

Reflection on Chapter 7: Our Life in Penance  
by Truong Dinh

When I think about penance it's usually about doing good things after you sinned, because I had only heard the word penance whenever I went to church for confession. Because of this, I didn't really bother searching for its real meaning. I thought as long as I confessed to the priest he was going to ask me to pray or volunteer for some actions to do reparation for my sins.

Ever since I joined the order, I have noticed that we use the word penance a lot. It has become a part of my normal conversation with the brothers. The more I think about it, the more confused I have become to try to find the real meaning of the word. I learned that I had already been doing penance when I live with the brothers, because I don't think that it's just a coincidence that we live together like this. I think we all have debt to one another; that's why God put us where we are at this moment. The Capuchin way of life has taught me that penance is one of the core elements of what we believe in and live for. Without penance, chastity and poverty and obedience wouldn't survive on their own and vice versa.

I'm still discerning the real meaning of penance. I joined the order because I love the brotherhood which is the most attractive element that drew me to the order. I was blessed with so many role models around me the past two years which have been the main forces that urge me to become a better friar, even yet a better servant for God. The joyful spirit that friars have shown me the past years has become my motto in life. I want to be like them, and to be joyful toward everyone around me.

For me the references in the chapter 7 to fasting have been part of my religious practices for many years. I have been fasting during Lent for the past 15 years. I have not eaten any meat during Lent during the past year when I was a novice. For me not eating meat has never been difficult because I grew up eating fish on an almost daily basis before I came to the U.S.

Now what I want to fast from more is the usage of technological devices because I believe that they do take away my time with the community. I strive to pray more as a way of doing penance because that is who we are; it is our duty to pray for the world around us. Now that I am a student I don't have the luxury of sitting alone in a beautiful chapel to pray for an hour every day, I find myself praying the rosary on the way to school on the orange line train.

I know that my experience in the order is in the beginning steps which I will have to keep striving to understand and make it part of me. I hope that in my discernment that my profession of vows will lead me to a lifetime of penance as a Capuchin.