



What is doing penance all about?

LENT 2020

St John the Baptist prepared for the coming of the Lord by “preaching a baptism of repentance”. Jesus Christ began his ministry on earth calling on people to repent: “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Repentance means we reject sin, so as to turn back to the Lord. We seek reconciliation with God and with the Church community. We can have the assurance of forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Doing penance by prayer, fasting (self-denial) and almsgiving (works of charity), is the concrete way we express our repentance and identify more closely with Jesus our Saviour. By doing penance we make satisfaction for our sins and take real steps in the renewal of our lives. To deny ourselves some legitimate pleasures can help train us to be able to say “no” to temptation and sin. Doing penance is proof of our repentance.

Because of original sin, our human nature is weak and inclined to sin. So repentance and conversion need to be central, ongoing features of living as followers of Jesus.

Penance, self-denial and self-control need to be part of our lives, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of those who have to live with us, for the common good. In nominating special times of penance (all Fridays throughout the year and the season of Lent), the Church encourages and promotes in all of us the habit of penance.

Furthermore, observing these special times of penance by all members of the Church throughout the world, emphasises “the social

dimension of sin”. The sin of the individual member always in some measure infects the whole body of the Church. Therefore during Lent and on the Fridays of the year, we do penance, not only on our own account, but also in the name of the Church and of the world.

Taking seriously our penitential obligations, we ought to carefully select the form of penance that we consider most appropriate for our own circumstances and for our own growth in the Christian life.

Days of Penance

AGE	OBLIGATION
Under 14	No abstaining or fasting obliged.
14–17	Abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. <i>No fasting obliged.</i>
18–59	Abstain from meat on on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. <i>Fasting obliged.</i>
60+	No abstaining or fasting obliged, while maintaining the spirit of Lent.

- Pastors, teachers, parents are to ensure that even those who, by reason of their age, are not bound by the law of fasting and abstinence from meat, are taught the true meaning of penance.