

Indulgences

Pope Francis recently bestowed the grace of an indulgence to works of mercy and service associated with the Coronavirus.

But wait a second.... Didn't the Church do away with things like indulgences long ago?

No!!!! The Church still believes in the power and importance of indulgences, and still grants them to those members of the Faithful who are striving to respond to the demands of love. But what exactly are they?

To understand the nature of an indulgence, it is important to understand two foundational principles – the profound wound caused by sin, and the reality of the mystical body of Christ.



Every time we sin, we do damage not only to our relationship with God but also to the Church – by failing to fulfill our duties of love; by giving bad example; by actively tearing down the good work of others; by not responding to grace – in all these ways we inflict damage upon the community of Faith that is the Church. And this damage must not only be forgiven, which takes place in the case of serious sin through sacramental confession, but it also must be healed, through good works, prayers and sacrifices offered up in reparation and atonement. This atonement may take place both in this life and in the life to come (purgatory), and is classically called “the temporal punishment due to sin.” An indulgence is the application of the prayers, sufferings and good works

of other members of the Body of Christ, including the saints, to the wounds caused by sin (either ourselves or a soul in purgatory) so that this temporal punishment might be remitted, either in whole (plenary indulgence) or in part (partial indulgence).

I like to think of indulgences as spiritual blood transfusions – the healing of the wounds in one part of the Church through the health and sacrifices of another.

It is all rooted in the mystery of our connectedness as a Church, a connectedness that is also known as communion. Indulgences are mysteries of mercy and communion.

Because the Pope is the visible head of the Body of Christ on earth, and is the successor of Saint Peter to whom Christ bestowed the Keys to the Kingdom, His Holiness has the divinely appointed power to facilitate this action of mercy and communion. While it is true that in the past the practice of indulgences may have been abused through human weakness, this fact alone does not mitigate the truth that the practice of applying spiritual remedies to the damage inflicted by sin is a beautiful and powerful gift of grace for which we should all be grateful.

In order to participate in this transfer of graces and merit, one must be a living member of the Church, that is, one must be in a state of grace. Thus, the general condition that to receive an

indulgence one must make a sacramental confession. What is more, the reception of Holy Communion is also generally connected to the reception of a indulgence, as it is Holy Communion that strengthens and manifests our communion with God and one another. The COVID19 Indulgence specifically allows for spiritual communions to take the place of sacramental communions, until such time as sacramental Holy Communion is again available to the faithful. The Church also asks that those individuals receiving an indulgence pray for the Pope and his intentions, and strive zealously to detach oneself from sin and those near occasions of sin which can be reasonably avoided.

Indulgences may be applied either to oneself or to someone who has died.

Plenary indulgences may be received once per day, while partial indulgences may be received many times per day.



[The Coronavirus Plenary Indulgences](#)