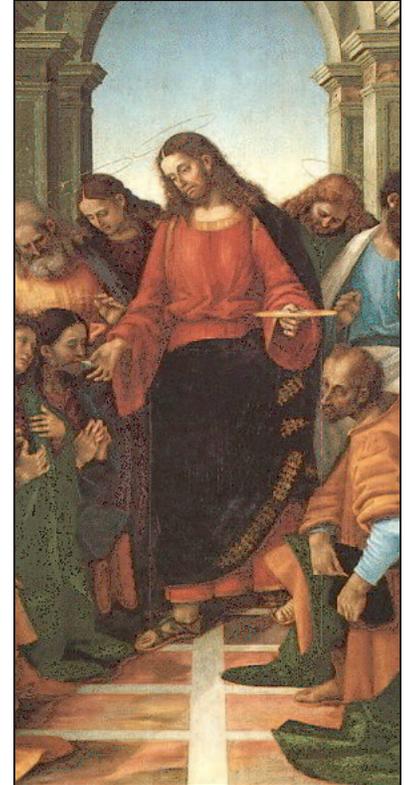


The Church's Practice of Granting Indulgences

Q What is an indulgence?

An indulgence is the remission in the eyes of God of the temporal punishment due to sins which have already been forgiven by faith in Christ's redemptive death, repentance and (when necessary) sacramental absolution. Because Christ has established the Church as the means by which the Gospel is to be preached, He has also granted to the Church all the ministries proper to redemption, including the right to distribute authoritatively and apply effectively the treasury of expiatory works of Christ, Our Lady, and all the saints. (Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, norm. 1)



Q Why is there temporal punishment if our sins have already been forgiven?

Sin is both an offense against God and a rupture of the relationship we enjoy with God through Baptism. Even when the offense is forgiven, the damage done to the relationship must still be repaired - as it would have to be in any relationship! When a child has a tantrum and breaks a window, even though his parents forgive him when he or she shows contrition and has a purpose of amendment, the window must still be repaired and the previous level of trust restored. The child may also be punished if that is necessary to teach the child the gravity of his misbehavior and thus redirect him or her away from such outbursts.

What we call the 'temporal punishment' due to our sin, then, is the need to repair the damage done by sin. The sinner must come to learn the gravity of his offense and through prayer and penance purify his attachments so that he is no longer attracted to sin. Every sin has a temporal punishment which - *if not remitted by an indulgence* - must be repaid in this life or in purgatory.

Q How does the Church remit the temporal punishment through indulgences?

The Church by means of indulgences remits the temporal punishment due to sin by applying to us from her spiritual treasury part of the infinite satisfaction of Jesus Christ and of the superabundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints. (*The Baltimore Catechism*, §439)

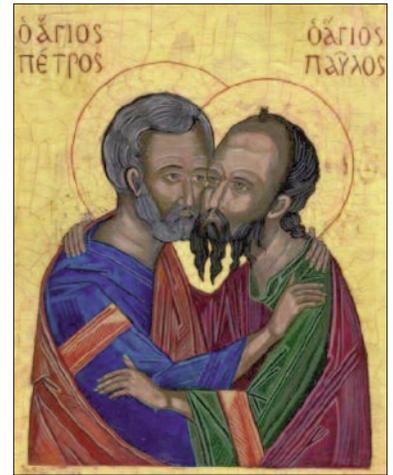
An indulgence may be either partial or complete (called 'plenary'). If an indulgence is partial, then it is said to free a person from *some* of the temporal punishment; if an indulgence is plenary, then it remits *all* the temporal punishment a person has as a consequence of sin.

Q Who may receive an Indulgence?

Any of the baptized faithful, who are rightly disposed and who fulfill the definite prescribed requirement attached to the indulgence may gain it under the normal conditions.

Q What is meant by “fulfilling the definite prescribed requirement”?

An indulgence may be attached to a certain prayer, for example. To gain the attached indulgence, one would have to say that prayer. In the same way, an indulgence may be attached to visiting a certain church on a certain day, perhaps the patron saint’s day of the parish. To obtain the indulgence one would have to visit that particular church on the correct day. Usually some accommodation is made for those who are physically unable to complete the conditions attached to an indulgence. In addition, the person has to intend (at least in a general sense) to actually gain the indulgence.



Icon of Ss. Peter & Paul

Q What does “under the normal conditions” mean?

The normal conditions which must be met for a baptized member of Christ’s body to receive a partial indulgence are that the person not be excommunicated and that he or she must be in the state of grace at least at the time when he or she completes the prescribed activity.

To receive a plenary indulgence, a person must not only be in the state of grace, but should not be attached to sin, not even to venial sin, and at the time that he or she completes the prescribed work, must make a sacramental confession, receive Holy Communion and say some prayers (*either an Our Father and the Apostles’ Creed or another prayer more suited to the person’s piety and devotion*) for the intentions of the Holy Father. These three conditions (Confession, Communion and prayers for the intention of the Pontiff) may be carried out several days preceding or following the performance of the indulgenced action, but it is more fitting that at least Communion and the prayers for the Pope be done on the same day as the day the activity is completed.

Bishops may even dispense from the obligation to go to Confession or Communion those faithful who desire to receive the indulgence and perform the required action, but simply can’t get to confession or communion at all, or only at great hardship, provided that they have inner contrition and the resolution to receive the sacraments as soon as possible. In the same way, priests in the confessional are empowered to commute either the prescribed work or the necessary conditions for the sake of those for whom legitimate obstacles make their fulfillment impossible.

Q What else do I need to know?

A plenary indulgence may also be applied to one of the deceased members of the parish or a member of your family. When you say the prayers while visiting the church, simply make your intention “for the repose of my parent” or “for my deceased sister.”

Other occasions to receive a plenary indulgence are:

- At the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday - or on the anniversary of your own baptism - if you renew your own baptismal vows in any approved formula;
- On any and each day from November 1 through November 8, if you devoutly visit any cemetery and pray for the deceased. On November 2 if you visit any Catholic church and recite the Our Father and the Apostles’ Creed. (These last two are only applicable to the souls in purgatory. and cannot be applied to anyone still living.)
- If you are willing to read Sacred Scripture (either Old or New Testament) in a Catholic translation of the Bible with suitable reverence for the Word, for at least half an hour, you can obtain a plenary indulgence each day.