

Part of God's Perfect Plan—Indulgences.

The Roman Catholic Church Listened to Luther? *Indulge me*, keep reading

The Vatican Speaks:

Recently the Vatican released a statement that a “plenary indulgence” may be gained by participation in acts of worship and veneration of the Most Holy Sacrament, (The Eucharist), as well as praying vespers (evening prayer) and compline (night prayer) of the Divine Office before the Tabernacle. This wonderful pronouncement may leave many with a glaring question; “What is a plenary indulgence? “

Indulgence Defined:

In the early Church, depending on the severity of the sin confessed, one could be burdened with a public penance. The suffering of this “temporal punishment” was considered “expiatory” (the taking away or making up for the injury of sin). As you may well know, it is not uncommon that after we have committed a sin and confessed it, we may be tempted to do it again. The “temporal punishment” was designed for what we today would call “behavior modification.”

Although the sin was forgiven, this residual tendency to return to sin reveals a persistent weakness left by the injury of the sin. Thus one may be forgiven, but nevertheless weakened. It could be likened to having a broken leg in a cast for a number of weeks. After the bone has healed and the cast is removed, the resulting muscle atrophy will require exercise—punishment if you will, to get back into shape and expiate the residual effects of the injury.

Quite simply stated, an indulgence is a spiritual exercise that gives us an opportunity to do something to counteract the injuries and residual effects of sin.

At one time, indulgences received a bad “rap,” especially because of the criticism of Martin Luther. You see, formulas and standards were used to apply penances according to the severity of particular sins. As one may imagine, the sum total of penances could become so burdensome that one could lose all hope. Therefore one could attain an indulgence to do a particular act that would commute the punishment for the sin. Therefore, indulgences might be granted if a person said a number of prayers, did particular acts of penance, or gave alms. During the time of Pope Urban II (1088-99), “Plenary Indulgences” were granted by the pope for personally taking part in the Crusades. For the wealthy, an indulgence could be gained by gifting land to the Church or perhaps offering sums of money as alms.

As you may imagine, with human nature being stained by sinful inclinations, these practices were exploited for profit by certain Church individuals. Sadly, the corruption of imposing guilt

and offering expiation for profit overshadowed the noble intention of easing the burden of sin and guilt. It is this corruption and exploitation that Luther protested and rightly so. Since that time, indulgences have been an embarrassing taboo for our Church. And as a result, over the last few centuries we have indeed “thrown out the baby with the bath water!”

Indulgence Reboot:

The Second Vatican Council, (1962-65) made a pronouncement to reform the practice of indulgences in *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*. It made an effort to reinforce the spiritual focus of indulgences stating that plenary indulgences are connected with one’s deliberate rejection of all sin, even venial. In other words, the Council Fathers desired a return to acts of penance or discipline that could help a person fight the effects of sin and win favor with God. Later, in 1969 the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary of Rome published a book outlining guides and norms for indulgences—literally a “work out manual” for strength training against sin, *The Enchiridion of Indulgences*.

While there are many spiritual exercises and disciplines we may impose on ourselves, an indulgence is a pronouncement by the Church that carries special graces as provided for in

Matthew 16:19, “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.” And Matthew 18:18, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

The general requirements for an indulgence are:

- 1) Worthily celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation
- 2) Participation in reception of the Holy Eucharist
- 3) Prayers for the intentions of the Roman Pontiff – generally an Our Father and Hail Mary and Glory be...
- 4) the specific act of penance or discipline required.

These four requirements must be done within a few days of each other (inside of one week), when a person is free from sin and desires to carry out the indulgence for the purpose of rejecting sin in one’s life it is indeed effective. One such Plenary Indulgence per day may be gained.

In 2004/2005, the Holy Father, Blessed John Paul II had declared the Year of the Eucharist, he has granted a Plenary Indulgence to all who carry out the previously mentioned qualifications of which item 4 is to include: acts of worship and veneration of the Most Holy Sacrament through personal visit and prayer in the Church while before the Tabernacle or during Eucharistic Adoration. Also, one may pray vespers (evening prayer) and compline (night prayer) of the Divine Office before the Tabernacle or during Eucharistic Adoration. Indulgences may also be applied to souls of loved ones in Purgatory.

I would like to encourage you to make plentiful use of this marvelous gift of our Church for personal holiness and freedom from the burden of sin.

Fr Moe

