

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: June 2019

Resource: FreeTruth.ca Infographic "Penance & Mortification – A Simple Guide"
Link at FreeTruth.ca → <https://freetruth.ca/Spiritual-Direction.php>

A Simple Guide to Penance and Mortification With Examples!

Acts of penance and mortification are willingly performed acts of self-denial in a spiritual context. But what, you might ask, is the benefit to performing these actions? And what is the difference between the two?

What is the Benefit?

The great saints of the Church all practiced actions of mortification and penance in order to grow in holiness.

St. Louis de Montfort wrote: "If we would possess Wisdom we must mortify the body not only by enduring patiently our bodily ailments, the inconveniences of the weather and the difficulties arising from other people's actions, but also by deliberately undertaking some penances and mortification such as fasts, vigils and other austerities practiced by holy penitents."

Acts of mortification and penance allow us to love as Jesus loved and to fulfill Jesus' command to, "love one another." Jesus said: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35)."

Jesus also said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23, emphasis added)."

How did Jesus love us? He loved us with His actions... He sacrificed Himself and died for us. "There is no greater love than this (John 15:13)."

But how are we to love like Jesus did? Thankfully we can start small. God knows our weakness and small sacrificial acts of mortification and penance done with love provide us a method to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Also, when our loved ones are struggling or ill, we can often feel helpless and wonder if our prayers are being heard. Well, penance and mortification done in love can strengthen our prayers for them (make them more fervent). The power of prayer cannot be underestimated! Remember, "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful (James 5:16b)."

What is the Difference Between Mortification and Penance?

Actions of mortification or penance can be the same; the difference is in the intention.

Mortification

The intention is to deny oneself in order to better fight temptations, and to grow in virtue.

For example, someone who struggles with the sin of overeating may choose to mortify in the form of fasting. This will allow for the practice of self-denial in the area of struggle (overconsumption of food) in order to grow in the virtue of self-control.

However, mortifications can be performed even when sin is not present, in order to grow in spiritual maturity and holiness. In this way, we are going above and beyond what may be expected of us in order to demonstrate our love for our Saviour.

For example, we may choose to undergo a period of fasting and prayer with the intention of growing in intimate union with Christ.

Penance

The intention is to offer sacrifice in atonement for your own sins, or for the sins of others.

For example, we may choose to offer up, without complaint, a difficulty or illness and to unite this offering to the Cross of Christ for the salvation of sinners, or for peace in the world.

Or, we may choose to skip a meal and offer this sacrifice in union with the Cross of Christ, in atonement for a personal sin, or for the sin of another.

It is important to note that these actions should be performed in secret (It's between you and God only), and with love!

“[But] take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. (Matthew 6:1).”

For, “If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).”

It is also beneficial to seek the guidance of a spiritual director when discerning which types of mortification and penance to practice.

So now that you know the basics of mortification and penance, you may (if you're like me) benefit from some concrete examples in order to help get you started. That's why I've made up the following infographic. I hope it helps!

Please Note:

God does not want us to put our health in jeopardy. If you are unable to safely perform any of these actions due to health or physical concerns, please choose another mortification or penance that will be safe for you.

For example, if you are unable to decrease the amount of food you eat without adverse health effects, you may choose to vary what you are eating instead. Perhaps you will choose healthy options that are not as pleasing to your pallet... or you may choose to forgo unnecessary condiments or garnishes.

Also, if your sacrifices are prompting you to be irritable and out of sorts, you are probably overdoing it. The fruit of mortification and penance done in love should be joy. When you're struggling emotionally, it will be helpful to allow yourself some extra comfort... a warm cup of tea, a relaxing bubble bath, a glass of wine, or whatever will help get you through the hump. Remember, these things are good, in moderation. The goal is not to deprive yourself to the point of spiritual, physical or psychological exhaustion. Go easy on yourself.

Let me know what you think and if you have any other examples you would like me to add to the infographic, let me know that as well and maybe I'll publish an updated version at a later date. After all, we're here to help each other be saints!

If you have any questions or comments, we would love to hear from you. Please [contact us](#) and let us know your thoughts.

Your sister in Christ,



Penance & Mortification

A Simple Guide

SEEK THE GUIDANCE
OF A SPIRITUAL
DIRECTOR

THE SPIRITUAL FRUIT
SHOULD BE JOY 😊

What's the Difference?

Actions of mortification or penance can be the same; the difference is in the intention.

PENANCE

The intention is to offer sacrifice in atonement for your own sins, or for the sins of others.

Example → Offer up, without complaint, a difficulty or illness and unite this offering to the Cross of Christ for the salvation of sinners, or for peace in the world.

SMALL THINGS!

IN SECRET!



WITH LOVE!

MORTIFICATION

The intention is to deny oneself in order to better fight temptations, and to grow in virtue.

Example → Someone who struggles with the sin of overeating may choose to fast in order to grow in the virtue of self-control.

EXAMPLES

Related to Comfort:

a cold shower; a shower instead of a relaxing bubble bath; wear an uncomfortable shirt; a pebble in your shoe; drive without the heat on/or air conditioning (provided it is safe to do so); forgo a sweater/slippers at home; accept emotional/physical suffering and unite it to the Cross of Christ; sleep without a pillow; submit to the teachings of the Church, even when this is difficult, or when you may not completely understand them

Related to Appetites:

no dessert; no cream, milk or sugar in your morning caffeinated beverage; no snacking between meals; no meat on Friday; fasting on bread and water; skipping a meal; abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, sex, etc.; no condiments or garnishes (ketchup, mustard, mayo, pickles, cheese); eating something healthy that you don't particularly enjoy

Related to Prayer:

an extra Holy Hour, instead of watching TV; drive without music, praying the Rosary instead; kneel during prayer; extra prayers; extra reading of Sacred Scripture; faithfully living the state of life to which we are called, fulfilling the associated obligations and duties with love and devotion, even when it is difficult or when we are tempted to do otherwise; pray a novena for someone who is struggling; offer a Holy Hour for someone who is struggling, or for someone who has died; obtaining an indulgence and offering it for someone who has died/is struggling

Examples of Daily Works of Mercy That Can Be Offered in Penance or Mortification

(Visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing the sinner, forgiving injuries, comforting the sorrowful, bearing wrongs with patience, praying for the living and the dead, etc.):

donate money; donate your time; donate items, especially unnecessary items that you would like to keep or could sell; accept blame for something you did not do (unless this would cause scandal); remain silent when words are not necessary; resist the urge to seek out someone in your household who has not cleaned up a mess he/she made, and cleaning it up yourself instead; make your spouse's/child's favourite dinner, even when this is a lot of work or you don't particularly like the dish; participate in your spouse's/child's favourite activity, even when you do not want to; make a phone call, write a letter or send a card to support or encourage someone who is struggling; avoid saying anything negative for the entire day; defend a target of gossip by pointing out his/her good qualities

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Works Consulted:

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Online: <https://catholicexchange.com/penance-mortification-differ>

“Life of Penance and Mortification” - Excerpt from the "Regula Sancti Michaelis" (Constitution) Order of the Legion of St. Michael - Online: https://saint-mike.org/library/rule/excerpts/penance_and_mortification.html