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PENANCE SERVICE: ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY & ENGLISH MARTYRS CHURCH, 33c MAGDALEN, St. Leonard-on-Sea, WEDNESDAY, 21 MARCH AT 7:00 PM. A great way to begin Lent and prepare to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

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Father Steve Schultz, parochial vicar of Our Lady of Angels Church in Woodbridge, Virginia, offers the following tips on going to confession:

1. **Prayerfully prepare!** It's considerate to those who are waiting in line behind you, especially if they need to confess before Mass in order to receive.
2. Do this preparation with an **examination of conscience**. Many different kinds are available. There are ones based on the Ten Commandments; the Virtues; your particular vocation; for adults; for children; etc. Two general questions should lead to specifics: In what ways did I sin? In what way(s) did I fail to do the good I ought to have?
3. Ask the **Holy Spirit** to help you. Think about what you've made friends with that keeps you from a true friendship with God. Greed? Pride? Selfishness? Being lukewarm? Lust? Fear? Too much bacon? (Is that even possible?) Seriously, though, think about your sins with respect to who or what you have favored more than God.
4. **Be ready to repent!** "I'm done with this, that, and the other thing. I want to change, and I trust in the Lord to help me!" That should be your disposition to the sacrament. Your faith and repentance open your heart to God's healing power!
5. **Go to confession!** Do it! God promises mercy; He doesn't promise tomorrow.
6. Start by saying, "**Bless me, Father, for I have sinned**, it has been X days/weeks/months/years/decades since my last confession and these are my sins..."
7. **State your sins**, in kind and in number if it is a serious sin. If it's been a while since your last confession and you don't remember the exact number, you can give some approximation, such as, "often," "more than I can remember," or "fortnightly." Venial sins should be confessed by habit, but with serious (i.e., mortal) sin, don't hold even a single one back! Put it all before the Lord. Trust Him. No sin is unforgivable as long as we repent.
8. **It's not necessary to tell the story of your life** since your last confession, give yourself advice, or expect hours of therapy. Confession isn't meant to change the circumstances of your life. It is meant to give you a new heart so that you can "put on" the mind of Christ.
9. **You don't have to say, "My biggest sin is..."** because that is probably not your biggest sin. Your biggest sin is probably the same as mine, the same as most people: We don't trust in God enough.
10. **Nor should you say, "I need to be better about X"** because your dear priest can't tell if that is a sin of omission (something you failed to do) or commission (something you did). Further, it doesn't sound like you're repenting of anything.
11. **Or, "and I know that's wrong"** because we know all sin is wrong.
12. **Don't tell the priest other peoples' sins** unless you want to do other peoples' penances. "For your penance pray three Our Fathers. For your wife's penance make a pilgrimage to Ephesus

on your knees, and when you return, eat that fruitcake she made for Christmas.”

13. One last, very important “don’t. **Don’t give in to fear!** There is nothing any of us can do that will make God love us any less! In confession there is no judgment, just mercy. (I probably should have led with that.)

14. When you’re finished, **LAND THE PLANE.** “For these and all my sins I am truly sorry,” or suchlike. If you just stop talking, the priest thinks you are still thinking or that you died. Land the plane!

15. **Glorify the Lord’s mercy.** If you want to be forgiven, healed, and freed, the Lord will do all that and much besides. Trust in His mercy! Know who you are: God’s daughter, God’s son!

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Coincidentally, or by God’s plan, the feast day of Blesseds Jacinta and Francisco Marto falls during this first week of Lent, certainly two figures of prayer, sacrifice and alms-giving if ever there were such figures. Not only did they give away their lunches, pray frequently the Rosary and do such things as tie ropes around their waists (which Our Lady of Fatima told them to ease up on), but they were threatened by the Communist government with being boiled in oil. What evil people they were!

On May 13, 1917, while those who started World War I were saying that violence brings peace, Our Lady was teaching the children her own peace plan. She said to the three saints, “Do you want to offer yourselves to God to endure all the suffering that He wishes to send you, in reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners?” “Yes, we do!”, they replied enthusiastically. Mary replied, “You will suffer greatly but God’s grace will be our comfort. Say the Rosary every day to obtain world peace and the end of the war.”

Jacinta and Francisco later suffered greatly with the flu, and died within two years. Lucia, their cousin, died in AD 2005 at the age of 97!

Lucia said that Our Lady’s main request is sacrifice. But what is sacrifice? Lucia says, “By sacrifice, Our Lady has said she means the faithful performance of the duties of one’s state.” The Rosary is important also, because as Lucia said, “Yes, because we must pray to gain the strength to be capable of carrying out our daily duties.”

Later in her book, Calls from the Message of Fatima, Lucia would say, “Many give to the word ‘penance’ the sense of great austerities, as they feel neither the strength nor the generosity for that, they become discouraged and give into a life of lukewarmness and sin.”

So, our sacrifices do not have to be difficult. The important thing is that they are offered with love, as lovers do with the little things that they do for each other. In a small way we say to God that we are going to give up one small item merely to say that we prefer God to all of our things small, medium and large. If we struggle too much, then it is an indication that we are trying too much and should moderate what we are trying to offer to God.

If one finds it difficult to say a Rosary (five decades) each day, then try one decade each day and complete a Rosary each week. Ask for the grace to do what you should do each day joyfully and well.

O Most Holy Virgin Mary,
Queen of the most holy Rosary,
you were pleased to appear to the children of Fatima
and reveal a glorious message.

We implore you,
inspire in our hearts a fervent love
for the recitation of the Rosary.
By meditating on the mysteries of the redemption
that are recalled therein

may we obtain the graces and virtues
that we ask, through the merits of
Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer.

AMEN.