

Modern Mortification



One year at the beginning of Lent I found a little basket full of folded papers on the table in the back of our parish's perpetual adoration chapel. A sign next to the basket read: "Pick a Penance."

Visitors were instructed to "pick a penance" each time they visited the chapel and to perform

it until their next visit.

I expected the basket to contain a bunch of feel-good exercises such as "hug your kids today" or "say a Hail Mary for the Pope."

I was wrong.

My first penance was "Drive no faster than the speed limit this week."

My suffering began minutes later while driving home and realizing that the posted speed limit and my speedometer were not exactly a perfect match. I was doing 45 in a 25 mile-per-hour zone. I slowed down . . . and down . . . and down . . . until I had to check to be sure the car was still moving.

It was – at the posted speed limit.

To make matters worse, one of those Type-A executives in a shiny black Lexus started tailgating me so close I could see the lights on his cell phone. Just the sight of his angry scowl was downright humiliating to a seasoned speeder like myself. By the time I got home, I was actually sweating.

This was the beginning of my introduction to modern forms of mortification.

Not long afterward, I attended a retreat where the priest brought up the subject of mortification. "Never mind kneeling on stones in your driveway," he said. "If you really want to wrestle with your demons, take a four-hour car trip with someone you don't like."

We all sank in our seats.

"How about leaving the house one day without makeup?"

He suggested and we all gasped in horror.

But his point was well made. Mortification is supposed to bring about a change in ourselves that doesn't end with Lent. Its goal is to train the body to be submissive to the spirit, which

is hardly an archaic concept. Every professional athlete is more than willing to endure physical hardship for no other reason than because they want to be the best.

Once my eyes were opened, I began to see a gold-mine of opportunities for spiritual athletes in today's hedonistic society.

Who needs a hair shirt when you can struggle to be chaste in a world where sex is used to sell everything from laundry detergent to hair spray?

Why bother flogging yourself when you can be the only

person you know who lives a simple Christian life while surrounded by every conceivable comfort, including heated car seats, plasma tv's and iPhones?

The list goes on and on, which is why you'll be interested in this issue of *Canticle*. It's full of ideas about modern forms of mortification - such as coping with the demands of aging parents, or allowing God to use our brokenness to help others. Fr. Morrow challenges

us to be more careful in how we dress and the remarkable conversion of former Jehovah Witnesses Jeffrey and Kathy Schwehm remind us that as painful as it is to leave our "comfort zone," real spiritual rewards await those who do so for the sake of God's Kingdom.

May this Lenten season leave you strengthened and the glory of Easter find you filled with joy!



Susan Brinkmann, OCDS, author and journalist, has joined Living His Life Abundantly & Women of Grace as Staff Writer and Editor of Canticle Magazine.