

Indulgences



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 June 7, 2015

Why the Living Need Indulgences

Our Holy Catholic Church teaches us that we should expect to spend some time in Purgatory after we die in order to be purified so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1030, 1031).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 1473 states: “The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God [in the Sacrament of Reconciliation] entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin [in Hell], but temporal punishment of sin [in Purgatory] remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin [in Purgatory] as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the “old man” and to put on the “new man”. “A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1472).

Pope John Paul II explained during his public audience at the Vatican in St. Peter’s Square on September 29, 1999, that the “temporal pain” endured by souls in Purgatory is a part of the “process of purification” for the sinner in order to prepare the repentant sinner to receive everlasting life [in Heaven]. Through the Holy Catholic Church, by the authority granted her by Christ Jesus, that temporal pain [in Purgatory] can be removed [now by the living] with indulgences that are “concrete steps toward conversion” here on earth. **Therefore the earning of indulgences cannot be only “external gestures, done superficially,” but must be “a process of interior growth toward actual detachment from sin.”**

Why the Dead Need Indulgences

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1032 teaches: “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice [the Holy Mass], so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1472 explains **the punishments of sin**: “To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has *a double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life [in Heaven], the privation of which is called the “eternal punishment” of sin [in Hell]. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth [in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and with indulgences], or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification [in Purgatory] frees one from what is called “temporal punishment” of sin. These two punishments [Hell and Purgatory] must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin [which pulls us away from God by our own free will].”

Jesus said to St. Faustina, “Today bring to Me the souls who are detained in Purgatory, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. Let the torrents of My Blood cool down their scorching flames. All these souls are greatly loved by Me. They are making retribution to My justice. It is in your power to bring them relief. Draw all the indulgences from the treasury of My Church and offer them on their behalf. Oh, if you only knew the torments they suffer, you would continually offer for them the alms of the spirit and pay off their debt to My justice” (*Diary, Divine Mercy in My Soul*, #1209).

Communion of Saints

All Christians, in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, are members of the Communion of Saints. The prayers and good works of all Christians are in this mystical treasury. Between us there is an abundant exchange of all good things. The holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Those who have made their lives holy by the grace of Christ the Lord and have followed in His footsteps, and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them, attain their own salvation and at the same time cooperate in saving other souls in the unity of the Mystical Body. Joined in Christ in this wonderful way, the recourse to the Communion of Saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1474-1477).

The Communion of Saints is composed of three groups:

1. Souls in Heaven – They can pray for the living here on Earth and for the souls in Purgatory.
2. Souls in Purgatory – They can pray for the living, but they cannot help themselves as their time of earning merit is over.
3. Souls living on Earth – We can gain indulgences for ourselves, or apply them to the souls of the deceased.

“Since the faithful departed now being purified [in Purgatory] are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments [in Purgatory] due for their sins may be remitted” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1479).

So therefore, Catholics can gain indulgences for themselves to lessen their time spent in Purgatory or offer indulgences to the souls of the deceased.

What is an Indulgence?

Our *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1471 tells us: “The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance. An indulgence is a remission [partial or total removal] before God of the temporal punishment [in Purgatory] due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven [in the Sacrament of Reconciliation], which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption [power to forgive sins], dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. An indulgence is **partial** or **plenary** according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment [in Purgatory] due to sin. Indulgences may be applied to the living [for ourselves] or the dead.”

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, **Obtaining indulgences from God through the Church** #1478, 1479: “An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of the remission [removal] of the temporal punishments [in Purgatory] due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians [who are still living], but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity [in order to gain an indulgence].

“Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same Communion of Saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments [in Purgatory] due for their sins may be remitted [paid for and cancelled].”

For more information on indulgences see *The Code of Canon Law* of the Catholic Church, in *Book IV: The Sanctifying Office of the Church, Part I: The Sacraments, Title IV: The Sacrament of Penance, Chapter IV: Indulgences*.

Specific Directives from the Catholic Church

Our Holy Catholic Church gives us specific directives as to how we can gain an indulgence. In union with the Communion of Saints and through certain sacraments, prayers, prescribed Indulgenced Works of penance and acts of charity, and certain conditions for reciting the Holy Rosary, we can earn partial or complete remission of the punishment for sins in Purgatory.

In 1967 Pope Paul VI released the document, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina, Whereby the Revision of Sacred Indulgences is Promulgated*. He stated that an attitude of humility and of sorrow for sin is necessary in order to receive an indulgence: “... indulgences cannot be acquired without a *sincere conversion of mentality* (metanoia) and unity with God, to which the performance of the prescribed works is added” (Chapter 4). Also, “... the faithful need *considerable time to prepare themselves properly for acquisition of a plenary indulgence*” (Chapter 5). In this document Pope Paul VI also listed 20 Norms about acquiring indulgences.

The required conditions can also be found in the documents: *The Gift of the Indulgence, Apostolic Penitentiary*, Nov. 29, 1998, and also January 29, 2000, given at the offices of the Apostolic Penitentiary, an official body in Rome.

Conditions for Gaining an Indulgence For a Prescribed Indulged Work

1. Spiritual Condition: Be in the State of Grace, at least at the end of doing the Indulged Work. Renounce all attachment to sin, even venial sin, and have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin. It is this penitent attitude that opens us to receive the complete remission of the temporal guilt of sin, which God desires to grant us through the Holy Catholic Church.

2. Intention: At the beginning of the day, or when doing the Indulged Work, make a specific intention to gain the indulgence. Ask God for the gift of the indulgence and express your desire to get it for yourself, or for the deceased. For example pray: “Jesus, I want to gain an indulgence today. I am performing a work of mercy and charity, visiting my mother who is in need. It is as if I am making a pilgrimage to You, Jesus, present in her. I know that whatever I do to her, I do to You, Jesus, because You love her. I want to apply this indulgence to (myself) or (name of a deceased person).”

2. Sacramental Conditions: Worthily celebrate Sacramental Confession within several days before or after the day of the Indulged Work. Receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist preferably on the same day as the Indulged Work. The faithful should frequently receive the grace of Sacramental Confession in order to grow in conversion and in purity of heart.

3. Pious Exercise: On the day of the Indulged Work take part devoutly in pious meditations, Holy Mass or another liturgical celebration such as Lauds or Vespers, or some pious exercise such as the Stations of the Cross, or the Holy Rosary, or Eucharistic Adoration.

4. Prescribed Prayers: Show conversion of heart and renewal to communion with the Holy Catholic Church and pray the “Act of Contrition”. Pray for the intentions of the Pope on the same day as the Indulged Work. Suggested prayers are: “Our Father”, “The Creed” and the “Hail Mary”. For example pray: “Jesus, I want to show You my conversion of heart and renewal to communion (unity) with the Holy Catholic Church. O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You. I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven and pains of Hell; but, MOST OF ALL, because they offend You, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all of my love. I therefore firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Jesus, bless our Pope (name). I offer these prayers for his intentions: (“Pray the Our Father”, “The Creed” and the “Hail Mary”).”

Prescribed Indulged Works

Catholics may gain an indulgence by performing one of the following Indulged Works of Pilgrimage, Mercy and Charity or Acts of Penance while also fulfilling the required Spiritual and Sacramental Conditions, taking part devoutly in a Pious Exercise and saying the Prescribed Prayers.

1. Pilgrimage: Make a pious pilgrimage or make a pious visit to a designated Pilgrimage Site, on the same day of participation in the Eucharist.

2. Works of Mercy and Charity:

- Visit for a suitable time those in need or in difficulty, as if making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them (see Mt 25:34-36), for example: the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped, those hospitalized, etc. Remember that whatever you do to them, you do to Jesus who loves them.

- Support monetarily by a significant contribution, works of a religious or social nature. For example: abandoned children, young people in trouble (Pro Life, Birth Right), the elderly in need, foreigners in various countries seeking better living conditions, or donate to a religious charity.

3. **Acts of Penance:** Make a form of personal sacrifice that expresses a penitential spirit.

- Devote a suitable portion of personal free time to activities benefiting the community, or other forms of personal sacrifice.
- Abstain for at least one whole day from unnecessary consumption (smoking, alcohol, etc.).
- Fast or abstain from meat or other food according to the general rules of the Church and the norms laid down by the Bishops' Conferences.

Indulgence for Praying the Holy Rosary

Catholics can gain an indulgence for praying the Holy Rosary under the prescribed conditions listed below. Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, on the Most Holy Rosary, to the bishops, clergy and all the faithful, wrote in section number 25, "The Rosary is at the same time a meditation and an imploration with Mary to unite ourselves more and more to Jesus Christ. ... To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and His Mother."

Pope John Paul II also wrote about the importance of indulgences granted by the Church, in his concluding section number 37. The quote is as follows. Underlined are words pertaining to Rosary Indulgences for your convenience.

"At present, in different parts of the Church, there are many ways to introduce the Rosary. In some places, it is customary to begin with the opening words of Psalm 70: "O God, come to my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me", as if to nourish in those who are praying, a humble awareness of their own insufficiency. In other places, the Rosary begins with the recitation of the Creed, as if to make the profession of faith the basis of the contemplative journey about to be undertaken. These and similar customs, to the extent that they prepare the mind for contemplation, are all equally legitimate. The Rosary is then ended with a prayer for the intentions of the Pope, as if to expand the vision of the one praying to embrace all the needs of the Church. It is precisely in order to encourage this ecclesial dimension of the Rosary that the Church has seen fit to grant indulgences to those who recite it with the required dispositions.

"If prayed in this way, the Rosary truly becomes a spiritual itinerary in which Mary acts as Mother, Teacher and Guide, sustaining the faithful by her powerful intercession. Is it any wonder, then, that the soul feels the need, after saying this prayer and experiencing so profoundly the motherhood of Mary, to burst forth in praise of the Blessed Virgin, either in that splendid prayer the *Salve Regina* or in the *Litany of Loreto*? This is the crowning moment of an inner journey which has brought the faithful into living contact with the mystery of Christ and his Blessed Mother."

*From the Vatican, on the 16th day of October in the year 2002,
the beginning of the twenty- fifth year of my Pontificate.*

JOHN PAUL II

Conditions for Gaining an Indulgence for Reciting the Holy Rosary

We can gain a plenary indulgence for reciting the Holy Rosary by following certain guidelines laid down by our Holy Catholic Church.

1. Ask our Lord for the indulgence for praying the Rosary. “At the beginning of the day, or when doing the Indulgenced Work, make a specific intention [prayer petition for oneself or for a deceased soul] to gain the indulgence” (*The Gift of the Indulgence, Apostolic Penitentiary*, Nov. 29, 1998, January 29, 2000).

2. “It is well to remind that a plenary indulgence may be gained only once in a day at this occasion: – **Marian Rosary** recited [out loud with a group] in a church or public oratory or in a family group, a religious Community or pious Association. The recitation of one chaplet only suffices: but the five decades must be recited continuously” (*The Handbook of Indulgences: Norms and Grants, conc. 17 / 1*).

3. “It’s necessary to fulfill the following three conditions: Sacramental Confession in the month, and, Eucharistic Communion and prayer for the pope’s intentions, *Our Father and Hail Mary*, take place on the day the work is performed. It is further required that all attachment to sin, even venial sin, be absent” (*IDEM, N. 20*). Renounce all attachment to sin, even venial sin, and have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin. It is this penitent attitude that opens us to receive the complete remission [removal] of the temporal guilt of sin [in Purgatory], which God desires to grant us through the Holy Catholic Church (*The Gift of the Indulgence, Apostolic Penitentiary*, Nov. 29, 1998, January 29, 2000).