

PIOUS PRACTICES FOR LENT

Every Lent, Holy Mother The Church advocates certain pious practices that her children should perform to satisfy their requirements to do penance, to pray, to perform good works, to make reparation for their sins, and to further the apostolic work of the Church—all at an extra level.

Our Lord tells us, as recorded in Scripture, “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” (*Luke* 13:3). And St. John the Baptist announced the coming of the Saviour with the ominous admonition, “Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (*Matt.* 3:2).

With regard to prayer, St. Paul tells us to “Pray without ceasing.” (*1 Thess.* 5:17). And Our dear Lord advises us, “Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.” (*John* 16:23). Also He said, “If you abide in me [i.e., “live in Me,” or “stay in the state of grace”], and my words abide [“live”] in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.” (*John* 15:7). Further, Our Lord has said, “Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of man.” (*Luke* 21:36). And in the Book of Judith we read, “Know ye that the Lord will hear your prayers, if you continue with perseverance in fastings and prayers in the sight of the Lord.” (*Judith* 4:11).

Our obligation to do apostolic work, no matter who we are, is seen in the general admonition of St. John the Baptist, “. . . make straight the way of the Lord. . .” (*John* 1:23; *Is.* 40:3). The Church has used this counsel in her Advent liturgy, so we know it applies to all—at least to the extent that all must pray and do penance for the success of the Church’s missionary activity, help support it financially, and wherever possible take an active part in the conversion or reconversion of those we know.

The primary purpose of Lent, of course, is to help us become truly holy—and we should work toward this goal during Lent by *extra* prayer, penance, good works, almsgiving, attendance at Mass and reception of the Sacraments (the chief sources of grace) and spiritual reading. This last is essential today in order to be inspired to do all the rest!

SPECIFIC PRACTICES TO CHOOSE FROM

1. **Abstinence:** This is the giving up of something we like to eat, drink, smoke, use, etc. (All Catholics 14 and over are currently required to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent.) We can abstain from (give up) meat on days other than those required, give up candy, sweets, dessert, pop, gum, coffee, tea, smoking, beer, wine, hard liquor, eating between meals, and/or our favorite foods and drinks, etc.
2. **Fasting:** This is still required by the Church of all those age 18 through 59 on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, but it is something which most people can do every day during Lent (Sunday is exempted, which was never a day of fasting), as used to be the rule. This was formerly required of all Catholics 21 through 59 years of age. The Catholic Church’s traditional method of fasting is to take only one full meal per day, at which meat may be eaten (unless it is also a day of abstinence), plus 2 small meals that together do not equal the main meal and at which no meat is eaten, with nothing eaten between meals. This is a mild form of fasting, but one which leaves a person always a little on the hungry side and ever cognizant that he is depriving himself of his regular fare. (Those doing hard physical labor were always able to be excused from the Lenten fast by their priest or confessor.)
3. **T.V.:** We can drastically limit our T.V. viewing, give up favorite programs or eliminate T.V. viewing altogether.
4. **Prayer:**
 - The daily Rosary. Our Lady urgently requested the daily recitation of the Rosary (5 decades) during *each* of her six appearances at Fatima in 1917 (an approved Marian apparition).
 - The First Saturday devotion, requested by Our Lady at Fatima. With regard to this devotion, Our Lady revealed to Sr. Lucy of Fatima on December 10, 1925, “I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who on the First Saturday of 5 consecutive months shall confess, receive Holy Communion, recite 5 decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for 15 minutes, while meditating on the 15 mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.” (A later revelation indicated that the Confession may be 8 days before or after the First Saturday and the meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary may be on as few as one of the mysteries. It does not need to be performed before the Blessed Sacrament.)
 - An extra Mass or more each week. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the greatest prayer there is.
 - A Holy Hour once a week, twice a week, or each day. This is one of the most underrated devotions in the Church. Our Lord Himself has said, “Could you not watch one hour with me?” (*Matt.* 26:40). Granted, this was addressed to the Apostles in the Garden of Olives the night before He was crucified, but it can be applied to all of us generally—and how very, very few practice this powerful devotion! Archbishop Fulton Sheen made it the center of his daily devotions, after the Mass.
 - Pray for those in Purgatory: We have an obligation to pray for our relatives and for anyone we may have harmed by our sins. A Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament after Mass is extremely efficacious for the Poor Souls and can lead to the gaining of a plenary indulgence—all other conditions for gaining a Plenary Indulgence also being fulfilled, i.e., 1) Confession a few days

before or after performing the work, 2) reception of Sacramental Communion on the day when gaining the Plenary Indulgence, 3) some prayers for the intentions of the Pope on the day the work is done, and 4) freedom from attachment to sin (or, some say, at least a fervent desire and effort to be free from attachment to sin).

- Pray for those who are in danger of dying without being in the state of Sanctifying Grace. Such prayers should be offered to Our Lady to apply as she desires, for she sees clearly who really needs the extra graces at any given time. (In this regard, read *Devotion for the Dying*—TAN, 12.00.) Worldwide, at least 266 people die every minute! And only some 17% of the world’s people are Catholic. Our Lord said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believes not shall be condemned.” (*Mark* 16:16). Therefore, most people dying need conversion. It behooves us to pray for their conversion.
 - Pray for anyone you may have had the misfortune to lead into sin.
 - Pray for an end to abortion.
 - Pray for peace in the world. The Old Testament tells us, “The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord: whithersoever he will, he shall turn it.” (*Prov.* 21:1). Prayer can work miracles and change the hearts of even wicked rulers.
 - Pray for priests! The devil is after them more than anyone else, because they help us with our salvation.
5. Go to Confession once a week: Frequent Confession is generally said to be once a month, but in *Introduction to the Devout Life* St. Francis de Sales recommends once a week, and St. Alphonsus Liguori says that anyone who is serious about saving his soul will go often, “at least once a week.” Some Saints went every day; many went several times a week. Just prior to Vatican II, priests in the U.S.A. were advocating once a week and getting about 1/3 to 1/2 compliance by the people in their parishes. This is one of the best ways to make progress in the spiritual life because we regularly stay focused on what we are doing wrong, and receive the grace of this Sacrament to correct our lives.
6. Examine your conscience every night: Review the day and what you did that might have displeased God; then, keep these things in mind for your next Confession.
7. Do penance: Our Lord has made it perfectly clear that penance is necessary for salvation. (See the quotes from Scripture above.) To Sr. Lucy of Fatima, He revealed that “The penance I now ask and require is that necessary for the fulfillment of My law and the performance of one’s daily duties.” (A pretty easy condition, indeed, and from a most merciful Master!)
8. Perform good works:
- Visit the sick.
 - Visit people in nursing homes once a week.

REMEMBER: Lent is a holy season set aside by the Church during which we are recommended to do *extra* prayer, penance, sacrifice, good works and almsgiving, plus to frequent the Sacraments and attend Mass more often—all for the welfare of our souls. And we should all keep before our minds that many a pious practice begun during Lent has become a lifelong virtuous habit that has thereby helped to perfect those who have made a mere “humble beginning” during Lent, often times a Lent that was even started late!

- Counsel, picket or pray at abortion clinics.
- Join in the Pro-Life Rescue effort.
- Take someone to Mass with you on Sundays.
- Get someone with a marriage problem to see a priest.

9. Give alms:
- Increase your donation at Church.
 - Give to cloistered monasteries and convents in your area.
 - Support good Catholic schools.
 - Support crisis pregnancy centers.
 - Support local soup kitchens.
 - Help those who are poor.
10. Do Apostolic work:
- Take someone to Mass with you.
 - Take someone to Confession with you.
 - Invite someone to become a Catholic—start talking to him about it.
 - Get him to a priest for instruction.
 - Get a priest to visit a fallen-away Catholic, especially an elderly one.
 - Distribute Catholic books and booklets. (TAN has many titles that are discounted specifically for this purpose.)
 - Distribute prayer cards and leaflets. (TAN has over a dozen of these, drastically discounted for wide distribution, plus small flyers announcing Catholic books.)
11. Engage in spiritual reading:
- Require yourself to do at least 15 minutes of reading from a good Catholic book each day.
 - Read your Bible at least 15 minutes each day.
 - Read from the life of a Saint for at least 15 minutes each day. (*These* are the heroes and heroines we should imitate.)
12. Consecrate your life to God and renew the consecration each day. Or, consecrate yourself to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary and read about and begin to practice “True Devotion to Mary.” Read St. Louis De Montfort’s book called *True Devotion to Mary*, one of the Church’s greatest classics.

PIOUS PRACTICES FOR LENT. Now you can order *Pious Practices for Lent* as a 4-page sheet folded to letter-size, to give to all your friends and relatives this Lent. It also includes “A Lenten Letter from the Publisher” (page 24-8) and “Suggested Lenten Reading—A List of TAN’s Best Books for Lent” (not included in this catalog). (10—.10 ea. (1.00); 25—.08 ea. (2.00); 50—.07 ea. (3.50); 100—.06 ea. (6.00); 500—.04 ea. (20.00); 1,000—.03 ea. (30.00))

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A Lenten Letter From The Publisher

“Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema” (*Gal. 1:8*). (“Anathema” means “cut off and cursed.”) The Catholic Church has always observed and preached Lent as a time for extra prayer, penance and sacrifice, and so it does today, despite what many may think. The reason is that we are weak, fallen creatures because of Original Sin, and we all need to gain a better grip on ourselves and gain greater and greater control over our wills, that we may better “do the good and avoid the evil” when temptations arise. For upon doing good and avoiding evil depends our eternal salvation. Thus, Lent has a direct bearing on whether or not we save our souls. Our Lord put it succinctly: “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” (*Luke 13:3*). Paraphrased, His saying might read, “Unless you strengthen your wills with difficult practices, you will succumb to mortal sin when temptation comes.”

Lent is actually a time when we should all pick up the tempo of our spiritual lives—on various levels—e.g., increase our prayer, use of the Sacraments, good works, self-denial, spiritual reading, etc. As the politicians like to speak about “jump-starting the economy,” Lent is a time when all of us need sort of to “jump-start” our spiritual lives by quickening our activity for the few weeks of Lent. Lent is a time for picking up the pace of our march through life, much like soldiers who occasionally, and for a time, will do “double-time” in their marching (in other words, they jog) in order to make better speed toward their goal.

Lent is a time of special graces, specifically ordained by God, through the laws of the Church, a time then to “jump-start” our souls, to pick up the pace of our spiritual lives, to do spiritual “double-time,” so to speak—for a while, for a time, for the forty or so days during this holy season. We are not expected to go on and on with our increased activities, but for a time we need to pick up the pace. The net result

is that we become stronger overall because of it, and often when Lent is over, that candy, coffee, beer, etc. we have denied ourselves and that we have been hankering for does not taste anywhere near so good as we had anticipated. For we have moved on, moved to the next level of looking at our daily habits and practices and uses, moved to a new mode of living. Often after Lent is over, we find that we can do without things we formerly enjoyed, we can take them or leave them. We have succeeded in strengthening our wills and in disciplining ourselves to rise above our former habits.

The same applies to the *positive* things we do for Lent: That Rosary or *extra* Rosary we said during Lent, the daily Mass we attended, the visits to the nursing home once a week, stayed with us when Lent was over, and we thereby became that much better a person because we decided that “at least during Lent” I will do such and so. And these beautiful practices we found were *not* so hard, and we were able to retain them as new, virtuous practices once Lent had ended.

Let it be the same for you this year, even if you start your Lent late. Determine to do something challenging. Make up your mind to *deny* yourself two or three things that you really like (try coffee, for example—whew!) and to do two or three things that are *positive*, like going to Confession consistently every week and to daily Mass (it won’t kill you!). Many a daily communicant got started during some Lent when perhaps a good Sister advocated this for Lenten practice when he or she was in school. (And I’ll bet many a Saint is in Heaven because of it—and the Sister too, for suggesting it!)

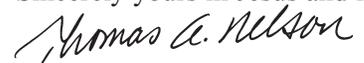
Because I am a publisher and make a livelihood selling Catholic books, I am going to suggest a half hour each day (Sundays too, now) of good spiritual reading from some of the great Catholic books from TAN. One of the reasons so many Catholics have lost the Faith in recent years, I believe, is that *they just did not know much about it*, let alone realize the glorious and totally

soul-satisfying thing that it is. Catholic spiritual reading will fill that void and inspire your soul with the knowledge and love of God . . . and thereby a willingness to serve Him more faithfully in the future. After all, we cannot love what we do not first know, and how will we ever serve Him whom we do not love? Knowledge of God and His plan for our salvation, therefore, comes first; then will follow love and service as natural consequences. A simply unparalleled source of the knowledge of God and His plan for us can be found in excellent Catholic books.

Unsurpassed for excellent Lenten meditation is *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* from the visions of Ven. Anne Catherine Emmerich. This book will melt a heart of stone and will show you just what Our Lord went through to redeem us. After reading this book, you will think twice before you snivel over some little inconvenience or discomfort you have to suffer. Rather, you will be a lot more likely to offer it up in reparation for your sins or for the relief of the Poor Souls. But there are many, many other excellent books as well, such as, *Devotion for the Dying*, (TAN’s most moving book), *The Way of Divine Love*, *Words of Love*, *True Devotion to Mary*, *Prayer—The Key to Salvation*, *The Twelve Steps to Holiness and Salvation*, etc, but above all, *Think Well On It*. (Yes, we are striving hard right now to have this book available this Lent. Don’t miss it!)

Take advantage of this special time to stock up on some great books for your spiritual formation and inspiration this Lent. And take advantage of the Lenten season to stock up your personal spiritual treasury, so to speak, with extra graces and to strengthen your will by extra penitential practices, so that you may “stand in the time of tribulation” and ultimately save your soul for all eternity, plus gain a higher place in Heaven. That, after all, is what life *and* Lent are all about.

Sincerely yours in Jesus and Mary,



Thomas A. Nelson, Publisher