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CALL TO PENANCE
CALL TO Penance

This issue of the National Bulletin on Liturgy is devoted to penance, to which Christ has called us.

The Bulletin has the laity primarily in mind. By making a reasonably complete presentation on the subject of penance, the Bulletin hopes to help your community grow in Christ by carrying his cross daily. The call to penance is not limited to Lent: it continues all year. Lent is a good time, however, for Catholics to begin to take a more serious and responsible view of Christ's call to penance, and to begin responding more fully to his call.

St. Paul tells us that thin sowing brings thin reaping (2 Cor. 9: 6). Bulletin 42 presents Christ's call to penance; how well we answer it depends on how generously we are ready to sow.
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EDITORIAL

PENANCE IS FOR ALL SEASONS

The Lord Jesus, the bridegroom, is taken away from us, and now the bride of Christ is called on to fast.

Christ invites his people to follow him, to pick up his cross every day and walk along his paths.

This invitation is not limited in time. It is not restricted to Lent or Fridays.

Christ asks us to carry our cross daily. (Lk. 9: 23)

* * *

In the last few years, God's people have been heeding Jesus' invitation a little more. Gradually, we have found ourselves asking if God doesn't expect more of us. Self-criticism of the current penitential vacuum is growing, and this is good. Should we be doing more and better penance?

We are becoming aware of Christ's call.
We are more ready to hear his voice, more willing to do what he asks, a little less reluctant and hesitant at the cost of discipleship.

This Bulletin echoes Christ's call to us to do penance. It shows his followers the wonderful opportunities of grace that we neglect, and invites us to bear the cross not only in one season, but throughout the year.

Lent is the great season of penance, but it should be the highlight in a year of penance, not the only time of self-denial.

This year, God willing, will be the time when many of his people begin to take Christ's invitation seriously:

If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross every day, and follow me.

* * *

This Bulletin is for all who want to follow him daily on the road of the cross.
How has the Church responded to Christ's call for penance? How is it responding today? What can we do better tomorrow?

The early Church took the command of Christ quite seriously. As the centuries rolled by, the manner and degree of penance varied. But faithful to the message of Christ, the Church continued to preach the message of repentance as the heart of the penitential obligation, particularly during the season of Lent.

Just before the Council: The era in history which is most familiar to us, however, is the immediate preconciliar period. Most of us can remember the strict Friday abstinence, the vigils and ember days of prayer and fasting, the rigorous Lent of fast and abstinence in various combinations. Between the second world war and the Vatican Council, a number of changes took place in the Church's penitential legislation, gradually easing up on the regulations.

While the penitential discipline of the 1950s had much to recommend it, there was a serious difficulty: too many were not following it, or were dispensing themselves from all penance because of various reasons. And the emphasis — at least in practice, if not in theory — was all too often on the mechanical achievement of so many meals and half meals per day. Who can forget the great discussions on whether you could eat whale meat on Friday? Or whether the flesh of some snail-eating duck was meat or fish? Every Ash Wednesday, the Catholic press led the world into another Lent by publishing a picture of a set of scales with a slice of bread and whatever else one could eat, up to eight ounces. In the last few years before the Council, the charts detailing what one could and could not eat — both in quality and in quantity — started to look like a 5BX plan.

And yet, as the Council reminds us, the Church did form our spirituality by these means: during the different seasons of the liturgical year, the Church uses its traditional ways of forming those who believe — instruction, prayer, works of mercy, acts of penance, and other pious practices (see Liturgy constitution, no. 105).

A fuller outline of this history is contained in the Canadian bishops' 1966 statement (see Bulletin 10, pages 8-9).

Vatican Council: By calling the people of God back to the treasures of scripture, the Council began to open our lives and customs to the scriptural values. A definite change of direction was clearly given. Minutiae and the mechanics of fasting were de-emphasized, as were superficial and relatively unimportant details that take too much attention and are in danger of becoming a preoccupation.

The basic spirit of penance was emphasized by the Council, pointing out its meaning and importance, and its necessity in the life of the Christian individual or community:
All who follow Christ are to continue in prayer and in praising the Father (see Acts 2: 42-47). They are to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, both holy and pleasing to God (see Rom. 12: 1). In all places they are to be Christ's witnesses, showing their hope of unending life to all they meet (see 1 Pet. 3: 15). The people of God are called to holiness by celebrating the sacraments, by making their prayer of petition and thanks, by giving the witness of holy living, and by carrying out acts of self-denial and love (see Constitution on the Church, no. 10).

Jesus shows us the way: He obeyed to the point of death, and for this the Father raised him up (see Phil. 2: 8-9) to the glory of his kingdom. All creation is subject to him until he turns it over to the Father, when God will be all in all (see 1 Cor. 15: 27-28). Jesus has shared this with us, so that we may share his freedom, overcoming the rule of sin in us by denying ourselves and by living a holy life (see Rom. 6: 12). He has gone even further, sharing his power with us so that our humble and patient service of others may lead them to our king (see Constitution on the Church, no. 36).

Union with Christ's suffering is part of our way to salvation. People who suffer from poverty, weakness, sickness, persecution, or other forms of oppression should realize that they are joined with Jesus in a special way: they are suffering with him in order to save the world. The Lord Jesus has called them blessed, for God has invited them to suffer a little while and be made perfect, and then to enter eternal glory with Christ (see 1 Pet. 5: 10). All who believe in Christ, of every walk of life, will be able to grow more holy each day through these circumstances: they need to accept these situations as coming from the Father's hand, and work with him in showing others God's love in their life and their works (see Constitution on the Church, no. 41).

Self-denial is mentioned along with other essential duties of Christian living: every believer is to share in the sacraments often, especially the eucharist, and in other liturgical rites. Every Christian is to be constant in prayer, in self-denial, in serving his or her brothers and sisters in Christ, and in exercising all the virtues (see Constitution on the Church, no. 42).

These few examples give us an insight into the ways in which the Second Vatican Council approached the question of penance. One further example, given in the Liturgy constitution (nos. 109-110), will be discussed in the section on Lent: see pages 34-36.

Father of love,
we bless your name
through Christ your Son
in the communion and love of your Spirit,
now and evermore. Amen!
The renewal in the field of penitential discipline seemed easy until it came to putting it into actual practice. Then the problem of helping people to think about penance in a whole new way came to the fore.

1966 statement: After serious consultation, study and prayer, the bishops of Canada established the postconciliar penitential discipline in our country in October 1966.

The general assembly of the bishops decided:

○ To give new emphasis, by an intensive and well co-ordinated catechesis, to the evangelical law of penance and to recall its obligatory character.

○ To maintain the penitential character of Lent and all Fridays of the year, with particular insistence on Fridays of Lent and especially Good Friday. On these days, penance should be considered as an important requirement of the Christian life, but the manner of fulfilling this duty is left to the discretion of the faithful.

○ To remind parents and educators, on the occasion of this legislation which is directed especially to adults, of their duty to introduce children gradually to the practice of penance.

○ To recommend to the faithful privileged forms of penance, either by reason of their evangelical value (such as fasting, almsgiving, prayer, works of mercy), or by reason of their traditional value (such as abstinence).

(Bulletin 10, page 7)

Along with the text of this decision, the bishops issued a five-page explanation of the meaning of penance in the life of the Church. The full text, which is contained in Bulletin 10, pages 7-12, should be read again.

It was a good statement, one which covered the directions of a sound catechesis. Unfortunately, many parishes did not grasp its import. Too many people just ceased doing penance, imagining that the change in ecclesiastical legislation somehow abrogated the law of Christ.

For many, Lent went limp and lost its meaning because of a few dietary changes. For others, Friday became the same as any other weekday. The whole purpose of the renewal seemed lost.

In 1972, for instance, a priest from another country wrote this note to the National Liturgical Office, expressing his sincere concern about our apparent lenten laxity:

"A month ago I began my second year in Canada. Last Lent and in particular last Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, I was disappointed that the Canadian Church did not see fit to make it the rule rather than the exception that the Church's universal fast be kept.

"It seems to me that most Canadians could have endured the very mild rigors of this fast, and by not doing it officially they perhaps missed a good chance to say that they are united with the rest of the Christians throughout the world in a
willingness to suffer in order that Christ may rise in them and be manifested in the world."

**Counterattack:** In the past few years voices have been raised, calling the people of God to a more responsible form of penitential discipline. Through the pastoral or introductory notes of the national liturgical calendar, *Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy*, the Canadian Church has been emphasizing a fuller and positive view of penance throughout the year, and especially during Lent. In a similar way the paschal fast was introduced to Canada. (See *Liturgical Calendar*, notes for Passion Sunday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday.)

Here and there, parishes and communities started to promote a better understanding of the Church's response to Christ's call for penance. (See Bulletin 33, pages 75-76; no. 37, page 31.)

**National Council for Liturgy:** At its meeting in 1973, the National Council for Liturgy expressed its concern about the low level of penitential practice in our country. Because many people still do not seem to have understood the importance of penance, the council issued a stronger call to penance in this resolution of concern:

In view of the general failure of the faithful to understand the spirit and intent of the post-Vatican II reforms of penitential practice, the National Council for Liturgy recommends to the Office for Liturgy that a renewed emphasis be placed on penitential discipline in the Church in Canada.

Specifically the National Council recommends:

1. that fasting on Ash Wednesday be strongly encouraged as a sign that the faithful are entering seriously upon a lenten program of conversion;

2. that a return to the original and ancient liturgical fast on Good Friday and Holy Saturday be strongly encouraged;

3. that the correlation between prayer, almsgiving, and penitential practices be stressed, specifically with regard to the program of CCODP (Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace);

4. that penitential discipline be urged as a responsibility of the Church at every level, e.g., penance undertaken by the parish community in connection with celebrations of communal penance, vocation programs, or parochial apostolic endeavors.

Since 1973, the National Council for Liturgy has continued each year to bring this matter before the regional liturgical conferences and diocesan commissions. The contents of this issue are one result of this call, as are the notes on penitential discipline and practices in the current *Liturgical Calendar*. But it is up to you — in your parish and in your community — to spread the understanding of this message, and to put it into regular practice across the country.

*When every parish and community and family in the land understands its Christian responsibility to do penance, then the Church in Canada will become more faithful to the way of the Lord.*
CALL TO Penance

CHRIST'S CALL

“The Pharisees fast twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. John the Baptist's followers fast. Why don't your disciples fast too?”

Jesus' answer is simple: “Those who are with the bridegroom would not think of mourning while he is with them. But when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast.” (See Mt. 9: 14-15.)

The proper way for a Christian to fast is described in the sermon on the mount: see Mt. 6: 16-18. All who want to be Christ's followers must deny themselves, take up their cross every day, and follow him (see Lk. 9: 23).

Jesus calls us to penance because we are his followers. He wants to continue the effects of his passion by our penance. Through our action, he continues the work of redemption in our community. As individuals and communities growing in Christ, we become more like him, and share more fully in his cross each day.

Call to Repentance

Christ's call to penance is first of all a call to repentance. “Repent and believe the Good News” (see Mk. 1: 15) echoes through the preaching of Christ and his apostles, continuing the message of John the Baptist.

Unless we are willing to turn from our sins and back to God, our penance is unacceptable. The sacrifice that God wants from his people is a humble and contrite heart.

The heart of the virtue of penance, the Council reminds us (Liturgy constitution, no. 109), is hatred for sin against God. The Lord wants service from the heart, not lip service or pietistic sham. God is not deceived by external appearances: he does not judge as a human person does, but reads our hearts and knows us for what we are.

The Lord Jesus wants us to work toward the day when each of us will be able to say with him that our food and drink — that which keeps us alive, as it were — is to do the will of the Father. (See Jn. 4: 34.)

Call to Penance

To bring us a little closer to this type of God-centered living, Jesus calls on us to bear our cross each day as we follow him. All acts of penance must lead us to growth in the virtue of penance, hatred of sin as an offence against God. Penance therefore is a sign that we have turned away from sin, and a source of strength for perseverance.

We are called to help redeem the world by our penance. Both by accepting the penances, trials, and sufferings God sends us, and by our voluntary penances, we
continue to follow Christ in his work of saving the world and leading mankind back to the Father (see Redemptive value, below).

The practice of penance in this spirit should be alive and growing in the life of every Christian and in every Christian community. Christ's call to penance hasn't changed.

Jesus led the way, and asks that we follow him along the road of penance.

Are we ready to listen to his call and to respond in faith?

REDEMPTIVE VALUE

Voluntary penance (the kind we choose for ourselves) and accepted or “sent” penance (the kind God chooses for us) are part of God's plan for salvation, because he has given sincere penance a redemptive value, the power to overcome sin.

Jesus Christ: The life and work of Christ centered on his Father's will, and could be summed up in two phrases: God's glory and our salvation.

• God's glory: Everything Jesus did was done in obedience to the Father and for his honor and glory. Jesus came as the light of the world, so that men and women might see his good deeds and give praise to God. He came as high priest to bring humanity's prayer and worship to the Father. He taught us to seek the kingdom of God first, before everything else. His apostles taught us to do everything for God's glory: whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we should do it in the name of Jesus for the glory of the Father.

• Salvation of the world: Jesus came to save us from our sins and to lead us back to the Father. He came to save the world by his death and resurrection, and to lead us back to the will of God.

Followers of Jesus: The Lord calls upon his followers to follow his example in working for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world.

By our penance, we work against sin and for God. We begin to seek God's will more fully, and promote his kingdom of justice, peace and love. Our lives become more pleasing to him; we bring him greater glory and honor. When we celebrate the eucharist in our community, our greater devotion to his will is reflected in our worship.

Christian penance has a redemptive value: what we do, when done with the proper motive, is joined to the suffering of Christ, and brings God's merciful help to sinners and saints alike. The communion of saints is still alive and well.

The penance we perform takes on such power because it shares in the redemptive work of Christ. It is not we who save others, but Christ working in us.

When we think of penance, our first inclination is to think of voluntary penance, the type we impose upon ourselves. A more Christian view is to realize that fundamental to penance is our acceptance of the crosses that God gives us, to see them with the eyes of faith. God wills that they should be a cause of our Christian
growth, both individually and as a people. It does not make sense to take on voluntary penances while neglecting the crosses that God has chosen for us.

St. Paul accepted the suffering of his life and apostolate, and recognized God's hand and plan in them. Though he was daily being put to death for God, he rejoiced — and asked for help from the one whose grace was sufficient for him.

The hardest penance to accept many times is God's will. But he asks us to share in the passion of Christ by accepting the trials and sufferings of daily living. The agony of a pain-ridden life, the struggle for economic survival, an alcoholic spouse — situations which human wisdom rejects, and even God wants improvements made in them — can be the paths through which God leads us. Every moment of human suffering has redemptive value when it is joined to the death and resurrection of the Lord. Like him, we suffer; and like him, we will, one day, come to glory through our suffering, for God brings good out of all things for those who love him.

By our penance and our suffering, we can help carry on the work of Christ to redeem the world. By suffering to make up what is lacking in the body of Christ, his Church, we bring the work of creation and redemption a little closer to God's plan in Christ. Suffering and penance accepted in love can be like prayer, bringing great rewards to us, for God will not be outdone in generosity.

**Personal invitation:** Every Christian is given a personal call to share daily in the cross of Christ, and to make up by penance what is lacking in the suffering of Christ.

By his will for us, God gives us the daily opportunity to work for the salvation of the world by our penance. In our daily living and work, as well as in our voluntary penance, he invites us to join our personal penance with the passion of Christ. Instead of letting our sufferings and penances go to waste, as it were, we are given the chance to let them become dynamic by acquiring redemptive value.

Individuals and communities can proclaim their faith in Christ's redemption by doing serious penance for their own and others' sins. Instead of grumbling about what is wrong with others and with ourselves, let's pray about these problems, and back up our prayer with fasting and penance. Suggestions for doing this are developed further in *Community penance*, pages 16-18.

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**GOD'S WISHES**

The Lord of heaven and earth has some suggestions about the kind of penance his people should do. These are expressed in Is. 58: 1-14, and are read during the first days of Lent (Lectionary, nos. 222-223). Reading them in several versions helps to clarify God's message.

These ideas make an excellent meditation for each believer and for believing communities, especially with regard to the lenten season.

*In the light of this message, what changes are you going to make in your life during Lent?*
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

a) **Neglected area:** Most of us grew up in an era that considered only the individualistic aspects of sin and penance. Despite St. Paul's teaching that what affected one member affected all, few considered that their sin or their good action had any influence or effect on others, as long as no bad example was given.

The Vatican Council pointed out the social dimension of sin and penance when speaking of the character of the lenten season:

- **Instruction:** It is important to help believers to understand the "social consequences" of our sin. The real nature of the virtue of penance should be seen as hatred for sin because it offends God. The Church has an important role in guiding us to penitential practices. Christians are to be urged to pray for sinners.

During Lent, Christians should make sure that their penance is both internal and individual as well as external and social. The Church is to encourage penance according to the possibilities (not the inclinations) of today's world, in each area, and according to particular circumstances. Both Rome and the local bishops are to encourage these penitential practices. (See Liturgy constitution, nos. 109-110.)

b) **Social consequences of sin:** Though sin is the act of an individual human person saying "No!" to God and his will, its effects go far beyond the person who sins. Each person is a member of the human community, and many are members of the people of God. Both in civil and ecclesiastical society, when one member glories, all glory; when one member suffers, all suffer. In a Church called to holiness, whose members are to be blameless in the sight of God, the sin of each member besmirches the bride of Christ.

The more we choose to sin, the greater the evil to be overcome in redeeming society for God; the less the light of Christ shines in the world through his members, the greater the darkness to be penetrated. A gradual cooling of love, a growing callousness, a greater reluctance in any one person to listen to the invitation of the Spirit is a lessening of the holiness of the entire Church.

In modern times, the power of sin has increased to a new dimension: now, countries, armed forces, large companies — even ecclesial communities! — can get beyond individual control. As a consequence, right and wrong are no longer determined by God but by the company rules. Individuals caught up in such a web seem to be faced with two choices: to be heroic, denounce the system, quit, and probably be ostracized; or to squelch their consciences gradually and live a 'Sunday Christian' type of existence. At the 1971 Synod, voices were heard speaking of the injustices of multinational corporations, but who has done what since then? Sin is no longer a 'God-and-me' proposition! Note the text of hymn no. 277 in Catholic Book of Worship.

c) **External and social penance:** What does the Vatican Council mean when it says that penance should be external and social?

- **External:** Didn't the Lord tell us to do our fasting in secret? (See Mt. 6: 16-18.) Yes, but the same Lord commands us to let our light shine before men by our good deeds (Mt. 5: 16). The clear distinction is in motive and results: Christ encourages us to do good deeds in order to lead others to give praise to God; he
condemns us only when we do good deeds to gain praise for ourselves. It is not the good deed in public but the showing off that he resists. When we do what is right before others, we are following the example of Jesus himself.

○ Social: We are the light of the world, and what we do and think affects the society we live in. Giving up salt in our porridge isn’t going to do much for the world’s salvation, but giving up what is sinful or harmful will. Changing bad example to good will have an effect. Putting the spiritual in first place and revising or reversing our present priorities is going to influence others. When a parish or community stops to analyze where it is spending its time, energy, and money, and moves from peripheral activities to concentrate on its spiritual task, others are able to see the kingdom of God being put in the first place. When a parish decides its primary role is to teach God’s word and worship him and deepen its prayer life and look after the pastoral needs of all its people, the example and the lesson are not lost on others.

By strong, positive action, Christian individuals and communities are able to follow the command of Mt. 5: 16 and effect a positive change for the better. By their spiritual growth into the fullness of Christ’s measure, the Lord is showing the power of his redemption and the effects of his grace, for we are the only proof of the paschal mystery that others can see.

d) Social justice in our community: Some protest that this has little to do with religion, that the pursuit of social justice is not the work of the Church; too often, however, we realize that social justice is our responsibility, and we do nothing about it. In answer, the lectionary presents Isaiah’s strong words at the beginning of the lenten season (Is. 58: 1-9, 9-14; nos. 222-223), on the Friday and Saturday after Ash Wednesday. The homily series in Bulletin 40 (pages 244-251) speaks at length about preaching on the social dimensions of the gospel. The forms for the examination of conscience also look into the social responsibilities of the Christian.

No one who accepts Christ’s commandment of love can claim that social justice is remote from the concerns of the people of God.

* * *

If we are to have a mature understanding of sin and penance, we can neglect neither their individual nor their community aspects. And we have to work to make sure that all our penitential activities reflect this broader view.

1 Various forms for the examination of conscience are given in other issues of the Bulletin: for Advent, see nos. 36, 41, 46, 51, 55, and 61; for Lent, see nos. 32, 37, 42, 47, 52, 56, and 62. Another form is included in Sunday Mass Book, pages 1108-1112.

STANDARD OF PRAYING

We hear much talk these days about seeking a higher standard of living.

What is your parish doing to promote a higher standard of praying?
BENEFITS OF PENANCE

When the virtue of penance is strong among God's people, the results are valuable for the Church and for the world. Among the benefits for individuals and the community we may mention:

- **Hatred of sin:** The essence of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin. As we begin to see sin for what it is, we are going to turn away from it because it offends God. Sin is darkness, evil, hatred, and we turn instead to Christ the light. Through sensitive use of the sacrament of penance, God's power to eradicate sin is free to work in our lives. The mission of every Christian at all times, not only during Lent, is to continue his baptismal promise: to die to sin and to live for God. And the Christian community must expand this approach to face social evils, making sure that they are not being condoned or ignored.

- **Turning to God's will:** As we strive to come closer to Christ, we try to imitate him in saying, “I come to do your will, O God!” (See Heb. 10: 7-9; Jn. 5: 30.) By prayer and by meditative reading of the scriptures, we seek to have in us the mind of Christ, sharing his attitudes. We become more alert to the promptings of his Spirit, and more willing to suffer with Christ that we may share in his glory. By voluntary penance we seek to realize more clearly our total dependence on God's loving mercy. In a community which is docile to the will of God, the Spirit is able to carry out his work of sanctifying the world.

- **Growth in love:** People who begin to realize how much God loves us want to respond with greater love and holiness. We look for ways of giving him greater praise and glory in our community worship and in our daily lives. Nourished by the eucharist, we will grow in love for others, and seek to love and forgive as Christ has loved and forgiven us. Concern for the salvation of sinners will be more evident in our prayer and penance. We will be ready to suffer more with Jesus to help his Church grow in love, and to become ever more effectively the light of the nations.

- **Working for salvation:** When an individual or community does penance with right motives, the Lord uses this occasion to fill up the needs of his Church, and to bring people closer to his salvation (see *Redemptive value*, pages 9-10).

* * *

These are but some of the benefits of the virtue of penance. In life, we cannot separate these results into neat compartments, for they are interdependent and simultaneous. But blessed is the Christian community that gains them through the fervent practice of penance!

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Thin sowing means thin reaping.

*2 Cor. 9: 6*
ATTITUDE OF FAITH

The attitude we take to Christ in our daily lives will affect the way we respond to his call to penance.

a) Negative approach: From a human point of view, the cross is foolishness; it is a stumbling block of pride and ambition. Whether we consider the crucifixion and death of Jesus, or his followers' sharing in his cross, we can make no sense unless we believe that Christ has risen.

The show off of whom the Lord speaks in the sermon on the mount is one who shortchanges himself. He does all the work, suffers all the pains and effort of fasting and penance, but he has already received his reward in the admiring or astonished applause of those near him. The true reward is missed, for God does not accept or commend what he does: it is destroyed by the man's pride. Here indeed God pulls down and rejects the rich man, the one who is self-sufficient and who thinks he doesn't need God's help.

The half-hearted person who does penance grudgingly, or because he feels he is forced to by law, is in a slightly better state than the show off. God rewards what generosity and good will he finds, even it is is minimal. Thin sowing means thin reaping (2 Cor. 9: 6).

Fear of God's demands, of changing our way of life, of what others might say if we changed: these are more ways in which a person or community can weaken and negate the response to Christ's call to penance. God will measure out to us in the same way we measure out our good deeds for him.

What is the answer for those who have a negative attitude toward penance? The answer is faith.

Only faith can move the show off to work for God's glory instead of his own. Only faith can encourage half-hearted and fearful persons and communities to be generous in their response to God.

And faith comes through hearing and prayer and example. The community has a responsibility to pray and to do penance for its weaker members, asking God to strengthen their faith and give them the Spirit of more generous love.

b) Positive response: We are called to do penance because we are Christians. We must put on Christ, be assimilated to him, become one with him, live his life. Through our penance, the Lord Jesus continues his passion and his redemptive work in us.

A Christian who tries to reflect on his faith and to live it will respond in this way to Christ's call to penance:

In faith: A believer does penance because he knows that he is identified with Christ so closely in the Church that his penance continues the passion of Jesus in
today's world. Imitating the patient suffering of the Lord, he seeks to grow to the full stature to which he is called.

Only the person of faith is able to look beyond the following of the cross. For those who believe, the death and resurrection of Jesus bring us salvation. Through them we are able to make sense of what would otherwise seem to be useless suffering. It is this same life-giving paschal mystery that we celebrate in the liturgy. With faith, our penance leads us to the eucharist and the eucharist leads us to live even more fully for Christ.

Generously: Remembering the great love and mercy that God has shown his people, a believer undertakes penance with Christ and his Church in a spirit of love and gratitude. His penance is done for God's glory, for his own salvation and for the salvation of the world. He is ready to see God's hand at work in his life, willing to accept God's will for him, looking for ways to respond to God's great love. Some privileged members of the Church are called to accept penance beyond the degree to which most of us are called: the sick, the seriously handicapped, the aged; religious are called to be witnesses to the world in their penance and their vows. How rarely do most of us pray for these persons and ask God to strengthen them in their penance and witness!

Humbly: We recall that we are the people of God who have stumbled and faltered along the way; we are the ones who begin each Mass by a prayer for mercy and forgiveness. Instead of depressing us, however, our need for God's help should raise our spirits and give us the will to do better penance.

When we practise the virtue of penance, the hatred for sin should be first of all for our own. We must disown the sins we have committed, turn against them, and turn back to God.

Penance for our personal sins is necessary, but the Christian is not to stop there. His penance is also to be redemptive, offered for others that they too may share more fully in the grace of Christ. The penance of the Christian community asks for the mercy of God on all, especially upon sinners: and that includes us all.

In undertaking any program of renewal in penance, care must be taken that sufficient time and energy is spent on attitudinal growth. Without a faith-inspired outlook on penance, our practices will avail us as little as did the twice-weekly fasting of the Pharisee who condemned the other man as a sinner.

ANCIENT PRACTICES

An early text of a lenten hymn for matins, attributed to St. Gregory the Great, outlines some penances we should consider:

\[\text{Utamur ergo parcius} \]
\[\text{Verbis, cibis et potibus,} \]
\[\text{Somno, iocis, et arctius} \]
\[\text{Perstemus in custodia.} \]

Therefore, let us be more sparing in our use of words, food, drink, sleep, and play, and let us be more strict as we continue to stand on guard.
COMMUNITY Penance

Penance by a community of people is common in sacred history. The citizens of Nineveh, for example, were moved by Jonah's preaching, responding by true repentance. God accepted their change of heart. Throughout the Old Testament, the cycle of sin, punishment by tragedy, repentance, and blessing is repeated often.

Community penance is a vivid recognition of the social effects both of sin and of penance (see Liturgy constitution, no. 110).

Role of the Church: The shepherds of the Church have an important part to fulfill in our life of penance (Liturgy constitution, no. 109). By designating certain days for penitential efforts, they guide God's people in the observance of the law of Christ. Thus Friday has long been a day of penance, when we share in the suffering of our savior. Lent and its Fridays, especially Good Friday, are days on which penance is an important part of Christian living.

The following article, Friday is a special day, speaks of Fridays throughout the year, and the section on Lent describes the lenten Fridays.

Even more important, however, is the role of the Church in calling us to the kind of penance God wants for his people. A Christian community can never exhaust the possibilities presented in Isaiah 58.

Beyond the law: God's people are not limited by the Church's legislation. Laws point out the minimum we must do, but concerned Christians want to go further. Following the example of the early Church, they fast and do penance and pray when they are truly in need. As we read the Acts of the Apostles, especially during the Easter season Masses, we might pay more attention to the prayer and penitential practices of the original Christians, for they have much to teach us.

Special occasions: The Spirit of God is not confined to official channels. He is constantly urging Jesus' brothers and sisters to look beyond limited horizons, to seek better ways of serving the Lord by concerned fasting and penance.

Every parish ought to take advantage of special spiritual occasions, and prepare for them by calling priests and people to communal penance.

Occasions for Communal Penance

There are many opportunities for which communities may prepare by prayer and penance, asking God to hear his people and shower his grace upon them. Many examples are suggested here so that each parish or community may be helped to discover a few that it can undertake.

Synod of bishops: Every three years, the bishops of the world send representatives to the synod of bishops in Rome, in order to discuss serious matters facing the Church in today's world. In 1974, they looked at ways in which the gospel needs to be brought to the modern world; in 1977, catechesis. Before and during a synod, bishops and pastors could invite their people to fast and pray for God's blessing on the bishops who gather in synod.
• **Special days and weeks:** Intentions which are close to the will of Christ — such as prayer for Christian unity, for vocations, or for the missions — are reinforced and taken more seriously when the Christian community backs up its prayer and activity by fasting and penance. A “Respect for Life” week, for example, would have much more meaning if it cost more in personal penance, prayer, and action. In other words, we should get serious about intentions which are dear to Christ and his Church.

• **Diocesan needs:** When a new priest or bishop is being ordained, or when a new bishop is being chosen, the people of the entire diocese might be invited to serious works of penance. By their communal prayer and fasting, they will plead for God’s mercy and help for his people in this part of his Church.

• **Parish needs:** When a new pastor is being chosen, when confirmation is to be celebrated, in preparation for penitential services before Easter and Christmas, on the occasion of growth (establishment of a parish council, opening of a parish school or new church), the members of the parish may be invited to prepare for it by prayer, fasting, and penance, that God may bestow his richest blessings upon this community of faith.

• **Universal Church:** When a new pope is being chosen, when the people of God are being persecuted in some part of the world, perhaps on particular occasions during the year, God’s people should be called by their pastors to prayer and works of penance (see *The top ten*, pages 20-33, for many suggestions). Days of prayer for missionaries and the people they serve, for people suffering from natural disasters (see Bulletin 39, pages 136-138), are to be encouraged.

• **National Church:** When the bishops of Canada meet each year, each diocese could invite the people in every parish and religious community to fast and pray that the Spirit will guide our shepherds in their deliberations, and lead the Canadian Church forward in the ways of God and his Christ.

When misunderstanding seems to divide us, or regional or cultural differences cause conflict, when natural disasters affect any part of our nation, when some citizens of our nation are victims of discrimination, the Christian community can carry on Christ’s work by prayer and fasting and action to help those in need.

During a national election, serious prayer and penance may be offered that men and women of conscience will run and be elected, and be courageous enough to work for sound principles and give good leadership.

• **Needs of mankind:** People in all nations are longing for peace. Christian values and family are attacked by open campaigns for abortion and for freedom to peddle smut. Nations and regions are being scourged by starvation. Natural disasters abound. Few seem ready to help young people prepare in a serious way for marriage and family life, while marriage breakdown and divorce rates are soaring. How many pray about the conversion of sinners today?

A truly Christian community will, like Christ, be weighed down by the sufferings of mankind, and feel compassion — and pray and do penance, asking God to show his mercy to all in need, and to guide those chosen to govern us.

All the various suggestions for community penance, from local to universal, may be the basis of ecumenical action.
Never on Sunday: The Lord's day is a day of worship, of prayer, of meditation, of joy, of mercy, of Christian action, but it is not a day of penance. The needs mentioned above still press on God's people, and they will pray about them personally and in the Sunday liturgy. The homily will bring these concerns to the attention of all (see Bulletin 40, Preaching the social dimensions of the gospel, pages 244-251; Bulletin 41 on the social dimensions of Advent, pages 285-288). The general intercessions should always include a petition for those who are being oppressed or crushed in any way.

In times of need, Sunday may be a day of special prayer, and weekdays may be devoted to prayer, fasting, and other works of penance. Sunday itself should not be a day for fasting, even during Lent. (See Bulletin 43, Sunday Belongs to the Lord.)

* * *

God has chosen us in his Son to be his beloved people. He has called us to be blameless in his sight and to praise his name. He has dedicated us to give him glory by our daily lives. And in a special way, he has chosen us in love to follow the footsteps of his thorn-crowned Son, our savior.

If we are Christian individuals, we try to follow Jesus and carry our cross daily (Lk. 9: 23). Can we do less as a Christian community?

FRIDAY IS A SPECIAL DAY

During most of the Church's history, Friday has been considered a day of special penance, a day on which Christians should respond more seriously to Christ's command to carry our cross and follow him. (See Bulletin 10, pages 8-9, for a fuller outline of the history of penitential practices in the Church.)

In 1966, the Canadian bishops stated their strong intention of maintaining the penitential character of all Fridays of the year.

Today's approach: Instead of ignoring Friday or merely concentrating on one, negative, dietary approach — to which stage Friday abstinence had often degenerated by the early 1960s — the Church calls us to make a fresh response each Friday to Christ's call for daily penance.

Here are some ways we should consider, both as individuals and as a Christian community:

- Remember the redemptive death of Christ: by meditative reading of the scriptures, especially of the passion story and the suffering servant poems; by prayer; by a thoughtful making of the stations of the cross (remembering always the requirements of the liturgy constitution, no. 13; see also Bulletin 62, pages 29-30); by participation in Mass. Prayerful use of Psalm 22, of a messianic psalm, or of Psalm 119 on the will of God would be a worthy Friday action. In the liturgy of the hours, Friday is devoted to the obedient and saving sacrifice of Christ for us.
• Share in the suffering of Christ through penance, in order to die with him to sin, to live for God, and to share with Christ in glory. How faithful are we to our duties of state? Do we accept God's providence and will for us? Are we kicking against the goad?

• Act by taking on specific penance for Fridays. Special works of charity and love for others — over and above our daily practice — are one way of showing our love for God, and of overcoming our tendencies to selfishness. Prayer is always acceptable to God; Friday can become for us a time of more fervent and prolonged prayer.

Our first thought must be to practise the virtue of penance, whose essence is hatred of sin as an offence against God. Giving up sin is the first penance God wants from us. Our penitential acts will reinforce and emphasize the virtue. We may choose one of the many forms of penance, one of which has traditionally been abstinence (see The top ten, pages 20-33, for further suggestions).

A serious reflection on one's way of life, and on our fidelity to the spirit of the sermon on the mount, would help us in working for conversion from sin. An occasional review of the reasons why we do penance would be beneficial on a Friday.

Special efforts should be made on Fridays during Lent and on Good Friday, as discussed in the section on Lent.

Parish action: How are we going to bring these ideas before the people of each parish? At every level — diocese, parish and religious community, home and school — we should encourage people to discuss the problem and to see where we presently stand. For too many, the plight could be described as a penitential vacuum.

This Bulletin may be distributed and used as a basis of discussion. One parish published some thoughts on Friday in its parish bulletin to start people thinking about it (see Friday: gone or still here? in Bulletin 33, pages 75-76). Such a note could be followed up in various ways: in homilies, bulletins, posters, banners; in parish societies, parish council, liturgy committee, and schools.

Friday is a special day. Though it presently seems to be dying, it can be dynamic once more if we begin now to make a true response as God's loving people to the Lord Jesus' call for penance.

FURTHER REFERENCES

The National Bulletin on Liturgy continues to present further articles on the subjects covered in Bulletin 42. A complete listing of the references in volumes 1-10 (1965-1977) is included in Bulletin 61:

- Penitential discipline
- Lent
- Holy Week
- Easter season
- Penance celebrations

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THE TOP TEN

There are many ways of doing penance described in scripture. Other forms have been developed and practised during the long life of the people of God. Ten of these ways are described below in the hope of bringing them back into the daily lives of Christians.

Scriptural Values

The bible proposes a number of ways of doing penance. By such works, undertaken with the proper intention, we praise God, seek his help, and turn away from sin.

Ten ways of doing penance — eight recommended by scripture, and two traditional in the life of the Christian community — are discussed below.

How are you going to bring them to the attention of your parish or community?

1. Giving up sin
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Doing good works
5. Giving alms
6. Duties of state and condition
7. Meditative reading and contemplation
8. Controlling our possessions
9. Abstinence
10. Controlling our entertainments

1. Giving up sin: Instead of salt or shows or jelly beans, Jesus asks us to give up sinning. There is no sense in our taking on extras if we do not do the essentials:

   ○ If you love me, keep my commandments.
   ○ People will know that you are my followers if you love one another.
   ○ It is not the one who calls me, “Lord, Lord,” who will be saved, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven.
   ○ Why do you reject the will of God and keep instead the traditions of men?

Our first penitential task is to die to sin. This — like all other works of penance — is not reserved to Lent or special days: it is our daily responsibility as believers, flowing from our baptismal promises.

And the sin God wants us to give up is our own: our specific faults, our pet weaknesses, the ones we really don’t want to change or do anything about.

This is part of our baptismal task, to die to sin and live for God. But the dying must come first, and come now.

An honest self-examination will not be pleasant, but it is a necessary step if we are to know ourselves as God sees us. Realizing our sinfulness, we are ready in our weakness to ask God to raise us up. Only when we are ready to admit our poverty and need, our total inability to save ourselves, is God ready to help us rise. This is why the penitential rite comes at the beginning of Mass, and Ash Wednesday at the start of Lent.
We must seek God's help in prayer if we are to be able to give up sin. We need the light and guidance of the Spirit, as well as his courage, to see the road along which Christ wants to lead us.

Through Mass, sacraments, prayer, good works, and penitential practices, we ask God to raise us out of our sin, to forgive us, to help us change our lives.

"Go in peace and sin no more!" These words are not just a pious or routine dismissal. Jesus says them often, not only to people in the gospel events, but to you and me.

The first penance God asks of his people, who are called to live blameless lives in his sight, and thus give him lasting praise, is to give up sin.

People of God, are we listening?

2

2. Prayer: Is prayer a penance? If someone asks us to name some acts of penance, prayer is usually not our first answer: we are still hung up on the "give up" syndrome. And yet anyone who is honest should be ready to admit how hard he finds it to pray, and how easy it is to give up praying.

- People in need of help: Scripture is filled with references to the Lord's own poor, the anawim, who are raised up while the proud and powerful are put down. God is ready to listen to those who seek his help in prayer.

The people of God need to realize and acknowledge their poverty, to proclaim his greatness and mercy, and to let him continue his work of salvation in us. Any penitential day or season is a good time for Christians to deepen their appreciation of the canticle of Mary (Lk. 1: 46-55).

- How do we seek God's help? By sincere and persevering prayer, by listening more eagerly to God's word, by celebrating the liturgy with greater fervor, by seeking to obey God's commandments more perfectly, by practising penance with greater zeal. When we follow Christ more closely, we come through him to the Father, and he makes us more dynamic members of his people.

- Praise: Prayer is not limited to our petitions for help and mercy. Jesus also gave us the example of praising the Father. The psalms are filled with cries of praise and thanks amid pleas for forgiveness and help. In the prayer of praise, we move from the danger of considering ourselves only and into the realm of giving God the glory he called us to sing.

When considering penance or prayer, we must not forget our public praise of God, nor the petitions his people raise. Community prayer brings fullness to the personal prayer of individuals. In the Mass, sacraments, and liturgy of the hours, the people of God praise the Father of light through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The concluding doxology of the eucharistic prayer is one which can be said sometimes in our personal prayer, or at the end of a psalm of praise.

- Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving: Our prayer is made easier — we are more inclined to pray — when we fast. Our prayer is given the testimony of sincerity by alms and good action.
As the people of God, are we making any effort to please him by our prayer? Is there room for improvement, especially on days of penance?

People of God, are we listening?

3

3. Fasting: Done for its own sake, fasting is a good form of self-discipline, and provides a sound way to lose weight. Fasting in order to gain admiration and praise from others is a lost cause. But fasting as penance for sin, as well as a way to better living for God, is the sort of penance that pleases him.

Fasting leads us to die further to sin and to put on Christ, so that we may rise with him into new life for God. As we read in the scriptures during the paschal season, we are to be new people, Easter people who have been renewed in Christ.

The practice of fasting is not limited to the Christian Church. We inherited it from the Jewish faith: Jesus himself fasted and proclaimed that his followers should also fast. Other religions too have understood the benefits of fasting, and use it on their way to God.

In today's world, fasting is perhaps more prevalent than we might suspect, even among Christians, for Jesus did tell us not to trumpet our fast in order to be applauded. We have seen dramatic hunger strikes focus the world's attention on some cause or injustice. In too much of the world, hunger is the daily cross, while we enjoy our abundance of milk and honey, often with little concern for the starving.

Fasting gains its full and powerful significance when it is used as a means to a positive end. God intends fasting to lead us to be more ready to pray, more willing to share in the suffering of those who lack sufficient food, and to save money to help people who are poorer than we are.

Through fasting, we discipline the body in order to free our spirit for prayer and contemplation and decisive action for others. For us who believe, fasting should open our hearts to God and to his people. For this reason, it is a privileged form of penance, most pleasing to the Lord.

- **Fasting and prayer**: Fasting can help a person or community become more willing and eager to pray. An empty stomach often leads to full prayer, when one is more open to the promptings of the Spirit. Contented nourishment of the body, like excessive possessions, will often lead to undernourished and flabby prayer. When a community fasts and prays in preparation for a special occasion or for a serious need (see *Community penance*, pages 16-18), God listens more closely to his people's prayer.

By prayer, we are referring to public liturgical prayer, community devotions, family and personal prayer, meditative reading of the scriptures, and contemplation. The sacramentary encourages the connection between prayer and fasting by designating two prefaces (nos. 10-11, Lent III-IV), for use on days of fast at any time during the year.

- **Sharing in the suffering of others**: While our fasting may be a light penance when compared to the more serious sufferings of others, it opens our hearts to
understanding and compassion, in the image of Jesus. We will be less inclined to judge others or to condemn them for their misfortunes, and more willing to serve them in their time of need. This service is given through alms and through working together with these people to help them better their situation.

- **Alms**: Since they are cutting down on food and other expenses in a time of penance, Christians are asked to give what they save — and more — to help those in greater need. This is considered in more detail in no. 4, below.

Fasting is God's way of purifying and liberating his people from sin and from everything that keeps us distant from God. Fasting is a privileged form of penance, practised by the Lord Jesus. It is urged upon all who have put on Christ, and who call themselves his sisters and brothers.

**People of God, are we listening?**

4

4. **Doing good works**: The spiritual and corporal works of mercy sum up the example and teaching of Jesus in two simple seven-point formulas. Basically, these lists suggest some of the ways we should exercise the great commandment to love others as Christ has loved us.

When we were young, we memorized these lists. Perhaps it is a good time now to take a fresh look at the gospel message they contain:

**Corporal works of mercy**

- feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- clothe the naked
- visit the imprisoned
- shelter the homeless
- visit the sick
- bury the dead

**Spiritual works of mercy**

- admonish the sinner
- instruct the ignorant
- counsel the doubtful
- comfort the sorrowful
- bear wrongs patiently
- forgive all injuries
- pray for the living and the dead

- **Corporal works**: These actions, which are primarily concerned with our neighbor's physical welfare, strongly echo the message of the bible. The first six come directly from Christ's parable of the judgment (Mt. 25: 31-46). The last one reminds us of the good work of Tobit, of the loving concern of Joseph of Arimathaea to bury the crucified teacher, and of the good women who set out on Easter morn to complete the anointing of the Lord's body.

- **Spiritual works**: These reflect our responsibilities toward the intangible side of our neighbor's life. Perhaps today's Church would benefit more if we placed the fifth and sixth works at the beginning of the list.

Instruction of the 'ignorant' need not be limited to the ABCs and social graces, but should be concerned first of all with the sharing of the Good News of Christ. Do we need to express this by rewording?
Some observations:

— The Christian community is called to die to sin (see no. 1, above) and to live for God. Living for God clearly involves the practice of these works of mercy. Or should we call them works of love?

— Most of these works are going to be needed because of the needs or situations of others: we do not know when we will be called on to help. It is God in his providence who gives us these further opportunities to serve him in others and so to demonstrate our love for him.

— Read James 2: 14-17; 1 Jn. 2: 9-11; 4: 19-21; and pray over these verses.

— God doesn’t want us to wait for these situations to arise or come to our attention. He prefers that we take our role of brother’s keeper more seriously: each individual and community should consider how its resources are being prepared and kept for such works. (See When disaster strikes, Bulletin 39, pages 136-138.)

— Social agencies and combined fund campaigns are necessary. But how carefully do we look to see that they are efficient? Do we watch to see that waste and bureaucracy are not abuilding at the expense of the people who should be helped by these agencies?

— In today’s complex, expanding society, Christians need to respond to the needs of others both by community means and by individual actions. Many Christians are serving the needs of others through social, government, and church agencies. A one-to-one approach alone cannot adequately meet the needs of people in our society or in the third world. By taxes and voluntary giving, we support the needs of many. In giving this support, however, it is important that we do so from Christian motivation.

At the same time, social agencies and government funds do not dispense us from individual action. God wants to see compassion from our heart. Individual Christians and parish communities should seek to recognize the many hungers that people have. Jesus wants us to be open at all times to his suffering in others.

— We are to be as compassionate as our heavenly Father is. Jesus is the perfect example of this tender, loving concern.

— God wants us to get our hands and feet dirty. He wants us to become involved with others, to take our time, talents, energy, property, and money, and use them for others. When we help them, we are helping him: reread Mt. 25: 31-46 on your knees, and ask the Lord’s strength and courage to live it from now on.

— Analyze last year’s annual report from your parish. Take a serious look at how much goes for real works of mercy. The rest is spent — legitimately enough — in salaries, maintenance, and staff. What can your community do to start improving the share of your parish income given to causes that are important to the work of the kingdom?

— Should we add a few more spiritual works of mercy to our list? or broaden the seven? What about leading the leaderless? (When Christ saw that people were like sheep without a shepherd, he was moved with compassion, and began to teach them: Mk. 6: 34.) Should we reassure the confused, especially in these days of swifter
change? Would widening the horizons of those who fear to look beyond their molehill be another work of mercy, especially when their hill is in danger of becoming a mountain? Would inspiring the young by our example and by sharing our experience be one we should add? How about pioneering in deep waters at the cost of being laughed at?

— How do we train our children in these works of mercy? What sort of example do we give as individuals, as a family, as a believing community? If these works are not important to our community, they will be ignored by individuals too.

— What about Christian use of our resources? Notice how often the 14 works of mercy talk about maintaining our buildings and building our monuments. Yet most Christian communities seem to end up as building-centered, spending much of their energy and resources in paying debts and maintaining structures. While we cannot ignore or waste what we have inherited from the past, do we have to continue and compound the same mistakes? What do we say of a small community that wants to build a hall and kitchen for use six times a year, when their village already has four others available to them? Are they really working for the glory of God, or unconsciously working for their own glory and prestige? Would it be better to give the money to the needy and make do with alien halls for their tea parties and potluck suppers?

The gospel says these works of mercy show us the way we should live. Do we? In times of penance, we should be making a special effort and look for ways to show our love for others as Christ has commanded. As individuals and communities, we have a general duty to support such works, but we also have a personal responsibility to find more ways of doing them.

People of God, are we listening?

5

5. Giving alms: The secular world has almost inoculated us against God's will about almsgiving. By stressing a brief one-shot campaign for many agencies, the combined appeal system tempts us to feel that we don't have to give the rest of the year.

Why do we give alms? To help God's poor. What we do for people in need, we are doing for Christ: see Mt. 25: 31-46. This parable is read near the beginning of Lent to help us understand more fully the relationship between fasting and alms. We give to people in need because we are followers of Jesus; his brothers and sisters — and ours, too — are in need, and look to us to help them, for we have more than they at this moment.

The first source of our alms should be our fasting and other penances by which we restrict ourselves and our consumption. (See fasting, abstinence, controlling our possessions, controlling our entertainments, for areas where we can generate alms.) As we cut down on our usual expenses, what we save should be set aside as alms.

But no Christian believer should limit himself to this. Love of neighbor should urge him to go beyond this. Many denominations set 10% — the biblical tithe — as
the ideal gift to God and his works. A good goal for every individual who earns or receives money, whether it be a child with his allowance or paper route, single adult, a family man, a working mother, is to give a gift that has meaning. A gift should be a sacrifice. Each community, parish, organization which has income should consider making sure that the first part of it goes to God’s work.

Our attitude is what makes or destroys the value of our giving. Christ tells us that we should not trumpet our gifts, but keep them secret (Mt. 6: 2-4). “The deeds God loves most are those he alone has seen,” says Blessed Rafaela Mary. Christ praised the widow for the way she gave her tiny gift. It was not the size of the gift that counted, but the fact she gave all she had to live on. We are asked to give gladly. Read chapters 8-9 of the second letter to the Church of Corinth. The apostolic Church encouraged people to sell property and turn over the proceeds for charity; the fate of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) need not be proclaimed, but neither should it be forgotten.

Lenten almsgiving is a privileged way of sharing with God’s poor; this is discussed on pages 44-45.

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Almsgiving is a sign and test of our faith and love. Through our charity, God displays his love for his people. By letting our good deeds shine before men, we lead them to praise our Father in heaven. By our lives of grace, we are redeeming this wicked age.

People of God, are we listening?

6

6. Duties of state and condition: That formidable-sounding phrase is but one way of describing the opportunity that God gives us in our daily life. Each of us is called to serve him in a particular vocation, with the special talents he has given us for the benefit of the Church and the world.

In living up to our particular call, in following Christ along the unique way he has chosen for us, we find many crosses that God lays upon us. These can be difficulties of health, annoyances, handicaps, shortcomings of others, but they are crosses made to measure for us. Like St. Paul, we are being tested, and we too will find that God’s grace is sufficient for us if we continue to ask for it (2 Cor. 12: 9).

By accepting this type of “imposed” penance willingly, we are conforming with God’s providential plan for our own salvation and for bringing the grace of Christ to the world. The sweat of our brow can be part of our penitential gift to the Lord.

We are called to be a living sacrifice, Christ’s gift to the Father. Our efforts to offer to God—in and through Christ, especially in the eucharist—in all our pain, suffering and discomfort make a unique, personal gift. Accepting God’s will for us in every way is a great sacrifice, but it is also a sign of our love.

Speaking of the element of offering within the action of the eucharistic prayer, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal notes (no. 55f) that the Church—
particularly the local assembly of the faithful — offers the victim to the Father in his Holy Spirit. It is the desire of the Church that we offer Christ and ourselves. We need to learn to be more perfectly united each day with Jesus Christ our mediator and with one another. In this way God's kingdom will come. (See also Bulletin 54, pages 160-161; Bulletin 62, pages 38-39.)

Another aspect of penance is often forgotten: if we suffer from the actions, habits, or faults of others, we should do our best not to do things which disturb or annoy others. Striving to be more sensitive to others' feelings is a form of charity; when it limits our actions somewhat, it can also be a form of penance done in love.

* * *

This form of penance is not dramatic, and it is usually seen by God alone. But remember: our Father, who sees what we do in secret, will reward us (Mt. 6: 18).

All who believe in Christ — no matter what their state in life — will grow holier each day through their daily situations, as long as they accept these crosses in a spirit of faith, as coming from the hands of their Father in heaven. By such daily activities, they are co-operating with God's will by showing to all how much God loves this world (see Constitution on the Church, no. 41).

People of God, are we listening?

7

7. Meditative reading and contemplation: One of the dangers facing Christians in today's world is the overwhelming presence of secular influences. By total immersion methods, we are bombarded with advertising, songs, papers, magazines, books, programs, and ideas that are often a long way from Christ; at times these can be pagan and directly opposed to God's law.

"Your ways are not my ways. As far as heaven is from earth, so far are my ways from your ways" (see Is. 56: 8-9). Believers need to be reminded of this.

How much nourishment does our faith receive? If we are nourished only by our Sunday celebration, are we in danger of spiritual malnutrition? A person who wants to be more than a mediocre Christian needs to drink every day at the fountain of scripture and prayer. A community that wants its members to grow in grace is going to encourage them to read and meditate on the bible, especially the gospels.

In the past few centuries, our Catholic track record has not been anything to boast about. But for a good many years now, the Church has been encouraging us to read the bible daily.

Through daily bible reading, we open our hearts to the Spirit, and become more ready to listen to his guidance, to think about the things of God, and to let God's will and ways influence ours.

Not any form of reading will do, however, if we are to derive the greatest benefits from the bible. Prayerful reading rather than exegetical study is what we need. We should begin with prayer to the Spirit, asking him to help us by opening
our hearts and our lives to his action. We should read slowly and carefully, not trying to gallop through a great number of pages for the story only, as if this were a detective novel. As we go along, we should pause often and talk to the Lord Jesus: “Lord, help me to understand what you are telling me by this event.” Often he speaks directly to us in his dialogue. Sometimes we can take the words of others and make them our own: “Lord, I do believe! Make my faith stronger!” Or “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

As we read slowly and prayerfully, we ask him to help us know his will for us and for our community. We may make short prayers of love, prayers of mercy, grace, forgiveness. We may pray for the needs of others, for sinners, for world leaders, for all, because Jesus died to save them.

At the end of our prayerful reading, we should pause and thank God for his help, and ask his strength to live his way.

Priests and parish liturgy committees who want their people to grow in God’s love and to become more sensitive to his ways must bring them to the scriptures. Only God’s word can help us to overcome the flood of secularism in which we live.

Contemplation is also necessary in today’s believer. This is not some esoteric practice reserved for monks and gurus, but an essential one for a strong Christian life. In its simplest form, it means looking at God and his wonderful works, and admiring him for what he has done. We look at his plans for us, and strive to see his hand in all that happens. If a person does not anchor his day by looking at God first, he will drift along without too much thought for God’s concerns.

A parish concerned about the prayer life of its people will want to help all its members grow in contemplation of God.

Reading other books can lead to contemplation and spiritual growth. Some books explore the wonderful teachings of Jesus, and lead us to a deeper appreciation of our faith. Reading about the lives of persons who were faithful to Christ can inspire us to follow the Lord more closely.

* * *

If we are to remain pure in the midst of contagion, silent in a storm of noise, praying when others turn to distractions, if we are to remain faithful to God, we need to immerse ourselves daily in his word, and let him lead us forward along his paths to eternal glory.

People of God, are we listening?

* * *

Before reading scripture:

Lord, open my heart:
Let your Spirit speak to me
as I read your word.

After reading scripture:

Father, I thank you
for speaking to me today
through your holy word.

(See Bulletin 63, page 85.)
8. Controlling our possessions: A strong desire to gather more and more possessions can make it harder for us to serve God. Avarice is a form of creeping idolatry. But have we really listened to some of the things that Jesus tells us about possessions?

- **Where is our treasure?** Our heart will always be where our treasure is. If we store up our riches in heaven, they will never be lost (Lk. 12: 33-34).

- **Money:** We cannot serve God and eagerly pursue stacks of money; we have to make a choice. The desire for money is the root of much evil: for those unfortunate caught in this spiral, God is in a secondary place. Yet, he tells us: “You shall have no strange gods before me.”

- **Possessions:** As God’s pilgrim people, who do not have a lasting home here, we are to travel light. The Roman army rightly called its baggage impedimenta! Christians seek the kingdom of God first; they need possessions to live, but do not live for possessions. High on their priorities is the common good.

- **Gospel teaching:** To know God’s will, we must hear his Son. The sermon on the mount, for example, where the ideals for discipleship are presented, should be read in an open spirit. We need to let Jesus’ teaching on giving, lending, and sharing sink in. Once again, we hear his invitation to those who would be perfect (Mt. 19: 16-30). The whole of chapter 12 in St. Luke’s gospel would be worthwhile meditating on a day of penance.

**Some practical suggestions:** Most of us are not going to leave our families or sell all our possessions, and follow Jesus in the way of perfection. But there are ways to lighten our baggage, so that we can more freely serve God and one another.

- **Give away our surplus:** Is there anyone among us who does not have more than is needed, at least in some areas? If we look more carefully at our motives, perhaps we will find that we cling to many things because they give us a sense of security; they keep our mind on the things of earth — exactly as Jesus promises they will. Yet, our true home is in heaven.

One form of penance, a very simple one, indeed, would be for us to go through our closets and cupboards: how many shoes and suits and dresses and coats do we have? How many do we need? Are there good things here that we can offer the poor? Presently, we are in mid-winter. For the well-to-do, winter means ski trips: for the poor, it means colds and discomfort.

Such a sharing of our belongings is needed once or twice a year. In Lent, we could let our penitential efforts and our spring housecleaning coincide, and give away some of our ever-growing plenty.

When we receive a gift of clothing, could we give away its equivalent? On a day of prayer or penance, we can share our surplus with others.

We must be careful not to insult the poor. To offer give-aways which are as useless to them as to anyone else is neither charity nor good manners. To give away
something we would like to keep ... well, that's what the cross is all about. Penance is meant to hurt a little.

○ *A shopping spree?* "Hard sell" today can easily lure us into hurrying out to get the latest fashion, the "in" thing, the most recent trends. Motivational research has made it possible for companies to promote sales by encouraging us to convince ourselves that we simply cannot do without the article or service in question. Two years later, we ask ourselves, "What was that all about, anyway?"

Buying only what we need, looking for serviceable items of less than superior quality — taking time to study the need and the offer — and using what we save for alms: how many of us are ready to do that?

○ *Bigger, better, and automatic:* Read Mt. 6: 24-34. One wonders why many of us drive a bigger or more expensive car than we really need? Strangely, priests seem to be particularly vulnerable in this matter, though today there is a welcome swing away from luxury in this area. Are some of us still being conned by the old siren, bigger and better?

Do our actions and possessions match God's view of the poor, the *anawim*, the people who trust in the Lord instead of their wealth and power?

*Lord Jesus, call us to penance*
*and open our eyes, for we are your people!*
*Make us fear the power of wealth;*
*spare us from being owned by our possessions,*
*from building on sand.*

*Guide us by your Spirit.*
*Keep the pilgrimage moving on,*
*so that all may enter holy Jerusalem*
*with new hearts, new hopes, and full contentment.*

**People of God, are we listening?**

9. **Abstinence:** God has revealed his grace in Christ in order to free all nations from sin and death. His grace enables us to forego everything that does not bring us to our Father, and to give up our worldly ambitions or passions. While we are waiting and hoping for the day when the glory of God and our savior Jesus Christ will appear, we are to be self-controlled, living upright and religious lives.

Jesus surrendered himself upon the tree to rescue us from all wickedness and to make us the holy people of God. He has made us his own people, eager to do good works.

These two paragraphs are based on Titus 2: 11-14. After reading them over in several versions of scripture (to bring out the richness of Paul's thoughts), we are ready to take a new look at abstinence as one of the forms of penance.

Abstinence is a special form of penance. For many centuries, abstinence was *legislated*: it was one of the foremost ways in which the Christian people expressed
their penitential efforts. Many of us were born in an era when the law of abstinence referred only to meat, although in Lent we took on additional forms of abstinence: we voluntarily refrained from entertainments, candy, cigarettes, liquor, and other things of this sort.

To be understood properly, abstinence should be seen in relation to fasting, for true fasting includes abstinence. It is a form of self-denial, in which we refrain from the enjoyment of much wanted foods (such as meat or other enjoyable things) for the sake of the kingdom, in order to be joined more closely with Christ, the suffering servant. We learn to discipline ourselves in small things in order to renew in our lives the pattern of his death (see Phil. 3: 9-11).

The value of abstinence is spread throughout the community when the money saved is used for alms. To abstain in order to help a good cause has a value beyond the monetary gift, and indicates our generosity of heart.

The sign value of abstinence should not be forgotten. The fact that many Catholics took the Church's call to penance seriously enough to refrain from meat each Friday (and on the day before certain feasts) was not lost on others: they saw what Catholics were doing, and learned of our belief that we do not live for this world only. At times, observing the law of abstinence required many Catholics to make public what the Church wanted done: and this also served to strengthen the faith of many.

How can abstinence come to life in today's Church? Pastors could invite the people to take on voluntary abstinence one or two days a week during Lent, especially on lenten Fridays. Before significant events, such as ordinations and religious professions, the diocesan community could be invited by the bishop to unite in prayer and penance: see Community penance, pages 16-18. Catholic families would welcome being invited to abstain once in a while in order to build up the spirit of penance and prayer in their home. The legalistic difficulties are now gone: voluntary abstinence is open to all.

Abstinence has been used in many cultures as a form of asceticism. Certain strict religious orders accepted total abstinence; others ate meat rarely. The great Mohandas Gandhi, for example, was a vegetarian, and strongly encouraged his disciples to share his simple life. Many did, to the benefit of an entire nation.

People of God, are we listening?

10. Controlling our entertainments: Followers of Jesus are called to bear in themselves the pattern of his death (Phil. 3: 10). Instead of modelling ourselves on the pattern of the world, we are to redeem it by our lives; we are to be a living sacrifice, dedicated to God: this is the true worship we offer, this is the road to perfection (Rom. 12: 1-2; Eph. 5: 15-17).

Bread and circuses, "eat, drink, and be merry" — full time, these are pagan attitudes, ways of the world: they are not the ways of Christians.
The Western world today is in a pleasure spiral, anxiously seeking to be entertained and distracted. We are children of our age; we, who have been “baptized into his death,” are in danger of being caught in the same maelstrom, and become forever too busy for Christ, too preoccupied to listen to his Spirit.

Believers who are aware of their responsibilities toward the world should do penance by foregoing some legitimate pleasures and entertainment, and use the time and money they save to liberate the poor.

How many of us are too busy to read the gospels? Yet we are quite fully able to read one or more daily papers, supplies of weekend and monthly magazines, digests, and reviews. Are we keeping ourselves so au courant that we are unable to hear Christ?

How many of us declare ourselves “too busy to pray”? Yet without fail we find time for every sports event, parade, and spectacular on television. Has community with Christ broken down?

How many of us there are who cannot afford to buy scripture commentaries or spiritual books, and yet we are able to get the latest arrival on the best-seller list.

Instead of a “piece of the action,” we need a piece of the desert. A Christian needs solitude, time for silence and meditation and prayer. Good music fills the spirit with wide wonder, a sense of God’s generosity: “hard sell” programming on radio and TV pushes the hours along, and any serious thoughts are well nigh impossible.

By curbing our entertainments and distractions, especially at times of communal penance, we can devote ourselves more fully to the Lord’s ways, to prayer and meditation on his law. We can use the money we save as alms for God’s poor: we can offer our suffering for the growth of God’s people in the image of their crucified Lord.

And perhaps the example of some who are not enslaved by entertainment may serve as a prophetic sign to those whose main goal seems to be bread and circuses.

People of God, are we listening?

Centered in the Eucharist

Every work of the Christian apostolate, including each form of penance, is joined with and directed toward the eucharist. The full richness of the Church’s spiritual treasure is contained in the eucharist: Christ, our passover, our living bread come from heaven. The Spirit makes Jesus’ flesh a source of life, and Jesus offers this life to all: we are invited to join our Lord in offering ourselves, our work, and all that God has created.

In this way, the eucharist is seen as the source and high point of the gospel teaching. For this reason, priests are to teach their people to offer Jesus to the Father during the Mass, and to offer their own lives as well (see Ministry and life of priests, no. 5).
God has given us many opportunities to do penance. He accepts our daily efforts to follow his Son on the road of the cross, especially when we join our penance with the Lord's saving memorial, offered daily upon our altars.

PEOPLE OF GOD, ARE WE LISTENING?

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

While every Christian has the responsibility of carrying the cross daily and of following Jesus, the Church's legislation on penitential discipline is directed primarily toward adults.

Parents have the duty of introducing their children gradually to the practice of penance. Each family is seen as a family or household Church, where parents are the first to preach the Christian faith to their children by prayer and daily example (see Constitution on the Church, no. 11).

The Council notes that a Christian way of living can penetrate the vocation of marriage and family life and change it. Such a home will become a school of apostolic life: the parents will carry out their vocation by being witnesses of Christ to each other and to their family. By its life, a Christian family proclaims the meaning of God’s kingdom and the hope of everlasting life (see Constitution on the Church, no. 35).

The example parents give of a penitential spirit is important. By their own practice of prayer and penance and Christian love, they will be teaching their children that the kingdom of God is to be sought first. By introducing their children to penance gradually, and by helping them to understand why we do penance, and the attitude with which Christ wants us to do it, they are leading their children on their first steps in following the Lord Jesus.

Catechists and teachers assist parents, who are the first educators of the child. Catechists reinforce the example and the teaching of the parents by helping children to understand better why Christ wants us to do penance. As children grow older, they should be shown the wide opportunities they have for doing penance (see The top ten, pages 20-33). They should encourage children from families whose faith is weak to take their first, generous steps in following Christ. As with parents, teachers give their greatest lesson by their example. Their Christian living and penance will teach more powerfully than any words they use.

Priests have the duty of sharing the gospel truth, and of summoning all people urgently to conversion and holiness (Ministry and life of priests, no. 4). All who believe should be helped to see the eucharist as the center of Christian living, and the source of God's graces. Every good work, including our penance, should lead us to better participation in the eucharist, and to better living. Priests should help parents and teachers understand penance better, and encourage them to lead their little ones by more generous example and prayer. Parents who are weak in faith, or who are lax in this duty should be helped to understand their grave responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children. And to back up what they say, to show that their words are rooted in faith, priests should lead their people by their personal response to Christ's call to penance.
LENT

LENT LEADS TO EASTER

Easter is the supreme solemnity of the liturgical year, when the Church remembers the resurrection of the Lord who died for our salvation. Every Sunday we continue to celebrate the resurrection and our share in it.

As the Church recalls the mysteries of our redemption, it opens to us the rich merits and powers of Christ: they become present now and at all times, and we are able to enter into them and be filled with his grace (see Liturgy constitution, no. 102).

The Church prepares us to enter into the celebration of Easter by six serious weeks of conversion and renewal: Lent is the time when God wants to bring back his wandering people.

Purpose of Lent

Perhaps the simplest way of describing Lent is to look at it from God’s point of view: what does he want to accomplish in us as he leads us toward the Easter celebration? We are to come to Christ to be saved:

He sacrificed himself for us
to free us from all wickedness
and to purify us
so that he could make us his own people,
and we would have one ambition:
to do what is good.

(see Titus 2: 14)

Lent is a time when Christ wants to make us his people, to free us from our wickedness, and to lead us to seek to do what is good. St. Paul expresses the last two when he calls on us to die to sin and to live for God.

God wants us to die to sin in order that we may be conformed to Christ and grow to the full stature he has planned for us. We are to put sin out of our lives, and rise with Jesus to a new life lived for God.

People of God: The scriptures are filled with references to our dignity as the beloved children of God, chosen in Christ to be his holy people. When did we last read Paul’s letter to the Christian community at Ephesus? The epistle contains only six brief chapters, and reading through it would make a fine preparation for Lent. As we become more conscious of God’s high expectations for us, we will be ready to enter the lenten season with faith.

The Father has gathered us as the people of God that we may sing his praise, especially in the eucharist. When he calls us together in our parish celebration each Sunday, he showers his mercy and love upon us, that we may grow in holiness and good works.

During Lent, we are invited to renew our understanding of the covenant, and of our responsibilities under it: he is our God, and we are his people; we are to serve him, and he will guide and protect and save us.
By prayer, by meditative reading of God's word, by a more conscious celebration of and participation in the eucharist, the Church will grow into the holy people of the Lord.

The Spirit of God leads us into the desert of Lent in order that we may know ourselves as God's people. (See Desert spirituality, in Bulletin 37, pages 13-15.)

**Freed from wickedness:** The old collect or opening prayer on the first Sunday in Lent mentioned that God our Father purifies his Church by the yearly lenten observance. His Son Jesus came to bring us abundant life by freeing us from sin, by bringing us from darkness into the kingdom of light. By his death and resurrection, he has set us free (see the fourth memorial acclamation: it is good to use it now and then during Lent).

The work of freeing us from evil goes on throughout our lives, as long as we are ready to work with him in overcoming evil. Mastery over our vices through God's grace and strength is one of the promised results of bodily fasting (lenten preface IV).

By his death, Jesus destroyed Satan's power over us. But we are still able to return to the slavery of sin, and it is against this that we have to struggle through the years.

Stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit, we inherit the freedom that God promises to those whom he has chosen to belong to him (Eph. 1: 13-14).

In Lent, the Spirit is leading the people of God out into the desert to purify us from all that keeps us away from the Lord. He wants to root out our vices and bring us back to be followers of the way of the Lord (Acts 9: 2).

Death to sin is part of our baptismal renewal that continues in Lent (Liturgy constitution, no. 109). The virtue of penance which we are called to practise is hatred for sin as an offence against God: and our own sins make a good starting point.

**Eager to do good:** It is important to realize why God wants to free us from wickedness. He does this because he wants to make us his people who are eager to do good works: we are chosen in Christ to be holy and blameless, and to live through love in God's presence as his adopted sons and daughters (Eph. 1: 4-5).

To help us live for him instead of for ourselves, the Lord Jesus sent his Holy Spirit as his first gift to all who believe. Why? In order to complete Jesus' work on earth — through our action and co-operation — and to bring us the fullness of grace (fourth eucharistic prayer).

Lent is a time when the Spirit invites us to reflect and pray and be converted. Are we really eager to do good, to love God with our whole heart, and to love our neighbor as ourselves? Are we ready to seek God's will and give his kingdom first place?

How eager are we to do good works? (See "Doing good works," pages 23-25.) By making a serious effort to practise these, we begin to grow to the full stature to which Christ calls us. This is part of the work of Lent that God wants to accomplish in us, his beloved people.
Movement of Lent

Lent is a personal and community meeting with Christ. It is a movement, however, rather than a static, once-for-all encounter.

The Church is a pilgrim Church, and this Lent is a stage in our pilgrimage. We move from the confrontations of Ash Wednesday and the first Sunday through quiet weeks of prayer, penance, conversion, renewal, and a change of direction in our lives.

We may summarize the lenten task of each individual believer and Christian community in the ideas expressed by St. Paul:

The only thing I want is to know Christ
and the power of his resurrection;
I want to share in his sufferings
by bearing in myself the pattern of his death.
For this reason, I am able to hope
that I will be among those he raises from the dead. (Phil. 3: 10-11)

Then we arrive at Holy Week: eight days of concentrating on who Jesus is and what he has done for us. From the exciting glories and somber passion account of Passion Sunday, we pass through the reflective celebration of the chrism Mass and the quiet rejoicing of the Thursday evening Mass to the stark realities of Good Friday and the apparent vacuum of Holy Saturday.

The paschal fast — re-introduced to Canada in the 1969 Liturgical Calendar — was described by the Second Vatican Council: The paschal fast should be observed everywhere on Good Friday and continued, where possible, on Holy Saturday. In this way, the people of God will receive the joys of the Lord's resurrection with uplifted and responsive hearts (see Liturgy constitution, no. 110).

Coming at the end of the lenten season, it leads the people of God into the climax of the Easter vigil. But it cannot do this unless parishes encourage it and help people to understand its purpose.

What did your community do last year? What are you going to do this year?

Our goal is Easter: the vigil celebration and the feast itself. We can summarize the day in the words of Paul: “It is about our Lord, Jesus Christ, who — with the spirit of holiness within him — was proclaimed God's Son through his rising from the dead” (Rom. 1: 4).

The new life — getting rid of the old leaven, dying to sin and living with Christ for God — is to be the life of this believing community and of all his people throughout the world. But our campaign of renewal is not over; in reality it has only begun. Read Titus 2: 11-14 again. And priests, parents, and teachers should read verse 15 too!

In this way through Lent and Easter and all our lives, we wait in joy and hope for the coming of our savior. (See Liturgy constitution, no. 102; Order of Mass: communion rite.)
A GOOD BEGINNING

Though Lent starts its journey toward Easter on Ash Wednesday, the parish community must begin its lenten planning much earlier: last minute haste usually fails. Even January is a little late, but it is better than February.

Good preparation leads to a good Lent, and this in turn will bring the community to an excellent celebration of the greatest feast of the Christian year, Easter.

Parish Planning

The parish celebration of Lent should be part of the liturgy committee's yearly planning, clearly determined by the end of the previous summer. Detailed plans for Lent should be made well in advance, and be completed by January 1 at the latest.

What should parish plans include?

Clear goals: The whole purpose of the lenten season is to prepare this believing community to share in and celebrate the paschal mystery more fully. The prayers, penance, and other spiritual activities are intended to purify us (die to sin), to deepen our life in Christ (live for God). The lenten program is not something restricted to church, but is to be carried on in our daily life; public worship and prayer are but one facet of religious living.

Teaching: Important too is the emphasis that will be placed on teaching Christ's truth during the time of Lent. The meaning of the paschal mystery and our sacramental involvement in this mystery is paramount. As we understand works of penance (see The top ten, pages 20-33) as the community's path to Jesus, we should not lose sight of our continuing involvement in his dying and rising in us and in our generation. Through the daily homily, and instruction by various means, including the parish bulletin, priests will endeavor to lead their people deeper into the mystery of Christ.

Preparations: If a liturgy committee is serious about its task, it will want to plan a lenten program that will invite the entire parish, as a community of believers, to grow in Christ. A good program, planned in advance, will be valuable in leading people and priests to more fervent prayer and serious penance.

The most difficult part of the program of preparation will be that of education. To help people grasp a more positive, penitential form of Lent will require several years of firm guidance and formation. Such work cannot be achieved in one talk on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Months of study and prayer are required. It is in fact a program that could be carried on throughout the year, though with varying emphasis according to the season.

Celebrations: Liturgical celebrations during Lent should contribute to and be the main source of growth in grace. The Sunday Masses in the parish should become a better vehicle for doing what the liturgy ought to do: give greater glory to God, and deepen love in us, shown by community and individual action for others. Perhaps the Checklist for Sunday liturgy (Bulletin 35, pages 207-213) may be one of the instruments used in assessing liturgical needs.
Daily Mass should be encouraged. It is not only a case of developing a weekday schedule that will be suitable for the greatest number of people: sensitive attention should also be given to the quality of the celebration. The good use of readers, thoughtful introductions to the Mass and its readings, a brief but well prepared homily (the lenten Masses provide an unmined source of scriptural and liturgical Good News), general intercessions, community singing, especially of the responsorial psalm if possible — these are some ways the committee should examine. If the greeting of peace has not yet been introduced in the parish, this would be a good time to explain it and begin to use it (see Bulletin 48, pages 122-124).

Penance celebration: The importance of this aspect of lenten renewal should be evident to the liturgy committee, reinforcing the spirit of penance as hatred for sin as an offence against God. The effect of the service is increased when it is well planned; celebration during the last two weeks of Lent — even during Holy Week — is most desirable. A model service is included in this issue of the Bulletin, pages 47-53.

Officially organized distractions: If the parish is one which organizes obstacles to Lent, or encourages or condones such spectacles, the liturgy committee should begin to question in public the seriousness of the community’s commitment to Lent. Society banquets and parties, St. Patrick’s day dances and similar events — no matter how ancient or otherwise worthy of special mention — are not in keeping with the spirit of Lent in today’s Church; too often they are symptomatic of what is wrong with our attitudes toward this time of prayer, penance, and recollection. Such a revolution will no doubt bring howls of protest, but the liturgy committee should be first to raise the question. Even if it is felt that no success will be achieved, the problem needs continuing mention; perhaps in some years, the effects will begin to be noticed. But now is the time for brave starts — and early ones: it will have little effect if the question is raised after posters and tickets are printed, the orchestra and hall hired, and the fatted calf and ice cubes all in readiness.

Leading the community to avoid such events or postpone them (there are 45 ½ weeks left outside Lent) will not increase the committee’s popularity among some people, but the Lord won’t be one of the ones complaining.

Countdown for Lent

Now that ordinary time has replaced the Septuagesima season, some communities find that Lent sneaks up on them, and a last-minute flurry replaces careful and conscientious planning. A poor start usually means a poor Lent.

Parishes which plan their lenten program also plan a way of preparing the community for the season. Some form of warmup is required.

Some suggestions:

Parish bulletin: Some parishes use their weekly bulletin for the last three Sundays before Lent to remind people that it is fast approaching, and to help them to understand more clearly what Lent should be (“countdown for Lent”). A few brief notes — which should be expanded and adapted to local conditions — are given for these Sundays in the current Liturgical Calendar. Preparing such bulletin notes could be a liturgy committee task in early January.
Pre-lenten day of education: Sponsored by the parish council, perhaps with the collaboration of other organizations and societies, a day of education could be held shortly before Lent. It would seek to expand the horizons of parishioners, and invite them to greater generosity in lenten living. Led perhaps by a team from another parish, this day could develop a number of areas:

- meaning of Lent and its movement toward Easter
- work of Lent — personal and community
- baptismal aspects
- penitential aspects
- growth in prayer and love
- deeper knowledge and love of bible and liturgy
- personal planning for lenten program.

Such a day could be held on a regional or area basis, or between two neighboring parishes. It might be an excellent program for diocesan commissions to provide to the parishes of the entire diocese. Bulletins 37 and 42 would be good handouts for all who take part in this day.

* * *

A good Lent in your community depends on thorough planning and preparation by your priests and liturgy committee.

How are you doing?

ASH WEDNESDAY

The universal Church begins its penitential work in your town or countryside when your community of worshippers takes up its lenten responsibilities. In union with all the children of God on earth, you are called in Christ to join in prayer and penance as he leads his people toward reform and renewal.

It is easy to speak about sin as man's greatest misfortune, leading to eternal death, and about Lent as a time to get away from such sin.

But it is much more difficult to face up to what God is demanding of us today and every day of our lives: give up your personal, individual, pet, well-beloved sins, and everything that leads you to them! (See “Giving up sin,” pages 20-21.)

This is the message we find in the newer form of words given us as one of the two forms for imposing ashes: We are to turn away from sin and believe the gospel.

Based on the gospel teaching (Mt. 3: 2; 4: 17; Mk. 1: 15), this text presents a challenge we cannot pass by. It is for this reason that some are asking, Are ashes for everyone? (See Bulletin 35, page 30.)

A day of fast and abstinence: The universal Church observes Ash Wednesday as a day of fast and abstinence. Although the Canadian Church does not have the legal requirements, zealous pastors will invite and encourage the Christians of their community to make this a day of special penance, in union with Christians around the world. By helping their people to understand the full meaning of penance and its values, priests will be leading them closer to the heart of Christ.
A day of prayer: Today is a good time to begin improving one's personal prayer life (see Bulletin 35, pages 194-196). It is also a time to encourage prayer for sinners; to ask the aged and the shut-ins to be a dynamic prayer source (see Bulletin 33, pages 70-73); to pour out prayers for those oppressed by sin and social injustice, by war and natural disaster.

A day of reflective reading in the scriptures: During Lent, we are called to pay closer attention to God's word (Liturgy constitution, no. 109; Bulletin 37, pages 10-11). It would be a good day for a serious, meditative reading of the sermon on the mount, as contained in chapters 5-6-7 of St. Matthew's gospel.

Perhaps a period of 15 minutes each day should be set aside for reflective, prayerful reading of a chapter or two of the gospel. The amount read should not be great; what is important is the way it leads us into prayer and resolution and action. The gospel according to Mark invites further notice. If Luke is chosen, it will lead into similar reading of the Acts during the Easter season.

A day to begin: Resolutions — what we are going to do during Lent — should have been formulated in the days before Lent begins. Today is the day to start carrying out what we have resolved to do.

Put it into words! Pious resolutions fade as quickly as a sky-writer's message if they are not written down. Parish resolutions should be written up in the preceding Sunday's bulletin, and perhaps made even more noticeable by the use of posters or banners. Family resolutions could be displayed prominently — on the refrigerator door, for example, or done as a poster or banner in the dining room. Personal resolutions should not be prominently displayed for public consumption, but kept where the individual sees them each day: in one's personal copy of the New Testament, diary, drawer, on the dressing table or desk — wherever it will be noticed daily.

Mass and communion should continue as the center of our lenten efforts. Parish schedules should be expanded so that Mass times are reasonably available to most parishioners who want to come. Parish organizations might encourage members and their families to take part in daily Mass. Celebrations should be improved to help all grow in faith and love.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Begin well, and continue in this spirit until you reach the climax of the season in the Easter vigil celebration.

FIVE DAYS OF DECISION

After the special effort to observe Ash Wednesday, the days that follow may seem tame. But these are days in which the Church seeks to help us strengthen our resolutions and purify our intentions as we enter the lenten pilgrimage.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday: In the lectionary, no. 221, the Church presents us with the path of life or death. Life is the path of God's commandments. We follow it by loving him and keeping his ways. The path of death is the way followed by those who let their hearts stray, and who refuse to listen to the Lord (Deut. 30: 15-20). In response to this reading, we sing Ps. 1, a very clear picture of the two ways before us
this Lent and throughout our lives. The person who puts his trust in the Lord is indeed blessed; so too is the parish or community that hopes in God.

Christ gives us a clear call to penance in the gospel passage (Lk. 9: 22-25). He is going to die and rise; we are to follow him through his paschal mystery by denying ourselves and carrying our cross daily. This is the work we undertake during Lent.

**Friday (no. 222):** Chapter 58 of Isaiah, used both today (58: 1-9a) and tomorrow, is the way the Lord reminds us of the social aspects of our lenten journey. He wants us to do much more than give up sugar in our coffee: he tells us the kind of fast that pleases him. Our response needs to be one of sorrow, as in Ps. 51. Since this is one of the common psalms for Lent, we might consider using it today and often (see lectionary, page 406; hymnal, no. 176).

Jesus tells us of our obligation to fast, for we are now living in that time (Mt. 9: 14-15). But as the first lesson and psalm remind us, we are to understand fasting as much more than a dietary exercise.

**Saturday (no. 223):** Jesus' desire to associate with sinners — that is, with us — and to call us to follow him is another way of describing his purpose in Lent: he has come to call us to repentance (Lk. 5: 27-32).

The first lesson (Is. 58: 9b-14), continued from yesterday, points out how God will reward those whose fast includes the total program he proposes. Our willingness to learn his ways is evident when we sing the refrain of the responsorial psalm: *Teach us your way, Lord, so that we may walk in your truth.*

**Monday of the first week in Lent (no. 225):** The Church continues its lessons in lenten attitudes for the two days after the first Sunday. The week begins with the last judgment scene, and Christ points out how he will judge us, for it is to us he addresses this parable in today's Mass (Mt. 25: 31-46).

More social responsibilities are outlined in the Old Testament reading from Leviticus (19: 1-2, 11-18). Love of neighbor is the basic theme of both readings. Our response, that the words of the Lord are spirit and life, should echo the truth of our lives if we do let him speak to us in the Mass readings.

**Tuesday (no. 226):** Two lessons in lenten living complete these opening days of Lent: the first reading reminds us of the power of God's word, and how he achieves his will (Is. 55: 10-11). We respond with a psalm of trust, leading into the gospel reading on prayer and forgiveness of others (Mt. 6: 7-15).

In these five days at the beginning of Lent, the Church uses the scriptures skillfully to teach us the spirit of Lent, the attitudes with which we should begin the season. The quality of our lenten pilgrimage will depend on the way we accept these lessons.

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**WE HAVE NO TIME!**

"We don't have enough time to read, to think, to meet, to discuss, to pray, to write, to serve. We're too busy!"

*Busy about what?*
DEATH AND RISING

Until the Vatican Council, most ordinary Catholics — laity, religious, and priests — believed that we were saved by the death of Christ, and that he rose from the dead to prove he was divine. Then the Council document on liturgy (no. 6) spoke about the paschal mystery, about our salvation through his death and resurrection, and started to connect a number of truths which until then had remained separate and isolated in the thinking of many. The Council taught us to go further:

- The Father sent Christ into the world, and Jesus sent his apostles, filled with his Holy Spirit. By preaching the Good News of salvation to every creature, they proclaimed that the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, had freed us from the power of Satan and of death and brought us into his Father's kingdom.

- Christ intended his apostles and his people to carry on the work of salvation which they proclaimed, by sacrifice and sacraments. The entire liturgical life revolves around Mass and the sacraments.

- In baptism, we are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ. We die with him to sin and we are buried with him, and we rise with him to new life for God. As his adopted sons and daughters, we are able to call God our Father, and we worship him in spirit and truth.

- Eucharist: Whenever we eat the supper of the Lord, we proclaim his death and rising until he comes in glory. From the days of the apostles, we have continued to listen to God's word and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayer, singing God's praises. The people of God still come together to celebrate the paschal mystery. We listen to the scriptures as they proclaim the wonderful works of God in Christ; we celebrate the eucharist, making the victory of his death and rising present once more; we give thanks to our Father for his great gift in Christ, to praise his glory, through the power of the Spirit.

Each of the sacraments is a celebration of faith, an act of worship offered by the people of God to their Father, through Christ, in the Spirit. Each sacrament is a celebration of the death and rising of Christ, bringing us forgiveness, grace, the promise of glory. In each sacramental celebration, Christ is present by his power, and helps us to redeem our generation by our lives, so that all things may be brought under his rule. Only our lack of faith or disposition can limit his action.

- People must come to liturgy with proper dispositions if it is to have its full effects. Their thoughts and their words must be in harmony so that they may cooperate with God's grace. Pastors must realize that they have to go beyond the rules for valid and licit celebration. They have a duty to make sure that the people are able to take an active, understanding, and fruitful part in the liturgy: see Liturgy constitution, no. 11. (See also Taking part in the eucharist, in Bulletin 62, pages 31-39.)

Lent and Easter are the seasons devoted to the paschal mystery. Their liturgy is filled with references to salvation and life through the death and rising of the Lord Jesus. (See Paschal mystery in our devotion, in Bulletin 62, pages 24-30.)

The more our people begin to appreciate the paschal mystery, the more fully they will be able to celebrate it, and the more they will derive from the liturgy.
CALL TO LENTEN Penance

Christians are called to do penance throughout the year. During Lent, however, they are to respond to this call more fervently. This call applies to communities and parishes as well as individuals.

The reasons why we do penance and the various ways in which it may be performed should be reviewed carefully.

Traditionally, the forty days of Lent include prayer, fasting (and other forms of penance), and almsgiving. By realistic penances, we reinforce our sorrow and regret for sin, and make reparation for sins committed by ourselves and others. As we turn more to God’s will, we become more acceptable to him in our daily living.

Do Penance

Sin weakens both the individual and society. For this reason, the Vatican Council (Liturgy constitution, no. 110) urges that our lenten penance should have a balance between its individual and internal elements (as in Mt. 6, for example) and the external and social aspects (as in Mt. 5).

- A positive approach: take the beatitude you find hardest, and work on it, asking Christ to help you follow him more perfectly.

- Time set aside: Cut down on TV, shows, radio, and use the time saved for prayer, reflection, and serious concern for God’s plan in Christ for the world.

- Time for better reading: Cut back on the amount of time spent on papers, magazines, paperbacks, and use it for serious Christian reading, starting with the gospel.

- Some serious daily penance to be observed faithfully. The top ten (pages 20-33) is a good starting point for ideas.

- A fresh look at Friday: Lenten Fridays are to be special days of penance. By tradition, Catholics of all rites, and members of the Orthodox and Anglican Churches, have made something special of the Fridays in Lent. Though this tradition has suffered of late in the Catholic experience, it is well worth restoring.

Perseverance: Lent is easy to begin, but difficult to complete. We seek God’s help through prayer and penance. Lent is a time when God corrects our faults and raises our minds to him; he helps us to become more holy, and offers us unending life as our reward (preface 11).

The reward of a good Lent is experienced throughout the season as one experiences a growth in prayer. This growth will be even more evident as we celebrate the Easter vigil with a special joy, and enter into the paschal season. The greatest reward is reserved for the moment when Christ calls us to look forward to our entry into glory with him and all his saints, when the Alleluia will sound for ever, when those who are now sharing our Lord’s paschal banquet with pure hearts will come to its complete fulfillment in heaven (preface 12).
Our penance and fasting are given an even higher value when we give the money we save — and more, if possible — to the poor and needy. What we give to them is given to Christ. When our gift is born of penance, it is doubly blessed.

**Development and peace (CCODP):** The bishops of Canada reaffirm their support for the work of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. Each Lent, in co-operation with other churches, CCODP continues to bring the needs of the third world before the people of our country, and encourages all to respond to God’s generosity to us by supporting the *Share Lent* campaign.

During Lent, at a time determined by each diocese, a collection is taken up for developing countries. Christians are urged to share their goods with others, and thus express in a concrete way their desire to imitate the heroic generosity of Christ. Only thus is the gospel validated.

The president of Canada’s bishops made a strong representation at the October 1971 Synod of Bishops, in Rome. Archbishop Plourde’s words involve us in serious duties:

“If the Church is the light of the world it must first of all live this justice to be believable. As St. Ambrose has said, ‘It is not by argumentation that God deigned to save his people.’ It is only by *practising* justice that the Christian learns to discern this prophetic liberty with regard to the structures within which we have been formed and live. *One who lives the truth comes to the light* (Jn. 3: 21).

“As long as the rich nations do not find the strength of soul to gain control of their consumer societies, sharing will not be possible, exploitation and wastage of the resources of the poor will only be aggravated by technological progress.”

**Begin at home:**

“The Church must begin this practice of justice at home. It must demonstrate that it can reach beyond the consumer society, and live a life of sharing and detachment. It must demonstrate that its entire resources — its manpower, its knowledge, its money — are at the service of the whole community, including the most under-privileged.”

The importance of “sharing-to-liberate-others” should be emphasized. Whenever possible, this sharing should be kept within the framework of lenten practice.

In the general intercessions during Lent, both on Sundays and weekdays, some of the intentions should express our concerns with justice, hunger, development and peace in the world.

* * *
Some years ago, one small parish placed the following notes in its bulletin, one on the third Sunday and one on the fourth Sunday of Lent:

* * *

**Lent — time for giving alms:**

*Who gives himself with his alms feeds three —
  Himself, his hungering neighbor, and Me.*

(Lowell)

Lent is a time for giving alms — gifts of money — to the poor. Our pope and the Canadian bishops have encouraged us during these past few years to give alms to the developing countries of the world, so that they can help themselves to rise out of their dire poverty, and become more able to stand on their own feet. Because of our gifts, many people around the world have begun to hope again.

This is truly a work blessed by Jesus. He tells us: "I was hungry or thirsty or needing shelter and you helped me. As long as you did this for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me."

A special envelope is in your package for this purpose, or you may use one of the extras at the back of the church. With the approval of our parish council, a second collection will be taken up on the next two Sundays for our lenten gift to the poor nations of the world.

*How much should we give?* Our bishop suggests a minimum of $4.00 a family. If you are able to give more to our poor, there is no limit to how much they need. Last year our parish contributed $............ to this cause. Can we do better this year?

* * *

**Lenten alms help God's poor:** "Your heart will always be where your treasure is." Jesus advises us that we should seek to be rich in the sight of God. (Read Lk. 12: 34, 21.)

Our lenten alms collection is an opportunity to share some of our goods with others, to help them to help themselves. This is the Lord's work which we are being called to do. *How will we respond?*

Some might ask, why should we help the poor in other countries when we have them here in Canada? Jesus once answered a similar problem by reminding us that we should do one without neglecting the other.

You have a special envelope in your box at home, or you can use one of the extra envelopes to make your contributions to our poor. If you didn't or couldn't give today, please bring your lenten gift next Sunday.

Let us be generous with the Lord. He will reward us beyond measure.
The Holy Spirit leads Jesus (with the people of God, our community, me) into the desert for forty days of solitude, prayer, and penance. Lent is a good time to invite the Spirit to set our lives on a new course.

Some thoughts we might consider by prayerful reading of the scriptures:

- **Poured out in our hearts**: Read the fifth chapter of Romans. May the Spirit teach us anew the love the Father offered us by sending Jesus as savior.

- **Death to sin, life for God**: The entire baptismal thrust of Lent is clearly set out in Romans 6. It is one of the major readings at the Easter vigil, but it would be an excellent meditative reading throughout Lent.

- **Life in the Spirit, and prayer**: We are unhappy about our difficulties in prayer, in living worthy lives. There is much help for us in chapter 8 of the letter to the Christians of Rome.

- **Gifts of the Spirit**: We should consider our needs (personal, community, today's world) in the light of Is. 11: 2-3 and Gal. 5: 22-23. Lent is a good time to pray and work for these helps from the Spirit.

- **Listening to the word**: In the scriptures, the Spirit speaks to us, reminding us of the Father's will, sharing his wisdom with us, and giving us light as he leads us along the way of the Lord. Our own day has seen a revival of scripture study and reading, a movement born of the Spirit and giving new vigor to the Church.

During Lent, we would do well to take Paul's epistles, and read them carefully. We will be surprised, perhaps, at the major role of the Spirit in our lives: we will be encouraged by Paul's many references to the paschal mystery.

\* \* \*

_Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe:_

_you have made us your beloved people,_

called in your Son Jesus Christ

_and sealed by the Spirit of your promise._

_Pour your Spirit of love into our hearts,_

_and make us open to his action in our lives._

_With his help, we are led in your light,_

_and sing your praises this day,_

_in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen!_

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PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

The use of lenten alms for works of peace and development may be reinforced by use of hymn 277 in _Catholic Book of Worship_. Why not listen to its words carefully, and include it as one of the hymns your believing community will sing this Lent?
Penance Celebration

Lent

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

a) Purpose: Bible services are encouraged in a special way during Advent and Lent as one way of promoting a warm and living love for scripture among God's people (Liturgy constitution, nos. 24; 35: 4). Penance celebrations help the Christian community to deepen its spirit of penance, and assist individuals as they prepare to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation (Rite of Penance, \textsuperscript{1} nos. 36-37).

Many members of a spiritual community may benefit from a bible service celebrating God's gift of forgiveness. This service may be used at any time during Lent. Communities should consider having several services, perhaps one near the beginning of Lent, and another during the final two weeks of the season. Preparations should begin well in advance of the date chosen.

During the final days of Lent, the Christian community is preparing for the celebration of the paschal triduum. This penance celebration should help them in making the choice of dying with Christ to sin and living with him for God.

b) Personal attention: The priest should seek to make the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation a personal meeting of the penitent with Christ and his Church. Individual attention — in the form of instruction, advice, and encouragement — should be given to each penitent by the priest. When the sacrament is celebrated after the bible service, as suggested in this outline, more time will be available for giving each penitent the individual attention he or she needs and desires.

c) A guide: The following outline is a guide, with suggested texts. While these may be used as printed, it is usually better to adapt them to the needs of the local congregation. Other suitable readings and psalms may be found in the lectionary for Lent (nos. 22-37 and 220-260; nos. 174-175, pages 406-407), or in the liturgy of the hours for this season.

If general absolution is warranted (see Rite of Penance, nos. 31-35), the third rite is used (nos. 60-66; Canadian edition, pages 71-74; see outline of rite in Bulletin 52, pages 30-33).

In Rite of Penance, several outlines are provided for specific penitential services (Canadian edition, Appendix II, pages 113-152). As well, the rite provides an extensive list of scripture texts in nos. 101-201 (pages 86-94).

The parish liturgy committee should be encouraged to develop this service as required to meet the spiritual needs of this community.

d) Proclamation: The readings suggested are contained in the lectionary, and should be proclaimed from it or from a dignified bible. Canada's lectionary is richly

\textsuperscript{1} Rite of Penance, available from Publications Service (address on inside front cover of this Bulletin).
bound in red and gold to signify our respect for the scriptures and to emphasize the place of God's word in our spiritual growth. Scripture references are to *The Jerusalem Bible*.

e) Participation: The Vatican Council suggests many ways of promoting active participation in the liturgy: pastors are to encourage people to take part by their acclamations and responses, and by singing psalms, antiphons and hymns, as well as by their actions and bodily postures. Reverent silence for reflection is an essential part of good participation (see Liturgy constitution, no. 30). An effort should be made to include all or many of these methods in this celebration.

f) Music should help the celebration to achieve its purpose. Hymns and songs are suggested from *Catholic Book of Worship*, the Canadian hymnal. Other ideas are given in the liturgical index of the choir edition (pages i-iv at the back of the book) under *Lent, Passion tide, Christian vocation, community, penance celebrations, unity, word of God*.

g) Full celebration: There should be a presiding priest, a number of confessors, the reader carrying the lectionary, servers (including two with lighted candles), crossbearer, thurifer, and choir. The president presides from the chair, leads the prayers, and preaches the message of conversion. His work will be more effective when he encourages others to assume their proper roles.

h) Team work: A number of smaller or scattered parishes may wish to pool their efforts in celebrating penitential services in each place. A team of priests going from parish to parish on several different days will bring the benefits of this celebration to more people.

i) People's leaflet: Parishes may encourage the people to use the Canadian hymnal as their response book; others may wish to prepare leaflets to help their people take a full part in the psalms and responses.

j) Prayer for sinners: The people of God are called to be people of prayer. The entire Church prays for sinners, asking God in his mercy to bring them back to full life in his family; this should be particularly true throughout the lenten season. During the penance celebration, the president should invite and encourage the congregation to pray for sinners: for themselves, for members of the community, and for sinners throughout the world (see 1 Jn. 5: 16). This prayer may well be backed up by an appeal for fasting by individuals, families, and the believing community (see paragraph k, below).

k) Prayer and fasting: During the week before the penance celebration, members of the parish may be invited to prepare for it by prayer, fasting, and penance on one or more weekdays. By their communal prayer and fasting they will plead for God's mercy on sinners and help for all his people in this community (see Bulletin 42, pages 16-18).

l) Suitable days: A weekday — especially Wednesday or Friday, the Church's traditional days for fasting and penance — is more appropriate for a penance celebration than is the Lord's day. In planning these services, pastors should lead their community into greater accord with the practice of the universal Church.

m) Banners and posters based on the theme, or reflecting the spirit of Lent, may help to set the mood for this celebration.
CELEBRATION OUTLINE

Theme

"Forgive others as I forgive you." This theme may be explained in a few sentences before the service begins, after the greeting, or in any leaflet distributed to the congregation.

Entrance Rite

1. Song:
   Forgive our sins as we forgive
   or another seasonal hymn

2. Enthroning the word of God: The lectionary, the book of God's word, is carried in procession by the reader, accompanied by servers with lighted candles, and the others mentioned in paragraph g above. He or she places the book in a place of honor (reading stand or lectern), and the candles are placed nearby. The presiding priest incenses the book after it has been enthroned.


   The president or one of his assistants may explain the theme briefly, if this has not already been done.

4. Opening prayer: The president may choose a suitable prayer from the lenten liturgy; he is encouraged to compose his own, based on the theme as developed in the readings chosen for this celebration. One example of this prayer:

   Let us pray for the grace to forgive others
   as generously as Christ has forgiven us:
   All pause for silent prayer.

   Lord Jesus,
   listen to our prayer
   and bring it to our heavenly Father.
   In your mercy and love,
   teach us to love and forgive others
   as you have loved and forgiven us.
   Have mercy on your people
   and lead us to the joys of heaven.

   Lord Jesus,
   we praise you for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

God's word invites us to conversion and renewal of our life by proclaiming that Christ's death and rising have freed us from the darkness of sin, and have brought us into the kingdom of light.

5. Reading from the word of God: The first reading may be chosen from Eph. 4: 30 — 5: 2 (lectionary, no. 117); or Eph. 4: 32 — 5: 8 (no. 479).
6. **Meditative silence:** A few moments of silence follow the reading, allowing all to reflect and pray in response to the word they have heard in faith.

7. **Psalm:** After silent prayer, a psalm or hymn is sung:

   Ps. 51: lectionary, page 406  
   Ps. 130: lectionary, page 407

   If a gospel acclamation is sung, see CBW, no. 208.

8. **Gospel reading:** The deacon (or another priest, but not the president) takes the gospel book and prays for God's help. After receiving the blessing of the presiding priest, he goes in procession with candles and incense to the lectern. He incenses the book, and then proclaims the gospel: Mt. 18:21-35 (lectionary, no. 239).

9. **Homily:** The president proclaims the wonderful works and mercy of God as revealed in the scripture texts, and leads the assembly to prayer for sinners, to a reflective examination of conscience, and to repentance.

10. **Prayer for sinners:** The presiding priest introduces this prayer; he may use ideas from introductory note j. Then he invites all to prayer:

    Let us pray for sinners  
    and ask God to forgive them:

    All pause for silent prayer.

    Heavenly Father,  
    you do not want sinners to die,  
    but to live in grace and serve you in love.  
    Look upon the people of the world  
    and draw them back to you through Christ.  
    With him we pray:  
    Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!  
    Send your Spirit to soften hard hearts,  
    to bend rigid wills,  
    and to warm those who are indifferent to you.  
    Forgive us our sins  
    and listen to our prayers for all sinners.  
    Bring them back to your love through our example  
    so that with them we may praise you  
    and celebrate our thanks through Christ our Lord.

11. **Responsory:**

    Reader:  
    Father, forgive us our sins  
    as we forgive those who sin against us.

    All:  
    Father, forgive us our sins  
    as we forgive those who sin against us.

    Reader:  
    Be as compassionate as your heavenly Father:  
    do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
    Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.  

   R.
Reader:
Grant pardon to others and you will be pardoned,
for the judgments you make
are the judgments you will receive.  R.

Reader:
If you do not forgive others,
your Father will not forgive you.
If you forgive others their failings,
your heavenly Father will forgive you.  R.

Hymn: If desired, a hymn may be sung: CBW, nos. 281, 282.

Examination of Our Christian Living

The points below are suggestions. The liturgy committee may work on
developing others.2 Care should be taken, however, not to omit the ones that disturb
you or the community: these are probably the questions that most need to be asked.

The points should be read slowly, and a pause is to be made for reflection after
each group. The examination of conscience is the heart of the penance service: unless
suitable time is given for reflection during it, it becomes a waste of everyone’s time.

12. Examination of conscience:

Presiding priest:
Let us turn to God our Father, and ask his mercy,
that we may repent of our sins
and turn back to him in love.

Reader:
Father, for the times we have been blind and insensitive
to the needs and sorrows of others:
All pause for a moment of silent prayer and reflection.

Reader:
Lord, forgive us:
All:
Lord, have mercy on your people.

Reader:
For our failure to show real concern
for those who are starving, sick, or homeless:

The pause for reflection and the responses are made after each point.

For missing or ignoring opportunities
of sharing our faith with friends and neighbors:

For our lack of concern for peace in the world,
and for your Church’s work and missions:

For the ease with which we turn our parish community
from working for your glory and the salvation of the world
to seeking fun and games and entertainment:

2 Other forms for the examination of conscience are given in various issues of the Bulletin: for Advent,
see nos. 36, 41, 46, 51, 55, and 61; for Lent, see nos. 32, 37, 42, 47, 52, 56, and 62. Another form is included
For our lack of generosity
toward you and all your people:

For the ways we have abused your creation
instead of singing its praises to you, Father:

For the times we have chosen sin
instead of doing your will:

For the times we have preferred
our own amusement or leisure
instead of doing your work:

For the days we have neglected prayer
because we were lazy, cold, or indifferent:

For our neglect of reading your word,
for our reluctance to listen to your Spirit:

For our sins against purity,
by which we defile the temples of your Spirit,
and for accepting the world's standards instead of yours:

For our failure to carry our cross daily,
our unwillingness to share in your Son's suffering
and build up his body, your Church:

For the times we have been hardhearted,
refusing to forgive others,
and yet expecting you to forgive us:

The parish council or liturgy committee may wish to add other reflective points.

* * *

Presiding priest:
The time has come:
God's kingdom is near, it is in our midst.
Turn away from your sins,
and believe the Good News of our salvation,
for Jesus has come to save his people!

13. Silent prayer: For about five minutes, all remain in silence. Sitting or
kneeling as they wish, they discuss their way of life with the Lord.

For those who wish it, the sacrament of reconciliation will be celebrated after
this bible service.3

14. Community act of sorrow: Working with the liturgy committee, the
president may develop a form of the third penitential rite. This may conclude with
the singing of the Lamb of God, as at Mass.

3 The act of satisfaction (formerly known as "the penance") is to be personal and must be given
individually, in a way that is fitting to each person's sins and sorrow. It is contrary to the mind of the
Church to impose a general or universal act of satisfaction on all members of the congregation before or
after the individual celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation (see rite, no. 55).
15. Acclamation: A hymn may be sung:
From the depths of sin and sadness CBW, no. 279

Or a brief form of the general intercessions may be based on the theme, ending with the Lord’s prayer, no. 16 below.

Conclusion of the Rite

16. Lord’s prayer: This prayer is best sung by all, as at Mass (CBW, nos. 221-223). The president may prepare an introduction, based on the theme of the service. For example:

Let us pray to our heavenly Father,
asking his forgiveness and love:

Our Father . . . .

17. Sacred action: The presiding priest invites all to share the peace of Christ with one another. This may be done as at Sunday Mass, or less formally. He may introduce the rite in this way:

Jesus gives his forgiveness and peace
to all who forgive others.
Let us share his peace and love with one another.

18. Invitation to the sacrament: The president invites the congregation to celebrate the sacrament of penance after the bible service has ended. A number of priests will be available for confession and spiritual guidance after the closing hymn.

19. Blessing: The presiding priest may conclude with a simple blessing, or may use this form:

May the Father of forgiveness bless you
and bring you to everlasting life. Amen!

May the Son, who died and rose to save us,
forgive us our sins
and lead us in his footsteps. Amen!

May the Holy Spirit of God
pour out his love upon you,
and fill you with joy and peace. Amen!

May the blessing of almighty God,
Father, Son, + and Holy Spirit,
come upon you and remain for ever. Amen!

20. Concluding hymn:

O merciful redeemer CBW, no. 283
or another seasonal hymn

Sacrament of Penance

Those who wish to receive individual guidance and sacramental absolution are encouraged to take the opportunity provided by the presence of a number of priests. The choir might sing meditative or seasonal psalms or hymns in a quiet manner for the first five minutes after the communal service ends.
CELEBRATING THE PASchal MYSTERY

Holy Week has many facets. Together with the Easter octave, it is the high point of the liturgical year; its center and focus is the Easter triduum.

Bulletin 37 looks at Holy Week as a week of faith, and studies its celebrations day by day, with special emphasis on the music for each day (see Bulletin 37, pages 32-44). Bulletin 42 looks at Holy Week in general, and places its emphasis on the Easter vigil celebration. Bulletin 47 looks at the history and development of Holy Week (pages 28-30, 34-52). Other articles from past issues of the Bulletin are listed in Bulletin 61, pages 308-310.

Week of Celebration

While every Mass and sacrament proclaims the paschal mystery, it is celebrated to the fullest in the liturgy of Passion Sunday to Easter Sunday. During this week that is called holy, we praise the Father for the death and rising of his Son Jesus, and for calling us to share in it by dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ.

Holy Week is three-dimensional:

○ We remember the past: During the week we recall and celebrate the messianic entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, his last supper, his betrayal, passion and death, and finally his glorious rising from the dead. We remember God's love for us, shown in the death and resurrection of Christ; we offer our praise and thanks to the Father through Christ, especially in the eucharist. Holy Week is a week of remembrance of the glorious things that God has done for his people.

○ We celebrate God's present action: Our liturgy is not limited to the past, for God is continually at work in his people. In the Holy Week celebrations, we praise the Father who, through our lives, continues to proclaim his Son as savior. We give him glory as we continue to celebrate the eucharist, as Christ has commanded us. We meditate on the crucifixion, given its full meaning when God raised his Son. Yet our celebration would not be complete unless we presented the needs of suffering mankind in our prayer to the Father. And our prayer would not be sincere unless it is carried into our lives by our love for others, working to alleviate their misery in the name of Christ. Holy Week is a time to pray to the risen Christ, who lives among us, and to give greater heed to his work and example.

○ We await future glory: In a spirit of joyful longing, God's people look forward to the close of their long exodus. Pilgrim people journeying through the desert to the promised land, we need faith and hope. During Holy Week, the Spirit encourages us. We know that one day Christ will be recognized by all as Lord, that he will be proclaimed Messiah and savior by all mankind. Through our lives and prayer, we will move the world closer to the day when his cross will be accepted by all in faith, when his resurrection will be proclaimed by all to the glory of God the Father.
**Week of Prayer and Penance**

**Prayer:** Christians are called to be people of prayer and praise, but particularly during Holy Week. This week should be a time of public prayer in the liturgy, and of personal prayer. We are especially invited to reflect on the gospel accounts of the passion and resurrection.

**Penance:** Coming at the end of the lenten season, Holy Week is a time of greater penance. These final days should see more fervor in the virtue and practice of penance.

The ever difficult work of conversion, of turning away from sin, should be pursued more energetically this week as we meditate on the agony of Jesus: the innocent one suffers for the guilty: he bore our sins on the tree to bring us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. By his suffering, death, and rising, Christ broke the fetters of our slavery, and made us sons and daughters of the Father.

This week we should ponder the true significance of sin, and see it as a rebellion against God: to see evil for what it truly is means that we reach wisdom, become of age, open our eyes. This week is the time for serious consideration of our lives (see the form of examination of conscience given on pages 51-52 in this issue: it may be used by individuals in personal prayer). If we have not received sacramental absolution recently, this is the time for us to enter into peace with the Church and the Lord of grace. A penance celebration should be held the week before Passion Sunday, or during the first few days of Holy Week, to enable all to be better prepared for the sacred triduum.

On Passion Sunday, the solemn paschal fast should be proclaimed, inviting all members of the community to take part in it:

*The paschal fast should be observed everywhere on Good Friday and continued, where possible, on Holy Saturday. In this way, the people of God will receive the joys of the Lord’s resurrection with uplifted and responsive hearts* (Liturgy constitution, no. 110).

When the Church fasts in this way, it honors the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, and it prepares to share more deeply in the joy of his resurrection.

During this week, all the other lenten practices we have taken on should be continued with renewed vigor until the celebration of the Easter vigil.

* * *

Holy Week frequently finds us busy. Priests are busy with Masses, preaching, confessions, and the special care of the sick: choirs are busy, sacristans are very busy, and parish members are called to church more frequently than at any other time. All of this is important, because Holy Week is the central week of our whole Catholic experience.

A well celebrated Holy Week is like a mission of former years: the scripture texts and homilies call us to reflection, to sorrow and conversion: the passion of the Lord is brought clearly before us: the eucharist is preached, celebrated, and shared: fervor is restored, promises renewed, fasting proclaimed, and generosity called forth.
EASTER VIGIL

The only approach to the preparation and celebration of the Easter vigil is one of faith. If we believe that the risen Jesus is among his people, and that he is proclaimed as Lord as we celebrate the liturgy, we will be ready to do as well as possible, not as little as we can get away with.

The Easter vigil is what our faith is all about. Because Jesus has risen and is alive among us, we are to lead new lives. We are new people. We proclaim our joy, praising the Father with our alleluias.

As Vatican II made known in the Constitution on the sacred liturgy (no. 7), the risen savior is alive and present among us in many ways:

○ In the Mass in the person of his minister, and especially under the eucharistic species;

○ In his word: it is Christ who speaks when the scriptures are proclaimed in the liturgy;

○ In the sacraments by his power: when a minister baptizes, it is really Christ who baptizes;

○ In the assembly as we pray and sing: he is in our midst when two or three of us gather in his name (Mt. 18: 20);

○ In his brothers and sisters: whenever we help another who is in need (or when we refuse our help), it is Christ we touch (Mt. 25: 31-46).

In the Easter vigil, we proclaim our belief in his presence among us as we celebrate his resurrection.

Preparation

In order to celebrate the Easter vigil well, much preparation is needed. In many parishes, we spend more time preparing for Christmas midnight Mass than we do for the Easter vigil. This is an imbalance which we did not cause, but which we should try to correct:

People: Much more effort must go into helping people understand the meaning of Easter in their daily lives. Parish liturgy committees should be concerned with using every possible means to help the adults and children of the community grasp the importance of Easter. What ways can the committee use to help people understand the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist) being celebrated during the vigil service? How can they relate the reception of adults into the Christian community with Lent and the Easter vigil? (See Bulletins 51 and 64 on Christian initiation.)

What preparation have parishioners received to help them appreciate the bible readings as the heart of the vigil service? Has the lenten season seen closer attention to the word of God? (See Liturgy constitution, no. 109.)

Preparation for the vigil service begins before Lent. Easter should be preached the year round. When explaining Lent, its climax during the Easter vigil service should be clearly described: all liturgical roads lead to the great vigil rite.

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What takes place at the vigil service can be explained through the parish bulletin, in parish meetings, in the schools, and again at the beginning of the service. Unless light-and-darkness are understood as the scriptures intended them — if one does not appreciate the entry of light into the night of darkness — the evening is dead before it is born. An afternoon vigil, in full daylight, is no more futile than a midnight vigil which is not explained.

During Holy Saturday, the people of the parish should be continuing the solemn paschal fast which they began on Good Friday. This invitation should be given on Passion Sunday, and again on Holy Thursday and Good Friday.

**Ministers:** Priests, readers, choir, organists, servers, ushers, and all others who participate, need to understand the importance of the Easter vigil. What can the liturgy committee do to help these persons become more informed?

- **Readers** need to understand the texts they proclaim on this holy night. Lent is a good time for the liturgy committee to review with them the meaning of their role. (See the introduction to *Sunday Lectionary — Study Edition.*) A sufficient number of readers should be chosen to proclaim the first eight readings, rather than relying on one or two persons only. This is one occasion where “the more good readers, the better.”

- **Singers and musicians** should be encouraged to prepare for Holy Week in good time. *Catholic Book of Worship* (choir edition, pages 33-54) contains music and guidelines for Holy Week.

A Holy Week LP record has been developed by the National Liturgical Office: it contains many examples of psalms and hymns for the week, all taken from the Canadian hymnal. The record may be obtained from Publications Service (address on inside front cover) for $5.50 postpaid.

Further thoughts on planning Holy Week music are contained in Bulletin 37, pages 33-34, 36, 39-41, 44.

- **Servers:** There was a time, a dozen years ago, when servers needed extensive practice for Holy Week. The new rites are far less complicated, and half a dozen servers can do the work quite easily, with a minimum of fuss.

Since much of what needs doing, especially on Good Friday and at the vigil, happens only once a year, the celebrant should expect to give more “on-the-spot” directives, more cues. That is not to suggest that no rehearsals should be called; on the contrary, the ceremony should be gone over several times so that the general outline and spirit of the rite is grasped. Attention to processions, candles, incense, and vocal participation will be given by those who see the whole picture, who have caught the message of the particular day on which they serve. A good master of ceremonies will help the celebration to move smoothly.

All of us — the servers, foremost — are glad to see the end of complicated rites. A far happier scene is taking place today, as the priest sits in the midst of the readers and servers, and explains their particular parts in the whole drama, and shows them how Holy Week is the great event of grace.

**Material preparations:** Since the new Easter vigil service first appeared in experimental form around 1951, a lot of hours have been spent preparing equipment,
decorating water containers, laying fires, organizing sanctuary tables, and so forth. Perhaps this is the year for the clergy of the parish to invite members of the sacristy group to work with them early in Lent to prepare the necessary items; in this way, the celebration will be truly beautiful, and unmarred by misplaced or forgotten articles.

_Candles_ for everyone should be ordered in good time. Copies of _Catholic Book of Worship_ (pew edition) should be provided for the congregation: if each person has a book, the sung response has a good chance of succeeding. Copies of the Holy Week record would be appreciated by the choir, priests, and catechists in school.

**Time of the Vigil Service**

_Vigil of prayer:_ The New Testament often refers to nights spent in prayer. The idea of a “night watch” or prayer vigil is really new to many of us, though. While a lot of people don’t mind staying at a party until well past the witching hour, most Catholics would be surprised at the thought of anyone spending the night — or a good part of it — in prayer.

The Easter vigil is, according to ancient tradition, a night of watching for the Lord (see Exod. 12: 42). In St. Luke’s gospel (Lk. 12: 35-40), we are urged to be ready, awaiting our master’s return so that he will find us wide awake, ready to greet him. One of the finest mosaics in the Byzantine tradition shows the Virgin, the apostles, bishops, religious, and countless rows of faithful Christians quietly standing together, lamps lit, eagerly awaiting the coming of Christ the bridegroom.

_Night watch:_ The vigil begins with a service of _darkness and light_. Its symbolism is frustrated when it is celebrated before night falls. Christ is the light of the world, a world which lies in the shadow of death; he brings us from the kingdom of darkness, sin, and death into his own kingdom of light and peace. The light service at the beginning of the Easter vigil requires darkness if it is to be effective.

_Another Saturday night?_ There are 51 ordinary Saturdays in the year, when most parishes celebrate the first Mass of Sunday at an evening hour suitable in their community.

But the Easter vigil is not just another Saturday evening Mass. Above all else, it is a _vigil service_, revolving around the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation. While it culminates in the eucharist, it is not just an ordinary Mass. For this reason it has never been Catholic tradition to have the first Mass of Easter without the preceding vigil service.

Perhaps the uniqueness of the Easter vigil would be brought out more clearly in the minds of parishioners if a special time were chosen for the celebration, a time quite distinct from the usual Saturday evening Mass — preferably a later hour when it is dark outside.

With uncomforting frequency of late, people are raising the question of the aged, the feeble, and the infirm who find it hard to move about in the dark; about bus lines that stop running at night; about icy streets when Easter is early.

One is inclined to wonder why it was that until very recently, we seldom heard such complaints about Christmas midnight Mass. We put up with a lot for the sake of a tiny moment of special value — “Silent Night” at midnight.
What a commendable thing it would be if parishioners were invited (and organized) to make a special effort to invite these people to the Easter vigil service, and help them to come by driving them to and from Church. (Some of the parishioners do considerably more of this kind of thing on election day.)

Elements of the Vigil Service

Service of light: The light service is simple and clear, and needs little explanation. This was the goal of the reform. It can be most effective if well prepared and rehearsed. As mentioned earlier, full darkness is required, and the people need to have candles, so that the "light of Christ" may be seen spreading from person to person throughout the assembly. It is the mood more than the word that is teaching the faith here.

The Easter proclamation (exsultet) should be sung by someone with a clear, pleasant voice. The deacon or priest need no longer assume this burden all alone: any good soloist, man or woman, is now allowed to sing the Easter proclamation.

Further notes on this part of the service are given in Bulletin 37, page 42, and in the current Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy.

Service of the word: To cut the lessons down to the bare minimum is to cripple the vigil service. The reading of God's word is the fundamental element of the Easter vigil. For this reason the Church has provided nine readings: seven from the Old Testament, two from the New.

The lessons should be proclaimed with dignity and meaning, for it is by his word that God forms his people. He teaches us the magnitude of his love as we listen to the account of our salvation. In return, we are invited to respond by psalmody, and by our renewed Easter lives. Time, therefore, for reflection and personal response should follow the readings.

The psalms are easily sung. Catholic Book of Worship has prepared good, straightforward music for the vigil. The people's refrains are given on pages 60-65 of the pew edition, and the choir's part on pages 43-49 of the choir edition. The solemn alleluia before the gospel should be sung as the community's acclamation to the risen Lord.

Further notes on the service of the word are found in Bulletin 37, page 43.

Baptismal liturgy: Serious attention needs to be given to the meaning of baptism throughout Lent. When Christians begin to appreciate baptism in their daily lives, then they will begin to live as "children of light." (Baptismal symbols now evident in the funeral liturgy — white vestments, Easter candle, white pall, holy water — derive their origin from the vigil service.)

Further notes on the baptismal liturgy of the Easter vigil are contained on page 43 of Bulletin 37.

The joyful signs of Easter — the best chasuble, flowers on or near the altar, a special Easter outfit, school holidays, a visit home for Easter dinner — all these things are ways of saying "Easter is special; Easter is great." Far from discouraging such celebrations, we should do our best to further them.

This book has been prepared by the Liturgical Conference as a practical book for families and parishes. It is a catalogue of plans, models, and solutions: learning from years of research and experiment is gathered in one package. The real value of this book, which gives a model for parish worship, lies in providing stimulation rather than answers. By inspiring us to put together our own learning from the past, it helps each parish to develop its own model. A plan is offered for bringing about the changes necessary in any parish.

Readers are invited to explore the concept of parish in a way they may never have done before. The book helps them to consider liturgy or Christian ritual as the unique way of Christian formation, growth, and maturity in faith, and invites them to become conscious of the relationship between catechesis and celebration. Can a faith tradition, the book asks, have any meaning if its expression through prayer, action, and ritual never finds its setting in a family home?

Further questions are posed to parents: Do you find meaning in what is happening in your church on Sundays? Are you going to church for the sake of your children, or for yourself? Is religious education for children alone, or should it involve everyone in the parish?

Parish means home: In every parish there are people living in isolation, people who are alienated: they rarely experience a sense of community. In the liturgy, Jesus reaches out to everyone, to reconcile, to heal, to unify. Parishes and Families offers many practical ideas for involving the elderly in the life and liturgy of the parish. It offers a program for one-parent families, and has good suggestions for involving single Christians in parish life.

Rhythm of the year: The book offers a picture of the way things might be if Christians were conscious of the glory of the year, with its rhythms and seasons, its festivals, moods and gifts. The year is the unfolding of the story of our redemption, of freedom and oneness with the Lord. It finds expression even in a simple family meal, on waking, while looking at the sunset, in hospitality, and in many other ways. When the community gathers together for prayer, a new dimension is added: public witness to our Easter faith.

The authors describe many customs for keeping Advent, Christmas, and Lent. This book is a good resource for families. It contains a variety of suggestions for a lenten program of religious education.

The book contains a description of the Duluth celebration of the 1972 Easter vigil, when the parishes of the city planned a central celebration in a rented arena. (See Living Worship, January 1973.)

Planning the Sunday eucharist is one of the best chapters in the book, and could be quite helpful to parishes as they plan their Sunday liturgy.
Worship is a joint venture of Christ and his Church. Jesus brings us to faith, and the Church's role is to create a good celebration, a good human experience. This effort requires hours of work each week by many people.

Whenever a parish clearly understands what to do and cares enough to do it, good celebrations occur and the parish is transformed. Good celebrations are the result of thoughtful, prayerful planning by many people. A planning team, which includes the presiding priest, needs adequate time to plan the celebration.

The authors offer some ideas on sanctifying the day by prayer, and on use of the liturgy of the hours by the laity. Good, practical suggestions help make the sacrament of penance more meaningful for all.

*Parishes and Families* is a book that will be quite useful for parish priests, for members of the parish council and its liturgy committee, and for families who take their spiritual life seriously.

Rev. B. J. Burke
St. Patrick's Church
Kinmount, Ontario

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Have you ever noticed that the lenten ferial readings from the day after Ash Wednesday to Wednesday in Holy Week (lectionary, nos. 220-223, 225-260) are taken only from the Old Testament and from the gospels?

Does it seem strange that there are no New Testament readings for the weekdays in Lent? Only on Holy Thursday and Good Friday (nos. 39-41) do the Masses follow the usual Sunday pattern of three readings. The Easter vigil service (no. 42) is unique, of course, the greatest celebration of the year, with its seven readings from the Old Testament, an epistle (the only time the term is used in the lectionary), and a gospel reading.

Should there be New Testament readings selected for the weekday Masses of the first six weeks in Lent? Would it be good to have alternative readings to replace the current Old Testament readings, at least occasionally, or to be used in conjunction with them in a three-reading Mass, as on Sunday?

The lenten readings are carefully selected, so that the first reading and gospel share or develop the same theme. It is an interesting and profitable exercise to take one or two of the days in Lent, or a day each week, and find a suitable New Testament reading to go along with the ones assigned to that day in the lectionary.

Serious suggestions for New Testament readings for the lenten weekdays will be of help when the lectionary is eventually revised or expanded. Now is the time to start thinking about the possible options for Lent, and discussing them.
BRIEF REVIEWS

Visual Kit

*The Beatitude People*, by Margaret Denis: 200 slides, commentary, samples of developed catechesis (1973, CCC, Publications Service, 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1): $50.00, plus postage.

A slide kit for pastoral use among Indian and Métis people has been designed by Margaret Denis, after years of work among them. During the preparation of this kit, she discovered the riches in the Sunday lectionary, and this has greatly influenced her presentation. The kit contains 200 colored slides, a printed commentary, and samples of developed catechesis for use among Canada's native peoples.

The slides present facets of Christ's message in terms of the actual life context of the native peoples, with bush and plain, forest and mountain, lake and ocean. Daily life activities of the Indian people with family and home and work are also included.

Developed sequences include scripture, lessons on creation, the Church, the road of life, and others; suggestions for correlating with the Canadian catechetical program; a complete selection illustrating the three readings and psalm for every Sunday in the liturgical year.

We recommend this kit to all who wish to make liturgical preparation come to life in home, committee room, and school.

Reconciliation


A practical, pastoral look at the sacrament of penance, both in its historical perspective and in its present, rapid developments, is the task taken on by *The Sacrament of Reconciliation Today*. In this revised edition (1974), Father Prieur has brought good theological and liturgical insights to help Christians understand and celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation with greater meaning.

When considering the reception of this sacrament by children, the author takes into consideration Roman declarations, pastoral exigencies, and the insights and faith of all who work with young Christians.

This brief work is valuable for everyone who is concerned with restoring the fullness of grace and vision that Christ has intended for us in this sacrament of peace.

COMMUNITY

Since it is the community which celebrates liturgy, anything that helps the community is of value to liturgy. A useful four-page help is *A Community of Quality*, the Royal Bank monthly letter for July, 1973.

ON THE OBSERVANCE OF LENT

St. Benedict speaks of Lent in his Rule:

Although the life of a monk ought to have about it at all times the character of a Lenten observance, yet since few have the virtue for that, we therefore urge that during the actual days of Lent the brethren keep their lives most pure and at the same time wash away during these holy days all the negligences of other times. And this will be worthily done if we restrain ourselves from all vices and give ourselves up to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart, and to abstinence.

During these days, therefore, let us increase somewhat the usual burden of our service, as by private prayers and by abstinence in food and drink. Thus everyone of his own may offer God “with joy of the Holy Spirit” something above the measure required of him. From his body, that is, he may withhold some food, drink, sleep, talking, and jesting; and with the joy of spiritual desire he may look forward to holy Easter.

Let each one, however, suggest to his Abbot what it is that he wants to offer, and let it be done with his blessing and approval. For anything done without the permission of the spiritual father will be imputed to presumption and vainglory and will merit no reward. Therefore let everything be done with the Abbot’s approval.

Chapter 49
St. Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries

DUPLICATING COPYRIGHTED MUSIC

It really does matter! The temptation to photocopy a piece of music is often fostered by the idea that a few such copies won’t make or break either the composer or the publisher. But multiply the effects of this kind of thinking by the hundreds — or even thousands — of people who take this attitude, and you begin to realize the magnitude of the problem. The copyright system is designed to protect the copyright holder by giving him the exclusive right to market his product. From the price of each piece the copyright holder must pay a percentage to printers, engravers, employees, dealers, and most important the composer whose income depends directly on the number of copies sold. When illegal copies are made, a sort of “black market” is created, cheating all of these people, especially the composer, of their incomes. The effect is similar to someone pilfering a few dollars from your paycheck each week on the assumption that you won’t notice.

It doesn’t stop there. Although the composer and the copyright holder are the most obvious sufferers, the effects ultimately come back to the consumer in the form of higher prices — triggered by the loss of profits through illegal copying.

You can stop this vicious circle before it starts by consistently refusing to make or use illegal copies.

It’s something like the dollar bill in your wallet. You own the paper, and there are many ways you can use it. But you do not have the right to make copies! Think of music the same way, and you’ll be on the right track.

Thank you.

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BEST IN THE WORLD

That is what is being said of Canada's liturgical calendars:

○ In English, it is known as Guidelines for Pastoral Liturgy — Liturgical Calendar. The 1977-1978 edition contains 227 pages of useful material for priests and liturgy committees. There are 50 pages of pastoral notes at the beginning of the book. These summarize the current guidelines and legislation on liturgy, and show the many options and alternatives which are available. This book offers helps for good celebrations throughout the year.

○ In French, it is known as Ordo. The 1977-1978 edition contains 265 pages of notes and helps.

Running from the first Sunday in Advent to the Saturday after the feast of Christ the King, each of these editions is available for $2.50 from Publications Service, 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1.

RESOURCES FOR THE LITURGY COMMITTEE

Some of the helps provided by the bishops' conference in Canada:

Liturgical books: Sacramentary, lectionaries, ritual books.

National Bulletin on Liturgy:

○ Bulletin 35, Parish Liturgy Committees, has been issued in a second, revised edition (December 1977).


○ Other issues cover particular seasons, sacraments, the Mass, liturgy of the hours, or important topics such as prayer and family life.

○ Back copies (from no. 34) remain in print and available.

Sunday Mass Book: A book of Mass texts and prayers for the people of God — for preparation for liturgy, for prayer, for living the liturgy. It contains a collection of Canadian sacred art, 19 full color reproductions and seven black-and-white. 1344 pages, two colors, ribbons. $10.95, including postage, from Publications Service.

○ Art Collection/Collection d'Art reproduces the art from Sunday Mass Book and gives a more detailed explanation of the pieces in notes drawn from the artists' own comments. Complete text in English and in French, 19 full color reproductions, seven black-and-white. 61 pages. $3.50.

These books may be ordered from Publications Service at the address given above. A free list of these publications is also available.