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*A Newsletter
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 Dismas Ministry
 A National Catholic
 Outreach for Inmates,
 Victims, their Families,
 the Released from Prison,
 and for the Community*

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“A national Catholic ministry supporting the spiritual needs of prisoners.”

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In his brief homily, the Pope noted that even though Jesus knew his hour had come and that he would be “betrayed and handed over” by Judas, he still chose to love.

“He who was the head, who was God. He washed the feet of his disciples,” *he said, explaining that washing the feet of guests was a custom at that time. Since there were no paved streets, people would frequently arrive full of dust. According to the custom, “the slaves did this,” he said, adding that “Jesus knew and he did it.”*

Pointing to how Peter in the Gospel initially doesn’t want Jesus, the Master, to stoop and wash his feet, Pope Francis said that in the moment Jesus explained “*that he came into the world to serve and to serve us. To make himself a slave for us. To love until the end.*”

The Pope said that although the Pope is the head of the earthly Church, the true head of the Church is Jesus: “*The Pope is only the figure of Jesus and I would like to do the same that he did and the priest washes the feet of his faithful.*” Recalling the Gospel scene where the disciples were fighting among themselves about who was the greatest the Pope said, “*Whoever is greatest must do the work of a slave,*”

On that occasion, “*Jesus said: whoever wants to be the most important must make himself the smallest,*” the Pope said, adding that “*all of us are poor, but he loves us as we are.*” The washing of the feet, he said, is not “*a folk ceremony.*” Rather, it is “*an act to remember what Jesus did. Let us think of the love of God alone today.*”

Rome, Italy, Apr 13, 2017 (Catholic News Agency)



The Story of Saint Dismas the Good Thief

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

Show God’s love even behind bars, Pope Francis tells prisoners

As Pope Francis washed the feet of prisoners, he told them that God is someone who loves until the end. He urged them to imitate this love even while in prison.

“Having loved his people who were in the world, he loved them to the end. God loves like this, to the end,” the Pope said. “He gives life to each one of us and he boasts of this because he has love, and to love until the end isn’t easy. We are all sinners and we all have limits and defects,” he said. “While we all know how to love, we are not like God who loves without looking at the consequences.”



He encouraged the prisoners to imitate the love Jesus showed in washing the feet of his disciples, saying they didn’t need to get up and take their shoes off, but “*if you can act as a help, do a service, here in prison, do it. Because this is love, it’s like washing the feet.*”

Pope Francis visited the maximum security facility of Paliano prison in the south of Rome. After arriving, Pope Francis met with the prisoners before celebrating the Mass that marks Christ’s Last Supper with his disciples. During the celebration, the Pope washed the feet of 12 inmates. Three of these were women and one was a Muslim who was baptized in June. They are serving sentences for various crimes. And apart from two who have life sentences, the rest are expected to be released between 2019 and 2073. Two of them, a man and a woman, were from solitary confinement. The Pope met with these two privately just before he celebrated Mass. He also greeted each inmate personally.

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From Christ's Body Behind Bars

From Chaplains and Ministries...

Dear Dismas Ministry Team,

I just wanted to write and let you know that we received the Bibles you sent for our Catholic population here at the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, PA, and we can't begin to thank you enough! They are BEAUTIFUL, and you can be assured that they will be placed in the hands of as many of our Catholic inmates as possible and will be theirs upon their release or transfer. As part of the Catholic Chaplaincy here at the jail, it is our desire to share the most powerful weapon of all – the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God – Jesus Himself – who comes to us in the Scriptures and in the Eucharist and whom we are invited to call forth from every human heart. On behalf of the whole Chaplaincy Staff, our deepest gratitude to you and your Ministry Team for providing our Catholic inmates with the opportunity to be cleansed by the Word of God. We pray for you and for the GIFT OF YOUR MINISTRY which provides such a precious and life-changing gift for souls most in need of God's mercy, light, and love. You are truly a gift to us and to all those we serve and we thank you again. Together in His Ministry of Mercy, Hope and Deepest Freedom in the Word of God.

Jean Marie, county jail Catholic coordinator, Pennsylvania

I wanted to write a quick thank you, on behalf of the Chaplain's department here from the Federal Detention Center. Thank you very much for your more than kind donation of 240 "Oraciones Catolicas" prayer booklets. That was very generous. The men here in detention are enjoying these books and are requesting them daily! Again thank you very much for making that possible. God Bless.

Briana, Federal Detention Center, Arizona



From Prisoners...

The following are some inmate prayer requests shared by jail volunteer and prayer union member Dave, Rock Hill, NC

I received all of your gifts. What a blessing to have these things to read and to remain strong in faith and word and belief because of the kind hearts of people like you.

Ronnie, Wisconsin prisoner

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to learn about the Bible. This has been one of the best experiences of my life. I have been enriched with knowledge and uplifted spirit. I hope to score well on my enclosed answer sheets.

Roxanne, Kentucky prisoner

The nice catholic prayer book and bible and prayer card help keep me focus on the Lord. I read them ever day. I love the Lord. Thanks.

Bruce, Texas prisoner

Thanks for your help in studying my faith. I need material to pray with and spend time in the spirit with my Lord. I look forward to completing all of your courses.

Mikel, New Hampshire prisoner

I appreciate and am thankful for your Ministry. Please find attached my 2 test pages for your study "God With Us" – Part 3. Thank you for providing it for me. Also, thank you very much for the Liturgy of the Hours. I am grateful that you provided it for me!

Brenda, Oklahoma prisoner

From the Director

Dear Prayer Partners,

I'd like to share the following words that we received from a prisoner in North Carolina recently:

"The Lord is really answering my prayers. Pray for me to be the father God called me to be, and bring my kids back into my life. We've grown apart because of my problems with drugs, which I am overcoming thanks to Jesus. I am praying for God to give me a new start and a new life in Him and for Him to reveal to me his plan for my life. Before I didn't even know what to pray for now God tells me. Thank you."

His words reminded me of Saint Paul's comments on prayer:

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be put into words." Romans 8:26

The Franciscan Sisters that taught me in elementary school here in Wisconsin were also working in Mississippi. I clearly recall one of these sisters speaking to our 8th grade class about her work in the south and how she was impressed by the prayerful example of an old man. She often saw him sitting in the back of church without a prayer book or any prayers that she could hear him say. One day she asked him what he was doing and he replied, *"I just look at Him and He looks at me."*

I had just two tomato plants in my back yard this summer and they did not do well. I could not blame the weather because friends had bumper crops. In fact my plants only produced two green tomatoes that never ripened, because they were snatched early and eaten by some very hungry squirrels. The reason the plants did not do well was because I planted them along a fence that shaded them most of the day. They got no direct sunlight until late in the afternoon and this was not enough sunlight for them to thrive and produce.

My spiritual life is like those unproductive tomato plants if I do not allow myself to be in God's presence and soak up His light and grace. It is true that I am in God's presence all the time since my very existence depends on Him. *"We live and move and have our being in him"* (Acts 7:28). But in order for me to grow spiritually I also need to be consciously aware of Him and prayerfully put myself in His presence. Like the old man in Mississippi, I do not have to say any special words or use a particular prayer book. Like the prisoner who wrote, *"God is teaching me what to pray for"* I can allow God to show me his will and his plan for my own life and for the work of this national prison outreach – Dismas Ministry.

We are so deeply grateful for your prayers for this ministry-you are *the wind beneath our wings*, as the song goes. Please continue to join your prayers with mine and with all the other members of our Union of Prayer, as we place ourselves in God's life-giving and guiding presence, whether with words or without words – with groanings beyond words.



Ron Zeilinger
Ron Zeilinger

