



Relationship Among Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Deeds [Lent]



A life of penance can be lived through:

Prayer, fasting, almsgiving and deeds.

Prayer:

Article #4 of the *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* instructs that we should devote ourselves “especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel.”

Listen to the Scripture reading from Ash Wednesday, “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18)

So, what does prayer have to do with penance?

Everything starts with our personal **attitude**. When we are **changed interiorly** this attitude becomes a part of us **which is expressed externally**. Not the other way around, that we do things in public so that we gain recognition. **We offer our prayers for many reasons**, one is to lift up our prayers for the needs of others. Our **prayers are offered as penance** because of our **intentions for the ongoing conversion of others and ourselves**, both in **mind and heart**.

Fasting:

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” (Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18)

So, what does fasting have to do with penance?

Again, another example of **attitude**, this is why it is suggested that when something is **given up for Lent**, then **something positive should be added**. For instance, if we **give up** candy, chocolate, coffee, tea, etc. then we could put aside that money for maybe the **Rice Bowl Collection**, the **Missions, community food depot**, etc.; **give up time** watching a TV show or going to the movies and **spend that time** with a **lonely neighbor, someone in the hospital, at Eucharistic Adoration**, etc. We fast so that we are **conscious** that something is different and we take note that **we want to change our lives and reflect more perfectly Christ’s love** for all of **humanity in fact all of creation**.

Almsgiving:

“When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” (Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18)

So, what does almsgiving have to do with penance?

Here we have another example of **attitude**. It is trying to help us to realize that our motivation for **giving alms isn’t for getting credit but to assist others**. We may decide to **increase our church envelope** amount by 25% or **buy some food for a family in need**, or **buy items for newborn babies, children**, or provide **food for an animal shelter**.

Deeds:

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.’” (Mt. 6: 1-6, 16-18)

So, what does doing deeds have to do with penance?

Yet again, **attitude**, we are serving others because we are the hands and feet of our Lord.

Here are a few examples of the deeds we can do:

- * Hold the door for others
- * Smile at someone
- * Be a polite driver
- * Send a card to someone who is lonely
- * Take an elderly neighbor shopping or to the doctor’s
- * Volunteer some time at a Crisis Pregnancy Center
- * Practice the Corporal Works of Mercy [feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those who are in prison, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, bury the dead]
- * Practice the Spiritual Works of Mercy [admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive injuries, pray for the living and the dead]
- * Be respectful of people, don’t text while at the table or visiting with people
- * Be present to people, don’t take cell phone calls when talking with others
- * Engage in present moments, like turning off the cell phone when at a meal, in Church, at a performance, etc.
- * Pray [Franciscan Crown Rosary, novenas, Stations of the Cross, prayers] for families, Fraternity members, those in need, friends, world peace, enemies, etc.



How are you going to incorporate Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Deeds into your Lenten journey? You may choose to focus on just one or two of these, because you realize that **conversion is ongoing** and a life-long **process** of **turning away from sin and toward God** with your mind and heart.

LOL!



[Created by Deacon Dave & Thérèse Ream, O.F.S., Revised July 2017]