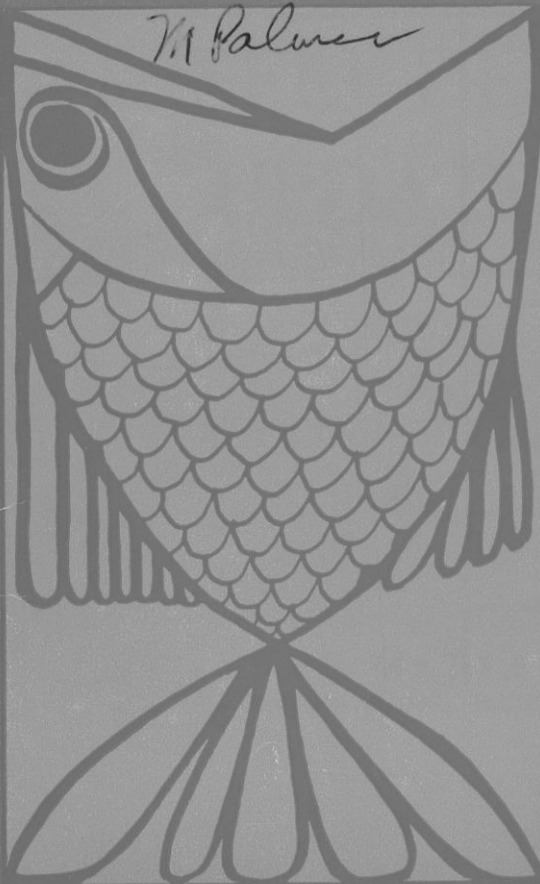
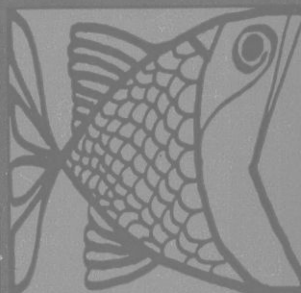


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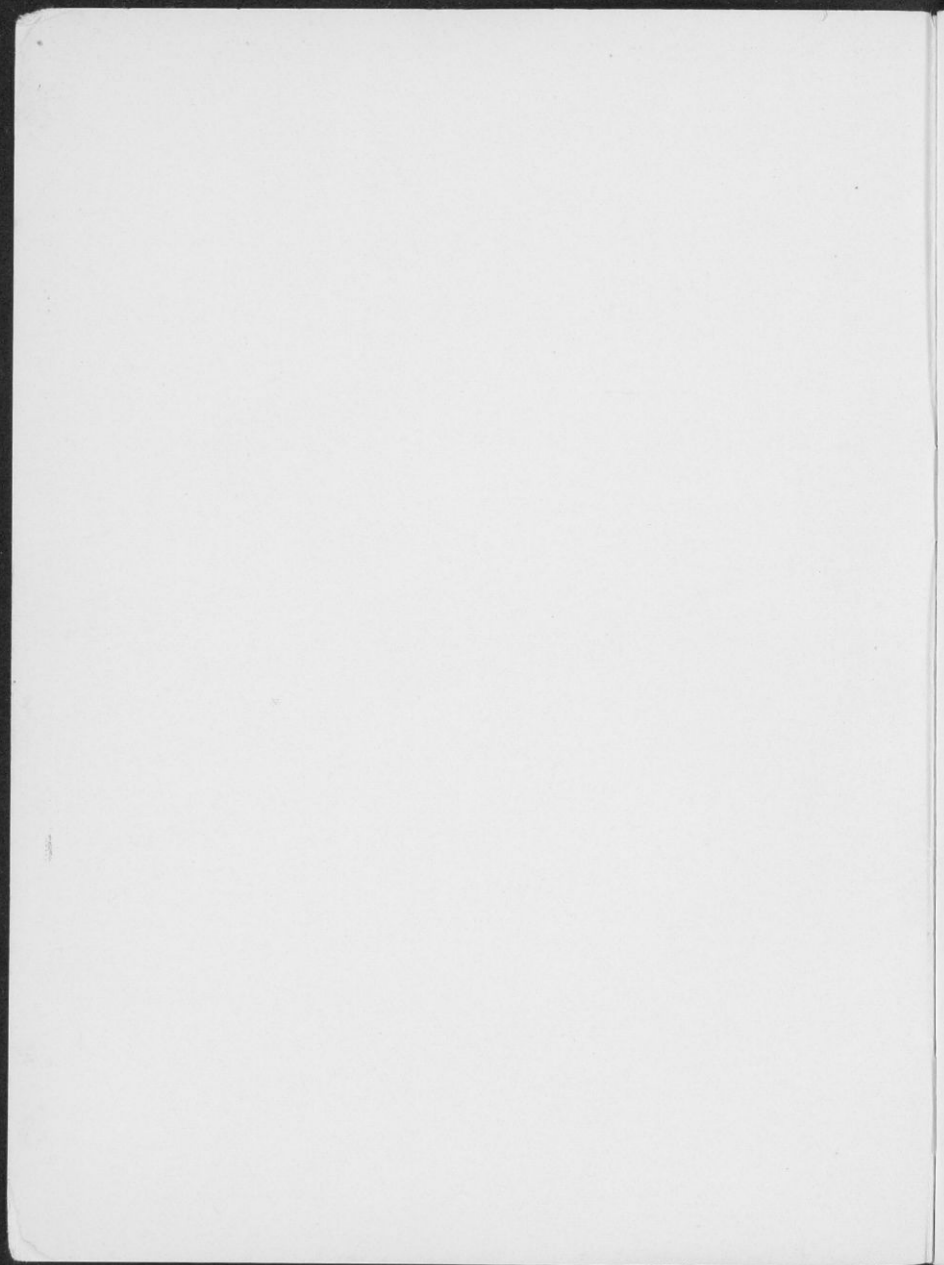
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PENANCE & SELF-DENIAL UPDATED

By Rev. Hugh Calkins, O.S.M.



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GETTING OUR IDEAS STRAIGHT

Perhaps you heard the story of the Jewish psychiatrist? He laughed good-naturedly with Catholic friends about his crowded schedule near Christmas. "So much talk about love for men, good deeds and fellowship stirs up anxiety and guilt feelings for many Christians," he said. "It's good business for us, but it shows troubled minds about the practice of charity."

Something like that happens to many of us during Lent. We're all for the big party on Mardi Gras night ("we've been working so hard, need relaxing, 40 days is a long stretch"), but we dread those ashes the next day. They jolt us with realities that we've mentally evaded most of the year. We feel guilty about our past sins, all right, but we grow guilty another way about our failure to work at penance and mortification. What ugly words! How we wish they'd just go away.

We've got troubled minds about Lent these days. We're even troubled by the decision of the U.S. Bishops to reduce the regulations for fasting during Lent. "Father, now that they've cut all those meatless meal routines," grouched a disgruntled Catholic recently, "nobody'll ever do any penance. We're liable to wreck a lot of fish joints and louse up a few menus. It's getting so nothing's for sure."

Don't Kid Yourself

Even with the changed regulations on fast and abstinence, one basic reality will never change. That basic reality was put in command form by Christ: "Take up your cross daily and follow Me." The liberalizing spirit breathing in the Church today is not laxity about penance. **It is a positive emphasis upon personal responsibility.** It is a challenge to each one of us to listen to the Holy Spirit within us, to strive for generosity in self-giving, to perform good works out of love — love for God and all men.

We followers of Christ must develop new patterns of thinking about penance and mortification. We'd better cast out once and for all the pattern of thinking that: "Whatever's hard to do or bear just must be the best. We've got to suffer. So let's pick out for penance and mortification some 'give up comforts' routine." That outdated approach makes a virtue of difficulty. You know, the tougher it is the more merit you win in heaven. "It ain't necessarily so," says Gershwin and many good theologians. Any good theologian would grant that a claim to greater merit that is based on difficulty alone is a false claim.

We should all know from traditional teachings — as well as from contemporary theologians — that greater love is what increases merit or reward in heaven. And the more truly we love, the less we worry about rewards hereafter. Those followers of Christ whose love is strong find His service yoke-sweet and burden-light despite heavy demands. So let's think about Lent and penance and mortification in terms of what I will do for Christ and for my neighbors that will be a response of love to their needs.

What Penance Is Not

Penance and mortification are not just pious forms of dieting or getting in shape. They are not merely payoff deals to square books dyed red with the losses we've incurred through personal sin. They are virtues, good habits that come from repeated acts. They are virtues that can only be practiced properly in a context of love. God must give us the light and strength — and He does to all men — that will enable us to seek our salvation by renouncing all loves that might separate us from God. And the purpose of making such renunciation is to free us from entanglements — free us so we can love Him with all our powers.

So let's forget this business of: "What'll I give up for Lent — smoking, food, drinks, shows?" Let's concentrate on: "What shall I do to free myself from self-centeredness, from greedy pursuit of pleasure, from coldness and harshness toward my relatives and friends, from grudging service in the cause of Christ?" Then the deprivations we might accept — loss of



sleep because we visited the sick, for example — become acts of love. And instead of settling for money gifts — helpful to good causes though they are — we work at self-giving to our neighbors.

PENANCE IN SCRIPTURE

The emphasis in theology today is scriptural. We are told to search out our ideals and values in Bible readings at Mass, in private study, in group prayer. Almost as soon as you open the New Testament, you are confronted with fundamentals on penance and mortification. Nothing in so-called “new theology” or even “new-breed” liberalizing can tone down or brush off the hard-hitting statements of John the Baptist, Our Saviour, the Apostles. So let’s review a few fundamentals that leap out from the divinely inspired pages of the Bible.

Without getting technical and burdening you with texts, it’s necessary to put penance and mortification in proper perspective. Although there is emphasis on action today, there are too many wild theories bouncing around about “All you need do is love others, be involved in relevant situations, work at meaningful encounters, be committed to the needy.” The theories sound great, but too many advocates are short on practice.

Penance is not glamorous or eye-catching, nor even demonstrable to spectators. It’s a good habit linked to justice (render to each man what is his due). It leads us to hate sin because it offends God, not because it offends our refined



sensibilities. It makes us determined to avoid sin in the future, and fires us with willingness to make amends for what we have done. Penance makes us want to love God and human beings more than we did before — and this because it makes us see that all our sins were failures to love, failures to put others before self.

Love Not Spartan Discipline

The works of penance are works of love, not mere Spartan discipline patterns. The most effective penances are those that are obscure in men's eyes, even hidden entirely, often misunderstood or misinterpreted by men. Our Lord wants us to put on smiling faces amid good works done for Him, and not be "like the hypocrites, sad." He most certainly wants us glad we have chances to make amends, to practice mortification.

As soon as we study the scriptural texts that deal with mortification, we discover two basic elements. One is *negative* — detachment, renunciation, self-abandonment. The other is *positive* — we put down our wayward tendencies, we labor at subduing animal instincts, we die to self that we may live to Christ. So the practice of mortification is a struggle to subject our evil inclinations to the domination of our will, and then subject our will to God.

Mortification is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. We die to self only to live to a higher life. We abstain from meat or smoking just to subdue our yearnings to our will, so

we can then learn to subdue our will to God's will. We work at removing obstacles in our way to union with God, and we work at maintaining good order and right balance with these human powers we have. The various acts of mortification commended by the Church — like fasts and abstinence — are pinpointed examples of how we can carry out the general command so often repeated in the Gospel. They show us how to practice mortification.

Legalism a Fallacy

Yet over recent centuries there has been too much *legalism* in our approach to the good works of mortification that result from our practice of the virtue of penance. Instead of striving to remove obstacles to our union with God by being generous with acts of love — thus overcoming our self-centeredness — we have observed just the letter of the law. All too many of us have abstained from meat just because it was a burden binding under sin. And we've tended to use every trick available to duck the duty. At the other extreme, we've felt "What a good guy am I," because we kept letter-perfect all basic legalistic requirements.

Countless and scandalous times over and over we did this legalism bit, while grossly failing to love our neighbors. We were "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel" as we kept Friday and Lent perfectly, but practiced and promoted sinful segregation that oppressed Christ in the persons of Negroes. Such pharisee patterns developed among us because we failed to love.

Now we can begin to see why the Council Fathers led by the Pope are calling off the *binding-under-sin* approach to works of penance. They are calling upon us to act from love, willingly to carry out any and all patterns of self-denial that bring us in closer union with God and closer fellowship with all our neighbors. They are de-emphasizing the legalism, so we may work harder on a voluntary basis at the practice of love for God and for all men.

Does that mean that nobody is going to do any penance now, if you don't bind him under sin? No, it doesn't. Maybe at first large groups of Catholics will flip for joy that the rules are off. But gradually we'll separate grownups from babies. Gradually the lessons will come home strong. Only what you do from true love has deep and lasting value. We'll begin to see in time why kind words to a troubled person can be more important than giving up smoking (and troubling everybody with your complaints about how hard it is). We'll learn to act like mature adults.

A PRACTICAL PROGRAM FOR LENT

After we form a correct idea of penance, we ought to establish some kind of a practical program.

The first step in adult behavior for Lent—or any day of penance—is to face ourselves as we are. This means we honestly admit our guilt before God. So few of us care to be found convicted of deliberate wrongdoing. We clothe even our most deliberate deeds in some semblance of good. Smooth

excuses, blame upon others, extenuating details, mixed-up moods are drafted for our defense. Twist and turn, wriggle and writhe, only avoid at all cost standing there and accepting full blame. Why? Because of pride. **Pride is the root of all our turning from God.** Pride it is that makes us so slow to repent sincerely. Yet all our years have taught us we are dust and ashes, incapable of creating anything on our own. Our sins alone are our progeny.

Facing Serious Sin

Honest fact-facing must begin within our own souls. Tell not lies to your own heart. Allowing for all possible excuses and extenuating circumstances, we committed serious sin for one big reason. We wanted our own way. So we turned our back on God's way. Venial sins are almost inescapable in daily life; so many of them are tied up with frailty. But serious sin for most of us could be avoided with far greater facility, would we but choose His way. How hard it is to admit even in our hearts the things we really yearn for — and choose by sinning. Yet to admit to God and ourselves these dread motives is to slip free of enslaving bonds.

It's amazing how shocked some of us are that grave sin was chosen by us. "But I'm not that kind of person. I've been so devout and prayerful, so prudent and chaste. How could such foul sin become part of me, enjoyed by me?" Such reflections only prove you're disappointed in your "I love me and think I'm wonderful" practices. **You can't bear to face facts that apply to all human beings.** Of ourselves we can pro-

duce nothing worthy of grace or eternal life. Never be surprised at how low you can fall. Be thrilled rather at how high you can rise with God's grace. Be delighted to find God can still love you after countless failures.

From St. Paul on down, the saints all gloried in their weakness. They knew how strength is perfected by God amidst our weakness. They were truly sorry for their sins, but not surprised by them. What else but sin could be expected from us who spring from seed damaged by sin? We all need the realism of a Francis of Assisi who told a novice who sang his praises this shocker: "Brother, Francis may yet have children unlawfully." This frank appraisal of his limitations came from a man already marked with the sacred stigmata. The saints who called themselves gross sinners were not fools. They saw truth shining in God's mercy.

Antidote to Pride

The saints understood and worked at that badly misunderstood virtue — humility. If we work on that first big step — facing ourselves as we are — we shall come to ponder Our Lord's words: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

Few things belong to us so personally as our sins. All our sins are due to negligence or passion or malice or some combination of them. We come to understand ourselves better once we learn how much on our own each of us is. We begin to learn the humble-mindedness of the Publican and

deflate our bubbles of vain self-adulation. Truth is, all we can take credit for producing all on our own is sin. You can see why saints made oft-repeated assertions of their miserable sinfulness. They were not silly or insincere. Neither were they doing polite grandstanding for applause. They held high ideals; yet were aware their failure to attain such ideals came from failing to use grace.

The first function of humility is self-contempt. The kind Our Lord taught us by telling us even saints are unprofitable servants. What is useless or of no account should be held in contempt. If we ponder our nothingness we are led to proper disesteem for self. Reflecting on our sins leads us to admit with Job: "I have sinned and indeed I have offended and I have not received what I deserved." We'd hate to have others say that about us. Yet truth demands we admit God sees it that way. Proper contempt for self arises from reverence for God. We can always keep our proper self-esteem alive by recalling we are children of God — yet despise our proneness to sin.

Reverence for God — and Man

Genuine humility is built upon reverence for God. So it makes us reverence what is God in other human beings. We see a person of flesh and blood but we subject ourselves to him as a child of God. We take ourselves in one capacity — naturally. We take him in another capacity — supernaturally. We rightly deem our natural self to be beneath him whom we regard with supernatural light. So we see him as a son of

God, a brother of Christ, a child of Mary. Only through such an attitude could the saints humbly serve people inferior to them naturally. Only thus shall we wait upon the poor, sick, afflicted, downtrodden. There is good in others we don't possess — evil in us they don't possess.

Maybe a serious ailment I suffer isn't the worst in the world. Yet to me it's real misery because I feel it so deeply in me. And so my sins are much more real to me than any others. I know just where and how I failed God and how cheap it all was. From this deeper sense and fuller knowledge, I can judge my sinfulness greater than others. "A man must deem himself below others, not because he is certain that he is, but because he is more certain of his own worthlessness than he is of theirs." St. Bonaventure shows us in that sentence a basic secret of humility. How different our dealings with people who irk us, if we but remember this basic secret.

TAKING OUR STAND

Another big step in outlining a program of a mortified life is to take our stand for Christ. This means we admit we are followers of Christ Crucified, Christ Risen, Christ Redeeming Now. The work for souls that Christ accomplished through His humanity goes on until His second coming is accomplished. In our humanity it goes on, as we live through our suffering, death, resurrection. Just as Mary, the perfect Christian, lived through her Seven Sorrows and her Assumption. During Lent we stand with her on Calvary and study the God-Man twisting in death agony like a condemned failure.

It's tough to take, isn't it? He expects and even demands His followers to choose this kind of finale: nailed alive to a shameful gibbet awaiting ignominious death, while His enemies gloat and His followers grieve. Some followers grieve, for most of them have fled. This is an ending to imitate, this kind of failure? Did He really mean what He preached? This bit of "If any man has a mind to come My way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross, and follow Me"?

In our comfortable American existence, some of us are inclined to say: "What do you get for trying to be a hero? I can't buy it. Today is an age for playing it cool, for going along with the system for right-now rewards." To the *in* groups dazzling the American scene this climb-the-cross lingo is morbid. The longest life is too short to them and the easiest life is hard enough, so let's all take any little solace our days bring. Sadly, large numbers of baptized Catholics are gobbling up as Gospel the cult of comfort and conformity. They can hardly survive any day that throws a shadowy cross athwart the world. They just yearn to break forth in Easter finery and impress their neighbors. It's so stimulating to revel in thoughts of triumph and lasting beatitude. They are strong for lilies but cold toward cross agonies.

Christ did not come down that Good Friday. Mary never once sought to turn Him from the task set Him by His Father. Christ and Mary would never be popular then or now. But immensely loved and imitated they would always be. What do they think of so many adults today who fear pain and suffering so much? We soften a generation upon whom nuclear-age havoc may fall any year now, forgetting what St. Peter

said: "You are engaged to this by the call of Christ. He suffered. . . . You were to follow His footsteps."

Next to the Cross

So we take our stand with Christ and Mary. Notice the challenges that at once face us. Realize that your response to challenges determines whether or not you will do true penance. Don't say: "I'll give up this or that goodie." Think of giving up false patterns of thinking or living.

There stands that gaunt symbol of redeeming death. What a grim challenge to our plans for comfort and security. Good Friday is a Geiger counter assessing the values we hoard in our stingy souls. Hollow indeed seem the plans some families scheme even for kindergarten kids. For status and prestige even tots must be enrolled in "right" schools. Thus begins the rat race that pushes potential saints into mediocre conformists playing a "safe and smart" game on through graduate school into status-seeking society. It pushes young couples into antiseptic suburbs with "right" groups and contacts. And they raise their few children right into the same ticky-tacky world.

Are we followers of Christ and the crucified life? Are we pagan pursuers of the good and luxurious life heralded by slick-magazine media? Have we become liars? Too strong a word? No, for John the Witness beneath the Cross with Mary exclaimed: "If any man say 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he that loves not his brother whom he sees, how can he love God whom he sees not?" Can we honestly

say we love our brothers in Christ, when we flee any involvement with poverty problems around us? When we flee to perimeter suburbs and segregated groups so racial troubles won't touch us? Our religion thus becomes unrelated to actual life in our world.

Fleeing Commitment

Vast numbers of Catholics in America want to stay loose. They are averse to commitments. Notice how they duck joining civil groups working for common good projects. See how few work with Interracial Councils, so badly needed across America. Ask the average pastor how tough it is to line up good workers for Vincent De Paul or Legion of Mary groups. Check out how seldom do parishioners volunteer for visiting shut-ins and mentally troubled patients. And apostolic groups are shunned as extremists by earnest future executives. A major factor in priesthood-religious life vocation shortage is reluctance to take on lifelong sacrament or vows spelling final commitment.

We reach God through other people. This means we must be of service to other people. Our religion must be relevant to the world in which we live. Otherwise, it is not truly Christian. Christ came on earth with the good news that would save the world—the news that would transform the world and make it over in God's image. His lifework was to bring people life, buy heaven for them by suffering and death, help them overcome evils or learn to cope with evils. We have work to do in every parish that goes far beyond clean litera-

ture and good-movie campaigns. Get involved and get your family involved in works that minister to body-soul needs of all your neighbors.

Now ask yourself: "What am I doing for Lent that spells out service to the body-soul needs of my neighbors? What am I doing for relatives and friends who need me, my concern, my time, my work, maybe my cash *now*, now as I read?"

MOVING WITH THE CHURCH

"Come alive. Come alive. You're in a challenging generation." Singing commercials for a beverage may help emphasize for dullard Catholics what's going on in our Church today. One important good work of penance during Lent could be: "I'm going to come alive, get up to date, move with God's family."

Countless clergy, religious, laity still have no grasp of the revolution all around us. They feel that soon all the turbulent winds of change out of Vatican Council II will calm down. Business will be the same, at the old corner church or chapel, the same old lethargic pace. Mass on Sunday will be Dullsville again, without all these hymns and recited responses. They better come alive. Nothing can stop what the sacred liturgy reform has inaugurated. Mass and sacraments will be more revolutionized.

Transitions are painful, when we've known set patterns so many centuries. But why resist changes that are all good, in

terms of new insight and awareness of what our religion means? Too long have we forgotten religion is the binding force that joins God and human beings in bonds of love. So steadily we have thought of religion as what goes on between God and me. And have forgotten or even fought the idea that religion for a mature Catholic means all that goes on between God and all His creation, between God and all humans. Religion means involvement, it means commitment, it means self-giving, that Christ may be served in all our neighbors.

Soon our earnest Catholics of varied ages and varied levels of education will have real concern about bringing Christ alive. Bringing Him alive in their own Mass and sacrament life and in lives of neighbors around them. Soon multitudes of good but individualistic Catholics will stop worrying over trifles like "missing my prayers and hearing shady stories." They'll be too busy being concerned about serving genuine needs of body and soul experienced by their deprived neighbors. They might even start confessing they hindered fair housing by prejudiced voting. That they wounded Christ by snubbing neighbors needing better schools.

START CARING

Start caring about what happens to people around you. All around us is the aching cry: "Nobody seems to care!" Each of us during Lent must ponder person-to-person kindness as a form of penance — in the sense of doing God's will and atoning for our past selfishness.

Countless numbers of us could bring Christ into lives around us by imitating the simple kindness of Pope John. Remember what he said the day he received in private audience Editor Adzhubei (Khrushchev's son-in-law)? He began his chat by saying: "They tell me you are an atheist. But surely you will receive the blessing of an old man for your children."

Such kindness disarms opposition, lessens problems, spreads love. And it makes for a good and holy Lent, even if we omit a few abstinences.

So easily in today's superorganized society the individual person feels inadequate. He tends to feel there's so little he can do to remedy social evils. "I'd like to see Negroes and all groups get fair play across the board. But these huge problems take a long time to solve," rationalizes the foot-dragging Catholic. He forget that *it doesn't take a long time for each one of us to work at showing love for the Negroes we deal with each day*. All we need to do is start improving things by treating each person we meet *as an individual*. The answer to "What do they want *now*?" is basically broken down to that. They want full recognition and acceptance as individuals.

Wasting Fire

It's appalling to notice across America the way Catholics waste fire. They burn up about dangers of Communism, creeping socialism, secret schemes of godless materialists (or some other bogeyman). Often this sincere but misdirected zeal

leaves them no energy for working at love for sinners and help to the neglected. You wonder how many of our fireball Catholics who rave about economic abuses would graciously honor (as Pope John did) a professed atheist? Many moderns feel Christ seems inaccessible, because they find us Christians so inaccessible. We make such violent crusades against groups outside approved-doctrine circles it's no wonder people entangled in error fear the worst.

The essence of this reform and renewal movement revolutionizing the Catholic Church today is easily spelled out. Christ and His Members (the Church) must become more meaningful to all persons alive today. We have failed to win acceptance, because we have failed to prove to millions that we really care. In a terrified and despairing age we appear in the eyes of millions as pinheaded, self-centered, superstitious. Our image will improve only if we show forth true love for all peoples of all races and true concern about all modern problems. We win souls by power of love shown in personal example. Each person we meet wants from us what we all want — acceptance and love as individuals.

The Sick and Lonely

Acceptance and love as individuals — who needs it more than sick or disabled or handicapped persons? Visiting and caring for the sick, the institutionalized, the dependent aged and handicapped has always been one of the great works of mercy. What place does it find in your plans for Lent?

Do you look away when sick people appear? Does the sight of retarded children or invalids or handicapped persons throw you into a "lemme outa here" mood? If they do — and at times I guess we all feel that way — you deserve compassion and prayers. **For you are missing wonderful lessons the sick can teach the well.** The sick teach us the profound lesson Mary teaches in the Seven Sorrows. It's the lesson we never learn well enough, the lesson that God uses suffering to let us help Christ buy eternal life for human souls. We make no sense about pain until we learn this.

Missing the Point

We often deceive ourselves in this matter. We think and even say: "Well, it's only because I feel so sorry for them. That retarded child, that spastic adult, that young blind mother — I feel sorry they must suffer so much." Are we confusing things? Feeling sorry for someone in pain is not the lesson God wants us to learn. **Feeling sorry for our personal sins that helped cause pain is the important lesson.** True compassion for suffering people does not regard them as pitiable but as honorable — privileged souls chosen by God as special co-redeemers. Yet true compassion seeks to share the pain as far as God allows. It tries to see suffering with the eyes of the sufferer.

We demoralize people when we offer pity or mere feeling-sorry consolation. They are keenly aware of how too bad it all seems. They wish deep down that they and we could realize more and more just how wonderfully good it all is.

What is needed by them from us is reassurance that their steady anguish will help accomplish what God has in mind — win graces to redeem souls by these pains. You can see why we do the sick ones a disservice by this “lemme outa here” mood. **Our turning away means we refuse to face the price of sin and the cost of helping to save souls.** We all have had the audacity to sin freely, so let’s have the bravery to look at sufferings produced by our selfishness.

What to Do

Of course we should do all the thoughtful things so consoling to sick and afflicted people. The kindly visits, greeting cards, Masses and prayers. And especially the gift of not talking too much. **Mostly we should try to treat them even as we would wish to be treated.** They are not outcasts or persons stigmatized — especially the mentally troubled — nor are they about to be canonized. They are fellow sufferers in this vale of tears, chosen in a special way to help redeem souls, worthy of our awareness, deserving of our compassion, but especially possessing true dignity not to be defaced by pity. Often by just being on hand in kindness we convey we truly understand.

The loneliness of sick people is what makes pain seem so bleak and useless. We healthy people often fail to sense how bad the loneliness is. Sure, most sufferers know that giving their pain to God to help redeem souls should console them. But they need reminders that others share pain with them, that still others reap profit from their pains.

ONE RESOLUTION: BE A GOOD SAMARITAN

Suppose you made just one resolution for a good and generous Lent. How would you phrase it?

Mind if I suggest one that could be all-embracing? **"I promise that all 40 days of Lent I will be a Good Samaritan."**

Do we have fewer Good Samaritans (or Good Sams, as Jack Lemmon might say)? Did we really have a custom of helping a stranger in distress, or do we have one now? Has it become too costly, in terms of legal or money penalties, to play the role of a Good Sam? You wonder how most Americans, let alone most Christians, would actually behave when confronted with a helpless, suffering, attacked person. Then you question how you individually would react and behave. Maybe we need badly some laws that would demand and enforce by penalties duties of Good Sams, even though we now have clear-cut doctrinal teachings of Christ and most religious leaders and religion groups.

What Would You Do?

There on the curbstone, feet in the gutter, clothes messed up, face bloodied, lies an unconscious man or woman. It could be from drunken stupor, heart spell, coma or paralysis, brutal beating — you can't tell as you stop to look. What have you done before, or what do you do now? Parallel your reaction and your behavior with Our Lord's story. Which of the three do you become? And do you act like a Good Sam? Many of

us walk away in disgust (hidden sadism or pride?). Some of us flee in fright or repugnance (justified, or merely selfishness?). Some multiply rationalizations as they drift away ("I can't get involved" syndrome?). Some few stop, check, act with love and good sense.

True love always burdens us to help anybody in need. The burden may weigh lightly or crushingly, but it weighs upon us always. That's why we so easily spin out generalizations to ourselves and others, trying to prove we were not at fault for walking by. Our minds and hearts are aware that love burdens us. Once confronted by such personal distress — and with our moment of truth to help or walk away — we don't easily wipe out our reactions to what we did or did not do. Years later, amid tearful boozing or emotional gushing, we'll still be explaining. To face the failure would mean facing other failures like that, even patterns of failure within our own souls — and this we dread.

Simplifying the Complex

You know, if you did make that Good Sam resolution for Lent you'd go much farther. You'd begin to look around at persons you now pass by. You'd begin to see social problems, seemingly so complex, in terms of simple human values.

Try sincerely to see human dignity involved in social problems. Don't worry so much about techniques — mass pickets, sit-down protests, freedom rides or marches. Think rather of the fair play due to every human being. Just as proper pride

is the basis of true humility, so is gratitude to God the basis of social justice. We'll stop indulging our silly conceit and have proper respect for all people around us, if we thank God humbly for the dignity conferred upon us by His loving creation. Christ always emphasized the priority we must give human beings over mere human traditions. His care for the sick and downtrodden was a constant reminder of this.

Notice how in Gospel narratives the Pharisees held it unlawful to cure human beings on the Sabbath. Yet the same men would rush to save oxen and donkeys from harm on that day. Christ defied their false stand with a striking miracle. So men might realize any human being is greater than all animals put together and greater than man-made laws. That lesson came hard to ancient people poisoned in mind by pagan practices that degraded human beings. Just as it comes hard to us who have lived so long amid prejudice and social injustice. What would Christ think of the millions we squander upon pedigreed animals while brutally neglecting fellow citizens?

Test Yourself

Test your reaction next time you meet a stranger. Your first reaction should be like this: Here is a man made in God's image, gifted with an immortal destiny, redeemed by the blood of Christ, worthy of deepest reverence. Most of us seldom react thus, very few of us react thus consistently. Perhaps only a saint is quite that sane. Sane is the word, for sanity means seeing things as they are. The stranger I meet

is all those things. His true worth and dignity arise from just those things. Yet so many of us meet the stranger and our reaction is: This is a doctor, butcher, Negro, German, priest, hoodlum, drunkard. We think of them in stereotype images.

It is hard to conquer the paralysis of habit and routine. We see inequalities among men so easily. Great spiritual realities are so deeply hidden. We've esteemed money, looks, manners, power so long and steadily that we've lost true perspective. Yet, every man is an object of eternal value, just because he is a man. He may be damaged beyond recognition by his own sins or those of others. But what is damaged is a true masterpiece. Every instinct within us should cry out for restoration of the masterpiece. No masterpiece from God's hand should remain mutilated if we can do even a little remedial work. Look beyond the obvious and esteem true values.

ABOUT YOUR OWN SUFFERING

Now what about your own pain and suffering? What will you work out this Lent in coming to terms with crosses God sends you, you as a co-redeemer with Our Lord? One of the fundamental lessons we must apply, if we wish to be spiritually healthy, is: **Avoid self-pity.** We do this only when we see the place of pain, pain of body, lonely heart, dull monotony, pain of mind, all types of crosses.

Self-pity works in subtle patterns. Easily deceived, even as we are demoralized, might be the summary. We narrate our problems to anybody kind enough to listen. Each time we narrate them we wax more indignant at those we fancy as oppressors and weaken our own moral fiber. And we also diminish and maybe cancel out entirely our claim to supernatural awards for bearing a cross. Our Lord did command us, "Take up your cross daily and follow Me." We should be conditioned to accept daily life as a vale of tears, with soul-filling joys a tomorrow thing in heaven. Yet our talk indicates we feel so put upon, so badly treated just because life's burdens have found us.

Pain remains pain, no matter how lofty our motives for accepting and bearing it. Should we become too used to suffering, it would no longer be suffering. Our human nature revolts against it always. We just can't help the revulsion we feel. Yet we must continue to do what God wants. God rewards us for loving Him and proving our love by bearing pain. He understands why we often hate pain itself. We would be neurotic if we loved to endure pain. But we can love God for sending it—a chance given us to share His great work—and we can love the good for souls pain accomplishes. From tiniest aches and itches to serious illness pain borne for God helps save souls.

Too Many Pills?

Can you see how so often cowardice is involved in unwise pill swallowing? We think and act as if pain were the worst

of all evils and must be avoided at all cost. Even at the cost of narcotizing ourselves into problems of addiction. Taking pills as part of a sensible medical program planned by our doctors makes sense. But rushing madly for every latest pill to shake off pain that we'd do better to sanctify by quiet acceptance is folly. We cheat ourselves of rich moments of grace and pass by chances to win help for others. Try Father Filas' *Prayer For Drivers* theme: "Help me control my impatience as I drive. Accept my efforts as prayer to relieve pain."

We find salvation by finding Christ and allowing Him to rule our hearts. The surest way to find Christ is through His Mother. The surest way to find Mary is to study out the meaning of sorrow in her life. The story of Mary's Seven Sorrows is found in the four Gospels. There you will discover the seven great mysteries of compassion known as the Seven Dolors. These seven are the price Mary paid to be Mother of Mankind. Love is often not much fun. Who knows it better than Christ who gave His life for love? But Mary knows it well too. She gave her life in a martyrdom of love. And often the only way we love God and mankind properly is through pain endured for God.

HAVE A HAPPY LENT!

So have a happy Lent. Any time you think how much you hate Lent—and certain bleak days we all do—just remember, **Satan hates Lent more than we ever could.** Don't let his scheming spoil the good work you can do for Christ and souls.

So long as Satan can enter our souls and torment us, he does not care how much we mortify our bodies. At all costs, he plans to ruin the good it produces in souls and society. His strategy is simple and yet multiple in application. He practices sabotage constantly and with endless variation, undermining our good deeds and sacrifices by poisoning our minds. So he tempts us to gloom over the long weeks of self-denial. Making us think we just can't hold out. Puffing us up with pride over mortifications is another trick. He fills our heads with unkind thoughts against neighbors, knowing that hearts at odds with neighbors are farthest from God even amid penance.

"Not by Bread Alone . . ."

Satan knows that Almighty God "by the fasting of the body curbs our vices, elevates our minds and bestows virtue and reward." So he stages a powerful attack upon our bodily appetites and their demands. Since our fallen human nature dislikes all suppression and curtailment of food, drink, sense pleasure — Satan tries breakdown arguments. Arguments like: "Forty days of self-denial are too much, you already work too hard. Stress and strain of modern life demand you nurture bodily health daily. All this restraint and penance will upset you and harm health. Why not use God's good things all around you? (He really means *abuse* them.)" So soon we begin weakening good resolves — unless we reject such fallacies.

"Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that

comes forth from the mouth of God." Our whole being must be fed, and we are body and soul. Try to live without nurturing your soul health and you'll end up a soul suicide. Fail to feed your soul with the gifts of God's love and you'll become bestial instead of human. The spiritual workout we accomplish during Lent rebuilds soul damage done the year long by stress that makes us neglect our souls. The extra Masses and Communion develop powers too long unused. Alertness to practice good habits long neglected sharpens our perception and appreciation of things eternal. We stand every chance of emerging from Lent happier — because holier — persons.

These days of renewal and reform are exciting, good-to-be-alive-in days. Our religion and its impact upon today's living make front-page news. The Church that seemed obsolete is proving eternally youthful. The liberal flexibility evidenced in adaptations to modern conditions shocks traditional-minded Catholics. They might be more comfortable if they pondered a basic truth. The Church is calling upon all of us to think adult, be more mature in religious practices. Far from becoming lax and too liberal, the Church is asking us for deeper commitment, more earnest dedication. She frees us from braces, so we'll try running giant strides.

Don't just think big, think huge. Think universe-wide, so you'll be just like your Older Brother, Christ. We Catholics have indulged for too many centuries the comforting complacency of being the chosen ones. We tended to forget chosen ones are people pledged to tough commitments. We must bear witness to the ends of the world, as the Apostles did. Our lives

must show forth these doctrines we boast of as being turned over to us by Christ. Yes, we do have the truths of salvation that people so hungrily seek. But having them could send us to deepest hell, unless we labor to share them with all people we can reach. Adult Catholics keep recalling that all men need our truth.

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