

THE TRUE SPIRIT OF PENANCE

"Let's enjoy ourselves and have a good time!" the world cries out.

To obtain the most pleasure possible, a person may steal, commit fraud, corrupt oneself, and even murder. When this person is no longer capable of enjoying things or when his heart... experiences all the emptiness and fallacy of the false happiness pursued, then, if humility, which can direct him toward God along the way of penance, is lacking, life becomes ugly and sometimes ends in vile suicide.

On February 11 we celebrate the anniversary of the Immaculata's apparition at Lourdes. What message did She leave us?

Bernardette, the fortunate creature chosen by the Immaculata, went to her pastor, who had asked that the Lady of the apparition make a rosebush bloom in winter as a sign of her heavenly origin, and told him: "I have seen that wonderful creature and I said to Her: 'The parish priest requires some sort of proof; for example, that you, My Lady, make that rosebush you are standing on bloom, since the priests do not believe me, and do not want to hear about the building of a chapel in this place.' For an answer She only smiled at me; then She told me to pray for sinners and said three times: 'Penance! Penance! Penance!'"

To make a rosebush bloom in the middle of winter is a trifle, even if performed by the Immaculata, compared to the conversion of sinners obtained through penance (from an article for Rycerz Niepokalanej magazine, February 1926).

Sometimes, our health and our duties do not allow us to suffer the hardship of penance, even though

everybody admits that the road of our earthly existence is covered with small crosses. The acceptance of these crosses in the spirit of penance is a vast field for practicing penance. Besides, the fulfillment of our everyday duties; that is, the perfect fulfillment of the will of God in every instant of our lives, in every action, word, and thought, demands giving up a lot of things we like at a given time, and this is a plentiful source of penance.

However, Jesus urges us not to be sad when doing penance, but rather to have it spring forth from love.

A soul that loves God is always ready to please Him with every thought, word, and action throughout one's entire existence. And should any affection be sacrificed in order to give joy to God, we should consider ourselves fortunate to have the opportunity to prove our unselfish love. That is why the Saints always desired to make sacrifices and to suffer. In fact, that was how they could prove the purity of their love. In the cross their love was purified and every affection that was contrary to it was rooted out.

Thus, we can all do penance, without considering our health, occupation, and duties of our state of life.



St. Maximilian writes

In fact, we can do penance every moment of our lives, as long as we do it for love (unpublished article on penance, 1940).

The Pinnacle of Love

Love lives on and nourishes itself on sacrifice. Let us thank the Immaculata for interior peace and for the ecstasy of love. Still, we should remember that even though these things are good and beautiful, they are absolutely not the essence of love. Love, in fact perfect love, can exist even without them.

The peak of love is the state in which Jesus found Himself on the Cross when He cried: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46).

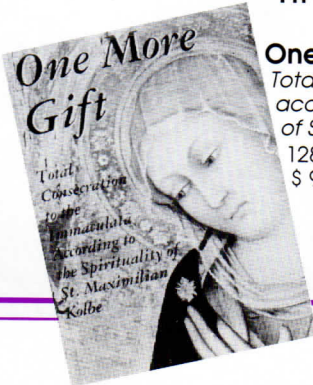
There is no love without sacrifice.

And this includes sacrificing our senses...our eyes..., our taste, our hearing, and so on, but, above all, sacrificing our reason and our will in holy obedience (letter, April 9, 1933).

Moreover, in every divine [apostolic] work, nothing great can be generated without suffering. On the other hand, is any sacrifice too much when it is for the Immaculata? (letter, July 12, 1935).

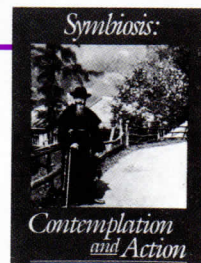
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