

***Last Friday, Pope Francis celebrated an extraordinary ‘Urbi et Orbi’ message for all the faithful. Associated with it, is a plenary indulgence for all who participate in any way—through watching it on-line, through watching a recording and through any other ‘means of communication.’***

***What does that mean for each of us?*** A plenary indulgence means that a full pardon for all temporal consequences of sin, mortal and venial, is given to someone who participates in the activity that is encouraged. Indulgences have frequently had a negative connotation due to the abuses of power that took place in the late Renaissance and leading to the Reformation, however they are one of the reminders to us that the mercy of God is a constant presence in our lives.

The ‘Urbi et Orbi’ message (literally: “to the City and to the World”) is an opportunity that the Pope takes to communicate the love of God to a world in need. Pope Francis, using the Gospel story of Jesus asleep in the boat while the disciples live in fear of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, has taken these extraordinary times through which we are living as an opportunity to reflect on our continuing need to trust in the Lord. It is a unique time to recognize how we will choose to respond to the challenges we face, to draw closer to the Lord and to trust more fully in His mercy and presence. At this time when we do not have the opportunity of seeking and celebrating the mercy of God in the sacrament of Penance, this is a grace-filled opportunity for us to receive the pardon and mercy of God.

***What do we have to do?*** Simply watch the video, take the time to reflect on the abundant mercy of the Lord, join with the Pope in prayer for all those who are suffering—both with the coronavirus and for all those who are experiencing the struggles associated with it—essentially everyone in the world.

In the future, when we begin to discover what the “new normal” is going to look like, we will have the opportunity to return once more to the more ordinary avenues of receiving the grace of pardon for sin in the sacraments, but Pope Francis embraces this opportunity to remind the world of the pervasive and all-encompassing mercy of God available to all.