

A man may have faith strong enough to move mountains, and it profiteth him nothing, says the Apostle St. Paul. Eighteen centuries ago the Holy Ghost inspired St. James to write to the Church, "What shall it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and has not works? Shall faith be able to save him? Faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. For, as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2 c.) Now, the first and most indispensable work required for the pardon of sin is penance. "Unless ye do penance," said the Saviour, "ye shall all perish." (Luke 13 c.) And what is meant by penance? The Written Word of God, as well as the uniform Tradition of the Church, proclaims self-chastisement to be the distinctive characteristic of true and salutary penance. All instances on record of God's anger being averted, and forgiveness extended to public or private transgressors, in consideration of their return to God by penance, exhibit their contrition of heart, outwardly manifested in acts of self-affliction, chief amongst which are: prayers and supplications with tears, long fastings, and prostrations upon the earth, and various other methods of painful discipline, such as the wearing of hair-cloth next the skin, and lying on ashes. "I do penance," said Job, "in dust and ashes." (Job. 23 c.) Josue, the leader of the Israelites, striving to avert God's anger from his people, rent his garments, and lay flat upon the ground before the Ark of the Lord until evening, both he and all the ancients of Israel, and they put dust on their heads. (Josue 7 c.) Samuel called upon all Israel to "fast all day, and cry out, we have sinned against the Lord." (1 Kings, 7 c.) The penitent David prayed and groaned and wept, night and day, for an entire week, keeping a fast and lying upon the ground, while he supplicated God to turn aside His anger, and remit the penalty decreed against him on account of his sin. "I humbled my soul in fasting," said he; "my knees are weakened by fasting; I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with my tears." (Psalm 34, 108, 68, 101.) Who is not moved by the Scriptural narrative of the penitential fast of the Ninivites after the Prophet had an-