

## IDEAS FOR PENANCES #1

### ► *PHONE PENANCES*

- Too much time is spent by too many people on the phone on idle, banal and trivial matters. Cut back on the phone time!
- If calls are necessary, be brief and keep to the essentials. Cut out idle chatter.
- Why not finish your phone call with a prayer, said out loud, with the other person participating—an Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.

### ► *TV PENANCES*

- Best penance of all is NO TV! If you risk having an anxiety attack, then consider other TV penance options.
- Deliberately turn the TV on some time AFTER the program you wish to watch has started—it could be 5 minutes, 10 minutes, etc.
- Turn the sound down so that you don't hear the program as well as you would like.
- Dim or brighten the screen to a level where it can still be watched, but it is a bit of a "pain in the neck."
- Switch-off the TV in the middle of a program to pray a few Hail Marys (or some other prayers).
- Switch-off the TV before the program you are watching has finished.

### ► *COMPUTER PENANCES*

- Alter the brightness settings (see above for TV penances).
- Alter the sound settings (see above for TV penances).
- Alter the screen font size settings to a size you do not like.
- When typing letters or e-mails, use a font that you do not like.

*Resource: <https://devotiontoourlady.com/>*

*\*The penances in this booklet are recommendations which can be adapted accordingly to your own circumstances. Don't try to do everything or too much, risking certain failure/and or discouragement. Remember it's 40 days and you are building discipline. Take one or a few items and persevere well with these.*

*Perhaps adding an extra one or two items each week is another option.*

*Blessed Lent!*

### ***The Practice of Lenten Penances***

The following Lenten practice ideas answer the challenge by presenting first the overall objective of a Fast, and then suggesting some ways to make a profitable forty-day period of prayer, penance, and spiritual exercises in preparation for the proper celebration of Easter.

### ***Why do Penance?***

We could simply answer with the popular phrase: "*Because I said so!*" or, more correctly, "*Because God said so!*" Jesus Himself commanded us to do penance: "*Do penance, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand ... Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish!*" (Matthew 4: 17; Luke 13: 3). Holy Scripture admonishes: "*God hath given him place for penance; and he abuseth it unto pride!*" (Job 24: 23).

**Our Lady**, in recent times, has insisted upon penance, saying that God is already enough offended.

**At La Salette** she complains that: "*The chiefs, the leaders of the people of God, have neglected prayer and penance*" and that people "*will think of nothing but amusement.*"

**At Lourdes** she commands: "*Penance! Penance! Penance!*"

**At Fatima** she asks for many sacrifices (penance) and prayers, and the children respond with many heavy penances. They deprived themselves of water during the periods of great heat; they gave their lunch to poor children; they wore around their waists thick cords that even drew blood; they abstained from innocent pleasures and urged one another to the practice of prayer and penance with an ardour comparable to that of the great saints. Jacinta, one of the three children at Fatima, said, before her death: "Men must do penance! If they amend their lives Our Lord will still pardon the world; but if they do not, the chastisement will come!"

**At Akita** Our Lady said: "*Prayer, penance and courageous sacrifices can soften the Father's anger.*"

In her 1957 conversation with Fr. Fuentes, Sister Lucia said: “*Father, we should not wait for an appeal to the world to come from Rome on the part of the Holy Father, to do penance. Nor should we wait for the call from our bishops in our dioceses, nor from the religious congregations. No! Our Lord has already, very often, used these means and the world has not paid attention. That is why now it is necessary for each one of us to begin to reform ourselves spiritually. Each person must not only save his own soul, but also the souls that God has placed on our path.*”

### **God comes FIRST!**

- ▶ Give God more time (which means taking time off from other things).
- ▶ Pray more frequently (especially those little one-liners that take barely a second, i.e. *Most Sacred Hear of Jesus, I put my trust in Thee!*).
- ▶ Add 5 decades (or more) to your usual daily Rosary.
- ▶ Begin to meditate (at least 15 minutes a day—use a book if you need to).
- ▶ Try to get to as many extra Masses as possible.
- ▶ Pray the Stations of the Cross daily (or as often as you can).
- ▶ Pray the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady devotion (as often as you can).

### **Corporal or External Fasting**

- ▶ Including the abstinence from certain foods, drinks and amusements, i.e. music, and parties during Lent. These points of fast should be stressed today especially with the mania of entertainment besetting our society.

### **Corporal or External Practices**

- ▶ Take less of what you like and more of what you dislike at meals today.
- ▶ Take nothing to drink between meals.
- ▶ Do not use seasoning on your food today.
- ▶ Do not use any sweeteners with your food or drinks today.
- ▶ Avoid listening to the radio at all today.
- ▶ Take nothing to eat between meals today.
- ▶ Avoid any TV or videos; instead read the Passion of Christ in your Bible or missal.
- ▶ Take only one helping of each item at meals today.

- Put a small irritating object in your shoe for a short while.
- In cold weather, remove either gloves, scarf, hat, etc. for a short while.
- If it is cold outside, wear sandals instead of shoes—perhaps go without socks too (though, not recommended for climates of sub zero temperatures).
- If it is warm outside, wear a coat or cardigan to make it feel warmer.
- Give away to charity some favourite items of clothing.
- If buying clothing, instead of the “apple of your eye”, buy something you like less.

### ▶ **PRAYER PENANCES**

- Slow down! Slow down! Slow down!
- Reverence! Kneel rather than sit (unless infirm or injured). Stand rather than sit!
- For private prayer when alone: pray with arms outstretched in form of a cross for as long as you are able.
- For private prayer when alone: Make a genuflection each time you say the Name of Jesus in the Hail Mary.
- Avoid the “all-poured-out-in-one-breath” manner of praying. Pray like you converse. Slowly and with many short pauses.
- Familiarity breeds contempt and routine destroys devotion—therefore vary your prayers, except for the Rosary. One can avoid a Rosary routine if you truly read about and meditate on the Mysteries.
- Pray at least one Psalm a day—they are the work of the Holy Ghost and part of the Divine Office of the Church.

### ▶ **"FUN" PENANCES**

- “Fun” Penances does not mean having fun, but doing without fun!
- A greater silence in the home would not be a bad thing! If the TV is always on, or the internet is always available, then the temptation to be worldly and not spiritual will obviously be successful. TURN IT OFF!
- If the above things are really needed (for truly necessary things rather than fun things), then allocate a certain time of day or a certain length of time when those electronic appliances can be used.
- Would it really be that painful not to watch sports, or movies, or other entertainment and give that time to God instead? It would send out a powerful message to everyone.
- If music is to be listened to, then why not choose religious music (like Gregorian Chant) instead of secular?

- Drop the room temperature in the house by one or two degrees.
- Say night prayers as a family. Make an *Examination of Conscience*—this could be read from a book, or a competent adult could lead it, or it could be made in silence (but this is rarely as effective).
- Perhaps sing a hymn (if capable).
- Generally turn down the entertainment and fun levels throughout Lent.

► **SLEEPING PENANCES**

- Go to bed on time and don't lose time on trivialities, so do some spiritual reading.
- Each and every time you awake during the night, for whatever reason, take time to pray three Hail Marys or some other prayer.
- Set your alarm to rise a few minutes earlier than usual, and give those extra minutes to extra prayer immediately on waking.
- Sleep with less comfortable pyjamas or nightgown.
- Use a blanket less than you usually are comfortable with. Or use an extra one to make it hotter or less one to make it colder.
- Alter the bedroom temperature to a less comfortable level—hotter or colder—by turning the heat up or down, opening a window, using or not using ceiling fans.

### IDEAS FOR PENANCES #3

► **FOOD & DRINK PENANCES**

- Wait a little longer before eating.
- Let hot food become lukewarm before eating, to remind you of your lukewarmness.
- Eat all of the food served. With many fruits, you can eat all the skin.
- Put a pinch of sea salt in your water, or vinegar (you may not like the taste, but it provides minerals & electrolytes).
- Make a vegetable broth from your vegetable peel and cut-offs, etc.
- Don't throw out food that is past its "best before" date.
- Buy the inferior produce at the store. The less juicy fruits, the smaller eggs, the fattier meat, etc.

► **CLOTHING PENANCES**

- Wear the clothes you don't like very much.
- Wear clothes that don't flatter you.
- For short spells, tighten the belt real tight.

**Spiritual or Internal Fasting**

► Consists of abstinence from "all evil"—sin. Saint John Chrysostom taught that the "*value of fasting consists not so much in abstinence from food but rather in withdrawal from sinful practices.*" And Saint Basil the Great explains: "*Turning away from all wickedness means keeping our tongue in check, restraining our anger, suppressing evil desires, and avoiding all gossip, lying, and swearing. To abstain from these things—herein lies the true value of fast.*"

**Spiritual or Internal Fast Practices**

- Don't do any unnecessary talking; instead, say little one-liners throughout the day, i.e. "*Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.*"
- Exercise your patience today in all things.
- Don't make any complaints today. Restrain any anger, and go out of your way to be kind to the person who caused your anger.
- Don't be distracted with things that are not your business.
- Avoid any gossip today, instead pray an extra Rosary to overcome this great fault, or pray for people who are the objects of gossip.
- When asked to do something extra do so with a joyful and pleasant attitude today.
- Speak in a pleasant tone to everyone today, hold back irritability.
- Avoid using the phone (unnecessarily).
- Tell the truth in all your dealings today.
- Avoid vanity or self-seeking today.

**Spiritual Change**

- The practice of virtues and good works must be the main objective of our fasting. The Fathers of the Church insisted that during Lent the faithful attend the Lenten church services and daily Mass.
- In the course of the centuries, our fasting discipline has undergone numerous and radical changes. Today, unfortunately, the observance of Lent is but a mere formalism, reduced to abstinence on certain days and without any stress in one's spiritual growth or the amending of one's lifestyle.
- It is urgent that we return to the pristine spirit of the Great Fast which is so badly needed in our materialistic world.

**Spiritual Practices (virtues and good works)**

- Practice humility today in all your actions.
- Be generous today; help someone in need.

- ▶ Look for ways to be helpful throughout the day.
- ▶ Do a job that needs being done without being asked.
- ▶ Be courageous; walk away from any impure situations today.
- ▶ Don't be at all idle today. Always be doing something for others, or for your own spiritual growth.
- ▶ Go out of your way today to help or talk to someone who is usually difficult.
- ▶ Volunteer for an extra job today.
- ▶ Say an extra Rosary today for the conversion of a sinner.
- ▶ Visit someone who is sick or lonesome today. Offer to pray the Rosary with them.

## **IDEAS FOR PENANCES #2**

### ▶ *MORNING PENANCES*

- Out of bed immediately, no snooze alarm.
- Say some (not all) prayers prostrate, or with your arms outstretched to the sides as on a crucifix.
- Reverently kiss your Brown Scapular, Crucifix and holy medals that you wear.
- Make an Act of Contrition regularly for all your sins.
- Mortify vanity in dressing & grooming.
- Take a short moment of a cold shower.
- Don't take too long in the bathroom.
- Do some spiritual reading at breakfast.
- Speak of religious, not worldly, topics.
- Some food mortification at breakfast. Eat what you don't like. Don't grab the best for yourself.
- Drink what you don't like. Perhaps even give-up your favourite drink. Take water instead.
- Eat less than you normally would.
- Do the dishes if you normally don't.
- Don't hog the conversation.

### ▶ *WORK DAY PENANCES*

- Leave on time if you are usually behind.
- Keep your eyes strictly on the road, do not gaze around, especially at traffic lights.
- Set the car temperature at a slightly uncomfortable level—colder or hotter.

- Show more courtesy to other drivers, even the bad drivers who want to cut-in.
- Park in a place that makes you walk more.
- Take the stairs rather than an elevator.
- Don't complain but see God's hand in all persons and things.
- Offer to do things that you normally avoid.
- Mortify your curiosity about events.
- Pray short prayers as much as possible, i.e. Hail Mary... Glory be...
- Avoid being caustically critical. If criticism is necessary, make it charitably.
- Mortify the eyes at the workplace. Look down or ahead, avoid looking all around.
- Avoid flattery and "greasing-up" to others.
- Do not show human respect in the face of wrong-doing. Silence makes accomplices.
- Give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay!
- Don't lie about mistakes you make.
- Avoid jealousy. Give praise where due.
- Be your Catholic self. Not a hypocrite.
- Accept criticism without making excuses.
- On drive home: see above.

### ▶ *EVENING PENANCES*

- Some food mortification at the meal. Eat what you don't like. Don't grab the best for yourself.
- Drink what you don't like. Perhaps even give-up your favourite drink. Take water instead.
- Eat less than you normally would.
- Do spiritual reading at evening meal.
- Make table talk more spiritual than worldly. Keep the talk charitable.
- Do the dishes if usually you don't.
- No TV, do some family spiritual reading or extra prayers. Let everyone pick their own book, and read silently in the same room for 30 minutes or more.
- Perhaps one person could give a summary of what they read. Do NOT announce the name of the person until it is time.
- Do not just say the Rosary as a family, but meditate on it. It could be a longer meditation and discussion on just one mystery, or some brief thoughts about each Mystery.
- Avoid banal, meaningless one-liners.