



HERALDS
OF THE GOSPEL

Ebook

Indulgences

*A way to Heaven without
passing through Purgatory*

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THE IMPORTANCE OF INDULGENCES

When we hear the term “indulgence,” it’s normal for expressions such as kindness, mercy, benevolence and compassion to come to mind. We’re not wrong in thinking this, because indulgence does indeed convey these ideas. However, above all, it represents the goodness of God and the Church toward their children.

When the word is used in its plural form, “indulgences,” this word takes on a new meaning, linked not only to the kindness and mercy we receive from Providence in our present life but also, and above all, with regard to our future, in other words, the destiny of our soul.

In this month of November, when we celebrate the Day of the Faithful Departed, also known as All Souls’ Day, we have decided to bring this topic to you: the importance of indulgences in the panorama of our future life.

Over the next few pages, you will learn what indulgences are, how they were created, their purpose, the different types, who can receive them, who cannot, the abuses that oc-

curred in ancient times involving this divine blessing, and various other important points for our Catholic life.

Although indulgences may seem like an ancient topic, they remain highly relevant today. Understanding them well can result in many benefits for you and the people you care about, even those who have already departed from this life.

By gaining a clear understanding of indulgences – and what they are not! – you will also be equipped with solid arguments to safely counter provocations and unfounded comments made against our Holy Mother Church regarding this practice that is almost as old as the Church itself.

We wish you an excellent read!



INDULGENCES



*A way to Heaven
without passing
through Purgatory*

No one is without sin

**Who in this life does not commit
sins?**

As the Apostle St. John so aptly defined: *“If we say, ‘We are without sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 Jn 1:8). If we all sin, then we all have debts to pay, for sin makes us debtors to Divine Providence. The situation worsens even more when the sin is mortal, for the penalty in such cases is eternal condemnation to the fires of hell.

We do not know when the hour of our death will come, which is why sincere repentance and a good confession are always urgently needed in order to obtain forgiveness for our sins, as is also explicit in the First Let-

ter of St. John: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 Jn 1:9).

A well-made confession not only erases the grave offense we committed against God but also frees us from eternal punishment, bringing great relief! However, it does not free us from the temporal punishment, and we will need to make an atonement to purify our soul from the consequences of sin, repair the offended glory of God, and restore the damage caused to society and the integrity of the universal order.

The sinner will fulfill this punishment voluntarily, through penance and good works, or through the purifying sufferings of Purgatory, assigned to each soul according to the most just Divine Wisdom.



Purgatory: the last step on the path to Heaven

*“Between the last breath
and eternity, there is an
abyss of mercy.”*

(St. Francis de Sales)

The existence of a place of purification after death, Purgatory, is a dogma of faith defined in several councils, especially in the Councils of Florence and Trent, based on various passages of Sacred Scripture.

In our times, unfortunately, we see many mistaken opinions about the salvation of souls, very different from those taught by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

While some see God only as a deeply cruel and vengeful being, ready to impose terrible punishments on His poor creatures, others see Him as a lenient God who, in the end, will turn a blind eye to all sins and take the souls of everyone to Heaven, regardless of the evil they have done and the harm caused.

We must be careful not to be deceived by false doctrines, failing to believe in the true God, who is just and merciful, who created us free to choose good and reject evil, reward-

ing the good with Heaven and punishing the wicked with the pains of hell.

It's a simple equation, but some try to complicate it at all costs, creating a misguided Christianity that removes people's responsibility for their actions and their consequences, contributing to a decline in faith and the growth of atheism.

We must fully trust in God's mercy and, with the same intensity, fear His justice, which remains unchanged since the first sin was committed by Adam and Eve and will remain so because the world changes, but God does not change.

However, even if we do good, obeying God's Laws and practicing all His Commandments, no sensible creature can consider themselves fully fit to enter Heaven, no matter how much they strive to deserve it. What will be the condition of these souls after death?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us the answer to this question:

“All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The



Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned” (CCC § 1030 and 1031).

Clean garments

No one is unaware that, after death, we will all be judged and receive a final sentence. However, this judgment will not be according to our own criteria but according to God’s criteria, who sees what we cannot see and from whom nothing can be hidden.

God is a supremely holy and perfect Judge, and in His Kingdom “*nothing unclean shall enter it*” (Rev 21:27). In fact, in the presence of God, of His most pure Light, the soul perceives in itself even the smallest defect,

judging itself unworthy of such majesty and greatness.

How can we enter the Heavenly Kingdom without having clean garments, with even the smallest regrets that accuse us?

There are doctrines that claim we should not worry about this because, through the Sacrifice of the Cross, God has already forgiven all our sins – both those we have com-



mitted and those we are yet to commit. Yes, God is merciful, and from the moment we repent, confess our sins, and receive absolution through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, He does indeed forgive us, especially when He sees in us a sincere resolve to sin no more.

However, the forgiveness of our sins does not erase their consequences. And this is why Purgatory exists, because “God’s justice demands a proportionate penalty that restores the disturbed order” (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl. q. 71, a. 1).

And it is Our Lord Jesus Christ who gives us news of this place of purification, where we can pay our debts and from which we will only leave when all the stains that cloud our soul have been erased: “...*truly, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny*” (Mt 5:26).

A place of pain

Obviously, knowing this truth, any Christian would gladly go to Purgatory and would even make a point of passing through it. However, according to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, corroborated by various Saints, Purgatory is not a place of delights, but a purifying *fire*!

Although the suffering experienced there is in every way different from the torment of those condemned to hell, who will never be able to approach the Table of the Kingdom of Heaven, St. Thomas Aquinas warns us that the pains inflicted in this place of purification are “so intense that the smallest penalty in Purgatory exceeds the greatest in this life” (*Summa Theologica*, Suppl., q. 71, a. 2).

This is why we are continually called to do good and to live our Catholic faith perfectly. Although we should gladly accept passing through this stage of purification that precedes heavenly bliss, the ideal would be to live in such a way that we could reduce our stay in this place as much as possible, or perhaps avoid passing through it at all. As the great St. Teresa of Avila so aptly put it: *“Let us make every effort to do penance in this life. How sweet will be the death of those who have done it for all their sins, and thus do not have to go to Purgatory!”*

Understood in this way, we can say that Purgatory is, in essence, nothing more than the last stage of the road that leads to Heaven. Although it is a place of suffering for souls, it is the source of our hopes and the clearest demonstration of God’s love and goodness toward His creatures. As St. Francis de Sales

expressed so well, *“between the last breath and eternity, there is an abyss of mercy.”*

It is a great suffering, but it is permeated with love. And God’s love is so great that His Holy Church maternally places Indulgences at our disposal to spare us the penalties of Purgatory.

What are indulgences?

*“For indulgences cannot
be acquired without a
sincere conversion of
mentality (‘metanoia’)
and unity with God...”*
(Pope Paul VI)

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, in Roman Law and in the Vulgate of the Old Testament, the word “indulgence” was used to express release from captivity or punishment, according to the passage in the book of the Prophet Isaiah: *“[The Lord] has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Is 61:1). In theological language, the word is also used in its primary sense to signify God’s kindness and mercy.

But in the special sense we are analyzing, an Indulgence is *“a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, 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, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints”* (CCC §1471).

An Indulgence is an extra-sacramental remission, meaning that in the Sacrament of Penance, the guilt of sin is removed, along with the eternal punishment due to mortal sin. However, the temporal punishment demanded by divine justice still remains, and this demand must be fulfilled in the present life or in the world to come, that is, in Purgatory. An Indulgence offers the penitent sinner the means of paying off this debt during his life on earth.

What is temporal punishment?

Temporal punishment is a penalty that the soul endures for a time determined by God to atone for the effects and consequences of its sins. It is called temporal to differentiate it from the eternal punishment of the damned.

By committing a sin, no matter how serious, we offend God and acquire guilt for that act. When we sin gravely and do not repent, and die in that state, we subject our soul to an eternal punishment, which will be served in hell for all eternity.

However, when we repent and confess our sins, we receive forgiveness and absolution from the priest, who, in the confessional, is vested with the power to forgive sins granted by Our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this important Sacrament, we are reconciled with the Father and restored to grace.

Nonetheless, we are stained by sin, which not only offends God but also creates a disordered attachment to creatures that must be purified. Furthermore, our faults harm others and disturb the natural order of the universe, as St. Paul teaches us when he says that all creation groans because of the effects of sin (cf. Rom 8:22).

We will not have peace if we do not also purge the guilt of the consequences of our sins. Let us take a concrete example: a child is playing with a ball in front of his house, throwing it against the wall and catching it when it bounces back. At some point, he throws the ball harder and it hits the window pane of the neighboring house, breaking it.



At first, the child may try to deny it. However, the evidence speaks against him: the shards of window glass scattered on the floor are proof of his wrongdoing. He was there, and he had the ball. The neighbor saw him throwing the ball; other people saw it too. Then he becomes aware of the harm he has done.

His mother calls her husband and tells him what happened. He is a strict man, becomes very angry, and tells his wife that he will destroy the ball and never let the child play outside again.

When he gets home, before saying anything, his son runs to him, hugs his legs and says:

“Daddy, I did something very bad, and I am very sorry! I ask you to forgive me and I promise I will never do it again.”

The father is stern but also very loving. He is moved by the child’s sincerity and decides to forgive him, giving him the punishment of not eating dessert that night. Everything settles down, the family gathers around the dinner table, and peace reigns once again in the house.

Repairing the damage caused

In this example, the father’s forgiveness erased the son’s guilt, but the consequences remained... The boy broke the neighbor’s window, and the neighbor cannot afford to fix it.

So the father talks to the mother, and they decide that the child will not receive his allowance until he has saved enough to pay for a new window pane. This will be his **temporal punishment**. The wrongdoing is forgiven, but the consequences must be made right.

This is exactly how God works with us when we become aware of our mistakes,

sincerely repent, go to a priest, confess our sins, and ask for forgiveness for the wrong done.

God, through the person of the priest, gives us absolution, asks us for a small symbolic penance, and reconciles with us at the banquet of the Eucharist.

But what about the people we hurt? What about the damage we have caused? Just like the dessert that was withheld from the child, praying a Hail Holy Queen or three Hail Marys (examples of penance) will not bring back the good, honor, or peace we took from others, or even from ourselves, through our sins, in addition to the offense we have made against God.

So, in His mercy, God gives us a temporal punishment – like in the story of the child, the father suspends his allowance until he has saved the equivalent of the value of the broken window. This penalty will vary in time and degree for each soul, and only God knows its duration.

Here or in Purgatory

Temporal punishment can be paid here on earth. We may not always be able to directly make amends to the people we have offend-

ed or harmed, but we can do penance, endure life's hardships with patience, pray, practice charity, and change our lives. God always gives us countless opportunities to make reparation for the wrongs we have done.

Whenever a person goes to confession and receives absolution, they are forgiven and once again deserve Heaven. This is so serious and important that, since ancient times, priests have brought Reconciliation to the sick and those in danger of death. When a person reconciles with God and dies in a state of grace, their soul is saved.

However, it often happens that repentance is a person's final act in life: they confess, receive absolution, and then die, with no time left to make amends.



What happens then? Are their faults and their consequences forgotten? No! They will atone for them in Purgatory, and will remain there, in that purifying fire, for as long as necessary to redeem their guilt. The length and intensity of each soul's temporal punishment is known only to God, but He gives them all the same hope and certainty that they will eventually enter Heaven.

In this case, the person will be saved, but their soul is not fully purified: in Purgatory they will pay the temporal penalty that will give them the necessary purification to enter the Kingdom of God.

Understanding this nuance of the perfection of divine justice, leads us to learn about the meaning of Indulgences and their role concerning the temporal punishment of souls.

The Indulgence of God and of the Church

We can say that there are two types of Indulgence: the one obtained by Our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross to redeem Adam's sin (and it is only through this that we are saved); and another that divine mercy has granted to the Church for the total or partial cancellation of our temporal punishment.



As we have seen, the temporal punishment that remains for a soul to pay after their sins are forgiven constitutes an obstacle to their entry into the Heavenly Abode, which will only happen once the soul has been purified. This is because sin deprives us of communion with God and distances us from Him, and the more serious our sin, the more distant from God we will be, which will aggravate our temporal punishment, extending it for the time corresponding to the offense committed.

This purification can begin here on earth and continue after death. Thus, the soul will remain, for a longer or shorter time, suffering the pains and torments of Purgatory.

However, through God's mercy, the temporal punishment can be erased or diminished by participating in the treasury of the merits of Jesus Christ, which are the Indulgences of

the Church. These can be received in part or in full.

Where did the Indulgences of the Church originate?

This is a very ancient practice, whose origins date back to the early days of Christianity, and developed over the centuries.

The Catechism tells us that the doctrine of the granting of Indulgences *“is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: ‘Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin.’ From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, 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”* (CCC § 1032).

To fully understand the function of Indulgences and their importance in the lives of all Catholics, we need to have a good understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – also called the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.

Firstly, it must be clear that this Sacrament is not an **invention of the Church**; it was instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Holy Scriptures attest:

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jas 5:16).

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:23).



Judas Maccabaeus praying for the dead
Fine Arts Museum of Nantes, France

The purpose of this Sacrament is to restore the grace of justification to members of the Church who have sinned, offer the opportunity for conversion and reconciliation, allow the faithful to feel forgiven, receive sanctifying grace, and ultimately go to Heaven.

Thus, in Confession, the faithful confess their sins to the priest, who, in the person of Christ, grants them forgiveness and assigns them with penance, which expresses the penitent's commitment to make an effort to change their lives.

What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation like today, and how was it in the past?

The structure of Confession today is the reverse of what it was in the early centuries: the person stands before the priest, confesses – that is, declares their faults – the priest listens, in many cases gives advice, then gives a **penance**, and then **absolution**.

Within this dynamic, the person first receives absolution and then pays the penance afterwards; usually it consists of reciting some prayers determined by the priest during confession.



In ancient times, however, this was not the case. The penitential rite of that era was very strict. The faithful who committed grave sins had to publicly acknowledge their sin, admitting their fault before an assembly, and

confessing details to the bishop – or a priest specially appointed by him – and then receive **penance**. **The penance could last for months or even years**, and only after fulfilling it would the person return to receive absolution.

These faithful who were paying their penance became part of the “group of penitents” and had to lead a mortified life, dedicated to prayer and almsgiving. They were prohibited from military service, holding public office, engaging in commercial activities, joining the clergy, marrying, or, if already married, from conjugal intimacy.

This rigor and public knowledge of this fault exposed the sinner to humiliation which contributed to his contrition, helped him not to relapse into serious faults, and served as an example to the other members of the community.

They did not doubt the existence of hell

It may be difficult for us to understand a practice that seems so harsh. However, this was not an affront to faith or to human dignity, but a custom of the time.

Mortal sin, especially after Baptism — which many people received as adults — was considered a serious and profound evil that affected every part of the sinner's life.

Of course, that has not changed! Sin remains what it has always been; the difference is that, nowadays, unfortunately, people care less and less about it.

Back then, Christians had a much clearer idea of the gravity of offending God. For this reason, they had a true horror of sin, and when they fell into the misfortune of committing a grave sin, they felt the need to repent for their sins because they knew they could very well lose the salvation of their souls.

Christians believed in the Word of God and did not doubt the existence of hell, as many do and teach today. Unfortunately, even religious people often doubt this!

Hell exists, it is where unrepentant sinners go if they do not seek reconciliation with God.

Doubting the existence of hell does not lead people to Heaven; on the contrary, it drags them into confirming firsthand what they doubted, allowing them to continue sinning freely without fearing eternal damnation.

Spontaneous Confession

Faced with this picture, we might be tempted to think that people in former times were forced to go to Confession and that they probably did everything they could to “escape” from it.

It’s a big misconception! Just like today, people were not forced to confess their sins, they did so voluntarily, with the aim of **reconciling with God** and atoning for their sins.

As we have seen, penances were not only rigorous but also lengthy, and depending on the seriousness of the fault committed, they could last for days, months, or even years.

During this period, the penitent was excluded from receiving Eucharistic Communion.

Even in the face of such strictness, it was the sinners who sought out the Church in search of healing for their remorse, not the other way around.

The “letters of peace” and the Communion of Saints

We know that the early days of Christianity were very difficult, and many Christians were persecuted and condemned to martyrdom for refusing to deny their faith. Then, at a certain point, something very touching began to happen.

Some faithful, condemned to death, knowing that martyrdom erases all faults and the



The Communion of Saints is the spiritual union of all Christians, both living and dead, who form a single Mystical Body, the Church, with Jesus Christ as its head. This communion is marked by the bond of love between Christians, and there is a constant exchange of spiritual goods that benefits everyone. **In this way, what each Catholic does or suffers for Christ is for the benefit of all (cf. CCC § 947).**

penalty due for them, would send a message to the bishops, usually in writing, asking that the merits of their death be applied to reduce the penance time for a certain penitent.

These writings became known as “**letters of peace**” and attest to the truth and power of the **Communion of Saints**, which we still profess in the Creed (“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins,” etc.).

The power of the keys

The greatness of this pious gesture by the martyrs led the Church to realize that there was a source infinitely greater than the merits of the holy martyrs: the merits of Our Lord



Jesus Christ through His martyrdom on the Cross.

From the understanding that the sacramental forgiveness of sin extends both to the guilt and the eternal punishment, it became clear that the Church could also free the penitent from lesser, or temporal, punishment. This understanding arose from the authority granted to St. Peter, known as the **“power of the keys”**:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19).

In this way, the Church began to apply the merits of Christ, united to those of the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints, to alleviate the suffering that penitents underwent to reconcile with God. Many of them were unable to complete their penance in this life, continuing to pay for their temporal punishment in Purgatory.

This is how Indulgences were born. Through them – by fulfilling certain conditions, as we will see later – the faithful could have their punishment alleviated not only on earth but also in Purgatory, by the grace of divine mercy.

Therefore, when the Church, through an Indulgence, pardons the temporal punishment, her action, according to Christ's declaration to St. Peter, is ratified in Heaven.

Why has the Church not abolished penances?

The doctrine of Indulgences acquired great importance because sinners truly needed – and continue to need – this relief. A practice that alleviated the suffering of many souls was not without abuses, but it overcame all obstacles and has endured to the present day, available to all of us.

For anyone who wonders if, instead of creating **Indulgences**, it would not have been easier for the Church to simply **abolish penances**, should remember what we have already discussed about **making reparation for the damage caused**: when faced with a broken window, forgiveness erases the guilt but it does not fix the window. For this reason, although softened over time, penance was never completely abolished by the Church.

In affirming this doctrine, the Council of Trent¹ stated that this power has been exercised since the early days, citing a passage from St. Paul. In this passage, a member of the faithful, who had been excluded from the community for a grave sin by order of the Apostle, was readmitted after showing genuine repentance.

Through this manifest repentance, St. Paul gave the verdict that “the rebuke was sufficient,” forgiving the sinner in the person of Christ and freeing him from excommunication (cf. II Cor 2:5-10). According to the Council, this passage contains all the essential elements of an Indulgence.

¹ The Council of Trent was the 19th Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, convened by Pope Paul III and held in the city of Trent, in the former Episcopal Principality of Trent, Italy. It was the longest ecumenical council in the history of the Church, lasting almost twenty years (December 13, 1545 to December 4, 1563). The doctrine of Indulgences was one of the topics dealt with by the Council (session XXV)

Can only Catholics receive Indulgences?

Yes, only the Catholic faithful can receive Indulgences, as there are certain requirements that a non-Catholic cannot fulfill: being baptized, going to Confession, and receiving the Holy Eucharist.

When God established His Church, He entrusted the Apostles and their successors with all the means necessary for His children to obtain salvation through observance of the Law and the teachings brought by His Good News. However, nothing prevents a person from converting, receiving the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist and becoming part of the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, enjoying the graces proper to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession, penance and absolution of sins), and also benefiting from Indulgences.

What is needed to receive an Indulgence?

The mere fact that the Church proclaims an Indulgence does not imply that it can be obtained without effort on the part of the faithful. It should not be understood simply as a gift, but rather as an opportunity to pay a

temporal punishment, and this is a matter of great seriousness.

For someone to be able to gain any Indulgence – Plenary or Partial – it is indispensable to be baptized, not be excommunicated, and be in a state of grace, that is, to be free from the guilt of mortal sin; then, of course, performing the prescribed act for obtaining the Indulgence.

Obviously, it is necessary to have the sincere intention of obtaining the Indulgence and not to do it for the sake of doing it or because other people are doing so.

Can children receive Indulgences?

There are no obstacles to a baptized child receiving Indulgences. However, in these cases, common sense must prevail.

Since the gaining of Indulgences depends on a person's conscious attitude, it must result from a free and responsible act. An infant, or a very young child cannot gain Indulgences because they do not have full use of their reason, do not yet have temporal punishment to be remitted, and theoretically cannot fully, freely, and consciously fulfill the necessary requirements for obtaining the Indulgence.

Characteristics of Indulgences

We often hear of two types of Indulgence: **Plenary** and **Partial**.

A **Plenary Indulgence** completely removes temporal punishment; a **Partial Indulgence**, on the other hand, cancels part of the punishment that the soul would have to endure in Purgatory.

Let's look at what is required to obtain each type:

Plenary Indulgence

A Plenary Indulgence can be obtained by performing an indulgenced act and fulfilling three other conditions: going to confession, receiving Holy Communion, and praying for the Holy Father, the Pope.

These three basic conditions always accompany the works that grant Plenary Indulgences. Additionally, one must reject any attachment to sin, regardless of its severity, even venial sin.

One Confession counts for multiple Indulgences, but each Communion counts for only one. Communion and prayer should be on the same day as the prescribed work, but they can take place on different days, either before or after performing the prescribed work.

With a Plenary Indulgence, one obtains the remission of all temporal punishment due to sins committed **up to that moment**, meaning no further atonement is necessary in Purgatory. It is as if one returns to the original state of grace and has no sins or their consequences. This is the immediate effect of the Indulgence.

It is important to remember that, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the absolution received after Confession eliminates the **guilt** of sin and the **eternal punishment** that mortal sin would incur, but it does not eliminate the **temporal punishment** required by divine justice: it remains and must be satisfied in this life or in Purgatory.

What the Plenary Indulgence does is eliminate the need for the temporal punishment in Purgatory, restoring the soul to the state of purity of the day of baptism. In other words, if a faithful person were to die immediately after receiving the Plenary Indulgence, they would go directly to Heaven.

The Church has the authority to offer Plenary Indulgences because it received this power directly from Christ, who declared to the first Pope, St. Peter: “*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven*” (Mt 18:18).



Note: At the end of this ebook, there is a list of the main works prescribed by the Holy Church for obtaining Indulgences.

Partial Indulgence

For Partial Indulgences, although Confession is not obligatory, at least a “contrite heart” is required. This Indulgence is easily available to everyone.

In fact, all of us, in whatever situation we find ourselves, whether religious, married, single, worker, student, etc. can receive it.

What we need to do is raise our spirits and offer everything to God, either by praying or by thinking piously of Him, in order to gain as many Indulgences as the number of offerings we make.

The faithful can gain a Partial Indulgence when they fulfill their duties and tolerate life's afflictions, in imitation of Christ, raising their spirits to God with some pious invocation, even if only in thought.

One earns a Partial Indulgence when:

1 – Anyone, while fulfilling his duties and in tolerating the afflictions of life, raises his spirit to God with humble trust and makes a pious invocation, even if it is very brief and only in thought.

For example: *“I believe!”* – *“My God!”* – *“I trust in You!”* Anyone who is “fulfilling their duty and tolerating the afflictions of life” can repeat such an invocation more than a thousand times in a single day!

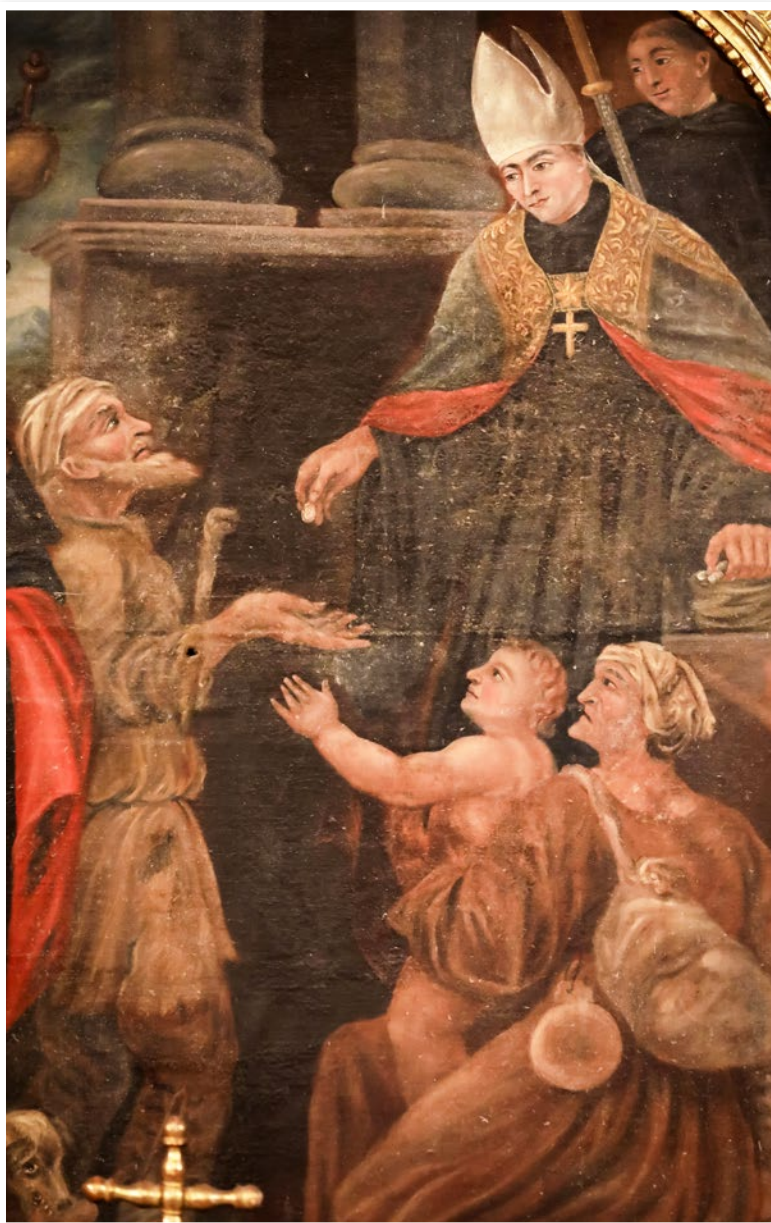
2 – Anyone, moved by the spirit of faith and with a merciful heart, makes a sacrifice in the service of their brothers and sisters who lack the necessities of life.

Thus, giving food or clothing to a poor person, visiting a sick person, consoling those who suffer, teaching someone to pray, bringing a non-practicing Catholic back into

parish activities – all these acts are examples of good work in service of our brothers and sisters in need.

3 – Anyone who publicly professes their faith, freely bearing witness to others in the particular circumstances of daily life.

4 – Anyone who abstains from licit and pleasant things in a spontaneous spirit of penance. These can be simple acts, like retraining from eating a piece of fruit, etc.



Remember that these small acts of piety and faith, which grant us access to Partial Indulgences, will gradually erase small portions of our temporal punishment, in addition to helping us grow in holiness, patience, and tolerance, making us better human beings fulfilling God's will.

Is there a limit to the number of Indulgences one can receive?

The Plenary Indulgence can only be gained once per day, with one exception: the faithful in danger of death can receive it more than once in the same day. A Partial Indulgence can be gained as many times a day as a person wishes.

If a person commits a grave sin after receiving Indulgences, do they lose their value?

We need to be clear that an Indulgence is not a permission to commit sin, nor is it a pardon for future sins; it also does not confer immunity from temptation or remove the possibility of subsequent lapses into sin. However, as a divine gift, once obtained, it cannot be taken away from us.

Suppose a person has lived for forty years and has committed many sins. Upon legiti-

mately receiving, through faithful and respectful fulfillment of the necessary requirements, a single Plenary Indulgence, he or she will obtain total remission of all the temporal punishment due for the sins committed up to that point.

So much so that, as we have already seen, if one dies immediately after receiving such a benefit, they will go directly to Heaven, as she will have no debts to pay. Everything will be reset, like a blank slate!

However, if the next day the person commits another grave sin or accumulates small venial sins, their debt will start again, but only from that moment on. What was erased by the Indulgence they received is erased and will remain erased. The new count, so to speak, will begin from there.

An Indulgence, however, does not represent exemption from any law or duty, nor does it imply authorization to sin, as God would never tolerate any abuse of what He so mercifully grants us. The value lies not only in the Indulgence itself but in the purity of intention of those who receive it, presupposing a strong desire on the part of the person not to sin again, rather than authorizing them to sin deliberately and misuse Indulgences abusively and indiscriminately.

We must never forget that, in our spiritual myopia, we only see partially, but God Almighty, who grants us so many goods, sees deeply. We can hide nothing from Him.

If a person has received Indulgences and changes religion, do the Indulgences still apply?

Similar to the answer in the previous question, the benefit of an Indulgence received is not taken away from us; it covers the temporal punishment up to the moment it is received.

If a person who received such a benefit changes religion, they incur a very grave sin which, depending on the circumstances, may even lead to the loss of their soul's salvation.

In this case, unless they repent and humbly return to the House of God, confessing and receiving absolution, they will forever be deprived of the incalculable benefit of Indulgences and will have to serve in Purgatory the full penalty for the damage inflicted upon themselves and against God. This is if they do not lose their eternal salvation.

Can one receive Indulgences for other people?

No one can gain Indulgences for other living people. Any faithful person can gain Partial or Plenary Indulgences for themselves or apply them to the deceased as a suffrage.

Some Indulgences are granted only for the benefit of the living, while others can be applied for the benefit of departed souls.

The *Indulgentiarum Doctrina* states that a Catholic can receive a Plenary Indulgence for a deceased person “in all churches, public or semi-public oratories, for those who legitimately use the latter,” following the usual conditions of sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Pope.

There are also Plenary Indulgences that any of us can receive, but they only apply to the souls in Purgatory: when visiting a cemetery devoutly between the November 1st and 8th and praying there for the dead, or when, on November 2nd, All Souls’ Day, visiting a church or oratory and praying a Creed and an Our Father for the soul of a loved one, a relative, a friend, or even for an unknown soul.

Pope Paul VI said that “*if the faithful offer indulgences in suffrage for the dead, they cul-*

tivate charity in an excellent way and while raising their minds to heaven, they bring a wiser order into the things of this world.”

St. Catherine of Siena said that souls in Purgatory who have been freed from their sorrows, will never forget their benefactors on earth and will intercede for them before God. Moreover, when that person reaches Heaven, they will welcome them.

And St. Catherine of Bologna once said, *“I have received many great favors from the saints, but much greater ones from the holy souls [in Purgatory].”*



St. Nicholas of Tolentino is known as the patron of the souls in Purgatory because during his life he recommended praying for them, obtaining many conversions.

Several other Saints wrote prayers for the souls in Purgatory, knowing the good they did both to the souls receiving the prayers and to those who recited them.

Who can grant Indulgences?

It is the Church that dispenses this treasure to us, through her pastor, the Pope. In fact, in the power that Our Lord conferred on St. Peter – and his successors – to open or close the gates of Heaven to men (cf. Mt 16:19), contains the power to remove all obstacles that prevent a soul from entering Heaven.

The distribution of the merits contained in the Church's treasury is an exercise of authority (*potestas iurisdictionis*), not of the power conferred by holy orders (*potestas ordinis*). Therefore, the Pope, as supreme head of the Church on earth, can grant all kinds of Indulgences to any faithful person; and only he can grant Plenary Indulgences.

The power of the bishop, previously unrestricted, was limited by Innocent III in 1215. Priests, vicar generals, abbots, and generals

of religious orders cannot grant Indulgences unless they are specially authorized to do so. On the other hand, the Pope can empower a cleric who is not a priest to give an Indulgence (cf. St. Thomas, “Quodlib.”, II, q. VIII, a. 16).

Jubilee Year Indulgences

The Vatican’s Apostolic Penitentiary, the tribunal responsible for everything related to the internal forum and Indulgences, published the norms for the granting of Indulgence in view of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025, so that the faithful may take advantage of the “necessary dispositions” to obtain and effectively practice the Jubilee Indulgence.

“During the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025, all other Indulgences previously granted remain in force. All the faithful, who are truly repentant and free from any affection for sin (cf. *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, IV ed., norm. 20, § 1), who are moved by a spirit of charity and who, during the Holy Year, purified through the sacrament of penance and refreshed by Holy Communion, pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, will be able to obtain from the treasury of the Church a plenary indulgence, with remission and forgiveness of

all their sins, which can be applied in suffrage to the souls in Purgatory...”

Pilgrimages

The document highlights that the faithful will be able to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence if they undertake a “pious pilgrimage” to the following places:

- To any sacred Jubilee site: by devoutly participating in Holy Mass (where liturgical norms permit, the Jubilee Mass or a votive Mass may especially be used);

- In Rome, to at least one of the four Major Papal Basilicas: St. Peter’s in the Vatican, Cathedral of the Most Holy Saviour (Lateran Basilica), Saint Mary Major, St. Paul Outside the Walls;

- In the Holy Land, to at least one of the three Basilicas: the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Annunciation in Nazareth;

- In other ecclesiastical jurisdictions: to the cathedral or other churches and holy places designated by the local Ordinary.

Abuses in the granting of Indulgences

As we have seen throughout this ebook, the practice of granting Indulgences is one of the most pious works, demonstrating God's immense love for His creatures and representing a very rich privilege for the faithful of the Holy Mother Church.

Unfortunately, however, there are many misconceptions surrounding this issue, and it is not uncommon to encounter atheists and enemies of the Catholic Faith making scathing comments about the sale of Indulgences in the Middle Ages.

Those who raise this issue are not lying, but they are not telling the full truth either, because yes, regrettably, there were abuses in this area, and the illicit trade in Indulgences did, in fact, occur. After all, bad Christians have always existed, both then and now.

However, these detractors fail to mention that the Church, upon learning of what was happening, took energetic measures to correct the error. In her wisdom, at the same time as acting to extirpate the rotten root of the disgraceful members of the Body of Christ who were doing this, the Holy See strengthened and enhanced the doctrine of Indulgences.

If Indulgences were not of divine origin, it would have been simpler for the Church to exclude them from its practices, as no one would then charge for something that no longer existed.

For this reason, in 1415, the Council of Constance condemned the position that stated: “It is foolish to believe in the Indulgences granted by the Pope and the Bishops.”

In his Bull *Exsurge Domine*, of June 15, 1520, Leo X condemned Luther’s assertions that “Indulgences are pious frauds upon the faithful and that they do not avail those who really gain them for the remission of the penalty due to actual sin in the sight of God’s justice.”

The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, debated at length the issue of Indulgences, and in the decree resulting from the Twenty-Fifth Session declared:

“Whereas the power of conferring Indulgences was granted by Christ to the Church; and she has, even in the most ancient times, used the said power, delivered unto her of God; the sacred holy Synod teaches, and enjoins, that the use of Indulgences, for the Christian people most salutary, and approved of by the authority of sacred Councils, is to be retained in the Church; and It condemns with anathe-

*ma those who either assert, that they are useless; or who deny that there is in the Church the power of granting them.”*²

After declaring the divine origin of Indulgences and the legitimacy of the Church in granting them, the Council determined how the practice should be conducted to prevent abuses, and ordered “*all bishops, diligently to collect, each in his own church, all abuses of this nature, and to report them to the first provincial Synod; that... they may forthwith be referred to the Sovereign Roman Pontiff.*”³

“*In granting them, however, [the Council] desires that, in accordance with the ancient and approved custom in the Church, moderation be observed; lest, by excessive facility, ecclesiastical discipline be enervated. And being desirous that the abuses which have crept therein, and by occasion of which this honourable name of Indulgences is blasphemed by heretics, be amended and corrected, It ordains generally by this decree, that all evil gains for the obtaining thereof, – whence a most prolific cause of abuses amongst the Christian people has been derived, – be wholly abolished.*”⁴

2 WARTERWORTH, J. Ed. and Trans. *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, London: Dolman, 1848). Available online at: <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent.html>

3 idem, ibidem.

4 idem, ibidem.



According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, in 1567, following this conciliar orientation, Pope St. Pius V canceled all grants of Indulgences involving any fees or financial transactions.

If we go back a little further in time, we see that the Church, while holding firm to the principle and intrinsic value of Indulgences, repeatedly condemned their misuse.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council spoke out against the excessive Indulgences granted by some prelates, and the same restriction was promulgated by the Council of Ravenna in 1317. In response to complaints from the Dominicans and Franciscans, who claimed that certain prelates had given their own interpretation to the Indulgences granted to these Orders, Clement IV, in 1268, forbade any such interpretation, declaring that when necessary, it would be given by the Holy See.

Boniface IX, writing to the Bishop of Ferrara in 1392, condemned the practice of certain religious who falsely claimed that they were authorized by the Pope to forgive all kinds of sins and extorted money from the faithful, promising them perpetual happiness in this world and eternal glory in the next.

To ensure that the idea of gaining Indulgences would not be an incentive to sin, Six-

tus IV, in 1478, reserved for the judgment of the Holy See a large number of cases where faculties had previously been granted to confessors.

These measures clearly show that the Church, long before the Reformation, not only recognized the existence of abuses but also used its authority to correct them. It was therefore no great feat for Luther to denounce this.

As far as Luther's revolutionary movement is concerned, the issue is much more complex, so much so that he had to exclude from Sacred Scripture the two Books of Maccabees, which clearly attest to the importance of praying for the souls of the faithful departed and the existence of Purgatory.

In other words, he had to make a maneuver to "suppress" Purgatory so that he could justify his thesis on the inappropriateness of Indulgences and continue his pseudo-reformation, delivering to his followers an empty Bible and denying the merits of Jesus' sacrifice.

While it cannot be denied that abuses in the matter of selling Indulgences were widespread, it should also be noted that even when corruption was at its worst, these spiritual concessions were being used properly

by sincere Christians – who sought them in the right spirit – and by priests and preachers who took care to insist on the need for true repentance.

It is therefore not difficult to understand why the Church, instead of abolishing the practice of Indulgences, aimed instead to strengthen it by eliminating the evil elements.

By eradicating abuses, the Church demonstrated the rigor of her spiritual life and maintained the practice of Indulgences because, when they are used according to what she prescribes, they strengthen the spiritual life, encourage the faithful to draw closer to the Sacraments, and purify their consciences from sin.

In addition, they encourage the performance, in a truly religious spirit, of works that result not only in the well-being of the individual, but also in the glory of God and the service to others.

However, those who still cling to this single fact, which was a deviation practiced by a negligible part of the clergy, without analyzing the correct and firm procedure of the Church to curb this infamous practice, fail to realize the immense benefit that Indulgences have brought and continue to bring to souls throughout the centuries.

Those who, unaware of the importance of Indulgences, focus only on the deviations to discredit the practice, forget to observe that the greedy and ill-intentioned prelates who benefited from this illicit trade, whether punished or not, have disappeared in history, while Indulgences, a free and sublime gift from God, survive to this day.

There are many pseudo-intellectuals who mock Indulgences and do not even believe in the existence of Purgatory. However, only those who turn to Heaven receive the blessing of Purgatory and the consolation of Indulgences.

For those who turn their backs on God, it makes no difference whether a place of purification exists or not, and whether there is a means to shorten one's stay there, for the path to hell is quick, and no Indulgence has the power to change the fate of those who, with a sound conscience, reject God and choose damnation.

List of some prayers and acts of piety through which one can receive indulgences⁵

Acts of Piety

- 1. Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who visit the Most Blessed Sacrament to adore it; a plenary indulgence is granted, if the visit lasts for at least one half an hour.
- 2. Visit to a Cemetery:** An indulgence, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, is granted to the faithful, who devoutly visit a cemetery and pray, even if only mentally, for the departed. The indulgence is plenary each day from the 1st to the 8th of November; on other days of the year it is partial.
- 3. Act of Spiritual Communion:** An Act of Spiritual Communion, according to any pious formula, is enriched with a partial indulgence.
- 4. Adoration of the Cross:** A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful, who

⁵ This data was taken from: THE ENCHIRIDION OF INDULGENCES norms and grants. Authorized English Edition Issued by the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary. 1968. Available at: <https://l.reconquest.heralds.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Sacred-Apostolic-Penitentiary-The-Enchiridion-of-Indulgences.pdf>

in the solemn liturgical action of Good Friday devoutly assist at the adoration of the Cross and kiss it.

5. **Christian Doctrine:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who take part in teaching or in learning christian doctrine.
6. **Use of Articles of Devotion:** The faithful, who devoutly use an article of devotion (crucifix or cross, rosary, scapular or medal) properly blessed by any priest, obtain a partial indulgence. But if the article of devotion has been blessed by the Sovereign Pontiff or by any Bishop, the faithful, using it, can also gain a plenary indulgence on the feast of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, provided they also make a profession of faith according to any legitimate formula.
7. **Mental Prayer:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who piously spend some time in mental prayer.
8. **First Communion:** A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful, when they receive Communion for the first time, or when they assist at the sacred ceremonies of a First Communion.
9. **First Mass of newly-ordained Priests:** A plenary indulgence is granted to a priest on the occasion of the first Mass he celebrates

with some solemnity and to the faithful who devoutly assist at the same Mass.

- 10. Reading of Sacred Scripture:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who with the veneration due the divine word make a spiritual reading from Sacred Scripture. A plenary indulgence is granted, if this reading is continued for at least one half an hour.
- 11. Visit to the Parochial Church:** A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful, who devoutly visit the parochial church:
 - on the titular feast;
 - on the 2nd of August, when the Indulgence of the “Portiuncula” occurs.
- 12. Renewal of Baptismal Promises:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who renew their baptismal promises according to any formula in use; but a plenary indulgence is granted, if this is done in the celebration of the Paschal Vigil or on the anniversary of one’s baptism.

Prayers

- 1. We give you thanks:** We give you thanks, Almighty God, for all your blessings: who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen. (Partial indulgence)

2. **Angel of God:** A partial indulgence is granted for reciting this prayer.
3. **The Angel of the Lord (*Angelus*) and Queen of Heaven (*Regina Cæli*):** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who devoutly recite these prayers.
4. **Soul of Christ (*Anima Christi*):** A partial indulgence is granted for reciting this prayer.
5. **I believe in God:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who piously recite the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.
6. **Litanies:** The following Litanies are each enriched with a partial indulgence: the Most Holy Name of Jesus, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, All Saints.
7. **Magnificat:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who piously recite the canticle of the Magnificat.
8. **Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary (*The Memorare*):** This prayer is provided with a partial indulgence.
9. **Novena Devotions:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who devoutly take part in the pious exercises of a public

novena before the feast of Christmas or Pentecost or the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

- 10. Recitation of the Marian Rosary:** A plenary indulgence is granted, if the Rosary is recited in a church or public oratory or in a family group, a religious Community or pious Association; a partial indulgence is granted in other circumstances.
- 11. Hail, Holy Queen:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who piously recite this prayer.
- 12. Sign of the Cross:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who devoutly sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, while saying the customary words: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- 13. The Te Deum:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who recite the Te Deum in thanksgiving. But a plenary indulgence is granted, if the hymn is recited publicly on the last day of the year.
- 14. Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest:** A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who devoutly recite the hymn Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest. But a plenary indulgence is granted, if the hymn is re-

cited publicly on the 1st of January and on the feast of Pentecost.



