



JUBILEE OF MERCY

WHAT ARE INDULGENCES?

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Double Consequence of Sin – the Necessity for Purification

Every sin has a double consequence. One consequence is that sin either weakens (in the case of venial sin) or destroys (in the case of mortal sin) the relationship one has with God. The other consequence is that sin causes us to have an incorrect and unhealthy attachment to material things and it weakens and dulls our conscience. The former is healed by the forgiveness granted by God, normally encountered by means of the sacraments. Even after one is forgiven, however, the latter consequence remains. One must undergo a process of purification in order that one's attachments become correctly oriented. Typically this process of purification from the effects of sins already forgiven takes some time. Those who die in communion with God but for whom this process is not yet complete must continue to undergo this purification after death before coming into the presence of God in heaven. This purification process is a process of being purged of the unhealthy attachments to things which are not God and therefore the state of being in this process is called Purgatory.

Prayers, good works, and the exercise of the virtues can assist in this process of purgation and detachment. Note again that these things do not earn forgiveness. Forgiveness is granted freely by the grace of God through the salvation won for us by Jesus Christ. These things, rather, help in the process of healing the wounds sin creates in the sinner.

What is an Indulgence?

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven. Our understanding of the communion of saints teaches us that between the living and the dead there is both a perennial link of charity and an exchange of spiritual goods. The prayers of the living can assist the dead and the prayers of the saints in heaven can assist those on earth. In light of this, we understand that it is possible that the great spiritual treasures of the prayers and good works of all the saints and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ might assist the purgative process of an individual and lead them to the purified state of being free from all unhealthy attachment. The Church, entrusted by Christ with authority in this area, can grant application of these treasures and achieve just such an end. This is what is known as an *indulgence*. Note again, importantly, that an indulgence is not the forgiveness of a sin, but the removal of the unhealthy attachments and weakening effects of a sin that has already been forgiven.

The Church regulates the granting of indulgences in that typically there are certain conditions which must be met and certain works which must be performed. The conditions necessary for an indulgence include:

1. being in a state of grace and disposed to receive the indulgence,
2. having confessed one's sins sacramentally,
3. receiving Holy Communion, and
4. offering prayers for the Holy Father and his intentions.

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. Indulgences can be applied either to oneself or to the souls of the deceased, but they cannot be applied to other persons living on earth.

The Jubilee Indulgence

Pope Francis has specified that for the Jubilee Indulgence the works that must be performed are:

1. making a profession of faith,
2. reflecting on the mercy of God, and
3. passing through a Holy Door at one of the specified churches.

For those for whom it is impossible to enter the Holy Door, particularly the sick and people who are elderly and alone, for this last work they may substitute living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial, receiving communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even through the various means of communication.

For those who are incarcerated, Pope Francis also turns his special attention and sees in the Jubilee Indulgence as a great opportunity. Therefore, in lieu of entering a Holy Door, they may obtain the indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. He writes, "May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom."

For more information

- ✘ About indulgences
 - † [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#)
 - † [*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*](#)
- ✘ General Norms on Indulgences
 - † [Apostolic Penitentiary](#)
- ✘ Information on the Jubilee Indulgence
 - † [Letter of Pope Francis to the President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization](#)
 - † The [Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization's website regarding the Year of Mercy](#)