

What is an Indulgence?

Among the many initiatives for the upcoming Year of Mercy will be a greater availability of indulgences. What are these?

To understand indulgences, we first need to reflect on the nature of sin. Every sin has two effects. First, there is the damage done to the relationship between the believer and God. Mortal (serious) sins destroy this relationship, while venial (lesser) sins damage it. Apart from this, though, is the damage done in the natural (or temporal) order by our sin- the damage done to our relationships with one another, with the nature, and even the damage that our sins do to our own selves.

The Sacrament of Confession is where we seek healing for the damage done by sin to our relationship with God. However, the damage done to the natural order remains. To understand the difference, it might help to imagine that a ball you've thrown has broken a neighbor's window. Even after the neighbor forgives you, the window is still broken. If the neighbor's forgiveness is analogous to the Sacrament of Confession, indulgences are what repair the window.

An indulgence is a grant from what is called by the Church the "Treasury of Merit." This refers to the overabundance of goodness in the world from the saving actions of Christ and also the good actions of saints who, throughout the ages, were faithful to the guidance of God's grace. All of these merits have their origin in the saving work of Christ in the world.

As all believers are members of the one body of Christ, these merits can be shared. An indulgence is an act of prayer or charity established by the Church through which one can receive a special share in these merits.

Indulgences are either plenary (total) or partial, referring to the amount of temporal punishment due to sin which is removed by it. To receive a plenary indulgence, certain acts must be performed (see box) in addition to the prescribed action. Also, the person who seeks to receive a plenary indulgence must be free of all attachment to sin. For a partial indulgence, at least the prescribed action must be performed.

An indulgence may either be applied to oneself, or to someone who has passed from this life.

An indulgence is **not** a way to "earn" grace or forgiveness. It is an additional act of faith through which God's grace is more fully received. It is a special gift during this Year of Mercy to have these indulgences so widely available.



WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS TO RECEIVE A PLENARY INDULGENCE?

To receive a Plenary Indulgence, in addition to the prescribed action and freedom from all attachment to sin, the person must:

1. Receive Holy Communion
2. Go to the Sacrament of Confession (*One Confession can be applied to any indulgences sought within 20 days on either side of the act*)
3. Pray for the Intentions of the Pope (*any prayers, according to the choice of the person; an Our Father and Apostle's Creed are suggested*)

How can I gain a Plenary Indulgence?

In addition to fulfilling the conditions (see box above), the following are some of the ways:

- *During the Year of Mercy, passing through the Holy Door at any designated church*
 - *Spending 30 minutes in prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament*
 - *Praying the Holy Rosary in a group setting*
 - *Reading Sacred Scripture with a prayerful intention for at least 30 minutes*
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