



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
The Charity of Penance

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Meditation – Self Denial in the Following of Christ

We live in an age in which the way to the personal love of Jesus Christ has been lost by so many souls.

Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." If we love Jesus Christ, we ought fulfill His commands. And He Himself gives us an example of how we can do this, for He says, "Love one another, as I have loved you." "As", that is, "in the same manner".

Was Christ born in luxury? Did He grown up amongst pleasures? Was he accustomed to having His every satisfaction provided for by Mary and Joseph?

Did He have a successful career? Was He popular and accepted by the many? Was His work profitable and enriching? Was His retirement benefit enjoyable and rewarding?

In the sight of this world: NO, to all of these questions. No, because "He made Himself poor in this world, that we might become rich in grace", says St. Paul. He made Himself poor, or in other words, He undertook a life of penance and mortification for the sake of our salvation, since it was in this that He merited for us, by the consummation of His life and the most bitter anguish of the Cross, all the graces of the Redemption.

Yes, Christ Jesus manifested His extremely, great and infinite love, for us poor wretches, in that He suffered and sacrificed all for love of us.

This is the way of love that the world, in growing cold, has forgotten, and lost. This is the way of personal love which so many lost souls have wandered from. This is that true form of Christianity which so many Catholics too have forgotten. But this is the perennial Gospel of the Catholic Church: Do penance and believe!

St. Peter's very first sermon on Pentecost Day had this theme: Do penance and believe! "Do penance!" because "all of us have sinned and have been deprived of the glory of God", which is that Blessed Vision of Love Himself. "No one has seen God", who "is Love"; hence none of us, by our birth into this world, and by our own right or powers can know what love truly is.

This innate ignorance is why the tendency of our fallen nature is to intemperance, indulgence, impurity, and concupiscence. This ignorance, in that it is fundamentally an ignorance of what Love is, is hence fundamentally an ignorance that leads away from what Love is.

Hence the necessity of Penance on the way to the perfection of Charity.



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We ought to do penance for our sins and those of the whole world: this is an act of justice, since God has been truly and deeply offended, and we, as Catholics, called to a life of supernatural justice, ought to pay our debts back to God and strive that the debts of others also be rendered to Him. Just sons would do not less.

But a more radical and fundamental necessity is that we undertake penance, a penitential life, a life of mortification and self-sacrifice, out of charity for Our Lord Jesus Christ. Did Our Divine Master not say, "If you do not take up your cross and follow Me you cannot be My disciple?" And again, "Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise. Be zealous therefore, and do penance" (Apoc. 3:2-3). The Apostle adds, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us, as an oblation and a sacrifice to God . . ." (Eph. 3:17-19)

The mortification of our senses, our faculties, our body and soul, of our inordinate desires, all this is a work of justice and charity for Our Lord and Redeemer. If we love Christ, we will want to walk with Him. And to walk with Him is to be His disciple. But, as He teaches, we cannot be His disciple, unless we take up our cross and only then follow Him.

The life of Penance then is the beginning of the life of authentic love of Christ Jesus. We see this in the life of every Saint. Just think of St. Francis of Assisi; the beginning of his conversion was a life of hard, manual, labor; a life of charity for lepers, despite their wounds which so revolted him; a life of fasting and prayer and vigils, of hair shirts, and thorns, and cold snow and ice; of abstinence from meat, and of long foodless lents. Such was St. Francis's love of Christ, manifest and worked out in penance, that he merited to hear a voice from Heaven, assuring him that all his sins had been blotted out.

Penance is the authentic road to the love of Jesus Christ. If there is a dearth of this Love today, is it not because there is a dearth of penance today? And since it is charity, more than all other virtues, which binds us to Christ and is the hallmark of fidelity, is it no wonder that without penance the members of the Church are corrupted by every infidelity?

We live in an age full of abominations, outrageous crimes, incredible scandals, and the most wicked perversions. The way to rid the Church of all of these is the Gospel of Penance: the proclamation of the necessity and importance of the way of mortification and self-sacrifice. But the proclamation is not enough; indeed it is the duty of the Hierarchy to tell the world of this and boldly; but it is the duty of all of us, whether clergy, religious, or laity, to practice it.

There is no greater work more needful, more important than this personal commitment to a life of penance. And no time has the Church had more need of this amongst its members than the present hour.

Do penance with the blessing of God! (St. Francis of Assisi)