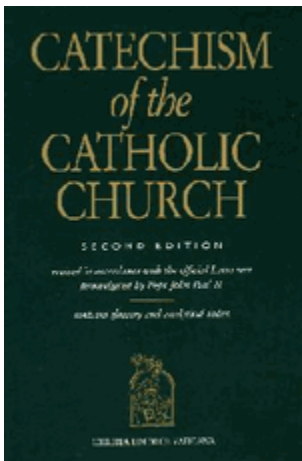




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Indulgences

Compiled by Marcellino D'Ambrosio



This is a selection of documents from the Magisterium (official teaching by the Pope and Catholic Bishops) of the Catholic Church on Indulgences that currently exist online in English Translation. Come back and visit over the next several days for more, since we are adding more material on indulgences constantly.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Indulgences

X. INDULGENCES

1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.

What is an indulgence?

"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."⁸¹

"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."⁸² The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.⁸³

The punishments of sin

1472 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, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by

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God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. 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.⁸⁴

1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin 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 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."⁸⁵

In the Communion of Saints

1474 The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."⁸⁶

1475 In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things."⁸⁷ In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."⁸⁸

1477 "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission in the unity of the Mystical Body."⁸⁹

Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church

1478 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 Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.⁹⁰

1479 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 due for their sins may be remitted.

1498 Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory.

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- 81 Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 1.
82 *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 2; Cf. Norm 3.
83 CIC, can. 994. 84 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712-1713; (1563): 1820.
85 *Eph* 4:22, 24.
86 *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
87 *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
88 *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
89 *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
90 Cf. *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
91 Cf. *SC* 26-27.
92 Cf. CIC, can. 962 #1.
93 Cf. CIC, can. 961 § 2.
94 Cf. CIC, can. 961 § 1.
95 *OP* 31.
96 *Mk* 2:5.
97 Cf. *Mk* 2:17.
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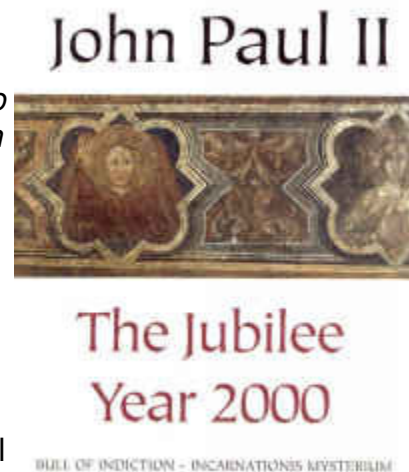
The excerpts from the following document, published on the occasion of the Jubilee Year of 2000, teach generally about indulgences and so have continued relevance today. Material specific to the Jubilee and no longer applicable today has been omitted:

APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY
THE GIFT OF THE INDULGENCE

The celebration of the Jubilee Year is not only an extraordinary occasion for benefiting from the great gift of indulgences which the Lord gives us through the Church, but it is also a fitting opportunity to recall the catechesis on indulgences to the attention of the faithful. The Apostolic Penitentiary is therefore publishing this sacred notice for the benefit of all who will be making Jubilee visits.

General Remarks On Indulgences

1. This is how an indulgence is defined in the *Code of Canon Law* (can. 992) and in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (n. 1471): "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".



2. In general, the gaining of indulgences requires certain prescribed *conditions* (below, nn. 3, 4), and the performance of certain prescribed *works* (nn. 8, 9, 10 indicate those specific to the Holy Year).
3. To gain indulgences, whether plenary or partial, it is necessary that the faithful be in the *state of grace* at least at the time the indulgenced work is completed.
4. A *plenary indulgence* can be gained only *once a day*. In order to obtain it, the faithful must, in addition to being in the state of grace:
- have the interior disposition of *complete detachment from sin, even venial sin*;
 - *have sacramentally confessed* their sins;
 - *receive the Holy Eucharist* (it is certainly better to receive it while participating in Holy Mass, but for the indulgence only Holy Communion is required);
 - *pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff*.
5. It is appropriate, but not necessary, that the sacramental Confession and especially Holy Communion and the prayer for the Pope's intentions take place on the same day that the indulgenced work is performed; but it is sufficient that these sacred rites and prayers be carried out within several days (about 20) before or after the indulgenced act. Prayer for the Pope's intentions is left to the choice of the faithful, but an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" are suggested. One sacramental Confession suffices for several plenary indulgences, but a separate Holy Communion and a separate prayer for the Holy Father's intentions are required for each plenary indulgence.
6. For the sake of those legitimately impeded, *confessors* can commute both the work prescribed and the conditions required (except, obviously, detachment from even venial sin).
7. Indulgences *can always be applied either to oneself or to the souls of the deceased*, but they cannot be applied to other persons living on earth.

Specific Aspects Of The Jubilee Year

Having fulfilled the necessary *conditions* in nn. 3-4, the faithful may gain the Jubilee indulgence by performing one of the following *works*, listed here below in three categories:

8. *Works of piety or religion*

- Either make a *pious pilgrimage* to a Jubilee shrine or place (for Rome: one of the four Patriarchal Basilicas — St Peter, St John Lateran, St Mary Major, St Paul —, or to the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, the Basilica of St Laurence in Campo Verano, the Shrine of Our Lady of Divine Love or one of the Christian Catacombs, and participate there in Holy Mass or another liturgical celebration (Lauds or Vespers) or some pious exercise (the Stations of the Cross, the Rosary, the recitation of the *Akathistos* Hymn, etc.);
- or make a *pious visit*, as a group or individually, to one of these same Jubilee places, and there spend some time in Eucharistic adoration and pious meditations, ending with the "Our Father", the profession of faith in any approved form and prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

9. *Works of mercy or charity*

- Either *visit* for a suitable time *their brothers or sisters in need or in difficulty* (the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped, etc.), as if making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them;

— or *support* by a significant contribution *works of a religious or social nature* (for the benefit of abandoned children, young people in trouble, the elderly in need, foreigners in various countries seeking better living conditions);

— or *devote* a suitable part of *personal free time to activities benefiting the community* or other similar forms of personal sacrifice.

10. *Acts of penance*

For at least one whole day

— Either *abstain from unnecessary consumption* (smoking, alcohol, etc.);

— or *fast*,

— or *abstain from meat* (or other food according to the specific norms of the Bishops' Conferences), and *donate a proportionate sum of money to the poor*.

Given in Rome at the offices of the Apostolic Penitentiary, 29 January 2000.

Cardinal William Wakefield Baum

Major Penitentiary

APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY

DECREE

Indulgences attached to devotions in honour of Divine Mercy

"O God, your mercy knows no bounds and the treasure of your goodness is infinite..." (*Prayer after the "Te Deum" Hymn*) and "O God, you reveal your almighty power above all by showing mercy and forgiveness..." (*Prayer for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time*), in these prayers Holy Mother Church humbly and faithfully sings of Divine

Mercy. Indeed, God's great patience with the human race in general and with each individual person shines out in a special way when sins and moral failures are forgiven by Almighty God Himself and the guilty are readmitted in a fatherlike way to his friendship, which they deservedly lost.

Duty of honouring Divine Mercy

The faithful with deep spiritual affection are drawn to commemorate the mysteries of divine pardon and to celebrate them devoutly. They clearly understand the supreme benefit, indeed the duty, that the People of God have to praise Divine Mercy with special prayers and, at the same time, they realize that by gratefully performing the works required and satisfying the necessary conditions, they can obtain spiritual benefits that derive from the Treasury of the Church. "The paschal mystery is the culmination of this revealing and effecting of mercy, which is able to justify man, to restore justice in the sense of that salvific order which God willed from the beginning in man, and through man, in the world" (Encyclical Letter [*Dives in misericordia*](#), n. 7).

It is God's Mercy that grants supernatural sorrow and resolution to amend

Indeed, Divine Mercy knows how to pardon even the most serious sins, and in doing so it moves the faithful to perceive a supernatural, not merely psychological, sorrow for their sins so that, ever with the help of divine grace, they may make a firm resolution not to sin any more. Such spiritual dispositions undeniably follow upon the forgiveness of mortal sin when the faithful fruitfully receive the sacrament of Penance or repent of their sin with an act of perfect charity and perfect contrition, with the resolution to receive the Sacrament of Penance as soon as they can. Indeed, Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us in the parable of the Prodigal Son that the sinner must confess his misery to God saying: "Father I have sinned against heaven and against

you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Lk 15,18-19), realizing that this is a work of God, "for [he] was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found" (Lk 15,32).

Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

And so with provident pastoral sensitivity and in order to impress deeply on the souls of the faithful these precepts and teachings of the Christian faith, the Supreme Pontiff, John Paul II, moved by the consideration of the Father of Mercy, has willed that the Second Sunday of Easter be dedicated to recalling with special devotion these gifts of grace and gave this Sunday the name, "Divine Mercy Sunday" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree *Misericors et miserator*, 5 May 2000).

The Gospel of the Second Sunday of Easter narrates the wonderful things Christ the Lord accomplished on the day of the Resurrection during his first public appearance: "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you'. When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad to see the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you'. And then he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn 20,19-23).

Plenary Indulgence

To ensure that the faithful would observe this day with intense devotion, the Supreme Pontiff himself established that this Sunday be enriched by a plenary indulgence, as will be explained below, so that the faithful might receive in great abundance the gift of the consolation of the Holy Spirit. In this way, they can foster a growing love for God and for their neighbour, and after they have obtained God's pardon, they in turn might be persuaded to show a prompt pardon to their brothers and sisters.

Pardon of others who sin against us

Thus the faithful will more closely conform to the spirit of the Gospel, receiving in their hearts the renewal that the Second Vatican Council explained and introduced:

"Mindful of the words of the Lord: 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (Jn 13,35), Christians can yearn for nothing more ardently than to serve the men of this age with an ever growing generosity and success.... It is the Father's will that we should recognize Christ our brother in the persons of all men and love them with an effective love, in word and in deed (Pastoral Constitution, [*Gaudium et spes*](#), n. 93).

Three conditions for the plenary indulgence

And so the Supreme Pontiff, motivated by an ardent desire to foster in Christians this devotion to Divine Mercy as much as possible in the hope of offering great spiritual fruit to the faithful, in the Audience granted on 13 June 2002, to those Responsible for the Apostolic Penitentiary, granted the following Indulgences:

a *plenary indulgence*, granted under the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer for the intentions of Supreme Pontiff) to the faithful who, on the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday, in any church or chapel, in a spirit that is completely detached from the affection for a sin, even a venial sin, take part in the prayers and devotions held in honour of Divine Mercy, or who, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed or reserved in the

tabernacle, recite the *Our Father* and the *Creed*, adding a devout prayer to the merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus, I trust in you!");

A *partial indulgence*, granted to the faithful who, at least with a contrite heart, pray to the merciful Lord Jesus a legitimately approved invocation.

For those who cannot go to church or the seriously ill

In addition, sailors working on the vast expanse of the sea; the countless brothers and sisters, whom the disasters of war, political events, local violence and other such causes have been driven out of their homeland; the sick and those who nurse them, and all who for a just cause cannot leave their homes or who carry out an activity for the community which cannot be postponed, may obtain a plenary indulgence on Divine Mercy Sunday, if totally detesting any sin, as has been said before, and with the intention of fulfilling as soon as possible the three usual conditions, will recite the *Our Father* and the *Creed* before a devout image of Our Merciful Lord Jesus and, in addition, pray a devout invocation to the Merciful Lord Jesus (e.g. Merciful Jesus, I trust in you).

If it is impossible that people do even this, on the same day they may obtain the *Plenary Indulgence* if with a spiritual intention they are united with those carrying out the prescribed practice for obtaining the Indulgence in the usual way and offer to the Merciful Lord a prayer and the sufferings of their illness and the difficulties of their lives, with the resolution to accomplish as soon as possible the three conditions prescribed to obtain the plenary indulgence.

Duty of priests: inform parishioners, hear confessions, lead prayers

Priests who exercise pastoral ministry, especially parish priests, should inform the faithful in the most suitable way of the Church's salutary provision. They should promptly and generously be willing to hear their confessions. On Divine Mercy Sunday, after celebrating Mass or Vespers, or during devotions in honour of Divine Mercy, with the dignity that is in accord with the rite, they should lead the recitation of the prayers that have been given above. Finally, since "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5,7), when they instruct their people, priests should gently encourage the faithful to practise works of charity or mercy as often as they can, following the example of, and in obeying the commandment of Jesus Christ, as is listed for the second general concession of indulgence in the "*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*".

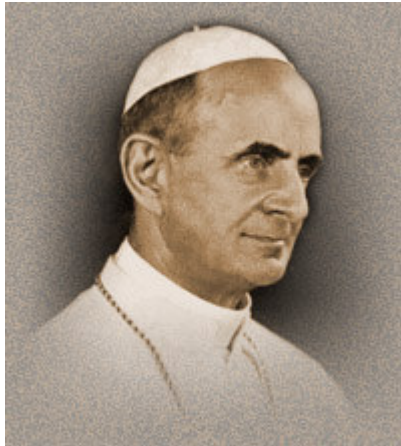
This Decree has perpetual force, any provision to the contrary notwithstanding.

Archbishop Luigi De Magistris,
Tit. Archbishop of Nova
Major Pro-Penitentiary

Fr Gianfranco Girotti, O.F.M. Conv.,
Regent

*The most authoritative recent teaching on indulgences is Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, On Indulgences, published 1 January 1967: AAS 59 (1967): 5-24. This documents does not appear to exist on the web in English translation. We include a brief excerpt here but will over the next several weeks gradually expand it until we provide the entire document.*

Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, On Indulgences



1. The teaching and practice regarding indulgences prevailing for centuries in the Catholic Church rest on divine revelation as their firm foundation. This revelation, handed on by the apostles, “develops in the Church under the influence of the Holy Spirit” as “. . . with the passage of the centuries the Church advances toward the fullness of divine truth until in it God’s words are holly accomplished.” In the interest of a right understanding of the teaching on indulgences and its sound application it is our responsibility to call attention to certain truths. The whole Church, enlightened by God’s word, has always believed these truths and, both through pastoral practice and through doctrinal statements, the bishops, successors of the apostles, and above all the popes, successors of St. Peter, have taught them don through the years and do so still.
2. As divine revelation teaches, punishment inflicted by God’s holiness and justice is the consequence of sin. Such punishment is to be borne in this world through the pain, miseries, and hardships of the present life, above all through death, or in the world to come through the fire and torments of hell or the purifying pains of purgatory. The faithful of Christ have thus always had the conviction that the path of evil has many stumbling blocks and that it is a rough and thorny path, lethal to those ho follow it. A just and merciful judgment of God enjoins such punishments: they are meant to purge the soul, to protect the inviolability of the moral order, and to restore the divine glory to its full majesty. With respect to the last point, every sin involves the upsetting of the general order that is his inexpressible wisdom and boundless charity God has laid out; sin also involves the destruction of supreme values, pertaining both to the individual sinner and the entire human community. To the mind of Christians of every era it has been absolutely clear that sin is a transgression of the divine law, but over and above that, even if not directly and flagrantly, a contempt or neglect toward the personal friendship between God and each person, that it is a real and never

adequately measured offense against God, an ungrateful rejection of God's love offered to us in Christ. For Christ has called us his friends, not his servants.



Heaven, Hell and Purgatory

How could a loving God ever condemn someone to hell for all eternity? If Jesus paid the price for our sins, why would anyone need to experience Purgatory before entering heaven? What awaits us in heaven and why should we be excited about going there? If you've ever been stumped trying to answer these questions, you need to get a recording of this talk which contains thought provoking insights guaranteed

to inspire and clarify. 45 minutes, followed by questions and answers.
Retail Price - \$8.00

Who Needs Confession?

Since this talk dispels many of the common misconceptions about this sacrament, it has helped many find their way back to confession and has helped others find greater fruitfulness and frequency in their celebration of this sacrament.

Retail Price - \$8.00

