

MERCY AND INDULGENCES

The Holy Father instituted the Year of Mercy on December 8, 2015, in Rome, when he thrust open the Holy Doors, what he called the “doors of justice.” Pope Francis celebrated the commencement of an Extraordinary Year of Mercy on the Feast day of the Immaculate Conception. Highlighting the “primacy of grace’ that can transform the human heart, Pope Francis amplified God’s infinite mercy toward sinners in this life, noting that we must put mercy before judgment. When we judge another person, we do not see that person as a brother in Christ that can be transformed and changed by grace, but fixed in time captured by personal sin and faults. Applying mercy as Our Lord does, drops barriers between people and enables Christians to help, to aid, and assist other persons suffering from the consequences of sin or their state in life. Mercy is bound up with justice.

Justice is the chief of the four cardinal virtues¹—a natural virtue built up by good habit. “Justice governs our dealings with others[. . . Justice [] aims at action right for someone else, adjusted to match another: for example, paying someone the due wage for services rendered.”² Justice can be aided by supernatural grace, yet it is a natural virtue. Justice appeals to all men and women of good will, not just Christians—as it calls to our natural rights and responsibilities to each other.³ Truth or veracity comes under the virtue of justice;⁴ in order for a person to do justice, truth is essential.

For humankind, mercy starts as a “feeling of compassion for another’s plight (as if it were our own), and goes on to do something to relieve it.”⁵ It is also said to be a “virtue influencing one’s will to have compassion for, and if possible, to alleviate another’s misfortune.”⁶ God is not impacted by feelings of sadness but as the “source of all goods he is above all a reliever of need.”⁷ God is merciful in giving “perfections, just in distributing them in balanced ways, generous in giving from goodness rather than for advantage, merciful in relieving need with those gifts.”⁸ For example, if you owed,

someone one pound you give two out of your own pocket you are not doing something unjust, but something generous and merciful. The same is true if you remit a debt or pardon an offence; forgiving is a form of giving. Mercy does not oppose justice, but fills it out. God’s justice is based on his mercy, for nothing is due to any creature except because of something it already is or will be because of God’s goodness. Mercy starts all God’s works and grows in all that follows, God always giving beyond the measure of a creature’s due.⁹

Mercy is a product of charity or love of God.¹⁰ It therefore follows that acts of mercy provide certain relief beyond what is due in justice to our brothers and sisters in Christ and others of good will, also known as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.¹¹

Indulgences too are engaged by God as a design of His mercy and kindness to humanity. Therefore, in this Year of Mercy, it is helpful to the Faithful to understand indulgences and employ them for the good of others, including others that have died in friendship with God, and for personal holiness. For, “[h]e who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call[.]”¹²

Indulgences.

The Catholic Church has preached an awe-inspiring Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is at once promising, yet demanding, for if we wish to know Christ, we must obey Him,¹³ and if we wish to be glorified with Him, we must first suffer with Him.¹⁴ “*The Gospel is not a promise of easy success.* It does not promise a comfortable life to anyone. It makes demands and, at the same time, it is a *great promise*—the promise of eternal life for man, who is subject to the law of death, and the promise of victory

through faith for man, who is subject to many trials and setbacks.”¹⁵ When Our Lord gave the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to St. Peter, He gave the power of binding and loosening,¹⁶ and to the Apostles He gave the power to forgive sins.¹⁷ The foundation point of forgiveness is—indeed the ultimate indulgence is—the suffering and death of Our Lord on the Cross,¹⁸ and the abundant mercy that flows to us from his redemptive death on the Cross.¹⁹ Yet, when one sins there are effects of sin, which includes restitution, punishment and satisfaction for the sin committed.²⁰

In the Old Testament, God made it clear He was a merciful and just God, yet He imposed punishments.²¹ Indulgences are tied to, bound with, and flow from the Cross. At the Cross is where it all starts.

The doctrine on indulgences has been maligned over the years—inside and outside the Catholic Church. The purpose here is to explain the doctrine of the Church on indulgences and to review the concepts involved, and what it means to the ordinary Catholic faithful to pursue indulgences, and the grace-filled opportunity for the everyday life of each and every Catholic that participates in this wondrous part of Christ’s life giving graces.

What is an Indulgence?

Pope Paul VI defined an indulgence as a,

Remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian,²² 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 Christ²³ and the saints.²⁴

The term was similarly defined in the Code of Canon Law (*See*, n. 12). It has also been defined as, “remission of the temporal punishment, or expiation, for sin after absolution in the sacrament of Penance [Reconciliation].”²⁵ Another definition of “indulgence” is a “removal of some or all of the punishment due to already forgiven sin because of the performance of a good deed or the saying of a prayer.”²⁶ Simply stated, it is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, the guilt of which has been forgiven.²⁷ It has been used to signify the kindness and mercy of God.²⁸ The term “indulgence” derives from the Latin term, *indulgentia*, and from *indulgeo*, meaning kind or tender,²⁹ and “*condescension* with the various nuances this implies.”³⁰ Others have defined indulgences differently. Protestants have defined it as a “permit to commit sin, given by the Roman church to its members,”³¹ or “remissions of the penance imposed on confessed and absolved sinners,”³² to Jimmy Swaggart’s spurious statement that an indulgence is “a permit for indulging in sin.”³³ Some Protestants have been less extreme, while others have been more rhetorical.³⁴

To study this issue carefully, we should define the terms as used by Pope Paul VI in his *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, quoted above. The term “remission” means “forgiveness or pardon granted for sins or offenses against the divine law; or the canceling of, or the deliverance from, the guilt and penalties of sin.”³⁵ The expression “temporal punishment” is used to express the “punishment which is a consequence of” venial sin or forgiven mortal sin; “it is not everlasting and may be remitted in this life by actual suffering and by prayer, the performance of good works, the gaining of indulgences.”³⁶

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides excellent instruction with regard to indulgences. It is capsulated below.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: We belong to a Family.

Sin has a double consequence. Grave sin breaks our communion with God and makes us “incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the ‘eternal punishment’ of sin.”³⁷ Every sin, even venial sin, involves an unhealthy attachment to creation, which must be purified here on earth, or after death “in the state of ‘Purgatory.’”³⁸ This purification frees a person from the “temporal punishment of sin.”

“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 the temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and various practices of penance, to put off completely the ‘old man’ and to put on the ‘new man.’³⁹ A person who seeks holiness—to put on the ‘new man’—is ‘joined in Christ and through Christ’ to all other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the ‘Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person.’”⁴⁰ “[S]o we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.” Romans 12:5.

The *Catechism* brilliantly summarizes the nature of the communion of Saints when considering indulgences. The “communion of Saints” is one of the concluding fundamentals of the Apostles Creed.⁴¹ In the *Catechism*, it quotes Pope Paul VI’s summary of this communion by saying, “The life of each of God’s children is joint in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as a single mystical human being.”⁴² Pope Paul calls this charitable communion a heavenly link with the triumphant saints, with “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.”⁴³ This communion or gathering of saints whether militant, suffering, or triumphant is truly a family of brothers and sisters not of the natural order, but of the supernatural order as God as Our Father and Christ as our Brother. This recourse to Our Lord, and to the “communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.”⁴⁴

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 been 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.”⁴⁵

This **treasury** includes the “prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” the prayers and good works of all the saints, who are “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 the Father entrusted to them.”⁴⁶ The prayers of the Saints are presented to God in Heaven,⁴⁷ and Holy David asked that his prayers be like incense before the throne of God.⁴⁸

Therefore, 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.”⁴⁹ The faithful departed who have died before us, being purified and are members of the communion of saints, we may help them “obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.”⁵⁰

The Holy Scriptures.

In one of the finest passages from the Old Testament, the Lord passes before Moses and proclaims who He is:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation.”⁵¹

God the Father does not remove punishment for sin, even though His love is so great for the World that He gave His only begotten Son so that those who believe may not perish.⁵² He forgives sin but punishment is part of mercy to restore the violated order for the sake of man’s good.⁵³ God forgave Adam and Eve, but both were punished.⁵⁴ In the book of Numbers, Moses’ sister, Miriam, was leprous after speaking against Moses, God’s prophet. Yet, after seven days of leprosy, she was returned to the Israeli camp cured.⁵⁵ Holy David was forgiven of his sin, but he too was punished for his adulterous affair and murder.⁵⁶ St. Paul urges the faithful to avoid the sin of unworthy reception of the Holy Eucharist, as “[t]hat is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 1 Corinthians 11:30. God does impose temporal punishment for sin. He even tests our faith and puts us through many trials.

We are exhorted not to lose courage when God punishes his adopted sons and daughters.⁵⁷ This doctrine is brilliantly stated by St. Paul in his *Letter to the Hebrews*:

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?—“*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all disciplines seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:3-11 (emphasis here). God’s discipline is like that of a father to his children. When children do wrong, they are justly punished. As adopted children—sons and daughters—of God the Father, we cannot avoid the punishment of sin. The punishment of King David’s adultery and murder plagued him for the remainder of his life, as he laments in Psalm 37:4-6, “For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because

of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning.” As brethren, we must pray for one another and guard our hearts so that sin does not harden us, as St. Paul says, “[E]xhort one another every day, whilst it is call today, that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Hebrews 3:13. Punishment for sin exists in this life and in the life to come.⁵⁸

If punishment is temporal as well as in purgatory, then indulgences are the “*remission* or relaxation of [the] temporal penalties” of sin ultimately by virtue of the sufferings of Christ and secondarily by the saints have followed Him.⁵⁹ Indulgences are part of His divine mercy to forgive sins. Catholics believe that indulgences are a way for each sinner to act in response to the free grace of Christ. “Grace is *favor*, the *free* and *undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.”⁶⁰ “The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to use of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the *sanctifying* or *deifying grace* received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification.”⁶¹ “Grace means being known and permeated by the Spirit of Jesus and the Father.”⁶² The Catholic Church’s view diverges with Martin Luther’s tradition, because Grace is not a “cloak” that covers your sins with Christ’s righteousness,⁶³ *but it is an infused grace that purifies the soul in Christ as a new creation*,⁶⁴ that allows the soul to “escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.” *See*, 2 Peter 1:4.⁶⁵

Penance is also a grace-filled response. “Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.”⁶⁶ *If grace actually permeates and glorifies our soul, then Penance is a source of grace toward perfection that He commanded us to achieve.*⁶⁷ Penance is encouraged in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In Ezekiel 18:21, we are urged, “But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.” And, in Jeremiah, it says, “Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ‘Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.’” Jeremiah 18:11; *see, also*, 25:5. The Book of Joel warns, “Yet even now,” says the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Joel 2:21. This sampling is also true in the New Testament. In the holy Gospel of Matthew at chapter 3, St. John the Baptist says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” St. Matthew 3:2, *see, also* 4:17 (where Christ exhorts the same). St. Peter preaches the same in the Acts of the Apostles.⁶⁸ “Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’” Matthew 16:24. Catholics believe that penance can be and is a source of grace.

In the Book of Romans, St. Paul says, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him.” Romans 15:1,2. As members of Christ’s body, the Church, he has “so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” 1 Corinthians 12:24-26. In this way, we are able to join in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for the good of others in the Communion of Saints.

It is here where indulgences are a vital part of the Church’s mission to the World. As Christ is the answer, the Alpha and the Omega,⁶⁹ we are His brothers, as His Father is our Father as well. And, as a family, we indulge one another, and give to each other in charity the love and yield to grace.

An indulgence is like Father's love when a child is repentant of a wrong doing, the Father grants him not only forgiveness, but withholds on the punishment due to the child's penitent heart.

Like a father, the Church was given this authority. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to St. Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And again, at Matthew 18:18, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." He also grants to the Apostles the power to forgive sin in the name of God where it states at John 20:22-23: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of many, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In these verses, and based upon the Mosaic law "fulfilled" in the New Testament, the Church derives its power to forgive sins that descended from the Apostles to the bishops that are in union with the pope in Rome.

Examples of the authority granted to the Apostles is cited in the Holy Scriptures. For instance, St. Paul is *binding* and *loosening* in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 and in 2 Corinthians 1:6-10, respectively. The authority to grant indulgences was known in early Church history as well.

The Early Church Fathers.

The situation in the early Church is catalogued by James Cardinal Gibbons in his historical and expository text, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, when he says:

No one dispute the right, which [the bishops] claimed from, the very first ages, of inflicting canonical penances on grievous criminals, who were subjected to long fasts, severe abstinences and other mortifications for a period of extending from a few days to five or ten years and even to a lifetime, according to the gravity of the offense. These penalties were, in several instances, mitigated or cancelled by the Church, according to her discretion; for a society that can inflict a punishment can also remit it. Our Lord gave His Church power not only to bind but also to loose. This discretionary prerogative was often exercised by the Church at the intercession of those who were condemned to martyrdom, when the penitents themselves gave strong marks of fervent sorrow, as we learn from the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian.

The Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), among others, authorized local bishops, in their judgments to mitigate or to remit public penances when the penitent evidence his or her contrition by deed and not by outward show.

Indulgences are a part of God's economy of salvation for the sanctification of souls. He died so that all of mankind is presented with the opportunity to be saved. He is the glorious Redeemer. At His death on the Cross, the gates of Heaven were let open, the Holy Ones of the Old Covenant were allowed in, and the new saints, including the Good Thief entered and are—even now—entering into Paradise. Indulgences are an orthodox and biblical reality, a gift from God granted from the superabundant merits of Jesus Christ for the remission of temporal punishment due God on account of sin "*after the guilt and eternal punishment have been 'absolved.'*"

Conclusion.

As adopted brothers and sisters of Christ, we enjoy His mercy and forgiveness. We enjoy His Holy name, His Holy Face, His Word, His spiritual abundance, His grace, His Light, and His plenteous spiritual gifts. As part of these wonderful attributes, we are infused with His grace and are able to partake of the divine nature through grace. Indulgences are a vital part of God's mercy, forgiveness,

forbearance, and a share in the Eternal joy. Blessed is the man who endures trial, for the crown of life is his for he has shown his love of God.

John C. Keenan, J.D., O.P.L.

john@keenan.org

www.dominicanidaho.org

Blessed Margaret of Castello Chapter, Boise, Idaho

¹ Slater, T. (1910). Justice. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company (hereinafter “Slater, T.”). Retrieved December 22, 2015 from New Advent:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08571c.htm>. The four cardinal virtues, in addition to justice, are prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

² *Summa Theologicae, A Concise Translation*, edited by Timothy McDermott, O.P., p. 382, (Christian Classics (© 1989)). (hereinafter “*Summa Theologicae*”).

³ The virtue of justice was recognized by the Founding Fathers of the American Republic as an essential virtue of civil government. For example, James Madison, in his *Federalist Paper* No. 51, stated, “Justice is the end of government.”

⁴ Walker, L. (1912). Truth. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 22, 2015 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15073a.htm>.

⁵ *Summa Theologicae*, p. 55.

⁶ Delany, J. (1911). Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. (hereinafter “Delaney, J.”) Retrieved December 22, 2015 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10198d.htm>

⁷ *Summa Theologicae*, p. 55.

⁸ *Id.*, p. 55.

⁹ *Id.*, p. 55.

¹⁰ Delaney, J.

¹¹ *Id.* The corporal acts of mercy are: (1) to feed the hungry, (2) to give drink to the thirsty, (3) to clothe the naked, (4) to harbor the harbourless, (5) to visit the sick, (6) to ransom the captive, and (7) to bury the dead; and, the spiritual works of mercy are: (1) to instruct the ignorant, (2) to counsel the doubtful, (3) to admonish sinners, (4) to bear wrongs patiently, (5) to forgive offences willingly, (6) to comfort the afflicted, and to pray for the living and the dead.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1424, (hereafter “Catechism”).

¹³ 1 John 2:3.

¹⁴ Romans 8:17.

¹⁵ *Witness to Hope, The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, pp. 30,31 by George Weigel (quoting His Holiness John Paul II), (Harper Collins (1999)), (hereinafter “*Witness to Hope*”) (emphasis original).

¹⁶ Matthew 16:18-19.

¹⁷ John 20:21-23.

¹⁸ More precisely stated, “The starting-point for understanding indulgences is the abundance of God’s mercy revealed in the Cross of Christ. The crucified Jesus is the great ‘indulgence’ that the Father has offered humanity through the forgiveness of sins and the possibility of living as children (cf. Jn 1:12-13) in the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5, 8:15-16).” By St. John Paul II, in an article entitled “*Indulgences Are Expression of God’s Mercy*” in the daily *L’Osservatore Romano*, dated October 6, 1999, published by the Holy See.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.* “For the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism, this process is centered on the sacrament of Penance [known as Reconciliation], but it continues after the sacramental celebration. The person must be gradually ‘healed’ of the negative effects which sin has caused in him (what the theological tradition calls the ‘punishments’ and ‘remains’ of sin.” A simple story that may demonstrate the point, which the author has given to his children, is of the man who was a bookkeeper for a bank, and in embezzling the bank’s money, he committed a terrible fraud upon the bank and its customers. The bookkeeper goes to prison for a time to satisfy the justice of society. The owner of the bank is commanded to forgive by the Scriptures. In turn, does

forgiveness require that the banker rehire the bookkeeper after his prison term? No. To employ the bookkeeper justifies no justice. It is not an act of charity to the poor inmate, to the banker, to his bank, or to the common good to reemploy the same bookkeeper again. To do so stretches the demands of mercy. The consequence of this bookkeeper's crime will stay with him, along with the forgiveness he received from God and the bank owner; yet there are consequences to sin.

²¹ *Id.* "God, after describing himself as "a God merciful and gracious ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin", adds: "yet not without punishing." Exodus 34:6-7. In the Second Book of Samuel, King David's humbles confession after his grave sin of adultery and murder, obtains God's forgiveness (cf. 2 Samuel 12:13), but he did not forego the foretold chastisement (cf. *ibid.*, 12:11, 16:21). God's fatherly love does not rule out punishment, even if the latter must always be understood as part of a merciful justice that re-establishes the violated order for the same of man's own good (cf. Hebrews 12:4-11).

²² A Christian in a state of *sanctifying grace*. "Sanctifying grace [] is a supernatural gift infused in the soul at baptism. . . . A person who is free of mortal sin is in the state of grace." *National Catholic Almanac*, p. 347 (Doubleday & Co (1996)) (hereafter "National Catholic Almanac").

²³ "... treasury of the satisfactions of Christ.." Although the theology of indulgences will be discussed in detail *infra*, the reader should understand this quoted term in summary. First, the Church draws upon the law-giving authority granted to Peter and his successors, as well as the power to forgive sins granted to the Apostles. To Peter, "The Rock", Our Lord said,

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld [hell] shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:18-19. To the Apostles, after His resurrection, Christ said,

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

John 20:21-23. With this authority, the Church "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 temporal punishments due for their sins." *Catechism*, para. 1478. This "treasury" is not a "bank" of material goods, but is of infinite value, which can "never be exhausted, which Christ's merits has before God. They are 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." *Id.*, para 1476. This "treasury" is first in Christ, as the Father "graced us in his beloved son. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace, which hath superabounded in us all wisdom and prudence." Ephesians 1:6-8. Through the Communion of Saints, Christ's salvific action finds fruit, for "[t]his 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 by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attain their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body." *Catechism, id.*, para. 1477. As God is our Father, and Christ is our Brother, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and in Him and through Him, in obedient faith, we cooperate with actual graces to bring each other closer and closer to the knowledge of God the Father by the practices of the virtues as one family. 1 John 2:3. For God the Father does not treat us as a defendant in a courtroom charged with a crime, but as His son or daughter—a member of His family. Obviously, the "satisfactions" is the merit Christ won for dying on the Cross in "satisfaction" for the justice demanded by the Father for the sins of all mankind.

One closing note should be made here. As said above, the power to forgive is vested with the Apostles. This power to forgive sins passed on to the Apostles successors through the laying on of hands of the priesthood. This authority is vested with the Church, as St. Augustine understood, when he said, "Rightly is the loosing of sins able to be given by the Church." *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, p. 21, para 1480a, (quoting St. Augustine, *Enarrationes in psalms* (Explanations of the Psalms)). When others injury us personally, we are admonished to forgive. "Then came Peter until him, and said: Lord how often shall my brother offend

Page 8 of 12 – MERCY AND INDULGENCES

against me, and I forgive him? 'Till seven times? Jesus saith to him: I say not to thee till seven times; but till seventy times seven times.” Matthew 18:21, 22. This verifies the Church’s authority to loosen and bind sins, as Christ granted authority to his ministers, his priests, to loosen or bind sins. The power to bind sins was not granted to the faithful. At all times and everywhere, the faithful have the duty to forgive offenses and injuries committed against us personally or against our family members and friends.

²⁴ Catechism, para. 1471, *quoting* Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 1). Canon Law defines it as “a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sin the guilt of which is already forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and definite conditions with the help of the Church which, as a minister of redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.” §992, *Code of Canon Law*, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C., D.C., 20064 (1983).

²⁵ *The Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, p. 4624 (1954).

²⁶ *Christ the King Lord of History*, by Anne W. Carroll ©1994, Tan Books.

²⁷ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, p. 783, ©1910, The Robert Appleton Company. (hereinafter “*The Catholic Encyclopedia*”). (On line: www.newadvent.org/cathen/07783a.htm). The *Code of Canon Law* defines the term as, An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins the guilt of which has already been forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and definite conditions with the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.

Canon § 992, Code of Canon Law, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C., 20064, © 1983.

²⁸ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, p. 783.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *The Historical Origin of Indulgences*, by Fr. Enrico Dal Covolo, S.D.B., *L'Osservatore Romano*, pp. 9, 10 (May 19, 1999)(emphasis here)(hereinafter “*The Historical Origin of Indulgences?*”). This article is highly recommended for a scholarly historical reference on indulgences.

³¹ *Answering a Fundamentalist*, p. 92, by Albert J. Nevins, M.M., (Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. ©1990)(hereinafter “*Answering a Fundamentalist?*”)

³² *Reformation Europe 1517-1559*, p. 18, by G.R. Elton (Harper Torchbooks ©1963). This definition comes from a college text, and it is not correct. First, penance can be called a virtue, “disposing one to be sorry for sin, to purpose amendment to make satisfactory for sins committed.” *National Catholic Almanac*, p. 344. Second, it may be called the “[p]rayers or good works imposed on a penitent in confession for the remission of temporal punishment due for sin.” *Id.* Third, it may be called a “sacrament” more recently known as Reconciliation or Confession. *Id.* The definition is more accurately stated to be not the remission of penance, “but the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.” *Catechism*. Penance is the virtue of sorry for sins, or the good works imposed for remission of temporal punishment . . . not the temporal punishment. For each sin, justice must be fulfilled, despite the forgiveness, there remains the satisfaction of justice.

³³ *Catholicism and Fundamentalism, the Attack on “Romanism” by “Bible Christians”*, by Karl Keating, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, © 1988 (hereinafter “*Catholicism and Fundamentalism?*”) (quoting pp. 159-163, *Catholicism & Christianity*, by Jimmy Swaggart (Baton Rouge: Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, © 1986).

³⁴ “Still another fabrication was needed to enable Rome to profit by the fears and vices of her adherents. This was supplied by the doctrine of indulgences. Full remission of sins, past, present, and future, and release from all the pains and penalties incurred, were promised to those who would enlist in the pontiff’s wars to extend his temporal dominion, to punish his enemies, or to exterminate those who dared deny his spiritual supremacy. The people were taught that by the payment of money to the church they might free themselves from sin, and release the souls of their deceased friends who were confined in the tormenting flames.” An excerpt from *The Great Controversy*, by Ellen G. White, a prophetess to the early 7th Day Adventists, this excerpt can be seen at one of their followers eaddress at:

<https://text.egwwritings.org/publication.php?pubtype=Book&bookCode=GC&lang=en&pagenumber=59>.

The internet site that hosts this quotation of prophetess E.G. White would be laughable if it weren’t so serious... seriously prejudicial.

³⁵ *The Oxford Universal Dictionary*, p. 1700 (Oxford University Press (1955)).

³⁶ *National Catholic Almanac*, p. 347.

³⁷ *Catechism*, para. 1473.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*, para 1476 (*quoting* Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 5)(italics emphasis original).

⁴¹ It reads at the conclusion of the *Apostle's Creed*, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen."

⁴² *Catechism*, para. 1474, (*quoting* Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 5).

⁴³ *Id.*, para. 1475.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*, para. 1476. (*quoting* Pope Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 5) (italics emphasis original, bold emphasis here).

⁴⁶ *Id.*, para. 1477.

⁴⁷ Revelations 8:1-5. "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the of the angel before God. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."

⁴⁸ Psalm 141:2. "Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee[.]"

⁴⁹ *Id.*, para. 1478.

⁵⁰ *Id.*, para. 1479; "Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and for the souls in Purgatory." *Id.*, para. 1498.

⁵¹ Exodus 34:6,7 (*Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (hereinafter "RSV")). God's fatherly love does not rule out punishment, even if the latter must always be understood as part of a merciful justice that reestablishes the violated order for the sake of man's own good (cf. Heb 12:4:11).

⁵² John 3:16.

⁵³ "*Indulgences Are Expression of God's mercy*" by the St. John Paul II, in the daily *L'Osservatore Romano*, dated October 6, 1999, published by the Holy See.

⁵⁴ Genesis 3:16-18. To the woman he said,

"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth the children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plans of the field."

⁵⁵ Numbers 12. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman; and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them came out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed: and when the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam, and behold, she was leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my Lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb." And Moses cried to the LORD, "Heal her, O God, I beseech thee." But the LORD

said to Moses, “if her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again.” So Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days; and the people did not set out on the march till Miriam was brought in again. After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.

⁵⁶ David had an adulterous affair with the wife of one of his chief soldiers, Uriah. He had Uriah murdered, and too, the woman as his wife. Nathan, the prophet, confronted David. David confessed his sin. “David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.” 2 Samuel 12:13,14.

⁵⁷ Hebrews 12:5. Also, *see*, Proverbs 3:11: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof[.]”

⁵⁸ Romans 6:21; 8:13.

⁵⁹ *Penance . . . Share Christ’s Sufferings*, p. 2, at <http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAX70.htm> (emphasis original).

⁶⁰ *Catechism*, para. 1996.

⁶¹ *Id.*, p. 484, para. 1999 (italics original).

⁶² *Bible Catechism (Vatican II Edition)*, p. 114, by John C. Kersten, S.V.D. (Catholic Book Publishing Co., NY, ©1973).

⁶³ “. . . God clothes us when he justifies us.” That is, he clothes us with Christ’s righteousness. This is a quote from Martin Luther’s letter: “Luther’s Tower Experience: Martin Luther Discovers the True Meaning of Righteousness,” An Excerpt from: Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Works (1545: by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546. Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, O.S.B.; from the “Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe. 1454;” in vol. 4 of Luther’s Werke in Auswahl, ed. Otto Clemen, 6th Ed., (Berlin: de Gruyter. 1967) pp. 421-428. This text is at the following internet site, which is an excellent resource for Luther’s writings.

⁶⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁶⁵ This is a great promise, which the soul may *participate in the divine nature of Christ*. This is very different from Martin Luther’s ideology, as he believed that “man was totally depraved, destitute of free will, that all works, even though directed towards the good, were nothing more than an outgrowth of his corrupted will, and in the judgements of God in reality mortal sins. Man can be saved by faith alone. Our faith in Christ makes His merits our possession, envelops us in the garb of righteousness, which our guilt and sinfulness hide, and supplies in abundance every defect of human righteousness. ‘Be a sinner and sin on bravely, but have stronger faith and rejoice in Christ, who is the victor of sin, death, and the world. Do not for a moment imagine that this life is the abiding place of justice; sins must be committed. To you it ought to be sufficient that you acknowledge the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world, the sin cannot tear you away from him, even though you commit adultery a hundred times a day and commit as many murders.” (Enders, “Briefwechsel”, III, 208). Ganss, H. (1910). Martin Luther. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 19, 2015 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09438b.htm>.

“For Luther believed that grace was totally extrinsic . . . and not made a part of the soul. “[I]f man is totally corrupt, then grace cannot be intrinsic to him, for then he would be transformed into something good and no longer corrupt. The blood of Christ covers over the sins of man, hiding them from the sight of God, but man remains as corrupt as before. Thus is undermined any motivation to strive to overcome vices and imperfections in oneself or in society. Indeed, the notion that man is totally corrupt and its corollary, that grace is only extrinsic, stem historically from Martin Luther’s despair in trying to live the vowed life. “ *The Catholic Church and the Bible*, p. 130, Rev. Peter J.J. Stravinkas (Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., © 1987)(Rev. Stravinkas published the paper of Fr. Bartholomew da la Torre, O.P., Ph.D. entitled, “The Seven Principles Essential to Protestantism.”).

⁶⁶ The Church has been given the authority to remit or not to remit sins. John 20:23. St. Augustine says of this verse: “The love of the Church, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, remits the sins of those who partake of it; but retains the sins of those who do not. Where when He said, Receive you the Holy Ghost, he instantly makes mention of the remission and retaining of sins.” *Catena Aurea*, St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Gospels, John 20:23. “And when he had said this, 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.” John 20:23. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 16:19.

⁶⁷ “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trial, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2. “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48.

⁶⁸ Acts of the Apostles 2:38. “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” See a thorough review of the Scriptural basis of the virtue of Penance and its necessity here: Hanna, E. (1911). The Virtue of Penance. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 19, 2015 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618b.htm>.

⁶⁹ Revelations 22:12.