

COVID-19: An Opportunity for Grace

On March 19, 2020, Pope Francis authorized, during this time of a global epidemic, special graces (“indulgences”) to be made available to the faithful suffering or dying from COVID-19, to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including prayer, care for them.



The usual conditions: As an expression of the abundance of God’s mercy, gaining an indulgence requires us to turn away from sin and be converted to God. The conditions are:

- Sacramental Confession,
- Reception of Eucharistic Communion,
- Pray for the Holy Father’s intentions.

“As soon as possible”: During this time of “social distancing”, the Vatican, recognizing that it may not be possible to fulfill the first two conditions immediately, permits them to be delayed, simply stating they be completed “as soon as possible.” This removes the requirement to complete them within a specific period of time, allowing people to receive grace while remaining physically safe.

The special *Plenary Indulgences* in the current pandemic can be gained in one of four ways:

1. The faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes:

In addition to satisfying the usual conditions (see above), they are to have a spirit detached from any sin, offer this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, and complete one of the following:

- Unite themselves spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass,
- or recite the Holy Rosary,
- or complete the Way of the Cross,
- or another form of devotion (such as the Divine Mercy Chaplet),
- or at least recite the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary (for example, a Hail Mary, the Memorare, or a Hail Holy Queen)

2. Health care workers, family members and all those who care for the sick of Coronavirus, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion:

Satisfy the conditions listed in #1.

3. The faithful who implore from Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself:

They are to satisfy the usual conditions (see above), and complete one of the following:

- Visit the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic adoration, or read Holy Scriptures for at least one half an hour,
- or recite the Holy Rosary,
- or complete the Way of the Cross,
- or recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

4. Those at the point of death, who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the Viaticum:

The official Decree states: “The Church prays for [them], ... entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful a *Plenary Indulgence* on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (the Church makes up for the three usual conditions). For the attainment of this indulgence the use of the crucifix or cross is recommended.”

Indulgences

“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.”

- St. John Paul II, General Audience of September 29, 1999.

An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sins which have been forgiven. Sin has both eternal and temporal consequences. In confession, the eternal consequences are forgiven, but the damage we have done to ourselves and to others here on earth remains, and God asks us to assist him in making amends. When we cooperate with God in doing good works and offering up our sufferings we are purified from the residue of sin. If we die without being completely purified, God, in his mercy, allows us to complete our purification in purgatory.

An indulgence is exactly what its name implies: God the Father, through Christ’s spouse, the Church, being indulgent with his children. It is like the mother who, knowing that her child will not be able to clean up the mess he has made, simply asks him to pick up a couple of toys by himself.

The indulgences which the Church offers us during the COVID pandemic are plenary indulgences.

That means that if we are completely detached from sin, the Lord grants the full remission of the temporal punishment due our sins. If there is not yet complete detachment from sin, however, we still receives a partial indulgence.

We may receive a plenary indulgence once a day. We may always apply it to oneself or to the soul of someone who has died, but cannot apply to another living person. A single sacramental confession suffices for gaining several plenary indulgences, but Holy Communion must be received and prayer for the Holy Father’s intention must be said for each plenary indulgence. However, the Decree “Special Indulgences in the Current Pandemic” notes that we simply need to have “the will to fulfill the usual conditions as soon as possible.” If there is the danger of contracting Coronavirus by receiving Reconciliation or Holy Communion, we are to satisfy those conditions later. The Church is a loving mother who wants us to receive indulgences without the danger of getting COVID.

Additional Reading:

Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic, March 20, 2020 (press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320c.html).

St. John Paul II, General Audience of September 29, 1999 (a catechesis on indulgences, www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_29091999.html).

“Indulgences” in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph numbers 1471–1479.



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