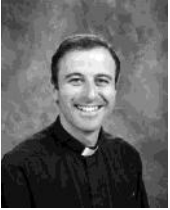


The FIAT

Faith In Action Team Newsletter

February 2010

Why Penance?



By Fr. Alvaro
Montero, DCJM

What is Christian penance? Paul VI wrote that “penance is a personal act which has as its aim love and surrender to God.” He continues, “One goes without food or gives away his property...to prepare oneself for the encounter with God.” Benedict XVI comments that “fasting is proposed to us as an instrument to restore friendship with God.”

Penance is a tool to cast aside whatever distracts the spirit from our love of God and neighbor. Penance makes sense within the dynamism towards God, with our heart set on the world that will never end.

Internal and external penance

According to Paul VI, “external practices are accompanied by an inner attitude of ‘conversion,’ that is to say of condemnation of and detachment from sin and of striving toward God.” Penance is a twofold reality: both internal and external. The Lord condemned any form of penitence which is purely external. However, “true penitence cannot ever prescind from physical asceticism as well” because “mortification aims at the liberation of man who often finds himself chained to his own senses.”

One goes without to prepare oneself
for the encounter with God.

Interesting enough is the pope’s idea that “beyond fast and abstinence the Church should seek for new expressions more suitable for the realization of the precise goal of penitence.” Could we fast from Internet or television and spend more time in prayer or with our family?

Practical examples of external acts of penance

Faithful acceptance of the burdens of everyday, persevering with faithfulness to the duties of one’s state of life, in the acceptance of the difficulties arising from one’s work and human coexistence.

Some voluntary acts. Apart from the traditional means (prayer, fasting and charity), “where economic well-being is greater, so much more will the witness of asceticism have to be given in order that the sons of the Church may not be involved in the spirit of the world,” wrote Paul VI. I would suggest that each one of us think about how much self-indulgence is present in our life and how we would grow in the spirit of self-denial.

However, Lent and penance is first of all a gift from God “to renew the family of the Church in spirit, to give us strength to purify our hearts, to control our desires and to serve God in freedom” (Preface II of Lent). The ultimate goal of fasting is to help each one of us to make the complete gift of self to God.

Father Alvaro Montero, a Disciples of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary priest, is pastor of St. Mary Church in Littleton. Excerpted from an article originally printed in the Denver Catholic Register of March 18, 2009.



**At a
Glance**

Valentine’s Dance

Friday, February 12
7:00pm Marian Hall
\$20/in advance \$25/at the door

Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, February 17

K of C Fish Bake

Fridays during Lent
Starting Friday, February 20
5:00pm Marian Hall

Stations of the Cross

Fridays during Lent
Starting Friday, February 20
7:00pm in the Church

Fast & Abstinence

- Everyone 14 years of age or older is bound to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday.
- Everyone 18 or older, and under 59 years of age, is bound to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
- On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, only one full meatless meal is allowed. Two other meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one’s needs, but together they should not equal another full meal. Eating between meals is not permitted. When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the law does not oblige.
- Catholics should not lightly excuse themselves from these prescribed minimal penitential practices.

The Family Altar

Creating and maintaining a family altar will make a difference to your family's prayer life and to the atmosphere of the home.

Lent has always been a time of increased reflection and prayer, a time for making new habits of prayer that will carry on into Ordinary Time. A family altar, or prayer table as some call it, helps not only to maintain a family habit of prayer, but serves as a physical reminder that our home is a place of worship.

This is the whole idea of the domestic church, that we worship with our family life, in our homes, as a family. A family altar is the expression of that worship call.

It need not be anything elaborate, fancy or expensive. If the home is full of small inquisitive children with busy fingers, it need not even be an table style altar. For many years, our prayer 'table' was the top shelf of a bookcase. What is essential is an easily visible spot when the family gathers for prayers. A small table in a corner (where the TV used to sit?), a space on top of a bookcase, or a mantle piece will all work well.

The family altar should include a few items to show that it is a special place.

A cloth covering, either embroidered or in the liturgical color of the season gives the family altar a certain formality.

A crucifix and small statues of favorite saints, along with votive lights or candlesticks can then be arranged on the altar. During the Advent season, the Jesse tree and the Advent wreath can be kept on the altar too.

A Bible is an important addition, books of prayers or meditations could also be kept at the family altar. Icons or pictures can be placed in stands or hung on the wall behind the family altar. Like the crucifix and statues, icons and pictures give focus to our meditations and devotions. Iconography is also instructive - the images always contain symbols that indicated some part of the Gospel story, or the life of the saint.

Last but not least, the family altar is a good place to keep the family's rosaries, (better than having them spread all over the house.)

Creating and maintaining a family altar is a simple activity, but one that will make a difference to your family's prayer life and to the atmosphere of the home.

by Catherine Fournier—www.domestic-Church.com

Feast February 23

Saint Polycarp (ca. 70 – ca. 156)



Imagine being able to sit at the feet of the apostles and hear their stories of life with Jesus from their own lips. Imagine walking with those who had walked with Jesus, seen him, and touched him. That was what Polycarp was able to do as a disciple of Saint John the Evangelist.

But being part of the second generation of Church leaders had challenges that the first generation could not teach about. With the apostles gone, heresies sprang up pretending to be true teaching, persecution was strong, and controversies arose over how to celebrate liturgy.

Polycarp, as a holy man and bishop of Smyrna, found there was only one answer—to be true to the life of Jesus and imitate that life. Saint Ignatius of Antioch told Polycarp “your mind is grounded in God as on an immovable rock.”

Polycarp faced persecution the way Christ did. One day, during a bloody martyrdom when Christians were attacked by wild animals in the arena, the crowd became so mad that they demanded more blood by crying, “Down with the atheists; let Polycarp be found.”

As he entered the arena, the crowd roared like the animals they cheered. Those around Polycarp heard a voice from heaven above the crowd, “Be brave, Polycarp, and act like a man.” The proconsul begged the eighty-six-year-old bishop to give in because of his age.

The fire was lit as Polycarp said Amen and then the eyewitnesses who reported said they saw a miracle. The fire burst up in an arch around Polycarp, the flames surrounding him like sails, and instead of being burned he seemed to glow like bread baking, or gold being melted in a furnace. When the captors saw he wasn't being burned, they stabbed him. The blood that flowed put the fire out.

Prayer:

Saint Polycarp, sometimes Christ seems so far away from us. Centuries have passed since he and the apostles walked the earth. Help us to see that he is close to us always and that we can keep him near by imitating his life as you did. Amen

Excerpted from www.catholic.org/saints

What is FIAT? FIAT (Faith In Action Team) is a school organization sharing spirituality in daily living and in becoming leaders that follow Christ. Fiat is a Latin word that means, “let it be.” Just as Mary, Joseph and Jesus said “yes” and accepted their earthly missions, let us strive each day to accept God’s calling for us in our lives. FIAT is a group for all parents of St. Mary’s School! Read this newsletter aloud with family, use the suggested resources and spread the faith! Any questions or comments can be e-mailed to Meg D’Costa at odc234@aol.com.