." The Catholic Church celebrates God's gift of mercy to us. Our response should be, "Jesus, I trust in you." Trust that God wants the best for you. Be open to his gifts and embrace them.

Know that he wants the best for you, something we all yearn for. In human words, it is happiness. Scripture calls it "peace beyond understanding" (Philippians 4:7). In the depth of your heart and soul, isn't this what you want? It comes when we seek to love God and neighbor, those around us (Matthew 22:37-38). This is the great commandment.



**The more you trust, the more you will receive.** Great things happen in our lives when we trust in God's gift of his life and love for us. If our hope and trust is limited to this life only, we won't go far. And we are the most pitiable of people (1 Corinthians 15:19). But if we turn to God and look to him as our source of hope, we will begin to experience more of God's goodness, truth and beauty. This changes and transforms our lives.

Don't push God away. Trust and receive. Make that an Easter promise to God and to yourself.

### Q&A

## Easter, the "Feast of feasts"

### Q. Why is Easter the greatest Church day?

**A.** Catholic understanding is that "Easter is not simply one feast among many others, but the 'Feast of feasts' the 'Solemnity of solemnities'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1169). That's a pretty strong statement. A lot of people like Christmas better (maybe you do too?), but that is probably because Christmas celebrations involve gifts, lots of eating and drinking, a longer holiday, lots of decorations. But still Easter is the greatest.

**Why?** The *Catechism* helps us understand: "The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushes death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time, until all is subject to him" (para. 1169). Christ has achieved victory over sin and death. We celebrate that on Easter. Jesus has opened the doors to new life for us. Our challenge is to embrace the new life and live it in our lives.

We will face the same old things in our lives *if* we do not intentionally walk with Jesus each day and invite him in to our lives. We need to do our part to receive the life-giving grace Jesus offers us to change and live a new life.

**Be all you can be.** God told Cain after he murdered his brother *and he tells us too*: "If you do well, you can hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door;

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## CHURCH CALENDAR

### APRIL 2019

- 7 **Fifth Sunday of Lent**
- 14 **Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord**
- 18 Holy Thursday
- 19 Passion of the Lord (Good Friday)
- 20 Holy Saturday
- 21 **Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord**
- 28 **Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday**
- 29 St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor

### MAY 2019

- 1 St. Joseph the Worker
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop and doctor
- 3 **Sts. Philip and James, apostles**
- 5 **Third Sunday of Easter**
- 12 **Fourth Sunday of Easter**
- 14 **St. Matthias, apostle**
- 19 **Fifth Sunday of Easter**
- 26 **Sixth Sunday of Easter**
- 30 **Ascension** (in many places celebrated June 2)
- 31 **Visitation of Mary**

### JUNE 2019

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 2 **Ascension** (if not celebrated April 30)
- 3 St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs
- 5 St. Boniface, bishop and martyr
- 9 **Pentecost**
- 11 **St. Barnabas, apostle**
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest and doctor
- 16 **Most Holy Trinity**
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, religious
- 23 **Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)**
- 24 **Birth of John the Baptist**
- 28 **Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**
- 29 **Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles**
- 30 **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

## Let's Talk!

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## Q&A **Easter, the "Feast of feasts"**

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his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master" (Genesis 4:7). With Jesus, we can resist sin and Satan. Turn to Jesus and ask his help.

Be true to the good intentions of your heart and allow God to perfect them. Live by his commandments. Care for one another. Ask God's help to overcome indifference and anger toward others. This is what Jesus' victory at Easter enables us to do, one small step at a time.

**40/50.** There are forty days in the Lenten season and fifty in the Easter season. Let's use all ninety to embrace the new life and to live it. We know that these ninety days of grace are only the beginning. Let us begin anew, walk with Jesus, and expect to see something new and good in our lives.

As you experience something happening, write to us at the address on page 2 and let us know. We would like to print some of your victories in our next newsletter.

### **Q. What is the First Step Act?**

**A.** In our last issue, we reported that the U.S. Congress was working on prison reform legislation. Congress passed reform legislation and President Trump signed it into law on December 20, 2018. Hopefully this is the beginning of some serious reforms.

If you are able to do more study of the bill, the full name of the bill is "The Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person Act." For short, it is known as the "First Step Act."

This legislation applies only to federal prisons. Reforms in state and city prisons and jails have to be passed at the state

level. It sometimes happens that when legislation proves successful at either the state or federal level, the other level(s) will consider it. But not always.

Most legislation involves a serious of compromises. That is the case here too. People across the political spectrum have a hand in the legislation.

### **This is some of what the legislation includes:**

It 1) allows prison employees to store their firearms securely at federal

prisons; 2) expands compassionate release for terminally ill patients; and 3) places some prisoners closer to family. In addition, the Act 4) authorizes Federal Prison Industries to develop new markets; 5) requires prison employees and officers to take de-escalation training, and 6) limits restraining pregnant women, especially during childbirth; and 7) improves feminine hygiene in prison.

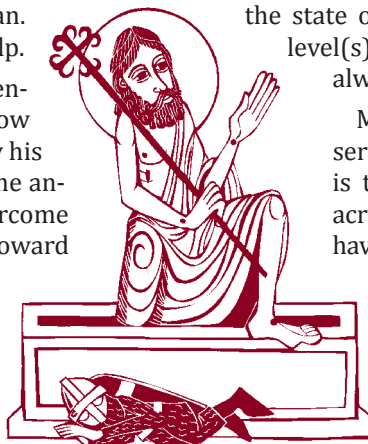
Finally, 8) "good conduct time credits" prisoners can receive increase from 47 days per year to 54 days. Up to ten days of earned time credits can be gained for every 30 days of successful participation in "evidence-based recidivism reduction programming or productive activities."

### **Prison reform; not sentencing reform.**

One criticism of the First Step Act is that it addresses only prison reform and not sentencing reform. The Senate proposed changes in sentencing reform, including changes to now-mandatory minimum sentences, but they did not pass the House. Because of that, they were not included in the legislation that passed.

*Let's Talk! responds to prisoners questions.*

*Write to us at the address on page 2 of this newsletter. We like hearing from our readers.*



## Prisoner Saint

**St. Thomas More (1478-1535)** + Thomas More was an English lawyer and statesman, a man of high achievements. So great were his abilities that King Henry VIII chose him as Lord Chancellor, a high officer in the British government. Things went well for More until he opposed King Henry when the king declared himself the head of the Church in England so he could divorce and remarry. King Henry was furious when More refused to agree with him. The King ordered More imprisoned in the Tower of London and beheaded. At his beheading, More declared, "I die the King's good servant, but God's first."

**Feast Day: June 22**

## Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for April/May/June 2019

Each month the Pope entrusts prayer intentions to the Apostleship of Prayer, his Worldwide Prayer Network. His monthly prayer intention is a global call to transform our prayer into "concrete gestures" of service. It is a monthly action plan mobilizing us to join together to build a more human and caring world.

In addition to the monthly requests below, the Holy Father at the beginning of the month offers a second prayer intention for his immediate concerns, a "last minute" intention to get us out of the "globalization of indifference." Your chaplain or volunteer may be able to get this request for you.

### APRIL

**Universal:** For doctors and their humanitarian collaborators in war zones, who risk their lives to save the lives of others.

### MAY

**Evangelization:** That the Church in Africa, through the commitment of its members, may be the seed of unity among her peoples and a sign of hope for this continent.

### JUNE

**Evangelization:** That priests, through the modesty and humility of their lives, commit themselves actively to a solidarity with those who are most poor.

*Pope Francis invites you to join him in praying for these intentions. Your prayer is needed and can help change the world.*

## Living as Missionary Disciples, Part 2

# Accompaniment

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

**Peaches:** OK, we talked about *encountering Christ*. So, what's number two on Pope Francis' short list of living as Missionary Disciples?

**Me:** Step two is "*accompaniment*."

**Peaches:** Accompanying?

**Me:** Yes. Maybe we can start by understanding it's opposite. How do you feel about religious types who are negative and condemning? You know, the kind who when you meet them, they have the rulebook out and are ready to take your Inventory?

**Peaches:** The worst! Those are the "Toxic People" that you're always talking about!

**Me:** Right. Now, that's the opposite of *accompaniment*.

**Peaches:** So Pope Francis' number two is "Don't be a religious jerk"?

**Me:** Pretty much. Let's back up a minute here and understand why I shouldn't be a religious jerk.

**Peaches:** 'Cuz it never works?!

**Me:** Oh, you noticed that, huh? Well, we are not entitled to be a religious jerk to others no matter how much we're saved, blessed or confessed! Because God is Mercy. Mercy within mercy, within mercy!

God is taking that person where they are at now. We need to also. The Holy Spirit is at work in that other person's life in ways we can't know.

**Peaches:** Even the messed-up people?

**Me:** Especially, the messed-up people! Take off your sandals because you stand on holy ground (Exodus 3:5).

**Peaches:** OK. I feel you, Deke. How do I *accompany* others into an *encounter* with Christ?

**Me:** Well, think of yourself as a doctor and the person is your patient. You need a good "bedside manner."

**Peaches:** You mean like a good and kind attitude and approach?

**Me:** Yes. Now, this person may be miserable—they're a patient! You look beyond that. You understand the pain they are in and respond in kindness.

**Peaches:** Right! You don't start yelling at them, calling them names and ordering them to take medicines!

**Me:** That's it. When you are done interacting with them, they should feel heard, cared for and loved, not condemned and written off.

**Peaches:** All right, walk me through a scenario on how this goes down.

**Me:** OK. You're coming back to your housing unit after Mass and someone on the tier starts to talk to you about you going to church. They might be negative or just searching, but you have great faith because you have encountered Christ in your own life.

You listen to the Holy Spirit and let the Spirit guide you in this conversation. Their questions or negativity don't throw you because you know that God is already working on them. That's why they started to talk to you in the first place!

**Peaches:** Yeah, so I'm like calm, understanding and patient with them, right?

**Me:** Yes, and humble (this is not about you!), friendly, encouraging and joyful.

**Peaches:** I see why you've got to have that encounter with Christ daily. You can't fake any of that!

**Me:** No. You always have to be prayed up because you don't know when this is going to happen.

**Peaches:** OK, that's how I am but what do I do?

**Me:** Work with the Holy Spirit. Listen to the person without interrupting. Ask them questions about something they told you. "What is faith to you?" "What kind of life do you want for yourself and your kids?" Things like that.

Then take whatever good they said and encourage that. Leave the rest. Relax. This is really between them and the Holy Spirit.

**Peaches:** Any tricks to this one?

**Me:** Always smile. You always do it right if you keep smiling. In fact, God can use that as his healing gaze that moves the person closer to encountering Christ.

**Peaches:** Isn't this kind of phony?

**Me:** Not if you mean it. Not if you're "prayed up" and flowing with the Holy Spirit of God's love.

**Peaches:** Why this way? Why me?

**Me:** I don't know, Peaches. It's just the way God has always preferred to operate through imperfect people who can walk other imperfect people home by love.

*Deacon Dennis Dolan is a retired chaplain from York Correctional Institution in Connecticut. He continues his ministry with and for prisoners through his writing.*

# Start with your own encounter with Jesus

Something really changes in us when we meet Jesus and ask him to come into our lives. Our meeting Jesus is often called “encountering Jesus.” When we meet or encounter Jesus and let him have a place in our lives, something changes. *We* change . . . or at least we should.

People see the change in us! Think about that a minute. People can see us change. Maybe we are less angry or hostile, more loving and kind, more generous and thoughtful. Hopefully, we reflect the change that St. Paul identifies when he writes about the ways of the flesh dying to the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:19-23).

Sometimes the change is fast; more often it is slow. It takes a lifetime. But as we walk and talk with Jesus and welcome his friendship on our journey, our lives change. This is what encounter does.

**Encounter starts with us.** In our last issue, we wrote about our call to “Go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). Discipleship—following Jesus—begins with us. If we are to answer the call to make disciples, we have to become a disciple first. The wonderful thing is that Jesus is with us all the way, knocking at the door of our hearts, asking us to invite him into our lives (see Revelation 3:20-21).

We encounter Jesus wherever we are. Even in prison. And what better place to meet Jesus than in prison? Don't waste your time while in prison; invite Jesus into your life and seek to include him in all you do. Remember, you are meeting Jesus, a real person. Christianity is not just about great thoughts, or moral decisions. It is about an encounter with a person—Jesus—who gives us life and love, won for us through his death and resurrection.

**But how?** This happens in number of ways. Take some time to think about these ways we meet Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus is not about being a “Lone Ranger,” acting alone. It happens in and with others!

• **Encounter Jesus.** These are all ways we encounter Jesus: through living our Christian life every day; through our acts of charity, mercy and justice; through our personal testimony and proclamation of the good news. Think of other ways you can meet Jesus and walk with him daily.

• **Encounter Jesus in your family.** Seek to build relationships in your family. Pray to heal any wounds left by your behavior,

and other's behavior. Whether or not you will see family again, or whether they come to visit you, keep them in prayer and ask God to heal all that is broken. Seek to meet Jesus through them. It does happen!

### Living as Missionary Disciples

1. **Encounter Jesus in your life.**
2. **Accompany others on the journey to conversion.**
3. **Grow in the community of God and neighbor.**
4. **Go forth as a missionary disciple.**



• **Encounter Jesus in and through the Church, the community of believers.**

Our work of making disciples needs to be done through the Church. Jesus founded the Church, and feeds the Church and her members in Word and Sacrament, the Eucharist. The seven sacraments nourish and sustain her members. The Church teaches us how to pray and how to live as followers of Jesus. Embrace the Church and live in her.

• **Encounter Jesus through others.** We also encounter Jesus through our brothers and sisters around us. It is very hard to encounter Jesus when we live in isolation from others. We truly see more of who we are at our core as we interact with others, through all the interactions that involves. This includes encountering Jesus through others in jail or prison around you, as hard as that can be.

**A gradual and lifelong process.** All the events of our lives, whether they be good or bad, give us an opportunity to seek Jesus. These are “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” we face each day. As the Church teaches, “nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo” in the human heart. “United in Christ, [we] are led by the Holy Spirit in [our] journey to the Kingdom of [the] Father” (Vatican Council II, *The Church in the Modern World*, para. 1).

Remember, encounter and evangelization are not one-time events, but part of a life-long walk: “Evangelization does not seek to invite people to experience only one moment of conversation but rather to experience the gradual and lifelong process of conversion” (*Living as Missionary Disciples*, p. 12).

Making disciples is really an exciting way to live. That is because we enter into the work of God and the Holy Spirit gives us the love and knowledge of what to do and what to say. As we live this out, we begin to experience joy ever more deeply in our lives. Joy is a sure sign that God is with us.

~ Anthony Bosnick

*This is the second article in a planned six-part series. It is based on the teaching of Pope Francis and the Catholic Bishops of the U.S.*

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