



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES

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Don't lose hope. God is with you.

God wants to do wonderful things in our lives. "Sure," you might be thinking. "It hasn't happened so far, and it's not going to happen now." This is the perfect way to think if we *don't* want the gifts God has for us.

But if we want to share in the promise and receive God's gifts, we have to do the things that make it possible to experience God's presence and life. In other words, we have to cultivate the soil in our lives. This is the point of the parable of the seed (Matthew 13:4-23). As Jesus said, "What was sown on good soil is the man who hears the message and takes it in" (v. 23). He *does something* with what he hears.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is alive and he gives us the grace to live new lives of hope and joy. Even in prison or jail.

Jesus wants you to live in hope and joy, even—and especially—during this time of imprisonment. We hope the articles in this issue will give you the encouragement you need daily to walk with Jesus to new life. It is possible when we turn to Jesus and walk with him.

We do not do this on our own. As Jesus tells us, "Take courage. I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). God gives us the Grace to follow him. Keep this in mind: There is always Grace. Abundant Grace. Amazing Grace. It is God's work in us. Know and trust that Jesus has come to give you life "and life to the full" (John 10:10). We need to cooperate with the Grace he gives. Let's take courage and give it a chance.

Let us pray for one another.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

New life in Christ. Here are some powerful words from St. Paul: "In baptism you were not only buried with [Christ] but also raised to life with him because you believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12). Paul continued, "God gave you new life in company with Christ" (v. 13).

This is the reality: In baptism we are raised to new life in Christ. But the rest of the reality is that we are weak human beings and have to decide each day, and many times throughout each day, to enter into that life. The problem is that we often fail to live this way. So we develop some really bad habits and ways of acting and living that move us *away* from Christ, not *toward* him.

Pray, persist, ask, trust. As God's children, we need to be in contact with our Father in heaven. *Prayer* is the foundation of our lives and opens the door to help



us meet Jesus in our lives. *Persistence* keeps us steady as we do that, even when we don't feel like it. We need to *ask* Jesus for the gifts he has for us and *trust* that they are his gift for us.

This is a life-long effort. You can begin *now*, and continue on *now*. Walk and talk with God each day and you will begin to experience more fully the gifts God has for you. Cultivate the soil of your life. The more you cultivate it, the richer it becomes. And the more fruit it bears.

And don't lose hope. God is with you.

Q&A

God gives us hope and joy

Q. I can't get over my feelings of guilt and being worthless, especially at Mass. What can I do?

A. Many of us who have some self-awareness of our sin can feel pretty bad when we see how we struggle with the same sin patterns and things in our past and present. People both inside and outside prison often face this issue. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy when it comes to these feelings. The truth is that God wants to walk with us daily and for us to know his hope and joy.

We have to stay rooted in the truth that God forgives us without any reservation. He came to give us life the full (John 10:10). This is the foundation of our hope and joy. When we know this hope and joy, it is easier to trust God and let go of the guilt.

Feelings of hopelessness and lack of worth can often be the effect of evil in our lives—the way we reinforce poor images from our sins and mistakes, and the way these images hide the real possibilities of our lives. Pope Francis says that "Satan is . . . a real person armed with dark powers" (TV2000, December, 2017). Satan is how we understand the forces of evil that take control of our lives. But we know that Jesus has already conquered these forces so that they need not take over our lives.

God changes us, but we have to cooperate and allow it. It is mostly a slow process, but it happens. As we seek forgiveness and ask Jesus to walk with us each day—and many times throughout the day—we will see change. So give those feelings of guilt over to

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CHURCH CALENDAR

OCTOBER 2019

- 1 St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church
- 2 Guardian Angels
- 4 St. Francis of Assisi, religious
- 6 **Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 7 Our Lady of the Rosary
- 13 **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 15 St. Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church
- 17 St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop, martyr
- 18 **St. Luke, evangelist**
- 19 Sts. John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, priests and martyrs, and companions, martyrs
- 20 **Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 27 **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 28 **Sts. Simon and Jude, apostles**

NOVEMBER 2019

- 1 **All Saints**
- 2 **All Souls**
- 3 **Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 4 St. Charles Borromeo, bishop
- 9 Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
- 10 **Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 11 St. Martin of Tours, bishop
- 12 St. Josaphat, bishop and martyr
- 13 St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, foundress
- 17 **Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
- 21 Presentation of Mary
- 22 St. Cecelia, virgin, martyr
- 24 **Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**
- 28 Thanksgiving Day in U.S.
- 30 **St. Andrew, apostle**

DECEMBER 2019

- 1 **First Sunday of Advent**
- 3 St. Francis Xavier, priest and missionary
- 7 St. Ambrose, bishop
- 8 **Second Sunday of Advent**
- 9 **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 12 **Our Lady of Guadalupe**
- 13 St. Lucy, virgin and martyr
- 14 St. John of the Cross, priest
- 15 **Third Sunday of Advent**
- 22 **Fourth Sunday of Advent**
- 25 **Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)**
- 26 St. Stephen, first martyr
- 27 St. John, evangelist
- 28 Holy Innocents, martyrs
- 29 **Holy Family**

Let's Talk!

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Q&A God gives us hope and joy

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God. Seek forgiveness. Receive the grace of a sacramental confession if you can in your prison.

Gradually, we change as we experience God's gift of hope and joy. This is a promise you can trust.

Q. Why are some Catholics so into the Rosary?

A. Let's start by saying that in the three months of this issue of *Let's Talk!*, on October 7 we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Rosary and recognize October as the month of the rosary. Moving on, we celebrate on December 8 the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and on December 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe. Also, Advent, as we prepare for Christmas, asks us to focus on Mary in a special way. This is in recognition of and helps us remember Mary's importance to Catholics and Orthodox, and to many other Christians. (Mary is also honored by Muslims.)

It is all tied up with Mary's relationship to Jesus as his Mother. Mary has been honored across thousands of years as the "*Theotokos*", or "God-bearer." Pope Francis gives us a good way of looking at this. On the celebration of the Assumption of Mary this year (August 15, 2019), he said: "You are precious in the eyes of God; you are not made for the little fulfillment of the world, but for the great joys of Heaven. Yes, because God is joy, not boredom! God is joy! Let us allow ourselves to be taken by the hand of the Madonna. Every time we take the Rosary in hand and pray it, we take a step towards the great goal of life. . . . May the Blessed Virgin, Gate of Heaven, help us to

look every day with trust and joy toward Heaven, where our true home is, where she is, awaiting us as a mother."

This has long been recognized. The frescoes in the Sistine Chapel in Rome were painted in the early 1500's by the great artist Michelangelo. When they were cleaned of candle smoke and soot in the 1980s and 1990s, two figures in the Last Judgment painting became clearer. To the surprise of many, it was discovered that two men in the painting who appeared to escape hell and damnation by hanging on to a rope, were actually hanging on to a rosary! Michelangelo was showing that through prayer of the rosary that they were spared damnation! Three cheers for Mary!



Pope Francis likes to remind us that Mary is the "untier of knots" of sin and trials in our lives. She helps us. Now some history and theology: Mary untying knots is an ancient belief rooted in the writing of St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130 – c. 202 AD). In his work *Against Heresies*, (Book III,22), he wrote that "the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."

Who among us doesn't need some help like this!

A new program for prisoners

Paulist Prison Ministries is asking our donors and supporters to help us send a special book to you. The book, *Tell the Prisoners I Pray for Them* is a collection of 18 reflections from Pope Francis. They are intended to encourage prisoners as you walk the challenging path of reform,

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Prisoner Saint

Blessed Miguel Pro (1891-1927) + "Long live Christ the King!" These were Fr. Pro's last words before he was shot to death by a firing squad. His crime: being a Catholic priest in revolutionary Mexico. Persecution of Catholics was intense in Mexico in Fr. Pro's day. Pro nonetheless returned there in 1925 after ordination in Belgium. For two years, he ministered "underground." He chose times and places thought safe by the faithful band of Catholics he served. Pro was arrested and imprisoned on false charges that he planned to assassinate the president of Mexico. Neither danger nor hardship could dampen Pro's love for Christ. Pope John Paul II declared Pro Blessed in 1988.

Feast Day: November 23

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for October/November/December 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.

OCTOBER

Evangelization: That the breath of the Holy Spirit engender a new missionary "spring" in the Church.

NOVEMBER

Universal: That a spirit of dialogue, encounter, and reconciliation emerge in the Near East, where diverse religious communities share their lives together.

DECEMBER

Universal: That every country determine to take the necessary measures to make the future of the very young, especially those who suffer, a priority.

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 4

Chow Hall Missionary

by Deacon Dennis Dolan

Peaches: OK, so continuing on with Pope Francis' four steps to living as a "missionary disciple" . . .

Me: Let's see. We've covered *Encountering Christ, Accompanying Others* and the idea that we are a *Community* of missionary disciples (not "Lone Rangers"!), so that brings us to *Send and Go Forth!*

Peaches: Well, Your Deakiness, that one certainly doesn't apply in here cuz unless you know something I don't, I'm not going anywhere anytime soon!

Me: Peaches, did I ever tell you that I was a missionary?

Peaches: You were?! What country?

Me: Countries...

Peaches: OK, what countries?!

Me: Let's see, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Haiti, Brazil, Philippines . . .

Peaches: Wait! Wait! ALL those countries?!

Me: I'm not done with my list yet.

Peaches: You're not serious, Deacon Dolan! When was this?

Me: This morning at 1 South before I came over here!

Peaches: 1 South- the dorm?!? What are you talking about?

Me: Simple. I'm a missionary. The Department of Corrections is my mission field where "Holy Mother State" has gathered a large assortment of nationalities for my missionary convenience! *And* I get to go home every night! Who's better than me, huh?

Peaches: Are you going anywhere with this, Deke?

Me: Absolutely. You are confused.

Peaches: Wouldn't be the first time.

Me: . . . or misinformed.

Peaches: OK, now I can feel my self-esteem dropping!

Me: Being a missioner is not about traveling, necessarily. It's not necessarily about crossing a country's border. It's about crossing a border—any border! It can be a border of culture, language, social or economic level, religion or even crossing a "sector."

Peaches: What's a "sector"?

Me: An area of life. So, you could be a missionary to the "art world" or the Internet or to Hip Hop culture, etc.

Peaches: OK. I get it. Any border. So I guess that *does* apply here in prison too.

Me: Yup, like at 1 South. It may only involve the travel distance between tables in the chow hall. You decide to sit and eat with some of the new people and "accompany" and serve them by showing them where the land mines are in here.

Peaches: That would be a great missionary ministry for us in here!

Me: Hospitality ministry!

Peaches: Problem is, Deke, that kind of thing is not really in my comfort zone.

Me: You think an Eagle Scout, white boy like me, had working in a prison in his "comfort zone"?! I'll tell you a secret: You gave up your "comfort zone" at baptism.

You gave up your "comfort zone" again at confirmation. I gave up my "comfort zone" for a third time at my ordination to the diaconate. Want to know another secret, P?

Peaches: Sure.

Me: I have to give up my "comfort zone" every morning before I come in here.

Peaches: Point made. I guess this comes under "take up your cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23), huh?

Me: Yup. Central to that whole "following" and "disciple" program of Jesus.

God the Father sent Jesus forth to cross the border between the divine and human sectors. Jesus sends us forth to cross the planet's borders and sectors until they are no longer barriers but bridges between people.

Peaches: OK, so how do you know how and when to do this border crossing, sector hopping, in here?

Me: Well, the "when" is an easy answer: you always at every opportunity go forth and cross. And the "how" is fairly simple as well. Just ask yourself the "Deacon Questions": "Who is being left out?" "Who is not here?" "How can I accompany them?"

Peaches: You know I get this! Well, Deke, time for chow. Send this missionary forth!

Me: OK! Go and glorify God by your life!

Peaches: Thanks be to God!

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

Grow in the community of God and neighbor

Let's begin with a short review. We began this series of articles on making disciples in January, centering on the command Jesus gave us: "Go and make disciples" (see Matthew 28:19-20). Deacon Dolan, in his series of articles, is also focusing on the call to make disciples. We are following the guidance of the teaching of the Catholic Bishops of the United States in their 2017 teaching *Living as Missionary Disciples*. That document is based on the teaching of Pope Francis.

As with much of what the Bible and the Church teach, making disciples is counter-cultural. That is, it goes against what we learn in the world. In the United States (and in western culture), we learn to be "Lone Rangers," standing alone and living alone, even when surrounded by many others.

Pope Francis and the U.S. Bishops are trying to teach us to live differently: according to what Jesus teaches. In previous articles, we have looked at encountering Jesus in our lives and on accompanying others on the journey of conversion. In this article, we focus on the next point: we need to grow in community of God and neighbor.

What does this mean?

Living in the community of God and neighbor. Years ago, when I was in eighth grade, our health teacher had us memorize that "we are all unique individuals unlike anyone else in the world." That is partly true. (It is amazing what we remember!) *But more importantly, we are part of a community of people, the People of God and, if baptized, the Body of Christ. This is our greater identity. We are not isolated individuals.*

Rooted in the community of the Trinity. Our lives are rooted in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our very life flows from the life of the Trinity. The love between the Father and the Son is the love of the Holy Spirit. This love enlivens and sustains us and gives life to the world.

This is part of the Christian mystery, that is, a truth so profound and deep that we always are able to learn more of what it means. We will never stop learning what this means if we are

walking with Jesus each day and learning from him through worship and prayer, reading and reflecting on Scripture, *actively living as part of a community*, and caring for and serving others. (These are our four spiritual resolutions.)

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.**



A community of people on earth. Our lives are to reflect this love. Living together with others and loving them ("love your neighbor as yourself"—Luke 10:27) is our call. This is something you can strive for even in prison. It will depend in part on the type of prison or jail you are confined to.

The Holy Spirit ennobles and empowers us. We do not do this on our own. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and helps us to live as disciples of Christ. "Are you not aware that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit gives us gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11) "for the common good" (v. 7) and builds up a spirit of harmony which reflects the uniqueness of what we can be when enlivened by Christ.

This is also possible even in confinement. How? Your experience probably tells you something different. But the gifts may be lying dormant in your life. As you follow Jesus, you will more and more see these gifts.

Fellowship and solidarity. As we seek to live in community with others and let God smooth out our rough edges, we begin to experience the blessing of other people and what they bring to our lives. Unexpected treasures emerge in our lives and in the community of faith, *even in prison*. That is something to expect and seek.

We said this in a previous article: The response of our encounter with Christ is to accompany others as we go out in our lives and invite others into this new life! Our Christian life is not a private affair; it is to be lived with others.

~ Anthony Bosnick

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

God gives us hope and joy

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struggle with isolation, face fear and uncertainty, and seek answers about God.

Copies of Pope Francis' book will be sent to prisoners as donors make this possible. Please pray for these donors whose generous support makes a gift like this possible.

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.

The Jesus Prayer ~

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

The Jesus Prayer likely is from the early sixth century when church leaders taught that repetition of this prayer can lead to inner stillness. Even earlier, in the fourth century in Egypt, these short "arrow" prayers were encouraged. As you go through your day, slowly and silently voice this prayer to God. It will transfer and make the most ordinary tasks holy offerings to God.

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.