

The Necessity of Penance and Conversion

All Sin Needs Atonement

“What am I to do, child of my heart, when my children turn from me? The false peace of this world lures them and in the end will destroy them. They think they have done enough in consecrating themselves to my Immaculate Heart. It is not enough. That which I ask for and is most important many have not given me. What I ask, have asked, and will continue to ask is reformation of life. There must be sanctification from within. ... Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them.” This is what Our Lady means when she speaks of reformation, renewal. It is this about which she is so concerned, namely, sanctification from within.

“My sweet child, unless my children reform their lives, they will suffer great persecution. If man himself will not take upon himself the penance necessary to atone for his sins and those of others, God in His justice will have to send upon him the punishment necessary to atone for his transgressions.”

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *The Diary*, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, OH, Pgs. 18, 16, 17)

The call to penance implies we acknowledge the reality of sin and that innate sense of justice that recognizes atonement is necessary. To deny and break free from the power of the flesh is to free our souls for the higher things of heaven, for the encounter with the living God who dwells in our inmost being. In humbling ourselves before God, confessing our sins and our need for forgiveness, we gain God's favor. Sacred Scripture constantly extols the virtue of humility and speaks of the delight God takes in the humble of heart. The First Covenant relates a history of sacrifices in atonement for sin with the blood of animals, but these sacrifices could only signify forgiveness and a more perfect sacrifice yet to come. The New Covenant speaks of God willing His beloved Son to take on the body of our flesh and to make a perfect immolation of Himself for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus is the unblemished Lamb laid on the altar of sacrifice, the Perfect Sacrifice offered once that would truly forgive our sins and end the need for any further sacrifice. The Church, the Mystical Christ, baptizes us into Christ's saving death and bids us lay our lives on His altar of sacrifice with Him, sharing in His redemptive mission for the salvation of souls. This Lenten season of 40 days reminds us of the purification of the desert experience, the 40 years the Chosen people wandered in the desert before they could enter the Promised Land. Stripped of all that is unnecessary and breaking asunder our idols, we learn to depend on God. When stepping away from the noise of the secular we can hear the sound of the Sacred which beckons from within.

Only in silence can we discern whose spirit beckons us: the spirit of Satan, the spirit of our disordered passions, or the Spirit of God. Since nothing impure can enter into the Presence of the All Holy One, penance is both necessary and purifying. Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai atoning for the people's sins. When God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh to announce: **“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed!”** the people heeded his message, put on the sackcloth and ashes of humility and repentance and were then spared the ***cup of God's judgment***. Jeremiah's call to Jerusalem and the kings and nations surrounding it to turn away from sin and back to God was not heeded; thus God commanded Jeremiah to deliver ***the cup of His wrath*** foretelling the destruction of

Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. His message, however, also held **a cup of blessing**, a promise that after 70 years of exile, God would bring a faithful remnant back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. The Old Testament is an ongoing story of God's Covenant with His people, His blessing and their rebellion, the call to repentance with the threat of judgment or promise of blessing in accordance with their obedience or refusal to obey the prophets God sent to save them. The prophet Joel declared:

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing ... (The New American Bible, Joel 2: 12-14.)

In the New Testament John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance with water, declaring the kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus, too, preached repentance and conversion and undertook a 40 day fast Himself, like Moses, to wrestle with the evil one before His mission of atonement for mankind's sins. When the Apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they preached: **"Do penance and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38) Constantly we are called by the Spirit to confront our sinfulness. If we have stained the white robe of our sacred Baptism, we are exhorted to wash it clean in the blood of the Lamb Who offers us **the cup of His Blood as the cup of salvation**.

Penance is both internal and external. Internal penance demands a hatred for sin and a determination to make amends for our sins. The Sacrament of Reconciliation makes that quite clear: the internal conversion, the external confession, a penance required, and the firm purpose of amendment. The internal penance must be reinforced with external penance to strengthen ourselves against future sin. Since we are social beings, our sins have a social dimension. Our penitence, then, must not only be personal but social as well.

External penance under the direction of **inner conversion** includes **accepting as the will of God the duties of our state in life and the burdens everyday life imposes upon us**. These, however, are not enough; we must make **voluntary acts of penance** in atonement for our own sins and for the sins of others in our families, our church, and in the whole of mankind, building up the body of Christ, in imitation of Him. The saints have modeled voluntary penance for us, both in its personal and in its social dimensions, but none can model the social dimension of atonement for the sins of others as did Jesus and His most holy Mother. Sinless as they themselves were and without need of any atonement, they embraced God's will and a lifetime of tribulations, fasting, and a terrible Passion unique to themselves, to atone for the sins of mankind. That atonement for us, however, does not excuse us from the need to claim our own personal atonement, achieved through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, both monetarily and in the form of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. That atonement by Jesus as our Redeemer and by His Mother as Co-redeemer with Him obliges us to imitate them in making atonement for the sins of others, especially those dear to us and those who would otherwise be lost because of their lack of faith.

In his December 20, 1759 encyclical **APPETENTE SACRO - ON THE SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGES OF FASTING**, Pope Clement XIII spoke of **the holy law of fasting** testified to by the law and the prophets, consecrated by Christ and handed on by the apostles and

preserved by the Church, calling us to mortification of the flesh and humiliation of the spirit in order to prepare us to enter ever more deeply into the Paschal Mystery.

...penance for the Christian man is not satisfied by withdrawing from sin, by detesting a past life badly lived, or by the sacramental confession of these same sins. Rather, penance also demands that we satisfy divine justice with fasting, almsgiving, prayer, and other works of the spiritual life. Every wrongdoing -- be it large or small -- is fittingly punished, either by the penitent or by a vengeful God. Therefore we cannot avoid God's punishment in any other way than by punishing ourselves. (Paragraph 3)

Although mindful of the prophetic voices of the past, the most prophetic voice of our time is that of the Mother of Jesus, Co-Redeemer with Him in the work of our salvation. Mary warns our sinful world, especially her children in America who honor her as the Immaculate Conception, that evil is enveloping the world and is particularly focused on America, both from within and without, because of her favor to us in her apparition as Our Lady of America. We must bring America back to God as the Supreme Authority over our land and we must restore Faith and Purity in our land. We must atone for the sins of our nation, especially for the 58+ million innocent babies murdered in the womb whose blood has been crying to heaven for justice. We must atone for the increased euthanizing of the mentally and physically impaired and the elderly, and for the injustices of the rich and powerful toward the poor and powerless. Is God's judgment upon us? Let us plead the blood of Jesus upon every person and nation on earth for their salvation so that the Precious Blood of Jesus be not shed in vain.

"Beloved daughter, the United States is a small one among nations, yet has it not been said that 'a little child shall lead them'? It is the United States that is to lead the world to peace, the peace of Christ, the peace that He brought with Him from heaven in His birth as man in the little town of Bethlehem. The Savior did not come to enter this world in a big city but a small town, again, a little one among many. Dear Child, unless the United States accepts and carries out faithfully the mandate given to it by heaven to lead the world to peace, there will come upon it and all nations a great havoc of war and incredible suffering. If, however, the United States is faithful to this mandate from heaven and yet fails in the pursuit of peace because the rest of the world will not accept or co-operate then the United States will not be burdened with the punishment about to fall."

I was afraid that the burden of leadership would be too great for the United States without some special help from heaven. Our Lady assured me that Michael and the whole army of Blessed Spirits will give their assistance at all times. As the Queen of Angels she has loving command over them and they accomplish whatever she wishes. This made me feel better and the fears that I had left me. (Diary, Pg. 38, November 22, 1980.)

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