

# THIS DAY

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A Newsletter  
Published by  
**DISMAS MINISTRY**  
A National Catholic  
Outreach for Inmates,  
Victims, Their Families,  
Those Released from Prison  
and the Community.

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## Floating Prisons

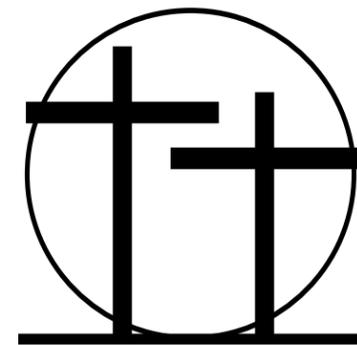
I am a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, originally trained in Emmitsburg, Maryland but now stationed in the west in Gallup, New Mexico for prison ministry here and in Grants, New Mexico.

St. Vincent de Paul had a great concern for the poor of the times in France. In those days of the 1600s prisoners were housed in the floating prisons. Such prisoners were known as galley slaves and rowed the ships of trade for France. They came to port occasionally if they survived their time aboard the ships, when prisoners were added or taken off.

Temporarily they were housed in Paris. There St. Vincent had the Daughters bring them food and a change of clothing either onto the ship or in the prison. He told us to be very patient and understanding.

I am honored to be in this ministry. Times have changed and there are no ships out here, but there sure are prisoners. The ministry that I do has such a marvelous effect on the inmates who feel so abandoned by family and God.

Your partner in prayer with St. Dismas, Sr. Elizabeth



Remember me.  
Luke 23:42

### The Story of St. Dismas

One of the criminals hanging in crucifixion said: "We are only paying the price for what we have done, but this man has done nothing wrong."

He then said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter upon your reign."

And Jesus replied, "I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23: 39-43



### The Power of Prayer

*That prayer has great power which a person makes with all her might.*

*It makes a sour heart sweet, a sad heart merry, a poor heart rich, a foolish heart wise, a timid heart brave, a sick hear well, a blind heart full of sight, a cold heart ardent.*

*It draws down the great God into the little heart, it drives the hungry soul up into the fullness of God, it brings together two loves, God and the soul, in a wondrous place where they speak much of love.*

Mechthild of Magdeberg

# This Day

Advent-Christmas

2012

A Newsletter Published by Dismas Ministry

A National Catholic Outreach for Inmates, Victims, their Families, and the Community.

## A New Catholic Prayer Study for Inmates

Dismas Ministry recently launched a new inmate correspondence course called **Pray Always-A Catholic Prayer Study for Inmates**. Like the ministry's two other courses, this unique course is designed especially for Catholic inmates who want to learn more about their own faith tradition and be able to defend it against challenges from prison volunteers, staff and fellow inmates.



The course includes a series of three resource books that together provide a comprehensive review of how and why Catholics pray. The first book, *Part 1: Prayer in the Old Testament*, includes the lives of the great women and men of ancient Israel and examples of how they prayed. This first part presents the background for the next book, *Part 2: Prayer in the New Testament*. In this part of the course, Jesus, Mary, the disciples and other people of Jesus' ministry are presented as models of prayer. How the psalms and temple worship influenced Christian prayer are explored.

*Part 3: Prayer in the Catholic Tradition* explores how Catholics have prayed from early to modern times. Inmates explore the Church's rich treasury of prayer, including *lectio divina*, Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican, Ignatian traditions, all ways that individuals and groups have prayed through the centuries, and how the entire Church offers its official prayer which includes the *Eucharistic Liturgy*, and the *Liturgy of the Hours*.

As an example, inmates learn that the *sign of the cross*, which non-Catholics typically reject, is an ancient customs that began with the early Christians. Tertullian (160-225 A.D.) described the long standing tradition in *De Corona Militis*: "At every going in and out, when we put on our clothes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign." St. Augustine adds: "Everything that is to be made holy is consecrated by the sign of our Lord's cross" (*Sermo LXXXI*).

# Hearing from Christ's Body behind bars...

## Chaplains and Ministries

"Thank you so much for your donation of large print Bibles. They arrived today and you should see how happy the Catholic community is. We presently have 30 members of the Catholic community and they are steadily growing in numbers." Chaplain (Missouri)

"Once again I bring you the heartfelt thanks of many, many women at the Correctional Institute for Women. We received your most recent box of 'Pray in the Spirit' prayer books, and they're going like hot cakes! I'm even getting requests from women who aren't Catholic—in an environment which is still very skeptical of Catholicism. The value of your ministry is immeasurable. We are blessed and deeply grateful to be on the receiving end of your good works. We pray for you each Saturday when our Catholic community gathers for Eucharist. May you be blessed in abundance and the good that you do be multiplied beyond measure." Chaplain (Louisiana)

"Can you imagine how happy you made us today? Thank you for the generous gift of 50 New Testaments in Spanish, the pamphlets on 'Why Read the Bible' and 50 prayer books. We feel like we've struck a gold mine! God bless you in your work." Chaplain (Arizona)

"Another wonderful surprise to receive the shipment of 100 'Pray in the Spirit' and 100 'Oren en Espiritu' prayer books. There is such a turn over of inmates, however, there are four men who requested sacramental preparation. The Holy Spirit is certainly present in this facility. The people are hungry for prayer and sharing scripture which gives the ministry volunteers a 'God high' on the way home!" Ministry Coordinator (Texas)



## Inmates

"I love the prayer book for inmates you sent me! And, I can't wait to get my first Bible study from you I am a new Catholic, and it is such a blessing to have someone like you minister to me. God bless you!" Inmate

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the service you provide for prisoners. When I received the packet you sent I was like a kid who just got a present. Thank you for helping me get closer to God. May your blessings be many." Inmate

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you have done for us here. You have truly blessed us! This morning before Mass we passed out the Bibles and prayer books, and the chaplain gave out the rosaries. Everyone was so happy to receive these gifts. I can't tell you enough how truly thankful we all are. You have blessed us beyond what I had imagined. We have placed Dismas Ministry on our list of weekly Mass prayer intentions and you will also remain in my personal prayers. You truly are a blessing to many prisoners, many of whom at one point in their lives had lost their faith and trust in God and man. But through the kindness and love shown to them by people such as yourselves, they have regained hope and faith, changes their lives and given themselves to serving our Lord." Inmate

"I am in a facility where out of 1000 inmates only 15 of us attend Catholic Bible study and Mass. I received the Bible, catechism and prayer book you sent and I can't thank you enough. A lot of us have no one on the outside and no money coming in so we can't afford to buy these things. Your ministry has helped me to not lose faith and once I've done my sentence I will do my best in passing on the gift." Inmate

## Thank you for Your Prayers



Dear Friends,

Dismas Ministry is developing a prison ministry training resource called "Messengers of Hope." At a regional prison ministry gathering recently I shared how we serve as messengers of hope because we have experienced what the Gospel means to us personally, how our weakness and God's mercy are actually the stuff of hope. We live by hope, hope that God will never lose patience with our mistakes and weakness. Based on our own experience we are able to bring hope to inmates who often have so little of it. The saying "There but for the grace of God go I" is especially true when reaching out to the incarcerated. We have all sinned, but their sins are more public and punishable by the state.

Although all of us, locked up or free, must take responsibility for our decisions and actions, there are circumstances in the lives of many inmates that would curdle your blood, or at least give a greater understanding as to why they made poor decisions. Some time ago I participated in a circle of victims, offenders and volunteers at a local prison as part of a restorative justice program. As I sized up the inmates sitting across from me, I eyed one man who seemed to have a very hard shell. I thought, "He is not going to share—he is too hard and resistant." Later, as the circle experience progressed and he had witnessed the sharing of the others he finally began to speak tearfully as he became aware of the effects of his crime on others like the ones gathered. At that point, the prison social worker next to me whispered in my ear, "You would not believe the horrific experiences he had as a child that are recorded in his file." Again I thought, "There but for all the graces I received go I — the loving parents, the faith and goodness of my extended family, the sound Catholic education and career opportunities that were the record of my life".

When grace occurs, in a victim-offender circle, in a study course that opens the treasury of faith

## A Memorial Gift

Honor the memory of a loved one or honor a special person with a gift in their name to our ministry.

Contact Dismas Ministry and request a *Memorial* folder. Then fill it out and give to whomever you wish. Send your gift to support the work of Dismas Ministry as you honor the person you name.

To request a *Memorial* folder write to:

**Dismas Ministry**  
PO Box 070363  
Milwaukee, WI 53207

or email:  
**dismas@dismasministry.org**

for an inmate for the first time, it is the moment when we realize our hope is anchored in the Infinite Love and Mercy that is there for us always. That was the grace experienced by Dismas dying next to Jesus.

It is a great joy for those in ministry to realize that "The Holy Spirit is certainly present in this facility" as the quote says on the opposite page. We are called to recognize and celebrate this joy as Jesus reminds us in two parables, *the lost sheep* and *the lost coin*. Both end with the shepherd and the woman calling together their neighbors and saying, "Rejoice with me because I have found what was lost." We are calling you to share our joy.

As we celebrate this wondrous season of joy, let us also recall the words of the carol, "O Holy Night" in which we sing "He appeared and the soul felt its worth." Please know, dear friends, your own worth, and how much strength and joy your prayers give us and the inmates we serve. You remain always in our prayers.

In the blessed hope and joy of this season,



Ron Zeilinger, Director