



- A RESOURCE FOR ONGOING FORMATION -

Part 2: A Life of Penance and Daily Conversion

Chapter 1. The Life of Penance—Conversion

United by their vocation as 'brothers and sisters of penance', and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls 'conversion'. Human frailty makes it necessary that his conversion be carried out daily. Rule 7

Hebrew: 'Shubah' שובה Greek: 'metanoia' μετανοια
- an about turn; change of mind; conversion



YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN [John 3.7]

The word 'penance' is used in several meanings...First, it refers to a total turning to God by a basic act of faith, sorrow and love that becomes our way of life...We will refer to this kind of penance as *conversion*. Second, the word penance refers to practices of self-discipline and self-control...in general saying 'no' to certain things not strictly necessary and 'yes' to certain other things when they are not strictly required...This second kind of penance we will call *self-discipline*...A third kind of penance sees the damage done by sin and the perfect atonement made by Christ in his life, death and resurrection. It joins this reparation of Christ, knowing that there is no others conceivable way to 'make up' for the past. We call this *Christian atonement*. Finally, there is 'penance' that is part of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived: a guide for Secular Franciscans* Reflection 12 (p 46-47)

- Why should we examine our conscience before going to sleep?
- Why is penance like 'making a U-Turn'?
- What is meant by a 'besetting sin'?

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians...This endeavour of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a 'contrite heart', drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first...St Ambrose says...that, in the Church, 'there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance.' Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works,...but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion...Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repentance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolutions to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1428-1431 (p 321-322)

Out of the depths I cry to thee, Lord God. O hear my prayer!
Incline a gracious ear to me, and bid me not despair:
If thou rememberest each misdeed, if each should have its rightful meed,
Lord, who shall stand before thee?

'Tis through thy love alone we gain the pardon of our sin;
The strictest life is but in vain, our works can nothing win;
That none should boast himself of aught, but own in fear thy grace hath wrought
What in him seemeth righteous.

Wherefore my hope is in the Lord, my works I count but dust,
I build not there, but on his word, and in his mercy trust.
Up to his care myself I yield, he is my tower, my rock, my shield,
And for his help I tarry.

Martin Luther, 1483-1546



Scripture—

Lk 9. 23-26

Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Rom 12. 1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.