

On Indulgences

Q. 839. What is an Indulgence?

A. An Indulgence is the remission in whole or in part of the temporal punishment due to sin.

Q. 840. What does the word "indulgence" mean?

A. The word indulgence means a favor or concession. An indulgence obtains by a very slight penance the remission of penalties that would otherwise be severe.

Q. 841. Is an Indulgence a pardon of sin, or a license to commit sin?

A. An Indulgence is not a pardon of sin, nor a license to commit sin, and one who is in a state of mortal sin cannot gain an Indulgence.

Q. 842. How do good works done in mortal sin profit us?

A. Good works done in mortal sin profit us by obtaining for us the grace to repent and sometimes temporal blessings. Mortal sin deprives us of all our merit, nevertheless God will bestow gifts for every good deed as He will punish every evil deed.

Q. 843. How many kinds of Indulgences are there?

A. There are two kinds of Indulgences—Plenary and Partial.

Q. 844. What is Plenary Indulgence?

A. A Plenary Indulgence is the full remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.

Q. 845. Is it easy to gain a Plenary Indulgence?

A. It is not easy to gain a Plenary Indulgence, as we may understand from its great privilege. To gain a Plenary Indulgence, we must hate sin, be heartily sorry for even our venial sins, and have no desire for even the slightest sin. Though we may not gain entirely each Plenary Indulgence we seek, we always gain a part of each; that is, a partial indulgence, greater or less in proportion to our good dispositions.

Q. 846. Which are the most important Plenary Indulgences granted by the Church?

A. The most important Plenary Indulgences granted by the Church are (1) The Indulgences of a jubilee which the Pope grants every twenty-five years or on great occasions by which he gives special faculties to confessors for the absolution of reserved sins; (2) The Indulgence granted to the dying in their last agony.

Q. 847. What is a Partial Indulgence?

A. A Partial Indulgence is the remission of part of the temporal punishment due to sin.

Q. 848. How long has the practice of granting Indulgences been in use in the Church, and what was its origin?

A. The practice of granting Indulgences has been in use in the Church since the time of the apostles. It had its origin in the earnest prayers of holy persons, and especially of the martyrs begging the Church for their sake to shorten the severe penances of sinners, or to change them into lighter penances. The request was frequently granted and the penance remitted, shortened or changed, and with the penance remitted the temporal punishment corresponding to it was blotted out.

Q. 849. How do we show that the Church has the power to grant Indulgences?

A. We show that the Church has the power to grant Indulgences, because Christ has given it power to remit all guilt without restriction, and if the Church has power, in the Sacrament of penance, to remit the eternal punishment—which is the greatest—it must have power to remit the temporal or lesser punishment, even outside the Sacrament of Penance.

Q. 850. How do we know that these Indulgences have their effect?

A. We know that these Indulgences have their effect, because the Church, through her councils, declares Indulgences useful, and if they have no effect they would be useless, and the Church would teach error in spite of Christ's promise to guide it.

Q. 851. Have there ever existed abuses among the faithful in the manner of using Indulgences?

A. There have existed, in past ages, some abuses among the faithful in the manner of using Indulgences, and the Church has always labored to correct such abuses as soon as possible. In the use of pious practices we must be always guided by our lawful superiors.

Q. 852. How have the enemies of the Church made use of the abuse of Indulgences?

A. The enemies of the Church have made use of the abuse of Indulgences to deny the doctrine of Indulgences, and to break down the teaching and limit the power of the Church. Not to be deceived in matters of faith, we must always distinguish very carefully between the abuses to which a devotion may lead and the truths upon which the devotion rests.

Q. 853. How does the Church by means of Indulgences remit the temporal punishment due to sin?

A. The Church, by means of Indulgences, remits the temporal punishment due to sin by applying to us the merits of Jesus Christ, and the superabundant satisfactions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints; which merits and satisfactions are its spiritual treasury.

Q. 854. What do we mean by "superabundant satisfaction of the Virgin and the Saints"?

A. By the superabundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin and the saints, we mean all the satisfaction over and above what was necessary to satisfy for their own sins. As their good works were many and their sins few—the Blessed Virgin being sinless—the satisfaction not needed for themselves is kept by the Church in a spiritual treasury to be used for our benefit.

Q. 855. Does the Church, by granting Indulgences, free us from doing Penance?

A. The Church, by granting Indulgences, does not free us from doing penance, but simply makes our penance lighter that we may more easily satisfy for our sins and escape the punishments they deserve.

Q. 856. Who has the power to grant Indulgences?

A. The Pope alone has the power to grant Indulgences for the whole Church; but the bishops have power to grant partial Indulgences in their own diocese. Cardinals and some others, by the special permission of the Pope, have the right to grant certain Indulgences.

Q. 857. Where shall we find the Indulgences granted by the Church?

A. We shall find the Indulgences granted by the Church in the declarations of the Pope and of the

Sacred Congregation of Cardinals. These declarations are usually put into prayer books and books of devotion or instruction.

Q. 858. What must we do to gain an Indulgence?

A. To gain an Indulgence we must be in the state of grace and perform the works enjoined.

Q. 859. Besides being in a state of grace and performing the works enjoined, what else is necessary for the gaining of an Indulgence?

A. Besides being in a state of grace and performing the works enjoined, it is necessary for the gaining of an Indulgence to have at least the general intention of gaining it.

Q. 860. How and why should we make a general intention to gain all possible Indulgences each day?

A. We should make a general intention at our morning prayers to gain all possible Indulgences each day, because several of the prayers we say and good works we perform may have Indulgences attached to them, though we are not aware of it.

Q. 861. What works are generally enjoined for the gaining of Indulgences?

A. The works generally enjoined for the gaining of Indulgences are: The saying of certain prayers, fasting, and the use of certain articles of devotion; visits to Churches or altars, and the giving of alms. For the gaining of Plenary Indulgences it is generally required to go to confession and Holy Communion and pray for the intention of the Pope.

Q. 862. What does praying for a person's intention mean?

A. Praying for a person's intention means praying for whatever he prays for or desires to obtain through prayer—some spiritual or temporal favors.

Q. 863. What does an Indulgence of forty days mean?

A. An Indulgence of forty days means that for the prayer or work to which an Indulgence of forty days is attached, God remits as much of our temporal punishment as He remitted for forty days' canonical penance. We do not know just how much temporal punishment God remitted for forty days' public penance, but whatever it was, He remits the same now when we gain an Indulgence of forty days. The

same rule applies to Indulgences of a year or any length of time.

Q. 864. Why did the Church moderate its severe penances?

A. The Church moderated its severe penances, because when Christians—terrified by persecution—grew weaker in their faith, there was danger of some abandoning their religion rather than submit to the penances imposed. The Church, therefore, wishing to save as many as possible, made the sinner's penance as light as possible.

Q. 865. To what things may Indulgences be attached?

A. Plenary or Partial Indulgences may be attached to prayers and solid articles of devotion; to places such as churches, altars, shrines, to be visited; and by a special privilege they are sometimes attached to the good works of certain persons.

Q. 866. When do things lose the Indulgences attached to them?

A. Things lose the Indulgences attached to them: (1) When they are so changed at once as to be no longer what they were; (2) When they are sold. Rosaries and other indulgenced articles do not lose their indulgences, when they are loaned or given away, for the indulgence is not personal but attached to the article itself.

Q. 867. Will a weekly Confession suffice to gain during the week all Indulgences to which Confession is enjoined as one of the works?

A. Weekly confession will suffice to gain during the week all Indulgences to which confession is enjoined as one of the works, provided we continue in a state of grace, perform the other works enjoined and have the intention of gaining these Indulgences.

Q. 868. How and when may we apply Indulgences for the benefit of the souls in Purgatory?

A. We may apply Indulgences for the benefit of the souls in Purgatory by way of intercession; whenever this application is mentioned and permitted by the Church in granting the Indulgence; that is, when the Church declares that the Indulgence granted is applicable to the souls of the living or the souls in Purgatory; so that we may gain it for the benefit of either.