What are some suggestions we can do to help remove temporary punishment due to sin?

This question gets to the heart of the issue of indulgences. Indulgences, of course, do not bring about the forgiveness of sin: that is only possible for mortal sins through the sacrament of penance, and for venial sins through acts of charity, or contrition, as well as the sacrament of penance. What is an indulgence? The Catechism says it is “a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven and 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 of all the saints.”

In the past, there was the idea that gaining an indulgence would take away a certain amount of time in purgatory. Saint Pope Paul VI did away with that notion and simplified how indulgences should be considered. There are two types of indulgences: partial, which brings a sort of cleansing; and plenary, which remits all temporal punishment. To receive an indulgence these things are necessary: be in a state of grace; a complete and wholehearted detachment from all sin of any kind, even venial sin; making a valid sacramental confession; receiving Holy Communion in the state of grace; and praying for the intentions of the Pope (one could offer an Our Father and Hail Mary, or other prayer), and completing the work for an indulgence. You can only receive one plenary indulgence in a day, but multiple partial indulgences.

A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who: in the performance of their duties and in bearing the trials of life, raise their minds with humble confidence to God, adding, even if only mentally—some pious invocation; or in a spirit of faith and mercy, give of themselves or their goods to serve their brothers in need; or in a spirit of penance, voluntarily deprive themselves of what is licit and pleasing to them.

Some actions that one can do for a plenary indulgence are: adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least one half hour; devout reading of Sacred Scripture for at least one half hour; the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross; the recitation of the Marian Rosary in a church or public oratory, or in a family group, a religious community or pious association. This does not exhaust the list of actions for a plenary indulgence but does give us easy ways to accomplish them during an ordinary day.

When our new website is up and running, we will place on it The Enchiridion of Indulgences, which is the Vatican document that addresses indulgences. It can give more details about exactly what other opportunities there are for receiving a plenary indulgence.