Forms of Penance

Teacher Background

**Forms of Penance**
The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines the many and various ways in which the interior penance of the Christian can be expressed. The Catechism quotes Scripture and the Fathers of the Church as insisting, above all, on three forms of penance in daily life, namely: fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

These three forms of penance express conversion in relation to oneself, to God and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom, Scripture and the Fathers mention, as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins, efforts at reconciliation with one’s neighbour, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one’s neighbour, the intercession of the saints and the practice of charity “which covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8; James 5:20).

Expanding on the forms of penance in daily life, the *Catechism* notes that conversion of heart can be accomplished through gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor and responsiveness to their needs, the defence of what is just and right, the admission of one’s faults to others, preparedness to correct and be corrected, efforts towards reforming one’s life, the examination of conscience, seeking guidance and spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering and willingness to take up one’s cross each day and follow Jesus (cf. Lk 9:23). The *Catechism* emphasises the importance of the Eucharist as a source of nourishment and strengthening in the process of daily penance and conversion. Reading the Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, the Our Father and other prayers and devotions are also commended. The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages, fasting, almsgiving and sharing of one’s material and personal resources in support of charitable and missionary works.