

“The Love which moves the sun and the other stars”

One thing for sure, Pope Francis likes to keep us on our toes. He likes to help us consider things that might not otherwise cross our minds. Like the medieval poet Dante Alighieri.

Dante (as he is known) was born in 1265 and died on September 14, 1321. So, this is the seven hundredth anniversary of his death. That set off bells in Pope Francis's mind and he began to think about what Dante has to say to us today. That's the Pope's job . . . among other things.

Dante's greatest poem is “The Divine Comedy.” It is divided into three parts: “Inferno,” “Purgatorio,” and Paradiso. It's written in Italian, but there are a number of English translations. Inferno is about hell. Purgatorio is about Purgatory. Paradiso is about heaven.

It's not easy reading. But if you put your mind and heart to it, many people find they can do it and benefit from it. That was my experience, with a bit of struggle. It's up to you and maybe some friends spending time helping each other get through it. This long poem is probably best read as part of a group so you can support each other.

What's Pope Francis getting at? The title of this article is: “The Love which moves the sun and the other stars.” This is the last line of the three-part poem (Paradiso, 33.145). Through this poem, Pope Francis would have us experience more deeply God's love in our lives. This is the love that moves the universe, the sun and the stars. It is the same love that moves our lives!

God has not created us and abandoned us. He created us in love. And he saved us in love through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus. That is the wonderful truth we celebrate at every Mass and especially during the Easter Season.

Pope Francis wrote a short letter to the Church on the importance of Dante to us. In English it is called “Splendor of Light Eternal” (March 25, 2021). He wrote that in our time we experience great inhumanity of one to another and a “lack of confidence and prospects for the future.” We can look to Dante for insight and hope. “Dante, prophet of hope and witness to the human desire for happiness, can still provide us with words and examples that encourage us on our journey” (Splendor, sec 9).



Do we need that? If we look at the world around us and see suffering and despair, we can fairly say: “Yes, desperately.” And so, we open our eyes to what Dante is telling us. “Dante can help us to advance with serenity and courage on the pilgrimage of life and faith that each of us is called to make, until our hearts find true peace and true joy, until we arrive at the ultimate goal of all humanity: ‘The Love which moves the sun and the other stars’” (sec 9).

Dante set out on a journey to find this Love. His journey is the story in The Divine Comedy—a journey that took him through hell, purgatory and to heaven. It's pretty fascinating, although some parts can also be a bit boring. Despite that, Dante's journey in the Comedy “was truly a journey of desire, of a deep interior resolve to change his life, to discover happiness and to show the way to others who, like him, find themselves in a ‘dark forest’ after losing ‘the right way’” (sec 4).

Jesus is the way. Jesus is also the truth and the life (John 14:6). Let us follow him. During this Easter Season, let us especially dedicate ourselves to following Jesus. Countless people have experienced the truth that Jesus is the way, truth and life. People even in our own time.

We think back to the article in the last issue of *Let's Talk!* “Spiritual practices to help you on your journey.” There we made these four spiritual recommendations for our journey: 1) Read the word of God. 2) Worship and pray. 3) Be part of a community. 4) Care for and serve others. These are sure-fire ways to find Jesus and experience the Love that moves all things.

Dante just might be a good companion on your journey. If you give him a try, write to us and let us know. It will be fun for us all to hear of your experiences. If we hear some good things, we will send them to the Papal Nuncio in Washington, and ask him to send them to Pope Francis.

We are all looking for ways to advance in our walk with Jesus. *This is the first article of two on Dante.*

~ Anthony Bosnick

Are you out of your mind?!?

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Some policy changes have been implemented. The First Step Act of 2018 (passed under former President Trump) has improved “access to classes, counseling, and other programming” in the federal system. There has also been a little action on reliance on for-profit detention.

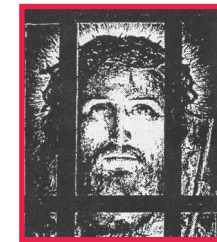
But on most other issues, such as the federal death penalty, there has been little or no progress.

If this topic interests you and you have computer access, look up “Brennan Center Criminal Legal Reform One Year into the Biden Administration.”

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.

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.



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES

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Mary is your mom

If we are lucky, one of the great blessings of our lives is that we have a mom who loves us. Through thick and thin, through joys and disappointments, we are blessed when we know our mother's—our mom's—love.

That is the way it is with Mary and us. Our Blessed Mother Mary is more than a plaster statue. She is a living person in heaven who cares for us and who guides and protects us.

May in the month of Mary. The tradition in the Catholic Church of dedicating the month of May to Mary began in the 13th century—eight hundred years ago. In the Northern Hemisphere where the Church expanded quickly, May is a beautiful month with spring flowers and generally mild weather.

Among the ancient Romans, the month of May was dedicated to Flora, the goddess of blossoms and blooms. It carried over into the newly Christianized lands of Europe. And we continue with it today.

Mary, our mom? From the Cross, as Jesus was crucified, he said to Mary: “Woman, behold, your son.” And to the beloved disciple John, he said, “Behold, your mother” (John 19:26-27). From that time on, Mary was known as the mother of all Jesus' disciples.

She is a woman who loves and prays for all who follow Jesus. She cares for and wants the best for us. Mary does all she can to guide us in the path of the life and love of God. She is not distant from us, but close to us in her motherly love. She has the tenderness and care of a mom. She



smiles when we do good things as followers of Jesus.

Reach out to Mary. Talk to Mary and become her friend. Let her love you and guide you. Let her show you what it means to follow Jesus.

A good practice in the month of May (and October, too) is to pray the Rosary. If you don't know how to, google “Paulist Prison Ministries Rosary Pamphlet: Praying the Rosary.” It guides you through praying the Rosary. The Rosary is a prayer of

comfort and peace. Let it calm and soften your heart. Let it change you and give you peace.

Through the Rosary, you will experience a special relationship with Mary, your mom. Talk with Mary as you would with a loving mom. You will be blessed.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We begin our celebration of Easter remembering, “The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world.”

Easter is not just one day to be remembered then quickly put aside and forgotten. We are on a fifty-day journey from Easter to Pentecost. Keep in mind every day that the Love of God “which moves the sun and the other stars” is the same Love which changes us.

Let us be open to this Love every day of this fifty-day journey of the Easter Season. In some way—small or even great—our lives should be better and more joy-filled because of Easter.

May that be our goal. Let us follow Jesus each day and become the new person Jesus wants us to be.

Let us pray for one another.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Q&A

Are you out of your mind?!?

Q. *You wrote that Jesus is calling us to follow him. I don't think he is too interested in me.*

A. Jesus is calling us. He is calling *you* to follow him, too. Look at the Gospel of Mark 2:14, where Jesus called out to Levi, a despised tax collector, “Follow me.” Levi must have thought, “Are you out of your mind! Or what?!?” But Levi “got up and followed him” (v. 14).

Tax collectors such as Levi were despised, regarded as sinners and outcasts. They brought disgrace to their families. Levi became a follower of Christ, a faithful disciple with the name of Matthew. He wrote the Gospel of Matthew, one of the four evangelists who wrote the gospels.

And look at St. Paul. This man—then known as Saul—persecuted the early Christians, and made lots of trouble. Yet Jesus saw something in his heart, and called him. Saul responded, was baptized, and followed (Mark 3:22-30). Saul became the great St. Paul. You will read a lot about St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles. (This is the featured first reading in the Catholic liturgy during the Easter season.) Try to follow along with the readings from Acts during this Easter season. You are bound to be struck how the Lord changed this man's heart from a persecutor of Christians to one of the great builders of the Church in all time.

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CHURCH CALENDAR

APRIL 2022

- 3 Fifth Sunday of Lent
- 10 Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord
- 14 Holy Thursday
- 15 Passion of the Lord (Good Friday)
- 16 Holy Saturday
- 17 Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord
- 24 Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday
- 25 St. Mark, evangelist
- 29 St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor

MAY 2022

- 1 Third Sunday of Easter
- 2 St. Athanasius, bishop and doctor
- 3 Sts. Philip and James, apostles
- 8 Fourth Sunday of Easter
- 14 St. Matthias, apostle
- 15 Fifth Sunday of Easter
- 22 Sixth Sunday of Easter
- 26 Ascension (in some places celebrated May 29) or St. Philip Neri, priest
- 29 Ascension, or Seventh Sunday of Easter
- 31 Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

JUNE 2022

- 1 St. Justin, martyr
- 3 St. Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs
- 5 Pentecost
- 6 Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church
- 11 St. Barnabas, apostle
- 12 Most Holy Trinity
- 13 St. Anthony of Padua, priest and doctor
- 19 Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)
- 21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, religious
- 23 Birth of St. John the Baptist
- 24 Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
- 25 Immaculate Heart of Mary
- 26 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 28 St. Irenaeus, bishop and Martyr
- 29 Sts. Peter and Paul, apostles

Let's Talk!

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Q&A Are you out of your mind?!

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Jesus is patient with us. Jesus has been calling us since Day One. What day is it now for you? If you haven't gotten up to follow Jesus, he is still waiting for you. Say "Yes" to his call and follow. You will be surprised by the joy, peace and love that begin to replace the emptiness of your life when you follow Jesus.



Q. I have a good friend who says he does not believe in God. Whenever we talk about this, we end in an argument. How do I avoid that?

A. This happens to many people, especially if you or the person you are talking with likes to argue and gets heated quickly. And even more so, if you tend to be the same way too! Keep in mind these words from Scripture: "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30). The "he" is Jesus. The "I" is John the Baptist. John was the greatest of the prophets, but a man of great humility.

Keep Jesus central in your mind and heart. Pray for the person you are talking with, even as you are talking. Know that conversion to Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit and you are only the instrument of the Spirit. Know, too, that our humility and love bring people to Christ.

If you are just out for a good argument, then argue is what you will do. But if you truly desire to help the other person come to Christ, be a witness of God's life and love. We need to get to know the people we are trying to share the truth of Christ with. What makes them tick? What have been the joys and sufferings of their lives?

Some people have really suffered from family issues, disappointments in life, or deaths of ones they love. Others may just be ornery cusses. Try to understand where the person is coming from and patiently reach out in love. It may take a long time. Or it may never happen at all. On the other hand, you may be surprised that a person responds quickly.

Also, don't be a lone ranger and try to do this alone. Other Christians can help you—through prayer, through insights they might have, by supporting you. But know that when you seek to share the good news with others, Jesus is on your side and is pleased with your efforts.

Let love prevail, not frustration. Ask Jesus to pour his grace upon the situation and expect great things from God!

Prison Reform Stalled

Last year after President Joe Biden became president, we wrote in *Let's Talk!* that we would keep you posted on any prison reforms that passed. The Biden Administration had high hopes for prison reform. But as with many things, political issues have made progress a mixed bag.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law recently posted an article on the state of prison reform since Biden became president. They report: "There's still tremendous work to be done to live up to Biden's promise to make the criminal legal system more just."

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Prisoner Saint

Bl. John Davy (d. 1537) + John Davy was a devout monk and deacon of the Carthusian Order in London who spent his days in prayer and contemplation. When King Henry VIII broke from Rome and declared himself head of the church in England, he demanded that all accept his spiritual leadership. Many refused, including the Carthusian monks. To end their opposition, they were arrested and imprisoned in Newgate Prison. John was faithful to his conscience and to the Church. He did not give in. He was chained to a wall where he starved to death on June 8. He was declared blessed in 1886.

Feast Day: June 6

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for April/May/June 2022

The Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network encourages Catholics to prayer and action as part of the church's universal mission. The Network provides monthly prayer intentions determined by the Pope. His monthly prayer intention is a global call to transform our prayer into "concrete gestures" of service.

In addition to the monthly requests below, the Pope 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

For health care workers: We pray for health care workers who serve the sick and the elderly, especially in the poorest countries; may they be adequately supported by governments and local communities.

MAY

For faith-filled young people: We pray for all young people, called to live life to the fullest; may they see in Mary's life the way to listen, the depth of discernment, the courage that faith generates, and the dedication to service.

JUNE

For families: We pray for Christian families around the world; may they embody and experience unconditional love and advance in holiness in their daily lives.

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

Making Spiritual Resolutions, Part 3

By Deacon Dennis Dolan

Fish only exist in water

Peaches: Ok, Deke, so far our rule of life has the Word of God and Worship. What's next?

Me: Next major item is Community. Christianity is not a "Do It Yourself" project.

Peaches: I know plenty of people who would disagree with that, Deke. They say that they just need the Bible, themselves and the Lord.

Me: Neither the Bible nor the Lord support that view—not in the Old Testament nor in the New Testament. God called the entire people of Israel not just Moses or David. And when he called spokespeople and leaders, he called those individuals with, in and for Israel.

Peaches: Oh, I get it! Jesus does the same thing with the disciples in the New Testament!

Me: Correct. The revelation of God in the Scriptures shows that he considers community an essential piece of his plan because we are social beings made in the image and likeness of God who is a Trinity.

Peaches: Then how come there's so many people who think they can DIY this thing?

Me: There are a lot of different versions of God, Jesus and the meaning of the Gospel out there. Be careful which one you choose to accept!

Peaches: You're right, but how can you know which version is the right one?

Me: Community.

Peaches: Explain.

Me: My community goes back to Jesus. That's a historical fact. My community walked and lived with Jesus. We don't know him just from a book. That knowledge was passed down by disciples, bishops, etc. and it gives you a sense of what's real and what's not. We call that tradition.

Peaches: How do we know that tradition is right?

Me: Because you can read the writings of a student of an Apostle in the First Century and compare their view of Jesus with the one you hear in the Church today. And you can see that same view in every century in between.

Peaches: So that's why community is important!

Me: That's one reason. How can you learn to be like Jesus?

Peaches: Reading the Bible?

Me: Where did the Bible come from?

Peaches: Community?

Me: Our Community to be precise.

Me: Reading the Bible isn't enough. You have to understand.

Peaches: So, I need Bible study.

Me: Where would you get that?

Peaches: The Community.

Me: Either that or you could go somewhere where they've got their own version of Jesus.

Peaches: Starting to appreciate the need for a pedigree here.

Me: But wait! There's more.

Peaches: Ok. What's the "more"?

Me: You go to NA, right? Isn't that a community? Do you have a sponsor?

Peaches: Yes.

Me: Is your sponsor in NA too?

Peaches: Of course! How can they help me if they're not on the same journey to recovery? Oh. I get it. Community!

Me: Same. Same. There is no part of you as an individual that can exist except as part of a community. For good or bad.

Peaches: I see where you're going with this, Deke. I grew up in a Spanish-speaking family in an English-speaking country so I'm bilingual! I grew up at a certain time and place which shaped me in a specific culture.

Me: Yup. There is no "me" without "us". But Community not only teaches us and shapes us. Community also corrects us.

Peaches: We don't like that, but we do need it.

Me: Many times, it's hard for us to see our own missteps. We need to surround ourselves with people who love us and share the journey with us.

Peaches: The Communion of Saints!

Me: And we need to promise ourselves that we will listen to them when they warn us! And then there is the service that we do for others.

Peaches: Well, you can serve on your own.

Me: You can, but can I, by myself, run all the schools, hospitals, orphanages, shelters, soup kitchens, charities, etc. around the world that are making life better for millions of people right now as we sit here?

Peaches: Community.

Me: And finally, we're supposed to Witness to Jesus. Which is the bigger, better witness to the power of the Gospel? My little life or . . .

Peaches: Community.

Me: Hey! Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto!

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