



What is an "indulgence"?

A gift of God's mercy as we purify ourselves

Prepare: Read 1 John 3:2-3

An indulgence is a lessening of the temporal punishment that results from our sins, after we've sought God's forgiveness. "Temporal punishment" means temporary time spent in the condition of purgatory (purging or purification) and may be accomplished in actual Purgatory after death or here on earth now.

Purification is needed even after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because the effects of the damage we've done still exist. We're still suffering from the consequences of our sins. And we need to learn to avoid repeating the sin.

Pope John Paul the Great explained indulgences for modern times in *Incarnationis Mysterium* :

"Reconciliation with God does not mean that there are no enduring consequences of sin from which we must be purified. It is precisely in this context that the indulgence becomes important, since it is an expression of the total gift of the mercy of God.... This purification frees one from what is called the 'temporal punishment' of sin, and this expiation removes whatever impedes full communion with God and with one's brothers and sisters."

In other words, sin comes from preferring worldliness (the temporal) over holiness, and even after we've been absolved of the sin in Confession, we continue to love him incompletely as long as we remain attached to anything that is not God. We suffer from this disunity. This suffering is the "temporal punishment."

God, in his mercy, provides us with opportunities to purify ourselves and overcome our worldly attachments; he *indulges* us with his mercy. We gain this indulgence through acts of kindness, by being merciful to others, and by giving up our time and comfort to make pilgrimages to holy places.

We can obtain a "plenary" indulgence, which overcomes all of the disunity from God that we're suffering, or a "partial" indulgence, which only overcomes it partially.

In the Middle Ages, the Franciscans built groups of 14 wooden crosses, each representing an episode of Christ's Passion. People then gained indulgences and united themselves to God by meditating at each cross. This has become known as the Way of the Cross or the Stations of the Cross.

Indulgences can also be gained through actions which express, in a practical and generous way, a penitential spirit. This could be done by abstaining from anything we normally purchase, for at least one day (e.g., denying ourselves the pleasure of smoking, alcohol, meat or candy) and donating the money to the poor; financially supporting works of a religious or social nature (especially those that benefit abandoned children, young people in trouble, the elderly in need, or foreigners seeking better living conditions); devoting free time to activities that benefit the community, and other forms of personal sacrifice.

CONDITIONS FOR GAINING AN INDULGENCE

1. First, make a sincere confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. Participate in the Holy Eucharist on the same day you perform the penitential acts of charity.
3. Pray for the intentions of the Pope and for those you have sinned against.

Your church info goes here
and the schedule for
confession or a penance service