

# Penance Is Necessary for Salvation



R. J. M. I.

By

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ;  
The Grace of the God of the Holy Catholic Church;  
The Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Our Lady of Good Counsel and Crusher of Heretics;  
The Protection of Saint Joseph, Patriarch of the Holy Family;  
The Guidance of the Good Saint Anne,  
Mother of Mary and Grandmother of God;  
The Intercession of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael;  
The Intercession of All the Angels and Saints;  
and the Cooperation of

Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

To Jesus through Mary

*Júdica me, Deus, et discérne causam meam de gente non sancta:  
ab hómine iníquo, et dolóso érué me*

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam



“I was clothed with haircloth. I humbled my soul with fasting,  
and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom.”  
(Psalm 34:13)

“And Jesus said to them: ...the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from  
them, and then they shall fast.”  
(Matthew 9:15)

“Those who govern the Church have rightly appointed times of penitence, that the Church in  
which the sins are remitted may be satisfied.”  
(St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, c. 65)

“I chastise my body and bring it into subjection  
lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.”  
(1 Corinthians 9:27)

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”  
(Colossians 3:5)

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”  
(2 Timothy 3:12)

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## Penance Is Necessary for Salvation

Penance consists of painful, laborious, or disagreeable things that are voluntary or involuntary and are endured for the true God and true faith. Even though God sometimes miraculously mitigates or eliminates the suffering, such as when martyrs feel no pain when being tortured, it still counts as penance because their intention was to suffer for God.

Just as the faithful during the Old Testament era had to endure voluntary and involuntary penances to be saved, so now during the New Testament era the faithful have to endure voluntary and involuntary penances to be saved.

Moses, Elias, and Jesus Christ did penance by miraculously fasting for forty days—miraculous, because they did not eat or drink anything!

“When I [Moses] went up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, and I continued in the mount forty days and nights, neither eating bread, nor drinking water...” (Deut. 9:9)

“And he [Elias] arose, and ate, and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb.” (3 Ki. 19:8)

“And Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for the space of forty days, and was tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days, and when they were ended he was hungry.” (Lk. 4:1-2)

Jesus told his followers, the Christians, that during certain days they must do penance by fasting:

“And Jesus said to them: Can the children of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.” (Mt. 9:15)

“When thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face that thou appear not to men to fast but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.” (Mt. 6:17-18)

From the birth of the Catholic Church when Christ died on the cross in AD 33, Christians, in imitation of Christ, have done penance by fasting and abstaining during Lent in preparation for Resurrection Day:

St. Athanasius, *Epistle 19*, 4th century: “8. ...I have been mindful, while I keep the feast, to give you also notice of the great feast of Easter, that so we may go up together, as it were, to Jerusalem and eat the Passover, not separately but as in one house; let us not, as sodden in water, water down the word of God; neither let us, as having broken its bones, destroy the commands of the Gospel. But as roasted with fire, with bitterness, being fervent in spirit, in fastings and watchings, with lying on the ground, let us keep it with penitence and thanksgiving. 9. [This year] we begin the fast of forty days on the sixth day of Phamenoth (3rd month, 2nd day); and having passed through that properly, with fasting and prayers, we may be able to attain to the holy day [Resurrection Day]. For he who neglects to observe the fast of forty days, as one who rashly and impurely treads on holy things, cannot celebrate the Easter festival. Further, let us put one another in remembrance and stimulate one another not to be negligent, and especially that we should fast those days, so that fasts may receive us in succession and we may rightly bring the feast to a close.”

## **Penance Is Only Available to Catholics and Inquirers**

Because penance is endured at the command of and for the love of the one true God and according to his reasons, penance is only available to those who believe in or invoke the one true God, Church, and faith, which during the New Testament era is the Catholic God, Church, and faith. Hence penance is only available to Catholics (the faithful and catechumens) and to inquirers who invoke the true God (that is, who do penance in the name of the true God and true faith).

While penance done by the faithful in a state of grace can remit venial sins and punishment due to sins, penance done by catechumens and inquirers cannot remit venial sins and punishment due to sins because they are outside the Catholic Church; and outside the Catholic Church there is no remission of sins nor salvation. Hence the penances done by catechumens and inquirers does not grant them sanctifying grace but does grant them assisting graces which enable them to convert, repent, and live a moral life in preparation for their entering the Catholic Church. And the prayers and penances catechumens and inquirers who invoke the true God offer for others can grant these others assisting graces but not sanctifying grace.

Penance, then, is not available to unbelievers who do so-called penance not in the name of the true God and true faith but in the name of a false god or false religion. All their good-intentioned sufferings that are painful, laborious, or disagreeable are not penance, even if they think they are, because they are offered to a false god or according to the dictates of a false religion. When God punishes them with the hope that they may convert, their involuntary sufferings are not penance but can move them to repent. For example, God punished Saul (a Christ-denying Jew) by throwing him off his horse and temporarily blinding him for murdering Christians, which caused Saul to repent, convert and thus become a Christian (Acts 9). He then went on to become St. Paul, one of the greatest and holiest of all Christians.

## **Penance Is Not Available to Believers Who Do Not Confess Their Mortal Sins**

Penance is also not available to Catholics who have committed mortal sins and have not sincerely confessed them. All of their good-intentioned sufferings are not penance and can only help to move them to repent and confess their mortal sins. And all of the sufferings that they endure as a direct consequence of their sins are not penance but a just punishment from God which can only serve to move them to repent. For example, the suffering a Catholic endures when a policeman shoots him in the act of stealing is not penance but a just punishment that can only serve to move him to repent.

Therefore let not the sinner who is punished for his sins think he is suffering for the sake of righteousness, as Job did. Not only will his sufferings not benefit him but they will also cause him to rest comfortably in his sins and hence remain obstinately on the road to perdition. Not until he acknowledges that his sufferings are punishments for his sins will his sufferings benefit him by helping to move him to repent. St. Peter says,

“Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you; but if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when his glory shall be revealed you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, you shall be blessed; for that which is of the honour, glory, and power of God, and that which is his Spirit, resteth upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a railer, or a coveter of other men’s things. But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in that name.” (1 Pt. 4:12-16)



“For this is thankworthy, if for conscience towards God a man endure sorrows, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if committing sin and being buffeted for it, you endure? But if doing well you suffer patiently, this is thankworthy before God.” (1 Pt. 2:19-20)

*Catholic Commentary* on 1 Pt. 2:19: “**Sorrows:** Take notice that this is praiseworthy, an effect of God’s grace, a thing acceptable to God, when you suffer injuries patiently. Whereas it is no glory, nothing that deserves commendation or reward either before God or man, to suffer for doing ill, as a malefactor who deserves punishments. But it is glorious and meritorious for you to suffer as Christians and for the Christian faith. Be not then ashamed to suffer in this manner. These sufferings are marks of God’s favour towards you, and you have the example of Christ, which you must imitate.”

St. Paul says it this way:

“For the sorrow that is according to God worketh repentance steadfast unto salvation, but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2 Cor. 7:10)

## Reasons Why Catholics Endure Penances

Catholics endure penances for the following reasons:

1. to obtain God’s mercy, favor, and protection for themselves or others
2. to remit venial sins
3. to expiate the punishment due to their forgiven sins
4. to protect them from falling into sin
5. to testify to their love of God when persecuted for the faith
6. to test their faith

### 1) To obtain God’s mercy, favor, and protection for themselves or others

Catholics do penance to obtain God’s mercy, favor, and protection for themselves or others.

King David did penance many times to obtain God’s protection from his enemies:

“But as for me, when they were troublesome to me I was clothed with haircloth. I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom.” (Ps. 34:13)

Daniel not only prayed but also did penance in order to obtain God’s mercy and favor, in this case to end the Israelites’ seventy-year exile in Babylon and to allow them to return to Israel to re-build the temple:

“The first year of his reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremias the prophet, that seventy years should be accomplished of the desolation of Jerusalem. And I set my face to the Lord my God to pray and make supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes... As I was yet speaking in prayer, behold the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, flying swiftly touched me at the time of the evening sacrifice. And he instructed me, and spoke to me, and said: O Daniel, I am now come forth to teach thee, and that thou mightest understand.” (Dan. 9:2-3, 22-23)

On another occasion Daniel prayed and did penance to obtain a favor from God, in this case to know future events regarding pagan kingdoms:

“In those days I Daniel mourned the days of three weeks. I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh nor wine entered into my mouth, neither was I anointed with ointment till the days of three weeks were accomplished... And he said to me: Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God, thy words have been heard and I am come for thy words.” (Dan. 10:2-3, 12)

Judith and other faithful Israelites did penance by an all-night vigil to obtain God’s protection against the Assyrians who were about to destroy them:

“And afterwards all the people were called together and they prayed all the night long within the church, desiring help of the God of Israel.” (Judi. 6:21)

Esther, Queen of Persia, in order to obtain God’s favor and protection for all the Jews, called for all the Jews to pray and do penance for three days before she risked her life by going before the king unsummoned to beg for the life of all the Jews who were under a death sentence from Aman, who was second in charge to the king:

“Esther sent to Mardochai in these words: Go and gather together all the Jews whom thou shalt find in Susan, and pray ye for me. Neither eat nor drink for three days and three nights, and I with my handmaids will fast in like manner; and then I will go in to the king, against the law, not being called, and expose myself to death and to danger.” (Est. 4:15-16)

The Ninivites not only prayed for God’s mercy to forgive them and turn away his punishment of utterly destroying them but also did penance:

“And Jonas began to enter into the city one day’s journey, and he cried and said: Yet forty days and Ninive shall be destroyed. And the men of Ninive believed in God, and they proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least. And the word came to the king of Ninive; and he rose up out of his throne, and cast away his robe from him, and was clothed in sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published in Ninive, from the mouth of the king and of his princes, saying: Let neither men nor beasts, oxen nor sheep, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water. And let men and beasts be covered with sackcloth and cry to the Lord with all their strength, and let them turn every one from his evil way and from the iniquity that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and forgive, and will turn away from his fierce anger, and we shall not perish? And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way; and God had mercy with regard to the evil which he had said that he would do to them, and he did it not.” (Jona. 3:4-10)

Jesus tells Catholics that certain devils can only be cast out by prayer and fasting. Here, then, is another example of the necessity of penance to obtain God’s help:

“Jesus rebuked him, and the devil went out of him, and the child was cured from that hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus secretly, and said: Why could not we cast him out? Jesus said to them ... This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.” (Mt. 17:17-18, 20)

The Apostles and other bishops, as well as those to be ordained, prayed and did penance to obtain God’s confirmation and blessing upon the men whom they were about to ordain as priests or bishops:

“And when they had ordained to them priests in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed.” (Acts 14:22)

“Now there were in the church, which was at Antioch, prophets and doctors, among whom was Barnabas, and Simon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manahen, who was the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them: Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have taken them. Then they, fasting and praying and imposing their hands upon them, sent them away.” (Acts 13:1-3)

And the *Apostolic Constitutions* teaches that God’s chosen people do penance to obtain God’s mercy, favor, and protection:

*Apostolic Constitutions*, 1st to 4th century: “For both Moses and Elias fasted forty days, and Daniel for ‘the days of three weeks did not eat desirable bread, and flesh and wine did not enter into his mouth.’ (Ex. 34:28; 1 Ki. 19:8; Dan. 10:2, 3) And blessed Hannah, when she asked for Samuel, said: ‘I have not drunk wine nor strong drink, and I pour out my soul before the Lord.’ (1 Ki. 1:15) And the Ninivites, when they fasted three days and three nights (Jona. 3:5), escaped the execution of wrath. And Esther, and Mordecai, and Judith (Est. 4:16; Jud. 8:6), by fasting, escaped the insurrection of the ungodly Aman and Holofernes. And David says: ‘My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh is changed for oil.’ (Ps. 108:24) Do you therefore fast, and ask your petitions of God.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2) To remit venial sins

Penance done by the faithful in a state of grace can remit their venial sins and the venial sins of the suffering souls in purgatory.

## 3) To expiate the punishment due to their forgiven sins

God’s chosen people do penance to expiate the punishment due to their forgiven sins or to expiate the punishment due to the forgiven sins of their brothers in purgatory.

Sin consists of the guilt (the stain) and the punishment due to the sin. The sacrament of baptism, when worthily received, remits all the guilt of sin and all the punishment due to sin. However, Catholics who fall into sin after baptism have their sins remitted by confessing them to a priest; but the punishment due to their sins is not remitted. Catholics who fall into sin after baptism must sincerely confess<sup>2</sup> their sins to a Catholic priest<sup>3</sup>, and when the priest gives them absolution their sins are remitted. If the sin was a mortal sin and thus the guilt is deadly to the soul, then not only was the sin remitted by absolution but also the everlasting punishment due to that sin. However, the *temporal* punishment due to the sin remains. This is known as the punishment due to remitted sins. Every sin remitted by confession, whether venial or mortal, is punished by God. Catholics expiate the punishment due to their remitted sins and appease God’s anger by making satisfaction to him. Satisfaction is made primarily and of necessity by prayer and penance. And if possible, satisfaction is also made by alms and any of the spiritual or corporal works of mercy:

“Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor...” (Dan. 4:24)

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<sup>1</sup> b. 5, sec. 3, xx.

<sup>2</sup> Sincere confession means that Catholics must be sorry for their sins and have a firm purpose of amendment not to commit them again. If they are not sorry or do not have a firm purpose of amendment, then the priest’s absolution is null and void and thus their sins are not remitted but remain.

<sup>3</sup> If a Catholic priest is not available, Catholics must sincerely confess their sins to God and God will forgive them. But they must promise to confess to a Catholic priest when one becomes available. (See *RJMI Topic Index: Sacraments in General: Sacraments without a Priest.*)

“For alms deliver from all sin and from death and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness.” (Tob. 4:11)

However, one of the necessary conditions for Catholics to expiate the punishment due to their remitted sins is penance, by enduring voluntary and involuntary penances.

Catholics who are in a state of grace (that is, all their mortal sins have been remitted) are worthy of heaven but cannot enter heaven until all their venial sins have been remitted (if they are guilty of any) and all the punishment due to their remitted sins has been remitted. If they die in a state of grace but are guilty of venial sin or have not expiated all the punishment due to their sins, they must go to purgatory to be purified from their venial sins and the punishment due to their sins before they can enter heaven. They are purified in purgatory by their sufferings that God sends and by the prayers, penances, alms, and other acts of satisfaction by the faithful on earth on their behalf. (See *RJMI Topic Index: Purgatory*.)

Catholics in a state of grace who die as martyrs go straight to heaven. And thus any venial sins they may be guilty of or any punishment due to sins that was not expiated is remitted by this supreme act of penance and love of God.

The punishment due to forgiven sins can be compared to the pain and wound that remain even after a patient has been healed from a deadly malady. Even though a man wounded with an arrow is healed when the arrow is removed, the pain and wound remain for a period of time:

St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 56*, 6th century: “(30) ...How can a...man be harmed if he is willing to change his evil habits to good and noble works, and if by almsgiving, fasting, and prayer he is anxious to restore the wounds of his sins to their former healthy condition?”

Hence, even though God heals men by forgiving their sins, the pain and wound caused by the sin remain for a time, the temporal punishment due to sins. And when all the punishment due to sin is remitted, then all the evils due to sin are wiped away. “The blueness of a wound shall wipe away evils: and stripes in the more inward parts of the belly.” (Prv. 20:30)

During the Old and New Testament eras, God forgives the sins of his penitent chosen people and the everlasting punishment due to their sins. But he never said that penitent sinners would not have to undergo temporary punishments for their forgiven sins.

Micheas, the holy prophet, acknowledges that God punished him for his forgiven sins:

“I will bear the wrath of the Lord because I have sinned against him.” (Mich. 7:9)

Miriam, Moses’ sister, sinned by murmuring against Moses; and God punished her with leprosy and banishment for seven days. Even after she confessed her sin and God forgave her, she was still punished for her sin in order to appease God’s anger and do penance and thus expiate the punishment due to her forgiven sin:

“And Mary [Miriam]...spoke against Moses, ...and behold Mary appeared white as snow with a leprosy... And Moses cried to the Lord, saying: O God, I beseech thee heal her. And the Lord answered him: If her father had spitten upon her face, ought she not to have been ashamed for seven days at least? Let her be separated seven days without the camp, and afterwards she shall be called again. Mary therefore was put out of the camp seven days, and the people moved not from that place until Mary was called again.” (Num. 12:1, 10, 13-15)

Moses sinned, confessed his sin, and God forgave him. But God nevertheless punished him for his sin by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land:

“And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: Because you have not believed me, to sanctify me before the children of Israel, you shall not bring these people into the land which I will give them.” (Num. 20:12)

“And the Lord was angry with me for your words, and he swore that I should not pass over the Jordan nor enter into the excellent land which he will give you. Behold I die in this land, I shall not pass over the Jordan; you shall pass and possess the goodly land.” (Deut. 4:21-22)

“The Lord also said to Moses: Go up into this mountain Abarim and view from thence the land which I will give to the children of Israel. And when thou shalt have seen it, thou also shalt go to thy people, as thy brother Aaron is gone: Because you offended me in the desert of Sin in the contradiction of the multitude, neither would you sanctify me before them at the waters. These are the waters of contradiction in Cades of the desert of Sin.” (Num. 27:12-14)

King David sinned, confessed his sins, and God forgave him. But God nevertheless punished him for his sins by killing his newborn child and raising up evil in his house until the day he died:

“Why therefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord to do evil in my sight? Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised me and hast taken the wife of Urias the Hethite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house, and I will take thy wives before thy eyes and give them to thy neighbour and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel and in the sight of the sun. And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David: The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Nevertheless, because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to thee shall surely die.” (2 Ki. 12:9-14)

Even though David’s sins were forgiven, he was nevertheless punished for these mortal sins until the day he died. David accepted this as the punishment due to his forgiven sins and to appease God’s anger. After he sinned and was forgiven, he composed the following psalm:

“[When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had sinned with Bethsabee.] Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.” (Ps. 50:2-5)

*Catholic Commentary* on Ps. 50:2: “**Sinned:** David knew that something more than confession was requisite and that he must submit to temporal punishments even though the prophet had assured him that his sin was remitted. He prays to be washed still more from evil habits (ver. 4).”

David’s iniquity was already forgiven. So when he says “Blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet from my iniquity,” he means from the habit and inclinations caused by his sins and from the punishment due to his sins. Jesus told his Apostles, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, that they were clean and thus not guilty of any deadly sin. Yet he said that they still needed to be washed (their feet, not their souls), which means that their bodies needed to be punished and purified from the punishment due to their sins. And Jesus told St. Peter that he could not enter heaven unless his feet were washed, unless he was purified from the punishment due to his sins:

“Peter saith to him: Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him: If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me. Simon Peter saith to him: Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him: He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly. And you are clean, but not all.” (Jn. 13:8-10)

*Catholic Commentary* on Jn. 13:10: “**Feet:** The foulness of the feet, when the rest is clean, signifies the earthly affections and remains of former sins remitted, which are to be cleansed by devout acts of prayer, penance, charity, and humility.”

In the following verses, David prays that God will relieve somewhat the punishment due to his sins:

“Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation nor chastise me in thy wrath. For thy arrows are fastened in me, and thy hand hath been strong upon me. There is no health in my flesh because of thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones because of my sins. For my iniquities are gone over my head, and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me.” (Ps. 37:2-5)

Therefore, God’s chosen people must not only convert by sincerely confessing their sins, by which God forgives them, but they must also be punished for their sins by enduring voluntary and involuntary penances:

“Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. . . Blow the trumpet in Sion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.” (Joel 2:12, 15)

St. James says that sinners are cleansed not just by God forgiving them but also by amendment and penance:

“Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into sorrow.” (Ja. 4:8-9)

*Catholic Commentary* on Ja. 4:9: “**Be afflicted and mourn:** And deplore your sins against his divine majesty; punish yourselves and think not that a mere change of life is sufficient after so many sins committed.”

That is why the Catholic Church, in approved penitentials and several decrees, prescribes penances for penitents in order for them to expiate the punishment due to their sins. The more grievous the remitted sin, the greater the punishment due to the sin.

Jesus the son of Sirach, Solomon, and St. Paul teach that as a father punishes his son when he sins (even after the son repents and the father forgives him), so does God punish his children:

“He that loveth his son frequently chastiseth him, that he may rejoice in his latter end and not grope after the doors of his neighbours.” (Eccus. 30:1)

“My son, reject not the correction of the Lord and do not faint when thou art chastised by him: For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and as a father in the son, he pleaseth himself.” (Prv. 3:11-12)

“And you have forgotten the consolation, which speaketh to you as unto children, saying: My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord; neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Persevere under discipline. God dealeth with you as with his sons; for what son is there whom the father doth not correct? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are made partakers, then are you bastards and not sons. Moreover, we have had fathers of our flesh for instructors and we revered them: shall we not much more obey the Father of spirits, and live? And they indeed for a few days, according to their own pleasure, instructed us; but he, for our profit, that we might receive his sanctification. Now all chastisement, for the present, indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees, and make straight steps with your feet, that no one, halting, may go out of the way but rather be healed.” (Heb. 12:5-13)

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a work that extended from the 1st century, the time of the Apostles, to the 4th century, testifies that penances were given to penitents:

*Apostolic Constitutions*, 1st to 4th century, Book 2: “Of Repentance, the Manner of It, and Rules about It - When thou seest the offender, with severity command him to be cast out; and as he is going out, let the deacons also treat him with severity, and then let them go and seek for him, and detain him out of the church; and when they come in, let them entreat thee for him. For our Saviour himself entreated his Father for those who had sinned, as it is written in the Gospel: ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ (Lk. 23:34) Then order the offender to come in; and if upon examination thou findest that he is penitent and fit to be received at all into the church, when thou hast afflicted him his days of fasting, according to the degree of his offence—as two, three, five, or seven weeks—so set him at liberty, and speak such things to him as are fit to be said in way of reproof, instruction, and exhortation to a sinner for his reformation, that so he may continue privately in his humility; and pray to God to be merciful to him, saying: ‘If Thou, O Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand? For with Thee there is propitiation.’ (Ps. 129:3) Of this sort of declaration is that which is said in the book of Genesis to Cain: ‘Thou hast sinned, be quiet’; (Gen. 4:7, Sept.) that is, do not go on in sin. For that a sinner ought to be ashamed for his own sin, that oracle of God delivered to Moses concerning Miriam is a sufficient proof, when he prayed that she might be forgiven. For says God to him: ‘If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterwards let her come in again.’ (Num. 12:14) We therefore ought to do so with offenders, when they profess their repentance, — namely, to separate them some determinate time, according to the proportion of their offence, and afterwards, like fathers to children, receive them again upon their repentance... (c. 16)

“Since, therefore, thou art to give an account of all, take care of all. Preserve those that are sound, admonish those that sin; and when thou hast afflicted them with fasting, give them ease by remission; and when with tears the offender begs re-admission, receive him, and let the whole Church pray for him; and when by imposition of thy hand thou hast admitted him, give him leave to abide afterwards in the flock. (c. 17)”

St. Cyprian teaches that Catholics must do penance for their remitted sins:

St. Cyprian, *Epistle 2*, 3rd century: “3. You see then, brethren, that you also ought to do the like, so that even those who have fallen may amend their hearts by your exhortation; and if they should be seized once more, may confess, and may so make amends for their previous sin.”

St. Cyprian, *Epistle 75*, 3rd century: “4. ...That for brethren who have lapsed, and after saving Baptism have been wounded by the devil, a remedy may by penance be sought: not as if they obtained remission of sins from us, but that through us they may be brought to a knowledge of their offences, and be compelled to give fuller satisfaction to the Lord.”

St. Ambrose teaches that Catholics must do penance for their remitted sins:

St. Ambrose, *On Repentance*, 4th century: “10. ...God has promised his mercy to all, and granted to his priests the power of loosing without any exception. But he who has heaped up sin must also increase his penitence. For greater sins are washed away by greater weeping. So neither is Novatian justified, who excluded all from pardon; nor are you, who imitate and, at the same time, condemn him, for you diminish zeal for penance where it ought to be increased, since the mercy of Christ has taught us that graver sins must be made good by greater efforts.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> b. 1, c. 3.

St. Ambrose, *On Repentance*, 4th century: “I have known penitents whose countenance was furrowed with tears, their cheeks worn with constant weeping, who offered their body to be trodden under foot by all, who with faces ever pale and worn with fasting...”<sup>5</sup>

St. Augustine teaches that Catholics must do penance for their remitted sins:

St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of St. John*, 416, Tractate 124 (John 21:19-25): “5. ...It is in the evils that every one suffers, not in the good things that he enjoys, that he has need of patience. The present life, therefore, whereof it is written, ‘Is not the life of man a term of trial upon earth?’ in which we are daily crying to the Lord, ‘Deliver us from evil,’ a man is compelled to endure, even when his sins are forgiven him, although it was the first sin that caused his falling into such misery. For the penalty is more protracted than the fault lest the fault should be accounted small, were the penalty to end with itself. On this account it is also, either for the demonstration of our debt of misery, or for the amendment of our passing life, or for the exercise of the necessary patience, that man is kept through time in the penalty, even when he is no longer held by his sin as liable to everlasting damnation. This is the truly lamentable but unblameable condition of the present evil days we pass in this mortal state, even while in it we look with loving eyes to the days that are good. For it comes from the righteous anger of God, whereof the Scriptures say, ‘Man, that is born of woman, is of few days and full of anger’; for the anger of God is not like that of man, the disturbance of an excited man, but the calm fixing of righteous punishment.”

St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 421: “Those who govern the Church have rightly appointed times of penitence, that the Church in which the sins are remitted may be satisfied.”<sup>6</sup>

St. Augustine, *The Creed*, 5th century: “15. ...For those whom ye have seen doing penance have committed heinous things, either adulteries or some enormous crimes: for these they do penance.”<sup>7</sup>

#### 4) To protect them from falling into sin

“Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin.”  
(Ecclesiasticus 5:5)

To protect themselves from sinning, Catholics must endure voluntary and involuntary penances. Penance eliminates their evil habits; protects them from falling into sin when tempted; increases their virtue; and moderates their good passions and thus prevents them from falling into sin by over-indulging in the good passions.

St. Paul says that he does penance to protect himself from falling into sin:

“I chastise my body and bring it into subjection lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.” (1 Cor. 9:27)

*Catholic Commentary* on 1 Cor. 9:27: “**I chastise my body:** Here St. Paul shews the necessity of self-denial and mortifications to subdue the flesh and its inordinate desires. Not even the labours of an apostle are exemptions from voluntary mortifications and penance.”

St. Ambrose, *On Repentance*, 4th century: “61. Let, then, our flesh die to lusts, let it be captive, let it be subdued, and not war against the law of our mind, but die in

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<sup>5</sup> b. 1, c. 26.

<sup>6</sup> c. 65.

<sup>7</sup> c. 7.



subjection to a good service, as in Paul, who buffeted his body that he might bring it into subjection in order that his preaching might become more approved...”<sup>8</sup>

St. Paul teaches that mortification (penance) eliminates evil habits and protects us from falling into sin:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is the service of idols.” (Col. 3:5)

*Catholic Commentary* on Col. 3:5: “**Mortify your members:** Fornication, uncleanness, etc. He considers man’s body prone to sinful inclinations. We practise abstinences and fasts to accomplish the precepts of mortifying the irregular desires of the flesh, among which gluttony must find a place. In a mortified body, immoderation is more easily subdued.”

St. Peter teaches that one of the things Catholics must do to be holy and not sin is penance, in this case by abstinence:

“By whom he hath given us most great and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature, flying the corruption of that concupiscence which is in the world. And you, employing all care, minister in your faith, virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, abstinence; and in abstinence, patience; and in patience, godliness; and in godliness, love of brotherhood; and in love of brotherhood, charity. For if these things be with you and abound, they will make you to be neither empty nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Pt. 1:4-8)

St. Caesarius of Arles teaches that fasting prevents Catholics from committing sin:

St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 68* (A reproof to penitents), 5th or 6th century: “(2) ...Just as the body abstains from eating, so may the soul fast from sin.”

## 5) To testify to their love of God when persecuted for the faith

This world is evil because of evil angels and evil men. Devils roam about this world and tempt men, and most men fall for the temptation and follow the devil and hence are evil:

“For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world: And they follow him that are of his side.” (Wis. 2:23-25)

St. Peter says, “Be sober and watch, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pt. 5:8)

“The earth is given into the hand of the wicked.” (Job 9:24)

“And the earth is infected by the inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the laws, they have changed the ordinance, they have broken the everlasting covenant.” (Isa. 24:5)

St. John says, “The whole world is seated in wickedness.” (1 Jn. 5:19)

Jesus says, “Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!” (Mt. 7:13-14)

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<sup>8</sup> b. 1, c. 13.

Jesus says, "If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (Jn. 15:18-19)

Hence Catholics endure penance by the mere fact that they believe in and are faithful to the one true God and true religion. By this fact alone, they are hated by and suffer persecutions from this evil world (from devils, damned humans, and evil men) in one way or another. Jesus said that all of the Old Covenant prophets were persecuted and most were murdered by their own people, by unfaithful Jews:

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, that build the sepulchres of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the just, and say: If we had been in the days of our Fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore you are witnesses against yourselves, that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets." (Mt. 23:29-31)

And these evil Jews persecuted and murdered Jesus Christ, the Prophet of prophets, the very one whom all the prophets spoke of, testified about, looked forward to, and prepared the way for. St. John the Baptist, who prepared the immediate way for Christ, was persecuted and murdered by evil Jews.

St. Stephen, the first martyr after Christ rose from the dead, testified that evil Jews persecuted all of the prophets and now persecuted and murdered Jesus Christ. And after hearing this testimony, the evil Jews murdered St. Stephen:

"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them who foretold of the coming of the Just One, of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers... Now hearing these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed with their teeth at him... And casting him forth without the city, they stoned him..." (Acts 7:52, 54, 57)

Like St. Stephen, all of the followers of Christ (Catholics) will endure penance by being persecuted like their Master in one way or another; and many of them will be murdered. St. Paul says,

"And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12)

*Catholic Commentary* on 2 Tim. 3:12: "**Persecution:** All holy men suffer one kind of persecution or other, being grieved and molested by the wicked, one way or another. But not all that suffer persecution be holy, as all malefactors. The Church and Catholic Princes persecute heretics while they are persecuted by them again, as St. Augustine often declareth. (See Ep. 48)"

Hence Catholics imitate their Master, Jesus Christ, when they take up their cross and share in his sufferings and persecutions for the faith. Jesus says,

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For he that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (Mt. 16:24-26)

"And he that taketh not up his cross and followeth me is not worthy of me." (Mt. 10:38)

Because faithful Catholics take up the cross, they will inevitably suffer persecution for Christ and the Catholic faith. St. Paul says,

"For unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him." (Phili. 1:29)

St. Paul speaks of the many times he did penance by suffering for Christ and the Catholic faith when he was persecuted:

“They are the ministers of Christ (I speak as one less wise). I am more; in many more labours, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often. Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes, save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was in the depth of the sea. In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren. In labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (2 Cor. 11:23-27)

“But in all things let us exhibit ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labours, in watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Spirit, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armour of justice on the right hand and on the left; by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastised, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as needy, yet enriching many; as having nothing, and possessing all things.” (2 Cor. 6:4-10)

St. Peter prepares catechumens and new converts for the persecutions they will undergo for Christ and the faith:

“Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you; but if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when his glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, you shall be blessed; for that which is of the honour, glory, and power of God, and that which is his Spirit, resteth upon you.” (1 Pt. 4:12-14)

*Catholic Commentary* on 1 Pt. 4:12: “**Think not strange:** Be not surprised, nor discouraged, that a hot and sharp persecution is come upon you at this time, as if it were a new and an extraordinary thing. It is what you must expect and be ready to receive with patience and even with joy when you suffer as Christ did before you, and for his sake: this is the way to everlasting happiness in heaven.”

## 6) To test their faith

Catholics endure penances sent or allowed by God to test their faith:

“Many shall be chosen and made white, and shall be tried as fire.” (Dan. 12:10)

*Catholic Commentary* on Dan. 12:10: “**Made white:** By persecution endured with patience. (Dan. 11:35)”

“And some of the learned shall fall that they may be tried, and may be chosen, and made white even to the appointed time...” (Dan. 11:35)

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation... Be thou faithful until death and I will give thee the crown of life.” (Apoc. 2:10)

“As silver is tried by fire, and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts.” (Prov. 17:3)

God tests his chosen people to see if they will remain faithful when calamities and persecutions fall upon them. It is easy to love God in good times when God gives you all good things, but the real test of faith is whether you love God in bad times, when bad things happen to you. Fair-weather friends are friends in name only. They remain friends as long as you are prosperous or healthy, but as soon as you become poor or sick they abandon you. They remain with you in the good times, but abandon you in the hard times when you need them most:

“Every friend will say: I also am his friend; but there is a friend that is only a friend in name. Is not this a grief even to death? ... There is a companion who rejoiceth with his friend in his joys, but in the time of trouble he will be against him.” (Eccus. 37:1, 4)

“He that is a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is proved in distress.” (Prv. 17:17)

God tested the faith of Abraham by commanding him to offer up his son Isaac, the faith of Job by allowing him to be severely persecuted by the devil, and the faith of Tobias by permitting him to be blinded. All of these holy men passed the test, their trial by fire. They did not curse God but instead blessed him and endured their penances, their sufferings, patiently and without losing their love for God and the faith:

“After these things, God tempted Abraham and said to him: Abraham, Abraham. And he answered: Here I am. He said to him: Take thy only begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision; and there thou shalt offer him for an holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will shew thee. So Abraham, rising up in the night, saddled his ass and took with him two young men and Isaac his son; and when he had cut wood for the holocaust, he went his way to the place which God had commanded him... And he put forth his hand and took the sword to sacrifice his son. And behold an angel of the Lord from heaven called to him, saying: Abraham, Abraham. And he answered: Here I am. And he said to him: Lay not thy hand upon the boy, neither do thou anything to him; now I know that thou fearest God and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake.” (Gen. 22:1-3, 10-12)

“And it came to pass, when on a certain day the angels of God came and stood before the Lord, and Satan came among them, and stood in his sight, that the Lord said to Satan: Whence comest thou? And he answered and said: I have gone round about the earth, and walked through it. And the Lord said to Satan: Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a man simple, and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil, and still keeping his innocence? But thou hast moved me against him, that I should afflict him without cause. And Satan answered and said: Skin for skin, and all that a man hath he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand, and touch his bone and his flesh, and then thou shalt see that he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said to Satan: Behold, he is in thy hand, but yet save his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with a very grievous ulcer, from the sole of the foot even to the top of his head. And he took a potsherd and scraped the corrupt matter, sitting on a dunghill. And his wife said to him: Dost thou still continue in thy simplicity? Curse God and die. And he said to her: Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil? In all these things, Job did not sin with his lips.” (Job 2:1-10)

“Now it happened one day that, being wearied with burying, he [Tobias] came to his house and cast himself down by the wall and slept. And as he was sleeping, hot dung out of a swallow’s nest fell upon his eyes and he was made blind. Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience, as also of holy Job. For whereas he had always feared God from his infancy and kept his commandments, he repined not against God

because the evil of blindness had befallen him, but continued immovable in the fear of God, giving thanks to God all the days of his life.” (Tob. 2:10-14)

## **Benefits of Penance Are Forfeited and Sin Committed by Murmuring or Complaining**

“Keep yourselves therefore from murmuring, which profiteth nothing...”  
(Wisdom 1:11)

A Catholic who murmurs or complains when he endures penance loses all the grace, merit, and favors he would have obtained and also commits sin:

“Do ye all things without murmurings and hesitations, that you may be blameless and sincere children of God, without reproof, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” (Phili. 2:14-15)

When some of the Israelites did not endure the penance God sent them to test their faith but murmured and complained, God destroyed them:

“In the mean time there arose a murmuring of the people against the Lord, as it were repining at their fatigue. And when the Lord heard it, he was angry. And the fire of the Lord, being kindled against them, devoured them that were at the uttermost part of the camp.” (Num. 11:1)

St. Paul warns Catholics that if they do the same they also will be worthy of being destroyed:

“Neither do you murmur, as some of them murmured and were destroyed by the destroyer.” (1 Cor. 10:10)

St. Jude says,

“Reprove all the ungodly... These are murmurers, full of complaints, walking according to their own desires and their mouth speaketh proud things...” (Jude 1:15-16)

Hence Catholics who murmur or complain when enduring penance not only lose all the benefits they would have gained but also commit sin. However, regarding involuntary penances, it is not murmuring or complaining to cry out in pain if one cannot help it or to express shock and anger when something painful or surprising happens to you.

## **Penances**

### **Types of penances (voluntary and involuntary)**

Penances that Catholics endure are either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary penances are those done by choice; and involuntary penances are those that are mandatory, necessary, or accidental:

1. Voluntary penances are penances that Catholics do by choice. Hence these penances are not mandatory, necessary, or accidental. Catholics do voluntary penances to gain extra grace, favor, or protection from God. However, Catholics must be careful not to take on too many voluntary penances so as to fall into the sin of stoicism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See *RJMI Topic Index: Stoicism*.

2. Mandatory penances are penances that Catholics must do as decreed by the Catholic Church, a religious rule, or a priest in the confessional (known as sacramental penance).
3. Necessary penances are penances that Catholics cannot avoid in their daily life, such as those incurred by doing their daily job, duty, and chores. Physical exercises to keep the body healthy and in shape are considered chores.
4. Accidental penances are penances that are not planned and thus are not voluntary, mandatory, or necessary. Some accidental penances are as follows: 1) illness, even a simple cold; 2) injuries, even a bump on the head, the stubbing of a toe, or a bite from a bug; 3) disabilities, physical or mental; 4) accidental loss of home, property, food, or loved ones; 5) persecutions, physical and spiritual; 6) involuntary confinement; 7) involuntary placement in disagreeable situations; and 8) enduring unpleasant odors.

### *Some voluntary penances*

Some voluntary penances are as follows:

1. Fasting from food or water or both;
2. Abstaining from eating meat or some other food you like; abstaining from some entertainment; or husband and wife abstaining from sexual intercourse for a time;
3. Eating bland food;
4. Whipping yourself with a cord (known as the Discipline);
5. Suffering the heat or cold for a time, such as taking a cold shower in cold weather, taking a walk or praying in cold weather without wearing a coat or sweater, taking an ice bath, taking a walk or praying in hot weather while wearing a coat or sweater to make you sweat, taking a hot bath or sauna to make you sweat;
6. Wearing a hairshirt or some other type of uncomfortable clothing;
7. Sitting on a hard, uncomfortable chair for a time;
8. Standing or kneeling for a period of time that causes some pain or discomfort;
9. Praying with outstretched arms to the point of enduring some pain or discomfort;
10. Keeping silent for a period of time (talking only when necessary);
11. Walking barefoot;
12. Sleeping on the floor or an uncomfortable bed;
13. Holding your breath for a period of time;
14. Doing an all- or partial-night vigil.

A Catholic is not required to do voluntary penances on penitential days but only involuntary penances. But he can also add some voluntary penances if he wants to.

For example, a Catholic must fast during Lent because the Church decreed it. And he must whip himself forty times daily during Lent because his priest imposed this upon him in the confessional as a penance. And a religious rule he is under decrees that he cannot drink alcohol during Lent. Hence the daily mandatory penances he must do during Lent are fasting, whipping himself forty times on the back, and abstaining from drinking alcohol. Now he can also do a voluntary penance if he wants to, such as wearing a hairshirt three days a week during Lent.

## **One penance can be substituted for another, but prayer or money cannot be substituted for penance**

If a Catholic cannot do a certain penance, there are plenty of others he can do. For example, a Catholic who cannot fast for health reasons can eat bland food or whip himself or do some other penance. Even a Catholic who is laid up in bed because of sickness can still do some type of penance. Even though he is bedridden, he can abstain from reading or doing or watching something that is entertaining. He can exercise the parts of his limbs that he can move without harming his health. He can remain silent for a period of time when he normally does not remain silent. Hence no Catholic is excused from doing penance.

To be saved, Catholics must not only pray but also do penance and study the Catholic faith. These are the three pillars: prayer, penance, and studying the Catholic faith. And if possible, and when necessary, they must do the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Because penance is necessary for salvation, prayers must not be substituted for penance, but rather a penance must be substituted with another penance if a Catholic cannot do a particular penance. Beware of the heretics who have done away with penance and thus teach that modern-day Catholics no longer need to do penance or at least not do sufficient penance. Some of them deceive by teaching that prayer is penance and thus when Catholics pray they are doing penance. Hence while paying lip service to penance, they have substituted it with prayer by calling prayer penance.

What is even worse is that some heretics have substituted penance with money. These heretics tell Catholics that if they give the Church money or something else with a monetary value, they do not have to do penance because it eliminates their need to do penance. These heretics are also guilty of the added mortal sin of simony for selling penances. While it is a Catholic obligation to give tithes and donations to the Church, and alms to the poor and for the souls in purgatory, that does not do away with the necessity of penance and thus cannot be a substitute for penance. Donations, tithes, and alms are one thing and necessary; but penance is another thing and also necessary.

Hence beware of the heretics who have either eliminated or greatly diminished the necessity of penance by substituting it with prayers or money. This is the lazy and effeminate man's way of avoiding penance, the man who does not want to carry his cross. Such a man is guilty of mortal sin not only for *not* doing penance but also for being a heretic. Hence he is not Catholic, not a disciple of Christ: "Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:27)

## **Do no penance that harms your health, endangers your life, or causes death unless God directly commands it**

Catholics are forbidden under pain of sin to do penances that harm their health, endanger their life, or cause their death unless God directly commands them to do so. The stoic nominal Catholics are guilty of doing penances that either harm their health, endanger their life, or cause their death without God directly commanding it and thus are guilty of mortal sin. And they are also heretics.<sup>10</sup>

When God commands his chosen people to do a penance that would normally kill them, he always gives them the grace to endure it and most times gives them the grace to survive it.

Even when Moses, Elias, and Jesus fasted miraculously by not eating or drinking for forty days, they did not die and even maintained a normal body weight so as not to appear to have been fasting. If God had not suspended nature, they would have been not only emaciated but also

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<sup>10</sup> See *RJMI Topic Index: Stoics*.

dead.<sup>11</sup> But even if they had been emaciated in this extraordinary case, it would have been by God's direct command, for a fast or any other penance that exceeds nature must never be taken upon oneself unless God explicitly commands it. And if one attempts to do such a fast without an explicit command from God, then he is full of pride, tempts God, and commits a mortal sin.

### **God allows penances that are involuntary to harm health, endanger life, or cause death**

God allows penances that are involuntary to harm health, endanger life, or cause death. Many times God tests his faithful, such as Job, with this kind of extreme penance to see if they will endure and remain faithful and in order for them to gain many graces and favors from him. Martyrdom is an example of an involuntary penance that causes death, to the great benefit of the martyr who goes straight to heaven.

Another example is a punishment a Catholic sinner incurs by the law which harms his health or causes his death, such as having his hand cut off for stealing, or incurring the death penalty for murder. In these cases, if the Catholic has confessed his sin, then this just punishment also serves as an involuntary penance that he endures.

### **There is a time to do penance and a time not to do penance**

There is a time to do penance and a time not to do penance. Hence Catholics sin when they do no penance when they must do penance (on penitential days) and sin when they do voluntary penances when they must not do penance (on non-penitential days).

- On penitential days, Catholics must endure their voluntary, mandatory, necessary, and accidental penances. Everything else they do must not be penance and thus must be enjoyed with as much comfort as possible.
- On non-penitential days, Catholics must not do voluntary penances. They must enjoy feasting and other good things in moderation and with as much comfort as possible and only endure mandatory, necessary, or accidental penances. If the non-penitential day is also a feast day of obligation, then they must limit physical exercise to a minimum.

Beware of the nominal Catholic epicureans because they never do penances that can be avoided, and the nominal Catholic stoics because they perpetually do penance or at least do penance when they must not do penance.<sup>12</sup> Many Church decrees condemned and excommunicated these stoics for fasting when they were supposed to be feasting, or for doing other acts of penance during non-penitential days:

*Didascalica*, 1st to 3rd century: "If there be anyone who fasteth on the Christian Sabbath which is (the day of) his holy resurrection, or at Pentecost [Footnote \*], (that is) until the feast of Pentecost—they who do thus and mourn on the feasts of the Lord, have no remission of sin. Do ye keep on them a spiritual feast, and never appear sad."<sup>13</sup>

Footnote \*: "Pentecost is used for the season from Easter to Pentecost, as well as for the Day of Pentecost."

*Apostolic Constitutions*, 1st to 4th century: "He will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord's Day, being the day of the resurrection, or during the time of Pentecost or, in

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<sup>11</sup> The Devil can also aid his disciples by giving them the help they need to do a total fast for long periods of time, such as for forty days, in order to deceive them, to give them a false confidence in their counterfeit holiness, and to lead others to follow them.

<sup>12</sup> See *RJMI Topic Index*: "Stoics" and "Epicureans."

<sup>13</sup> c. 30.



general, who is sad on a festival day to the Lord. For on them we ought to rejoice and not to mourn.”<sup>14</sup>

And the *Council of Gangra* in 325 teaches the following:

*Council of Gangra, 325*: “Canon 11. If anyone shall despise those who out of faith make love-feasts and invite the brethren in honour of the Lord, and is not willing to accept these invitations because he despises what is done, let him be anathema.”

*Council of Gangra, 325*: “Canon 18. If anyone, under pretence of asceticism, shall fast on Sunday, let him be anathema.”

*Council of Gangra, 325*: “EPILOGUE. These things we write, not to cut off those who wish to lead in the Church of God an ascetic life, according to the Scriptures, but those who carry the pretence of asceticism to superciliousness; both exalting themselves above those who live more simply, and introducing novelties contrary to the Scriptures and the ecclesiastical Canons.”

### **When Catholics must and must not do penance (penitential and non-penitential days)**

For the rules on abstinence, fasting, feasting, and penitential and non-penitential days, see RJMI book *Things Catholic Must Believe and Do*: Penance.

### **On perpetual vows to give up something good**

Some of God’s chosen people have taken perpetual vows to give up something good as a lifelong penance and sacrifice. For example, the Rechabites and St. John the Baptist perpetually abstained from drinking alcohol:

“Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers of the treasures, and thou shalt give them wine to drink... And they answered: We will not drink wine because Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your children, for ever.” (Jer. 35:2, 6)

“For he [St. John the Baptist] shall be great before the Lord, and shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” (Lk. 1:15)

Certain religious orders also perpetually abstain from drinking alcohol. As long as a Catholic is a member of such an order, these vows must be obeyed and thus even on non-penitential days, such as the Lord’s Day. If a Catholic religious does not want to perpetually abstain from alcohol, then he can join a religious order that does not take such a vow, such as the Rule of St. Benedict which allows the drinking of alcohol.

However, a Catholic or religious order must be careful not to fall into the heresy of stoicism by perpetually giving up good things for the wrong reason or in the wrong measure:

- For example, a wrong and heretical reason for abstaining from alcohol is the belief that drinking alcohol is either a sin or a fault or at least a sign of weakness or lack of virtue.
- For example, a wrong and heretical amount of perpetual abstinence would be Catholics or religious orders that perpetually abstain from so many things that they are perpetually doing penance even on non-penitential days, such as a religious order that perpetually abstains from alcohol, meat, fish, beans, vegetables, fruit, and all drink except water. Such an order

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<sup>14</sup> b. 5, sec. 3, xx.

would be perpetually doing penance on bread and water, even on non-penitential days, and would thus commit mortal sin and be guilty of the heresy of stoicism. Many Church decrees condemned and excommunicated these stoics for fasting and doing other acts of penance that can be avoided on non-penitential days. (See in this book [There is a time to do penance and a time not to do penance](#), p. 24.)

For this reason, I do not believe that any religious order should *perpetually* ban eating all types of meat. For example, the Rule of St. Benedict only bans eating red meat but other meat can be eaten. It only allows red meat to be eaten if a monk is sick. So even the ban on red meat, according to the Rule of St. Benedict, is not perpetual.

## Appendix

### Invalid and heretical Council of Trent on satisfaction for remitted sins

Even though the Council of Trent is invalid and heretical, it nevertheless teaches the truth, the dogma, regarding satisfaction for remitted sins:

Invalid and heretical *Council of Trent*, Session 14, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance, 1551:

“Chapter 8. The Necessity and Fruit of Satisfaction: Finally with regard to satisfaction, which of all the parts of penance has been recommended by our Fathers to the Christian people in all ages, and which is especially assailed in our day under the pretext of piety by those who ‘have an appearance of piety, but who have denied the power thereof’ (2 Tim. 3:5), the holy Synod declares that it is absolutely false and contrary to the word of God that the guilt is never forgiven by the Lord without the entire punishment also being remitted (Can. 12, 15). For clear and illustrious examples are found in the Sacred Writings (cf. Gen. 3:16 f.; Num. 12:14 f.; 20:11 f.; 2 Samuel 12:13 f., etc.), besides which divine tradition refutes this heresy with all possible clarity. Indeed the nature of divine justice demands that those who have sinned through ignorance before baptism may be received into grace in one manner, and in another those who at one time freed from the servitude of sin and the devil, and on receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, did not fear to ‘violate the temple of God knowingly’ (1 Cor. 3:17), ‘and to grieve the Holy Spirit’ (Eph. 4:30). And it befits divine clemency that sins [after baptism] be not thus pardoned us without any satisfaction, lest, seizing the occasion (Rom. 7:8), and considering sins trivial, we, offering injury and ‘affront to the Holy Spirit’ (Heb. 10:29), fall into graver ones, ‘treasuring up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath’ (Rom. 2:5; Ja. 5:3). For, without doubt, these satisfactions greatly restrain from sin and as by a kind of rein act as a check and make penitents more cautious and vigilant in the future; they also remove the remnants of sin, and destroy vicious habits acquired by living evilly through acts contrary to virtue. Neither was there ever in the Church of God any way considered more secure for warding off impending punishment by the Lord than that men perform these works of penance with true sorrow of soul. Add to this that, while we suffer by making satisfaction for our sins, we are made conformable to Christ Jesus, ‘who made satisfaction for our sins’ (Rom. 5:10; 1 John 2:1 f.), from whom is all our sufficiency (2 Cor. 3:5), having also a most certain pledge from him that ‘if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified’ (cf. Rom. 8:17). Neither is this satisfaction which we discharge for our sins so much our own as it is through Jesus Christ; for we who can do nothing of ourselves, as if of ourselves, with the cooperation ‘of him who’ comforts us, ‘we can do all things.’ Thus, man has not wherein to glory but all our glorying is in Christ: in whom we live, in whom we merit, in whom we satisfy; bringing forth fruits worthy of penance, which from him have their efficacy, by him are offered to the Father, and through him are accepted by the Father. (Can. 13 f.). (D. 904)

“The priests of the Lord ought, therefore, so far as the spirit and prudence suggest, to enjoin salutary and suitable satisfactions, in keeping with the nature of the crimes and the ability of the penitents, lest, if they should connive at sins and deal too leniently with penitents by the imposition of certain very light works for grave offenses they might become participators in the crimes of others (cf. 1 Tim. 5:22). Moreover, let them keep before their eyes that the satisfaction which they impose be not only for the safeguarding of a new life and a remedy against infirmity, but also for the atonement and chastisement of past sins; for the ancient Fathers both believe and teach that the keys of the priests were bestowed not only to loose but also to bind (cf. Matt. 16:19; John 20:23; Can. 15). ...No Catholic ever

understood that from our satisfactions of this kind the nature of the merit and satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ is either obscured or in any way diminished; when the innovators wish to observe this, they teach that the best penance is a new life, in order to take away all force and practice of satisfaction” (Can. 13). (D. 905)

“Chapter 9. The Works of Satisfaction: It teaches furthermore that so great is the liberality of the divine munificence that not only by punishments voluntarily undertaken by us in atonement for sin can we make satisfaction to God the Father through Jesus Christ, or by punishments imposed by the judgment of the priest according to the measure of our offense, but also, (and this is the greatest proof of love) by the temporal afflictions imposed by God and patiently borne by us (Can. 13).” (D. 906)

“Canons on the Sacrament of Penance:

“Canon 12. If anyone says that the whole punishment together with the guilt is always pardoned by God and that the satisfaction of penitents is nothing other than faith by which they perceive that Christ has made satisfaction for them: let him be anathema.” (cf. n. 904). (D. 922)

“Canon 13. If anyone saith that satisfaction for sins, as to their temporal punishment, is nowise made to God (through the merits of Jesus Christ) by the punishments inflicted by him and patiently borne or by those enjoined by the priest nor even by those voluntarily undertaken, as by fastings, prayers, almsdeeds, or by other works also of piety; and that, therefore, the best penance is merely a new life; let him be anathema.” (cf. n. 904 ff.). (D. 923)

“Canon 15. If anyone says that the keys have been given to the Church only to loose and not also to bind and that therefore priests by imposing punishments on those who confess act contrary to the institution of Christ; and that it is fiction that, after everlasting punishment has been remitted by virtue of the keys, there usually remains a temporal punishment to be discharged: let him be anathema (cf. n. 904).” (D. 925)