



A CATHOLIC MINISTRY
TO PRISONERS

Let's Talk!

A SERVICE OF PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES



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Drop that sack of rocks!

If you are like most people, you find it hard to believe how deeply Jesus loves you and wants the best for you. Well, he does. God did not create us to live meaningless lives. He created us to know his life and love. He created us for greatness. He wants something great for your life . . . no matter how long you remain in prison or jail.

Sadly, we often have little or no hope for our lives. We don't think there is something better for us. Guilt, depression, bitterness, and discouragement can pull us down. This is like a sack of rocks we carry on our backs. Drop it. We don't need to be burdened with that sack of sin and guilt. Jesus died and rose to free us from that.

Think big. If we turn from our sin and ask forgiveness, nothing we have done or said can stand in the way of the

gift God has for us in Jesus. Imagine being in the shoes of Peter. He denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75) on the way to Calvary. Yet Jesus forgave Peter and called him to "feed my lambs and sheep" (John 21:15-19).

Talk about forgiveness, big time. Jesus used this sinful, fearful man to build his Church on earth. Catholics know Peter as the first pope, with the great responsibility to lead the Church. So, this sinful Peter became great in his love and service of Jesus. Nothing can stand in the way of God's work in our lives, if we don't let it. So, drop what is keeping you from accepting Jesus' love and gifts.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. You can begin now, even while in prison, to start anew and accept the gift Jesus has



for you—the gift of his life and love. Ask God to give you sorrow for your sins, especially those that landed you in jail or prison. Turn from the "works of the flesh," bitterness, anger, hatred, selfishness, sexual depravity, and all the rest (see Galatians 5:19-21).

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and the "fruit of the Spirit," love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-25). Drop your sack of rocks and live in the life and love of God. Trust in God's love for you and accept it gratefully.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We all get stuck in life from time to time. And being in jail or prison, that can be pretty hard to shake. But release comes as we embrace the words of St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord."

We get unstuck as we meet Jesus and walk with him. Page two of this newsletter gives four tips—spiritual resolutions—that will help us take on the new and joyful life Jesus has for us. But we have to have faith and make the decision.

Open your heart to Jesus and find the peace he wants for you. Talk with him and walk with him each day. You will find the truth that will get you unstuck.

Let us pray for one another.

Father Frank DeSiano, CSP
President
Paulist Evangelization Ministries

Q&A

Life is a journey

Q. I'm stuck and nothing seems to change. What can get me out of this hole?

A. Let's look at St. Augustine (AD 354 – 440) for help in answering this question. Augustine had lots of talent but was a great sinner. Even so, he became one of the great Saints of the Church. In his autobiography, called *Confessions*, he wrote "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (I, 1).

We all face this challenge, whether we are in prison or out. It is rooted in our human nature, which is made for God. When we don't seek God—or just live for ourselves—our hearts are restless and our lives are empty. How do we fill this emptiness?

Life does not have to be this way. Here are three suggestions to help us get out of this rut. First, we need an ongoing encounter with Christ. Second, we need to continually deepen our faith. Third, we need to live life as a journey with a destination, not just a black hole.

Pope Benedict XVI taught us that being Christian "is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person." This Person—Jesus—gives our lives "a new horizon and a decisive direction" (as cited by Pope Francis in *Joy of the Gospel*, 7). We need to encounter Jesus, the Christ. More on that below.

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CHURCH CALENDAR

JULY 2022

- 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
- 26 Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of Mary
- 29 Sts. Martha, Mary, Lazarus, holy women and men
- 31 Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

AUGUST 2022

- 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 Blessed 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, mother
- 28 Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 29 Passion of St. John the Baptist

SEPTEMBER 2022

- 3 St. Gregory the Great, pope and doctor
- 4 Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 8 Nativity of the Blessed Virgin 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 Sts. Cornelius, pope and Cyprian, bishop, martyrs
- 18 Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 20 Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gön, priest, and Paul Chông Ha-sang, and Companions, martyrs
- 21 St. Matthew, apostle and evangelist
- 23 St. Pius of Pietrelcina, priest
- 25 Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
- 27 St. Vincent de Paul, priest
- 29 Sts. Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels
- 30 St. Jerome, priest and doctor

Let's Talk!

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Thank you for your help.

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Q&A Life is a journey

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We also need to continue growing deeper in our faith. This happens as we embrace what Jesus teaches us. Our lives can't be passive. We need to grow in understanding, accepting, and living what Jesus teaches and in knowing that the truth sets us free (see John 8:32) as it gives us life and meaning.

Finally, we need to know that life is a journey. It has a destination—eternal life with God in heaven. It is often easier to forget that God is calling us to new life in him. We lose sight of Christ in our lives and the truth that our lives have a purpose.

Get out of the hole.

This is easier said than done. If it were easy, the world would be filled with happy and holy people, with saints. We know it's not. But a step in the right direction is coming to know that Jesus is calling us to conversion and life with him. Life with him will help us change and get us out of the hole.

Life on the journey!

Nothing is easy, including the spiritual life. Paulist Prison Ministries offers **four spiritual resolutions** each new year, but they are good for every day of the year. So, we remind you of them now to support you on your journey. Change in our spiritual lives is often slow, but these practices can guide us on the way. *They are ways to help us encounter Jesus, grow in our faith, and make our daily journey meaningful.*

■ **First, read the Word of God**—the Bible—a little each day. Pray and talk

to God about what you are reading. Set aside some time each day to read Scripture. If you don't set time aside, you will likely not get to it. God speaks to us through Scripture.

■ **Second, worship and pray.** If your prison has a Catholic Mass, attend it if you can. And more than attend it, pray it and let it touch your heart. Also, have a time of personal prayer each day. At Mass and in your private prayer, talk with God and listen to him. He will guide you and give you hope.

■ **Third, take part in a community of believers.** Don't be a "lone ranger." Other faithful disciples of

Christ can be a great support in helping us be more faithful too.

■ **Fourth, care for and serve others.** As we are aware of the needs of others, our hearts are opened and we experience the love of God in a deeper way. The most faithful followers of Jesus—the Saints—provide a good example of this. You can do this in prison too.

These spiritual practices will bring you closer to God and help you get out of the hole and get on with your journey, even while in prison.

Free resources for prisoners and chaplains

Paulist Prison Ministries has a new pamphlet to help you develop your "spiritual disciplines," practices that will help you focus on God during your day. The pamphlet is called "Expect great things from God! Spiritual practices to help you

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Prisoner Saint

St. John the Baptist (c. 1st century BC - c. AD 30) + John was a wandering preacher in the region of Galilee, where he baptized in the river Jordan. Through John's birth, preaching and baptizing, he witnessed to the birth, preaching and baptism of Christ. John suffered chains and imprisonment as a witness to Jesus and gave his life for him. John was sentenced to death and beheaded by Herod Antipas around AD 30 after John rebuked him for divorcing his wife and then unlawfully wedding Herodias, the wife of his brother. Besides Catholics and other Christians, John is revered by other world religions, including Islam and the Bahá'í Faith.

Feast Day: August 29

Pope Francis' Prayer Requests for July/August/September 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.

JULY

For the elderly: We pray for the elderly, who represent the roots and memory of a people; may their experience and wisdom help young people to look towards the future with hope and responsibility.

AUGUST

For small businesses: We pray for small and medium sized businesses; in the midst of economic and social crisis, may they find ways to continue operating, and serving their communities.

SEPTEMBER

For the abolition of the death penalty: We pray that the death penalty, which attacks the dignity of the human person, may be legally abolished in every country.

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 4

By Deacon Dennis Dolan

Service: Co-Creators in God's dream for humanity

Peaches: OK, Deke, so far in building my personal Spiritual Rule of Life, we've got Reading the Word, Worship, and Community.

Me: Right! So, the Word provides the vision for your spiritual life. Worship is the only appropriate response to the awe and wonder of the vision presented by the Word. Community provides both the support and challenge to carry out that Vision.

Peaches: And so, the final piece of my personal spiritual rule is . . .

Me: Service! It's the "carrying out" that I just mentioned. Service is how you make the Vision real in the world. That's the "Will of God". The Word, the Vision, is God saying, "Here is how I would like the world to work". Service is where we put the Will of God into effect, into practice.

Peaches: Which I assume was the whole point of the Word/Vision in the first place.

Me: Yup. God's not just spinning his wheels! He doesn't need and is not looking for a Fan Club. His ego doesn't need our applause! He's looking for Co-Creators of his dream for humanity.

Peaches: So, not just "following Jesus" in your head or just with your mouth.

Me: Yeah, that's a delusion (Matthew 7:21). Jesus gave us clear direction on what we call "The Works of Mercy" (Matthew 25:31-46).

Peaches: Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit the sick. Visit the imprisoned. Bury the dead.

Me: Very good! Now, remember, you can't do them all at once, but you should be doing at least one. I certainly wouldn't want to show up for judgement without any of them!

Peaches: Yeah, Jesus saves everyone on "Team Jesus" but you're only on "Team Jesus" if you play the game! So, any practical tips on the Service part?

Me: Sure. First and easiest: look around. Who needs help? Who needs someone to listen? Who needs someone to accompany them? Family, neighbors, friends, fellow prisoners?

Second, check the parish bulletin that you get at Mass (visit the parish website) and volunteer for something!

Thirdly, check your diocese's website and the Catholic diocesan newspaper.

Fourthly, get to know the nuns, brothers and priests near you! They are always serving people and they always need help. An additional bonus to connecting with religious orders is they will introduce you to other serious disciples and that will cause an increase in the rate of your own spiritual growth.

Peaches: So basically, we should always be doing something for somebody.

Me: "Always" isn't always realistic. You've got to go to work and take care of the activities of daily life, etc. But you should "regularly" be doing something. It should fit into your schedule. And don't forget money!

Peaches: Money? I give at Mass.

Me: That's just the start. You could also donate to the service you're doing: the soup kitchen, those nuns you work with, etc. Also, you need a disaster plan.

Peaches: What's that?

Me: Like when you see on the news a tornado in Kentucky or a Tsunami in Banda Ache, what do you do? Say, "Oh, well! Too bad. What's for dinner?" and turn the channel?! (James 2:15-16).

Peaches: So, what do you do, Deke?

Me: If it's an overseas disaster, I go online and use my credit card to make a donation to Catholic Relief Services (CRS). It's a highly rated charity so you know the money is going where it's supposed to.

Peaches: Makes sense. The Church is everywhere before, during and after disasters so they know the players on the ground! What about in the USA?

Me: Same thing for the same reasons only I send it to Catholic Charities because they take care of disasters here. CRS does international work.

Peaches: So, you're ready!

Me: Yup, Jesus said to give to everybody who asks (Luke 6:30).

Peaches: When's the last time you did a work of mercy, Deacon?

Me: Doing one right now. I'm talking to you! Visit the imprisoned!

Peaches: You're slippery, Deke!

Me: Hey, I'm ugly – not stupid!

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

Our call to become holy

Most of us are satisfied to get through life without too many problems. But God created us for fullness of life with him, which is a pretty wonderful thing. Pope Francis continually calls us to remember and live this truth.

Pope Francis surprised many people last year by recommending that Catholics read *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (1265 – 1321). He used the opportunity of the seven hundredth anniversary of Dante's death to encourage Catholics to accept the call to become holy people.

A great calling. The goal of our lives on this earth is to become like Christ—quite a calling. While many of us are happy just to get by, Jesus tells us that he came so that we might “have life and life to the full” (John 10:10). There is quite a contrast between “getting by” and “life to the full”!

Living life to the full is called by the great Saints our “divinization.” Catholic and Orthodox Christians (and among some other Christians as well) understand that by grace we are called to become like Christ, or “little Christs.” And so, Pope Francis wrote that *The Divine Comedy* shows “all those who seek answers to their deepest questions and [who] wish to live their lives to the full, [about] purposefully undertaking their own journey of life and faith” (Splendor, 9).

The Divine Comedy can help you on your journey. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is divided into three books: *The Inferno*, on Hell; *Purgatorio* on Purgatory; *Paradiso* on Heaven. Written in Italian, there are a number of good English translations, as well as translations into other languages.

You can start at the beginning of *The Divine Comedy* and work your way through it. That is challenging and is best done with other readers. Some suggest starting with *Paradiso*, the end, but the goal. Below are some thoughts on the three books, highlighting what I found most interesting in each.

Hell: avoid it. The point of the *Inferno* is that we are punished for our sin, because sin makes us rebel against God. I found cantos 33 and 34 the most interesting in this book. They focus on the deepest and most desolate part of hell, reserved for the worst sin. Those sins are fraud and treachery, where we turn against people who have supported and helped us, but we have harmed them.

Those in this deep pit of hell have destroyed love, the great

gift of God for us. The love of God is extinguished and only freezing cold exists. Satan, the deceiver of the brethren (see Revelation 12:9), is even frozen in a great lake of ice. No fire and brimstone in this deepest part of hell.



Purgatory: God's gift to us. The Church understands that Purgatory is a gift from God. This is where people who have imperfectly repented for their sin while on earth are given another chance to be purified, so they can stand sinless before the pure and holy God in heaven. Protestants rejected this teaching in the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and in so doing rejected this gift.

As we climb the mountain of Purgatory, we repent of our sin and turn toward the light of God. Our steps become lighter and our walk faster as the weight and burden of sin is reduced on us.

Heaven: Where we all want to end up. Dante writes that in heaven, we stand in the light of God, with our unique individual identities remaining. All are moved and made lively by “The Love that moves the sun and the other stars” (*Paradise*, 33, 145). Aided by this divine love, we are brought back to God.

Some of the effort is our own, based on living our lives in a way that, simply put, loves God and our neighbor. That is the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39)! We will be with all the wonderful great Saints who have come before us, and are still to come. Dante points out Blessed Mary, our Mother. And he points out many Saints before him such as Saints Benedict, Dominic, and Bonaventure. And since the time Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy* 700 years ago, there are many more Saints.

Jesus is calling you. Don't say heaven isn't for you. It is. This gift is for all of us, even as you now face confinement for your offenses. Dante just might be a good companion on your journey.

As we wrote in the last issue, if you give Dante a try, write to us and let us know. If we hear some good things, we will have a third article in this series. And we will send your responses to the Papal Nuncio in Washington, and ask him to send them to Pope Francis.

This is the second article on Dante.

~ Anthony Bosnick

Life is a journey continued from page 2

on your Journey.” It is English on one side and Spanish on the reverse side. It can be downloaded at: www.pemdc.org/SpiritualPractices.

Also, consider our free pamphlet “How to Pray the Rosary.” It is a handy pamphlet that teaches people how to say the very helpful prayer of the Rosary. It is also in English and Spanish. It can be downloaded at www.pemdc.org/Rosarypamphlet.

Both of these pamphlets can be printed on 8.5" X 11" paper, and folded into an easy-to-use trifold pamphlet. Keep one for yourself and give to others.

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.

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