

# Our Lady of Fatima, Preacher of Penance

By Thomas Storck

## Scripture

“Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, Douay-Rheims version).

With these stark words, Our Lord addressed His contemporaries about the absolute necessity of doing penance if they were to gain eternal life. And in this century, the Blessed Mother, in her appearances to the three children of Fatima, likewise told our own contemporaries of our equally great need of performing acts of penance if we are to gain everlasting life.

Even at her first Apparition of May 13, 1917, Our Lady asked the three little shepherds, “Will you offer sacrifices to God and accept all the sufferings He will send you in reparation for the numberless sins which offend His divine Majesty? Will you suffer to obtain the conversion of sinners, to repair blasphemies, as well as all the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary?”

At the third Apparition of July 13, after saying to the children, “Sacrifice yourself for sinners,” she taught them the prayer of sacrifice. Our Lady then showed them the terrifying vision of Hell, a place where some go because there is no one to make sacrifices for them.

In the recently revealed Third Secret of Fatima, the seers saw an angel who was crying out in a loud voice: “Penance! Penance! Penance!”

It is clear then that penance is central not only to the message of Fatima, but to the Gospel as a whole. And this is not surprising when we consider the teaching of the Church on this subject. Penance is necessary for man because men are sinners. St. John teaches us in Holy Scripture, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Because of this, penance on our part is necessary.

## Tradition

The Roman Catechism (*Catechism of the Council of Trent*) says this of the virtue of penance:

“Interior penance consists in turning to God sincerely and from the heart, and in hating and detesting our past transgressions, with a firm resolution of amendment of life, hoping to obtain pardon through the mercy of God.”

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that this interior penance “urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance” (CCC 1430).

The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others (CCC 1434).

Thus, penance is necessary. In fact, the Code of Canon Law (canon 1249) teaches that all of the faithful are obliged by divine law ... to do penance. However, so that all may be joined together in a certain common practice of penance, days of penance are prescribed. On these days the faithful are in a special manner to devote themselves to prayer, to engage in works of piety and charity, and to deny themselves, by fulfilling their obligations more

faithfully and especially by observing the fast and abstinence which the following canons prescribe.

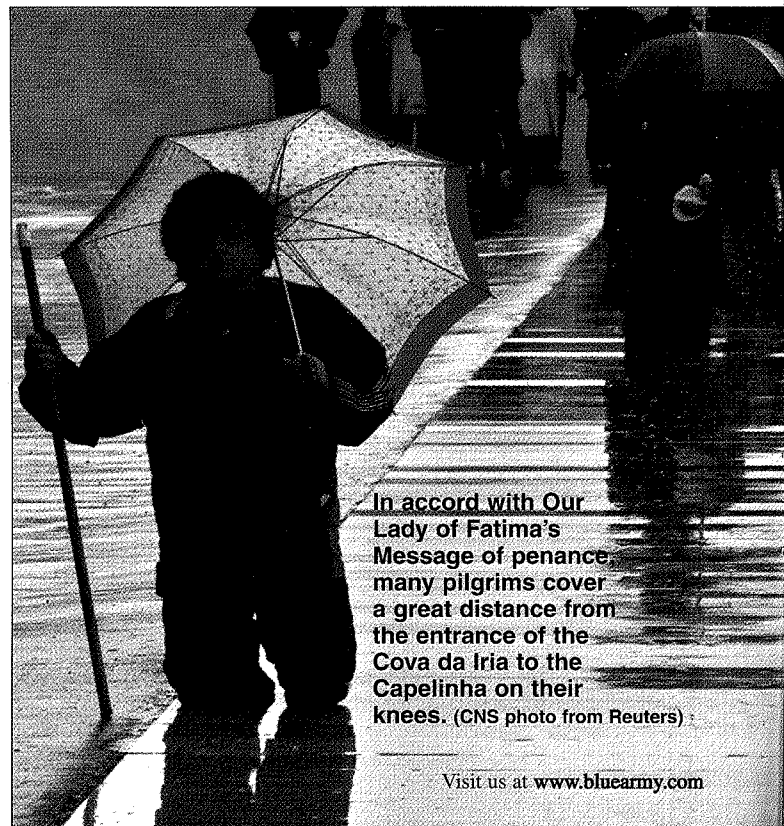
The next canon (1250) says, the “days and times of penance for the universal Church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.” Lent is thus one of the chief times for the “common practice of penance” for the universal Church. Although it is fitting, indeed praiseworthy, for individuals to practice penance at any time according to their own spirit of devotion, we are not just separate individuals but a community. Therefore, we are bound to do penance as a community. Hence, the importance of Lent.

Lent therefore provides for the fulfilling of our obligation in divine law to do penance. But the actual amount of penance asked for by the Church, especially today, is very small. Souls who aim at Christian perfection will heed the words of Our Lady of Fatima and strive to make sacrifices for sinners, including for themselves. The more charity we have, the more will we desire to do penance; for like our Lord, we are unwilling “that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

## Fatima

Thus, the Fatima Message and the call of the Church to share in the “common practice of penance” in Lent harmonize entirely. During Lent, and on each Friday, the Church obliges us to the minimum of penance, while at the same time encouraging us to offer additional penance for others.

Blessed Jacinta, in particular, was troubled at the prospect of people going to Hell, and resolved to do penance for those who would not do penance for themselves. Thus, the wonderful unity, not only of the Mystical Body of Christ, but even of the entire human race, is shown by the ability that we have, in Christ, to aid one another by our sufferings. So during this Lent, and whenever we do penance, we should see ourselves as members of Jesus Christ, helping one another, and also those outside the Mystical Body, by our prayers, our fasting, our almsgiving and our other penitential acts. Then we should recall the proclamation of the Angel, revealed in the Third Secret, “Penance! Penance! Penance!” This is the message that will save the world and bring souls to heaven, the constant teaching and practice of Christ’s true Church and the special message of Our Lady of Fatima.



In accord with Our Lady of Fatima’s Message of penance, many pilgrims cover a great distance from the entrance of the Cova da Iria to the Capelinha on their knees. (CNS photo from Reuters)

# Looking Forward to Lenten Sacrifices?

By Wendy Pavlat

## Sacrifice Hurts

No chocolate. Sacrifices!

As a child I never looked forward to Lent. I was never very big on sacrifices because they always seemed so painful. It's taken about 30 Lents and tons of actual grace to change my perspective.

I've always loved reading the lives of the great saints. Even as a kid I loved to hear about the amazing sacrifices the saints made for the love of God.

St. Catherine of Siena fasted so much she eventually ate nothing but the Eucharist.

St. Rose of Lima spent hours dragging a heavy cross around her family garden.

The Desert Fathers took "the discipline" (in the desert, no less!).

The children of Fatima spent hours prostrated in prayer and slept with cords around their waists.

It's sort of like the bumper sticker: "*I love work*. I could watch it for hours." I could read about people making sacrifices for God all day, but when it came to making sacrifices, my limit was about a minute and a half. I was (and am) a spiritual wimp!

The truth is: We are here to love God. We can show that love *directly* with prayer and sacrifice; and we can show it *indirectly* by loving our neighbor (which also involves sacrifice).

The "no sacrifice" way may show love, but only for myself; and my love for God can't grow without my love for myself dying to make room for it. The problem, of course, is that sacrifice hurts. It's not that I didn't give it a try, in a sort of grudging, "I'll offer up this SUFFERING for you, Lord, but don't You forget it!" What a great gift for my Beloved! Clearly it was time to go to confession and start over.

## Key to Joyful Sacrifice

When the angel appeared to the children of Fatima, asking for sacrifices for sinners, they were perplexed. Lucia had to ask what exactly they should do.

The angel's answer was: "Make everything you do a sacrifice, and offer it as an act of reparation for the sins by which He (God) is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. Bring peace to your country in this way... Above all, accept and bear with patience the sufferings which the Lord will send you."

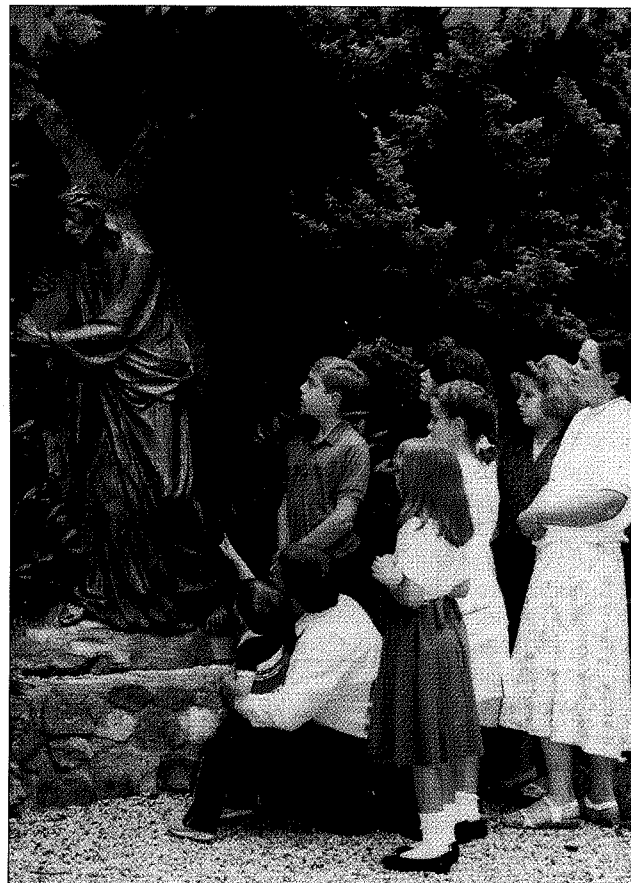
What a gift that would be, to do everything as a sacrifice for love of God and neighbor! To accept with patience the sufferings God sends seems more difficult, but that, for me, became the key to joyful sacrifice. In the beginning I was just too wimpy to go out of my way to take on extra sacrifices. As I became more serious about seeking God's will and trusting His loving plan for me, many of the things in my life that I had been grudgingly "offering up" as sufferings became joys.

## Parenthood: the Least Painful Cure for Selfishness

One of the greatest graces that God has given to me for my own sanctification has been my family. Not that they count as my sufferings, far from it!

Specifically, I believe that God called me to be a mother to save me from living my life for me. Parenthood is probably the least painful cure for selfishness.

I am only 3 1/2 years and 3 kids in, but if having 3 small, helpless, and utterly dependent people around 24 hours a day doesn't start to teach you to live for others, I can't imagine what would! Yet even with the first child, a curious thing began to happen. Everything that I thought would be a terrible suffering (leaving my job, labor, diaper duty, etc.) was transformed by love into joy. I can't say that



Day to day family life can offer many opportunities for sacrifice.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS; BLUE ARMY SHRINE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

I'm delighted with every diaper. There are days (and diapers) that seem very sacrificial, but even they are a gift because there seems to be so little I can really offer to God.

## Mistaking Pain for Suffering

A while back, I mentioned to a spiritual friend that I had so little to offer in the way of suffering. She pointed out several things in my life, including that my father and sister had recently been diagnosed with serious health problems, and my 12 month old daughter was still recovering from major surgery to repair a birth defect. I had to think about that for a while. It was true that I had wept and prayed over each of the problems she had mentioned, and yet I could see God moving so clearly in our lives (a tremendous grace in and of itself) that I was filled with joy. It hadn't occurred to me to consider it "suffering." I could finally see the gift that a spirit of willing sacrifice was to me. I had always thought of sacrifice as my gift of love to God, but it was to turn out to be God's gift to me. I had always wondered about His yoke being easy and His burden being light. It seemed to me that, in some ways, those who were living their faith

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