

MORE ABOUT PENANCE - - - - -

True penance is the surrender of the WHOLE SELF to God. To maintain this surrender, enduring constantly the greater as well as the smaller hardships of life, is to prove the quality of the original repentance, contrition conversion (TURNING AWAY), break with sin. The man who can face the idea of surrendering himself to God may have little understanding of what he is undertaking; but at least he is approaching penance in THE RIGHT WAY. The man who asks himself if he can take on the wearing of a hair shirt, of more strict fast, nights spent in prayer, etc. etc. is approaching penance in THE WRONG WAY. By concentrating of the outward manifestation of the penance itself, he is in danger of forgetting about the reason why he is performing the penance.

The END of penance is God Himself, not more penances. Thus the approach to penance has to be BY WAY OF LOVE, not BY WAY OF STEELING THE WILL TO TOUGHNESS. Penance must have its roots in charity (LOVE) not in ruggedness or heavy duty austerity. Austerity may accompany the growth of penance, but it has to remain a by-product of penance not its essential fruit. A certain austerity can be a sign of true penitence (contrition - sorrow) but it is not an infallible sign of it. The infallible signs of contrition are HUMILITY AND CHARITY (LOVE OF GOD).

When we have decided that God is calling us to penance (contrition - sorrow for sin), the procedure is much the same as when we have decided that God is calling us to prayer. We give our whole selves to it (to Him) and leave the details to be arranged as the occasion arises. Just as we do not approach the question of prayer by deciding to practise this or that devotion se we do not approach the question of penance by deciding to renounce this or that appetite of ours. It is notural to see it in this way, both in regard to prayer and to penance, and perhaps it is the particular observance in either case that first attracts us to the general idea; but the only way of approaching prayer and penance with any hope of perseverance is with the open mind and with the surrender of the whole self to God.

LORD, GRANT US MONKS! LORD, GRANT US HOLY MONKS! LORD, GRAND US MANY HOLY MONKS!