

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after Me" (Mk. 8:34). Our Lord's instruction, recorded in the Gospels, was preceded by the practice of mortification among the Chosen People as recorded in the Old Testament (Gen. 37:34; 1 Kg. 21:27-29; Joel 1:13-14: and Is. 22:12-14). St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks of the mortification of the flesh in definite and specific terms: "Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). St. Paul sets forth the fundamental reason why we are in need of mortification. The Christian must continually seek to crucify and put to death that dimension of our self that remains under the influence of the fallen state of the first Adam into which we are conceived and born.

Sacred tradition expressed through the lives of the saints provides innumerable accounts of the necessity and importance of the practice of mortification. The practice of mortification is promoted and defended in the magisterial teaching of the Church. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Salvifici Doloris* sets forth a profound presentation on the matter of pain and suffering. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in paragraph 2015 associates progress in spiritual life with the practice of mortification.

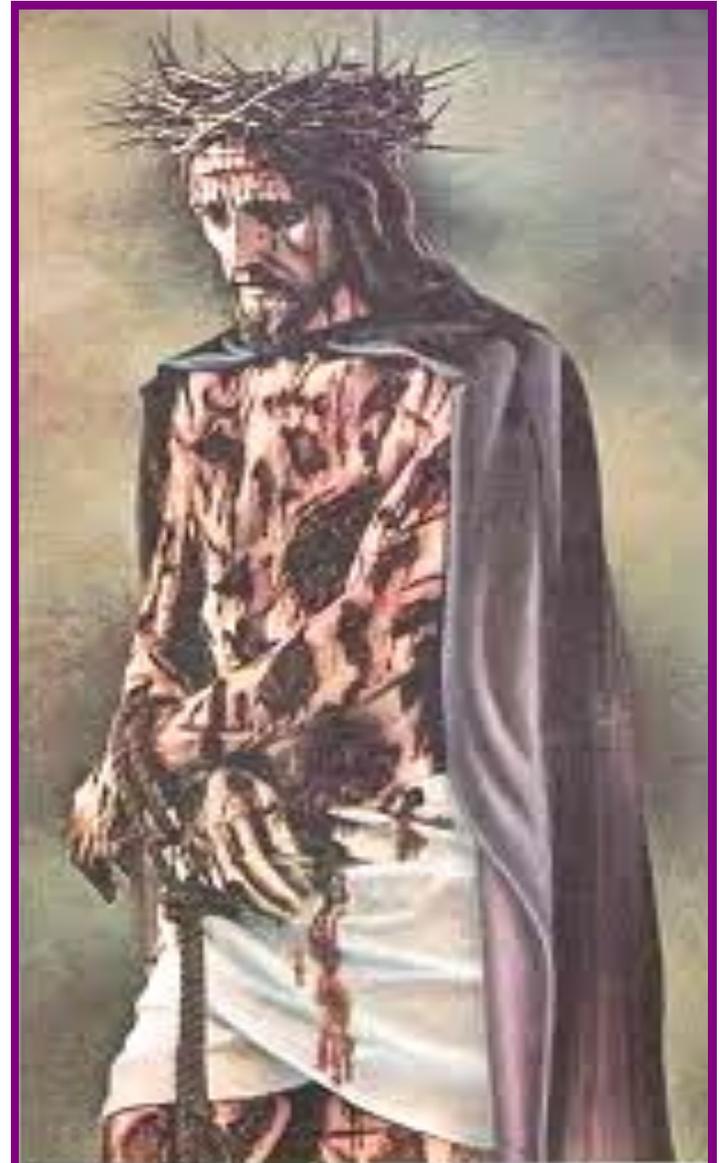
Suffering that happens to us and suffering that we allow to happen, when accepted in faith and united with Christ's redemptive suffering contributes to our own redemption and sanctification as well as that of others. Passive mortifications come in various forms, but they are not the sufferings we experience from having sinned, e.g. suffering a hangover. Active mortifications are encouraged but include certain cautions. Prudence must always be exercised especially active mortifications of a severe nature, e.g. flagellation, scourging, and wearing of hair shirts. These types of mortifications should only be done under the guidance of a spiritual director.

Finally, it needs to be pointed out that to realize the spiritual growth and benefit that results from active and passive mortifications does not require that we carry them out with a conscious intention of uniting each one to Christ's redemptive suffering at the time that they are done. To do so, would be distracting and make our daily work almost impossible.

** (excerpted from: www.mariancatechist.com)

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The Scourging of Jesus



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The Scourging of Jesus

*Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him (John). Mark and Matthew parallels saying, "Having scourged Jesus". John's reports in his Gospel account that it was the Roman soldiers who were doing the dirty deeds. An indefinite number of soldiers is stated in John's Gospel, while Mark 15:16 and Matthew 27:27 speak of the whole cohort (600 soldiers).

The Romans used three forms of bodily chastisement with sticks or whips: *fustigatio* (beating), *flagellatio* (flogging), and *verberatio* (scourging)- in ascending gradation. Beatings were used as a corrective punishment in itself, but severe punishments were part of the capital sentence. The scourging took place with a short whip with lead balls and sheep bones tied into the leather thongs. The victim was tied naked to a flogging post. Deep stripe like lacerations were usually associated with considerable blood loss.

Flogging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt. The usual instrument was a short whip with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. Occasionally, staves also were used. The man's back, buttock, and legs were flogged either by two soldiers (*lictors*) or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging depended on the disposition of the *lictors* and was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. After the scourging, the soldiers would taunt their victim.



As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victims back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and tissues. As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive on the cross. (Above information taken from Mayo Clinic, 1986 at www.frugalsites.net/jesus/scourging.htm).

At the Praetorium, Jesus was severely whipped. While the severity is not discussed in the four Gospels, it is implied in one of the epistles (1 Peter 2:24). A detailed word study of the ancient Greek text for this verse indicates that the scourging of Jesus was particularly harsh. It is not known whether the number of lashes was limited to 39, in accordance with Jewish law. The Roman soldiers, amused that this weakened Man had claimed to be a king, began to mock Him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on His head, and a wooden staff as a scepter in His right hand. Next, they spat on Jesus and struck him on the head with a wooden staff. Moreover, when the soldiers tore the robe from Jesus' back, they probably reopened the scourging wounds.

The severe scourging, with its intense pain and appreciable blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a pre-shock state. Moreover, *hematidrosis* (the sweating of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane) had rendered His skin particularly tender. The physical and mental abuse meted out by the Jews (the 15 untold tortures discussed in another pamphlet) and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to His generally weakened state. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possible critical. *(excerpted from: sermonsfromseattle.com)

**What are the fruits of Jesus' scourging for mankind? In Father John A. Hardon's *Basic Catholic Catechism Course*, Lesson 9, "In order to control our desires we need, 1. the grace of God; 2. to use our will power; and 3. to mortify ourselves. Father Hardon underscores the spiritual truth that "without mortification of the senses, or the cooperation of our wills with the will of God, our desires will remain unruly." Mortification is not for a few special souls but is a requirement for anyone who seeks to advance in the life of holiness.

The mortification of our external senses as well as the interior operations of our soul, e.g., imagination, memory and intellect, is necessary to live an authentic Christian life. While the modern world judges mortification to be medieval, it is our Lord Jesus who indicates its necessity for His followers when He states: