

Lent—Loving Sacrifices for Souls



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By Lorraine Vincent

During the Season of Lent our Holy Mother Church encourages us to do penance and make sacrifices to try to purify ourselves and become more holy. Lent is the time to take stock of our lives and determine where we need to change. It is very important to go to Confession in Lent to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus acts through the Catholic priest. If we are truly repentant and want to depart from our sinful ways and do penance, we will be absolved of our sins and our souls will be washed clean. We will be reconciled with God and renewed and strengthened spiritually. Filled with the grace of God we can start anew. Each one of us has a mission here on earth. Every one of us affects the whole Body of Christ here on earth, either in a positive way or a negative way. By earnestly striving to be holy, we strengthen the Church, and more souls will be saved throughout the world.

We can make **loving sacrifices for souls**. In this way we will follow Jesus and do what He did. Think of all the wonderful acts of mercy that Jesus did for the suffering people that He encountered! How hard He worked for souls despite all the rejection He experienced and angry comments said to Him. Jesus said, *"Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Mark 8:34). He made loving sacrifices!

The greatest loving sacrifice was made by Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She stood at the foot of the Cross, looking with great love and compassion at Jesus, sharing in His suffering, trying to comfort and console Him as He died. She joined Jesus in His loving sacrifice because she loved souls. "There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of His suffering, joining herself with His sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim, born of her..." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 964*).

In our journey in this life, we will constantly experience trials, tribulation and suffering. Jesus often spoke to St. Faustina Kowalska, who wrote His words in her Diary. He said to St. Faustina, and thereby to us, *"Do not be absorbed in your misery ... be merciful to others"* (*Diary, 1486*). Jesus is Love and Mercy. We can try to imitate Him and His Mother Mary. Being merciful to others changes our focus from all our problems to something positive. We could plan to accomplish some **difficult** good deed in a **loving** manner. We could go to visit and help the sick and the elderly. They really need us! But we have to go with the determination to be kind and loving, and try to help them. It feels good to help others and see them smile in gratitude. **Our** problems won't necessarily disappear, but we will be filled with the love of God, set on fire and full of zeal to do His will. Jesus said, *"...unite, in a special way, even your smallest deeds to My merits, and then My Father will look upon them with love as if they were My own"* (*Diary, 1543*).

Loving sacrifices for souls are accomplished when it is not easy or convenient. Here is an example. I know a lady who drove for 7 hours to another city to visit a person in a nursing home. She did this every 6 weeks for years until the death of the sick person. A nurse approached the lady, amazed at her continual acts of mercy, saying that people in the same city do not visit their sick and suffering family members as often as she did.

We too can perform a difficult act of charity and mercy for someone in need. Remember that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Jesus. Making this great effort will not go unnoticed by God and He will bless us. Our loving sacrifices for souls will draw us more closely to Jesus, and we could make significant progress in our spiritual life.

If we are not well and cannot go to visit ailing friends, we can phone these people often and try to cheer them up. Our calls could really brighten their days! We can also pray for our sick and suffering friends and offer Masses for them. Another way for us homebound sick people to make loving sacrifices for souls, is to offer to Jesus all our pain and sufferings for these souls. Jesus said, *“Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners”* (Diary, 1032). So with each agony during the day we can bring this prayer to mind for a certain soul. Then we can experience with a sense of relief that each pain and agony of ours will have great spiritual value.

St. James wrote about **spiritual care** for the sick: *“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders [priests] of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil [the Sacrament of the Sick] in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”* (James 5:14,15). The Sacrament of the Sick is wonderful for the sick and the dying. We can make the time and effort to arrange for a priest to come and administer the Sacrament of the Sick, also called the Last Rites, for a very sick Catholic friend or loved one. What a great act of charity that would be! Such a **loving sacrifice** would certainly be well received by Jesus, as we try to imitate Him more closely for the good of souls.

Our Lord Jesus Christ asks us to embrace the cross He gave us in this life, the cross of suffering and trials. This Lent we are to endure our cross with patience as we make loving sacrifices for souls. We could attend any special Lenten programs held in the parish, particularly the Stations of the Cross, or pray the Stations privately at home. We could spend more time daily in prayer, even to the extent of praising and calling upon Him in prayer every moment of every day. Our loving sacrifices and prayers for souls conquer the evil one. Therefore, this Lent we can make significant progress in our spiritual life, drawing closer and closer in union with God, and praise and thank Him for His loving presence in our lives.