

Men's Lenten Camping Retreat 2025:

Growing in the Virtue of Penance

Talk 1: What is Penance and How to Hate and Sorrow over Sin

Method:

- *Talk 1: What Penance is*
- *Talk 2: How it fits into the Spiritual Life*
- *Talk 3: Ways to Practice Penance*

Terms:

- **Virtue of Penance:** the habit of turning away from and atoning for sin readily, effectively, and with delight
- **Sacrament of Penance:** the sacrament that bestows powerful graces to turn away from and atone for sin
- **Acts of Penance:** specific actions that repair the damage caused by sin
- **Repentance vs. Penance:** they are different ways to translate the same Greek words, but, for some, repentance has a connotation of being more passive and interior while penance has a connotation of being more active and to be accomplished
- **Mortification:** killing whatever is disordered within us (acts of mortification can be done as penances)
- **“Sacrifices”:** this term is used in many ways, but when we talk about “making a sacrifice for someone” or “praying and sacrificing for an intention” we mean an act of penance done on behalf of another person as a type of intercession for them.

Definition:

Supernatural Virtue connected to Justice

Four Acts:

- **Hate Sin:** (only by ever increasing light of grace could we begin to see the extent of sin)
- **Sorrow for Sin:** (until we are like Our Lady of Sorrows our contrition will be incomplete)
- **Avoid Sin:** (enemy territory rescue mission, full vigilance, highest stakes, heroic effort)
- **Make Reparation for Sin:** (long to repair God's honor, relationships, the order in our soul, other evil effects of our sin)

Christian Penance:

- **Of Love:** If penance is not done for the love of God and for His glory, it is not Christian penance
 - if I give my body to the flames but have not love I am nothing but a sounding gong or a clashing cymbal
- **In Christ:** Our penance has supernatural value only if it is the continuation of Christ's perfect reparation accomplished on the Cross mystically extended to us as a part of His Mystical Body and if it is God Himself moving us by His Spirit through the divine nature that has been infused into our souls through sanctifying grace
 - it is now not I who live but Christ, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me
- **Not worshippers of Baal:** We are not to be like those who cut their arms to receive demonic favor. God is not sadistic. The pain has no value in itself, it is the love that proves and manifests itself in the flames of suffering that pleases God and atones for our sins. Job put Satan to shame by his holy suffering.

Motivations for Practicing Penance:

- Restoring God's honor
- You can pay it off!!!! (St. Catherine of Genoa)
- You will pay it off the easy way or the hard way
- Penance transforms you
- The Way of the Cross (No Penance? Not Christian!)
- Conversion and Salvation for others

Talk 2: How to Grow in Penance

Humility (being real about self and God)

Without me you can do nothing

Every good gift is from above

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble

Grace (through Petition, Sacraments, and Good Works)

Petition:

If you ask, you will receive

If you who are evil give good things to your children

We know that whenever we ask for anything according to His will He hears us, and because we know if

...if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we

ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. -1 John 5:14-15

Sacraments:

He who eats this bread shall have everlasting life

He whose sins you forgive are forgiven

Good Works:

God will never be outdone in generosity

If you give even a drink of water in my Name

Understanding (Mental Prayer and Formation)

I am the Light of the World -John 8:12

Eternal Life is this to know God and Jesus who He sent -John 17:3

Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear -Matt 9:16

Desire (God and what leads to God)

Delight yourself in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart

Resolution (Glorify God and what leads to glorifying Him)

Good for food, delight to the eyes, desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate

Action (Prayer, Sacraments, Penance, Good Works, Avoid Sin)

Pray without ceasing

Take this all of you and eat of it

Repent and believe!

He who listens to my words and does them is like a wise man who build on rock

Be doers of the Word and not only hearers

If you love me you will keep my commandments

Failure (Self Love, Willful Blindness, Hardened Heart, not mistakes, weaknesses, etc.)

Repentance

Have mercy on me a sinner

Humility

Grace

Etc.

Talk 3: A Practical Guide for Making Reparation

Sentiments of Penance

Besides acts of penance, there are certain sentiments of penance that have atoning value.

- Sorrowful Remembrance
- Humiliation
- Shame - Self-Accusation
- Fear - Distrust of Self

Works of Penance

Acts of Penance make reparation/atonement/expiation for our sins. These three terms refer to the same thing although with a different emphasis.

- Reparation → emphasizes repairing the damage done by sin
- Atonement → emphasizes restoring the relationship ruptured by sin (at-one-ment)
- Expiation → emphasizes the taking away of debt (to propitiate/atonement fully)
- Propitiation → to make favorable
- Satisfaction → to do enough to satisfy (justice)
- Restitution →
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Every act of penance seems light when we remember that we are fugitives from Hell or fugitives from Purgatory. If the discomfort we experience from our penance ended up being the sum total of just punishment the Lord gave us for our sins, we ought to feel like it was a light punishment indeed.

1 - Hardships and Trials

The Best Penances are Handpicked by God = Trials of the Day

- Acceptance of Trials
 - Submissive: I submit to this trial as if it were handpicked by God
 - Willing: I voluntarily accept this trial as if I had chosen it myself
 - Joyful: I rejoice in the goods that this penance will accomplish
- Examples
 - Being Mistreated (insults, betrayal, rudeness, persecution, humiliation)
 - St. Therese of Lisieux getting splashed by dishwater by a careless sister
 - Sickness, Injury, Physical Discomfort, or Accidents
 - St. Teresa of Avila's Wagon Stuck in the Mud
 - Delays and Disappointments (traffic, plans interfered with)
 - St. Andre Bessette having to shut down the project he worked so hard for on the night before it opened
 - Failure, Misfortune
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2 - Duty and Obedience

Since these are obligations, they are more important than any penances that we choose for ourselves

- Duty Should be Done...
 - With a Spirit of Penance
 - With a Spirit of Reparation/Expiation/Atonement
 - In a Christian Manner
 - For God's Sake
- Obedience
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- Examples
 - Chores: Cooking, Cleaning, Mowing the Lawn, etc.
 - Work Responsibilities: Forms, Projects, Meetings, etc.
 - Taking Care of Children: Changing Diapers, Disciplining, etc.

3 - Fasting and Almsgiving

- Fasting Battles Our Craving for Pleasures (cause of countless sins)
- Fasting is well attested to in the Bible as a powerful form of penance
 - Jonah 3:6-10: ...let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, or drink water... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it.
 - Joel 2:12-13: "Yet even now," says the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.
- Almsgiving is also singled out in the Bible as a powerful act of penance
 - Tobit 12:9: For almsgiving saves from death, and purges away every sin
- Works of Mercy
 - Almsgiving as Works of Mercy (all of the works of mercy are a type of almsgiving according to St. Thomas Aquinas)
 - Material Almsgiving has a double benefit because it is both a work of mercy and a privation
 - Superiority of Spiritual Almsgiving
- God Won't be Outdone in Generosity

4 - Mortifications

All Mortifications (actions that put to death anything disordered in our faculties) can be done as acts of penance (actions that make reparation for sin) if we do them with this intention (i.e. making reparation for our sins).

There are Two Ways to Mortify our Faculties:

- (1) Depriving them of what they Like
- (2) Inflicting on them what they Dislike

● Mortification of the Body in General

- Modesty of Dress (not showy, not scandalous, not negligent, dignified, simple, fitting, appropriate)
- Good Comportment (How we carry ourselves, our mannerisms, our gestures, our posture, etc. → calm, dignified, self-controlled, good posture, easy and natural carriage of the body, avoiding slouching/leaning, and avoiding abrupt/rude movements)
- Extraordinary Mortifications
 - *Passive Discomfort*: Pebble in Shoe, Tight Belt, Tight Watch, Purposeful Thirst (Fatima Children), Sack Cloth, Waist Chains, Hairshirt/Cilice, Crown of Thorns (St. Rose of Lima)
 - *Active Discomfort*: The Discipline, Uncomfortable/Painful Pressure (e.g. holding a rosary tight during prayer)
 - *Sleeping*: No Pillow, Board Bed, No Blanket
 - *Posture*: Kneeling during Prayer, Arms Outstretched, Knees Together (St. Therese), Don't Use Backrest of Chair
 - *Temperature*: Cold Shower, No A/C or Heater in Car, No Jacket, No Umbrella in rain,
 - *Lifestyle*: Voluntary Poverty, Pilgrimage

● Mortification of External Senses: Sight, Hearing & Speech, Taste, Touch, Smell

- **Sight**
 - Custody of the Eyes: Avoiding Dangerous Sights (e.g. Romantic, Sexual, Violent, Horror, Occult, Worldly)
 - Do not look intently at a virgin, lest you stumble and incur penalties for her. - Sirach 9:5
 - Gazing Upon the Good: Beauty of Creation, Holy Images, Holy Locations, Holy Objects, Eucharistic Adoration
 - Deprivation:
 - Wearing a blindfold for a time, making a habit of looking down at the ground (St. Charbel)
 - No lights (St. Therese went without a lantern when a sister forgot to provide one), not using lights after sundown
- **Hearing & Speech**
 - Taming the Tongue (Avoiding Blasphemy, Cursing, Profanity, Sinful Gossip, Worldly Gossip, Lying, Foolishness, etc.)
 - Avoiding Listening to Evil (Offensive Conversations, Offensive Music, Blasphemies, Unwholesome Entertainment)
 - Edifying Words (look for opportune moments, but don't force it or become a burden by poorly timed seriousness)
 - Holy Silence (avoid speaking, reduce noise in the environment, pursue periods of total silence)
 - No radio while driving
 - Speak only when necessary
 - Fasting from the News, Social Media, Podcasts, Music
 - Penitential Prayers
 - Morning Offering (Offers every prayer, suffering, joy, and sorrow in the day as reparation)
 - Fatima Prayers of Reparation
 - I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love Thee. And I ask pardon for all those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love Thee. Amen.
 - O Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the most precious Body, Blood...
 - O Jesus, it is for the love of Thee, in reparation for the offences committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for the conversion of poor sinners.
 - Divine Mercy Chaplet (...in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world)
 - Recite Penitential Psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143)
 - The Divine Praises (restores honor that has been denied God)
 - Other Prayers offered in reparation for sin (e.g. Rosary)
- **Taste** (battling gluttony)
 - Quality: No Salt, Bell Peppers, Ashes, Fasting from Certain Foods (meat, sweets, alcohol, etc.)
 - Quantity: No Seconds, Smaller Portions, Leave the Meal Hungry
 - Timing: Count Before Eating, Be Last to Dish Up, No Snacks, Fast from Daybreak until Receiving Communion
 - Manner: Don't Eat Hastily or Rudely
 - Feeding the Hungry: Saving a Choice Portion of Your Food to Give as Alms, Trading for Black Bread (St. John Bosco)
- **Touch** (battling lust)
 - Deprivation: Avoiding Pleasurable Touches that Could Lead to Danger, Giving up small comforts of the body
 - Painful Touch:
 - Rolling in the snow during temptation (St. Francis)
 - Thorn bush during intense temptation (St. Benedict)
- **Smell**
 - Moderation of Perfumes
 - Bearing Foul Odors without Complaint

● Mortification of Internal Senses: Imagination and Memory

- Expel Idle Thoughts (Avoid lustful, uncharitable, materialistic, disturbing, time wasting thoughts/imaginings, avoid frequent day-dreaming)
 - Focus on the Duties of the Moment (Focusing well on work, study, relationships, ordinary occupations, etc.)
- Use Imagination to Nourish the Mind (connecting truth in beautiful similes, rich imagery, etc.)
 - Mental Prayer: Imaginative Prayer (St. Ignatius of Loyola)
- Grace to Forget (asking God to protect you from evil images/memories that you have already been exposed to)

● Mortification of the Passions

- Custody of the Mind: thoughts lead to desires and actions either for good or for evil
 - Overpower Thoughts with Stronger Thoughts: pick up a book, turn your mind to something that really interests you, etc.)
 - Linking Thoughts: the power of thoughts grows when they are linked (sin as a lie, as ingratitude, as adultery, as soul poison, etc.)
 - A Motto: gather your most motivating sentiments and thoughts together and express them with a motto to focus you.
 - Give me souls, and take away the rest! (St. John Bosco)
 - For the Greater Glory of God (St. Ignatius of Loyola)
 - To the Heights! (Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati)
- Custody of the Passions:
 - Inhibit the Passions
 - Avoid Exterior Actions (acting out of our disordered passion will strengthen it)
 - Forgetting the Object of the Passion
 - Diversion (study, interests, recreation, social situations, conversations, walks, etc.)
 - Considerations (natural consequences: present consequences, future consequences, possible attachments, possible dangers; supernatural consequences: block to sanctity, endangers salvation, scandal to others, etc.)
 - Flee (time to cool)
 - Oppose
 - Perform Contrary Actions (dislike someone → seek their favor, too affectionate → courteous indifference)
- Directing the Passions:
 - Mental Prayer (Meditation): this prayer deepens our convictions, stirs our affections, strengthens our resolve, and moves us to action in accord with the ideal use of each passion in the Christian life (below)
 - *Love/Joy*: family, holy friendship, Our Lord
 - *Hate/Aversion*: sin, vice, occasions of sin, temptations, Satan
 - *Desire*: honoring family, country, becoming a saint, doing great things for God
 - *Sadness*: sweet resignation under trials, compassion for the suffering
 - *Hope*: trust in God
 - *Despair*: mistrust of self tempered by trust in God
 - *Fear*: sin, hell, fear of the Lord
 - *Anger*: just and holy indignation that strengthens us against evil
 - *Boldness*: eagerness to overcome great difficulties, obstacles, and dangers with God and for Him
- Moderating the Passions: excess in our passions wears us out, sustained effort will best secure spiritual progress
 - Submit to a Wise Spiritual Director and the Dictates of Christian Prudence:
 - Habitual Moderation: calm tranquility to avoid strain since it is a long road
 - Proper Rest: before a major endeavor we must allow ourselves a certain rest (curb holy ambitions and zeal)

● Mortification of the Intellect

- Ignorance
 - Study
- Curiosity
 - Study what is Profitable over what is Pleasurable
- Hastiness
 - Read Slowly
 - Study in order to Edify Self and Others
- Intellectual Pride
 - Docility to the Teachings of the Faith
 - Seek Truth not Victory
- Obstinacy of Judgment
 - Listen Attentively
 - Admit Whatever Truth can be Found in Opposing View
- Mental Prayer: Discursive Meditation (Method of St. Sulpice)

● Mortification of the Will

OBSTACLES TO A WELL ORDERED WILL AND THEIR REMEDIES

- Lack of Reflection
 - Reflect before Acting
- Over-Eagerness
 - Self-Possession
 - Self-Restraint
- Indifference
 - Build up Energies and Convictions to Act
- Fear of Failure
 - Fear not
- Human Respect
 - Dash Human Respect
- Bad Example
 - Imitate Christ
- Positive Means to Mortify the Will (*Mind, Will, and Grace* work together to strengthen the *Will*)
 - Mind: Furnishes the will with convictions
 - Will: Acts with
 - Decision
 - Firmness
 - Constancy
 - Grace: It is reassuring to the *Will* to remember *Grace* and the renewal of *Grace*
- Practices
 - Denying Our Will: letting someone else decide, choosing against our preferences,
 - Humiliation: Not defending ourselves a second time