

# Indulgences

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# All Souls' Day

## ALL SOULS' INDULGENCE

On All Souls, November 2, under the conditions of confession, Communion, and the prescribed visit to a church or public or semipublic oratory and prayers for the intentions of the Pope (six Our Fathers, six Hail Marys, and six Glories), one may gain a plenary indulgence each time such a visit is made and those prayers are said.

The visit prescribed suffices for the gaining of the plenary indulgence even if the Blessed Sacrament is not kept in the church. For the indulgence of November 2, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament is not prescribed; therefore, the indulgence can certainly be gained also in a church or oratory where the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved.

The condition of "visiting a church or public or semipublic oratory (in the case of those who may legitimately use the latter)" is fulfilled by entering the church or oratory with at least a general or implicit intention of honoring God in Himself or in His Saints, and making use of some form of prayer, or indeed the prescribed form if any has been imposed by the grantor of the indulgence, or any other form, vocal or even mental, in accordance with the piety and devotion of the individual [*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, p. xiii, note].

The requirement, as regards the visit, is that you step out of the church and then enter it again. You need not leave the church grounds and you need not descend the

steps. It is sufficient to step outside the door. If you then turn around and go in again you make another visit.

Furthermore, "He is considered to go out of the church who goes into the sacristy or who goes out into the atrium of the church itself," says Ferreres (*Compendium Moralis*, edit. 16, 1940, Vol. 2, n. 795). The atrium is what you would call the vestibule, a room into which other doors open, from which other rooms open, an entry.

You may look at the matter in this way. Surely, you would not think that you had visited the church if you merely stepped into the vestibule and then went away or if you merely entered the sacristy. In that case you would say that you were not really in the church. Hence, if you go into the vestibule or into the sacristy from the church you may say that you have left the church.

However, we must remember that "if one is unable actually to enter the church because it is closed or access to it is for any reason obstructed, it will be enough to say the prayers at the door or on the steps, but the visit even in that case must be pious and devout. This special provision repeatedly made for jubilee visits is now regarded as general" (Bouscaren and Ellis, *Canon Law*, p. 339).

It is to be well noted that one and the same person cannot gain those plenary indulgences for All Souls' Day on both All Souls' Day and the following Sunday. This indulgence may be gained on the following Sunday only by those who did not obtain it on All Souls' Day. It was not the intention of the Sacred Penitentiary to grant the indulgences for two distinct days but only to give a second opportunity to those who were unable to gain the indulgence on the first day. This is clear from the very wording of the decree: "Wherefore His Holiness Pius XI . . . deigned to decide and declare that this plenary indulgence can be gained either on the second of November or on the

following Sunday, without any change in the other conditions . . ." (AAS, 31-23; Bouscaren, *C.L.D.*). You can gain it *either* on November 2 or on the following Sunday. But one member of the family may decide to gain the indulgences on All Souls' Day and another may prefer to wait until the following Sunday. But please note that in January, 1930, the Sacred Penitentiary decided that the faithful could gain the Portiuncula indulgence in one church on August 2 and then gain it in another church the following Sunday, when that day had been appointed by the local Ordinary (AAS, 1930, p. 43).

#### THE QUESTION OF A CONVENT CHAPEL

The question is often asked whether anyone can gain the plenary indulgence on All Souls' Day by visiting the chapel of a religious house or hospital or other institution instead of going to a nearby church.

Canon 929 states that the faithful of either sex who, for the pursuit of religious perfection or for education or for health's sake, live a common life in houses established with the consent of the Ordinaries, but which have no church or public chapel, and likewise all persons who live in the same place for the purpose of ministering to them, whenever a visit to any unspecified church or public oratory is prescribed for gaining indulgences, may make the visit in the chapel of their own house where they can legitimately satisfy the obligation of hearing Mass, provided that they duly perform the other works prescribed.

This includes religious as well as inmates of an institution, a place of study, a hospital, or asylum for the aged or disabled.

All the persons mentioned may visit the semipublic chapel of the house for the purpose of gaining the indulgences, provided the community has no church or public oratory.

If the community has a church or public oratory, then its members must make the required visit in that church or public oratory, and it may not be made in the community chapel.

The church or public oratory in question *must belong to the community*. The members of a community (all the persons mentioned above) which has no church or public oratory of its own need not go to a neighboring church or public oratory to make the visit required, no matter how close it may be, but may visit their own semipublic chapel, provided it has been approved by the local Ordinary for the saying of Mass.

Note well that we are considering that for the gaining of the indulgence a visit is prescribed *simply* to a church or public oratory. If a *specific* church or public oratory is prescribed, then the visit must be made in that church or public oratory.

On All Souls' Day there is no specific church or oratory prescribed. The grant reads:

To the faithful, on the day in which the commemoration of all the faithful departed is celebrated or on the Sunday immediately following, as often as they visit some church or public or (for those who may legitimately use it) a semipublic oratory in order to pray for the dead, is granted: A plenary indulgence applicable only to the souls in purgatory, if moreover they shall have gone to confession and received Holy Communion and shall have recited six Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glorys according to the intention of the Supreme Pontiff in each single visit" [*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, 590].

But suppose a specific church is prescribed, as for the gaining of the Portiuncula indulgence. Or suppose that you are for some reason unable to visit even the semipublic community chapel.

Canon 935 states that pious works imposed for gaining indulgences may be commuted by the confessor into other good works for those who are lawfully prevented from performing the good works prescribed. Thus those who are chronically or continually ill or prevented by some other physical obstacle from visiting a church or public oratory or a semipublic oratory, if they have the right to use it, may have that requirement changed into some other good work.

When the Commission of Interpretation of the Code was asked whether confessors, in virtue of Canon 935 can commute the visit to a particular church, even for the gaining of the indulgences known as *toties quoties* and of the *Portiuncula*, it replied, January 19, 1940, in the affirmative.

#### MORE ABOUT THE VISIT

In order to gain a plenary indulgence it is often prescribed that in addition to confession and Holy Communion a visit to the church and prayers for the Holy Father are necessary. Suppose conditions are such as to make a visit impossible. Does that mean that one cannot gain the plenary indulgence, though one does say prayers for the intentions of the Pope?

Canon 935 states that pious works imposed for gaining indulgences may be commuted by the confessor into other good works for those who are lawfully prevented from performing the good works prescribed. Confessor here means any priest who is approved for confessions. It is not required that the person actually go to confession; the confessor's power is not limited to the time of confession. As Genicot teaches, "the faculty need not necessarily be employed in actual confession but holds good as regards all persons whose confession a priest could at the moment hear."

Our question concerns the condition of a visit to the church. This visit is not always a condition for gaining a

plenary indulgence. So, for example, no visit to a church is prescribed in order to gain the plenary indulgence attached to the recitation of that prayer before an image of the Crucified after Holy Communion. Suppose you have made the Heroic Act and that because of this you can gain a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions every time you receive Holy Communion. One of the usual conditions is a visit to the church. When you enter the church in the morning to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion make the express intention of at the same time making a visit to the church in order to satisfy that condition for gaining a plenary indulgence. Then before you leave the church say one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory for the Pope's intention in order to gain the plenary indulgence attached to the Heroic Act and Holy Communion; then say your prayer before an image of the Crucified after Holy Communion and again recite one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory for the intentions of the Pope in order to gain that plenary indulgence. Thus in this visit you can gain two plenary indulgences, because no visit is required for the prayer before an image of the Crucified. If then, after Mass, you would make the Way of the Cross you would gain two more plenary indulgences, one for the Way of the Cross itself, and one because you made it on Communion day; and, remember, no visit to the church and no prayers for the Pope's intentions are required for gaining the indulgences of the Way of the Cross. If then you had a little more time and you would say five decades of the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament you would gain another plenary indulgence; also for this no prayers for the Pope's intentions are required. But perhaps you have not so much time in the morning but must leave church immediately after Mass. Then you can at least gain the first two plenary indulgences mentioned. We take it for granted that you are a

daily communicant or go to confession at least twice a month, thus also fulfilling the condition of confession (except a jubilee confession).

However, bear in mind that if a visit to the church and prayers for the Pope's intentions are required, you must both visit the church and pray for the Pope's intentions. If you cannot visit the church ask the confessor to commute that pious work to some other good work. Confessors can so commute also the visit to a particular church, even for the indulgences known as the *toties quoties* and of the Portiuncula. The priest might tell you for instance: "Since you cannot make the visit because of that lawful impediment, visit the church in spirit and say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys in honor of the Blessed Sacrament instead."

What is meant by a lawful impediment? While it is absolutely required that the impediment be real and not fictitious, nevertheless it is not necessary to speak about an absolute impossibility. We need not be too severe in defining a lawful impediment in this case. It need not even be a physical impediment, as in the case of those who are in prison or those who are sick, etc., but a moral impossibility (fear or danger of some grave injury or inconvenience) suffices, indeed even a moderately serious inconvenience or some truly reasonable motive, from whatever cause it may proceed, as when one is about to undertake a journey, when one lives far away from church, etc.

It is to be noted, moreover, that the impediment must last during the whole time in which the indulgence can be gained and not only for a part of the time. When in doubt as to whether the impediment is sufficient or not the commutation is to be considered lawful and valid.

We spoke above about prayers for the intentions of the Pope. The question arises whether these prayers must always be said while one is actually in the church for the prescribed

visit. Surely these prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father are among the conditions which are usually imposed for the gaining of plenary indulgences. But these prayers may as a general rule be recited anywhere, provided they are said within the time designated for the gaining of the indulgences. Indeed, documents are not lacking in which it is expressly declared that the prayers may be separated from the visit to the church. When the prayers are to be recited during the actual visit to the church, it is expressly so stated, and that happens quite frequently. Thus for the *toties quoties* plenary indulgence on November 2 and Portiuncula it is expressly prescribed that six Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glorys be said for the Pope's intentions *in each and every visit* (cf. De Angelis, *De Indulgentiis*).

#### THE CAPACITY OF GAINING THESE PLENARY INDULGENCES

Contrition is sincere sorrow for having offended God and hatred for the sins we have committed, with a firm purpose of sinning no more. There are two kinds of contrition: perfect contrition and imperfect contrition. Our contrition is perfect when we are sorry for our sins because sin offends God, whom we love above all things for His own sake. Our contrition is imperfect when we are sorry for our sins because they are hateful in themselves or because we fear God's punishment (Revised Edition of the *Baltimore Catechism*).

Again, three conditions are required for the gaining of indulgences: (1) the capacity of the subject; (2) the intention of gaining them; (3) the performance of the prescribed good work.

We are now discussing only the first condition, i.e., the capacity of the subject. Canon 925, Section 1, is quite explicit about this: "To be capable of gaining an indulgence for oneself one must be baptized, not excommunicated, in the

state of grace at least when he complies with the last work prescribed, and a subject of the grantor."

Here we are concerned with only one of these four requisites, namely, the state of grace. At least when the last work prescribed is complied with, the state of grace is required because temporal punishment due to sin is not remitted unless first the sin and eternal punishment are remitted. If a number of good works are prescribed for the gaining of an indulgence it is sufficient if the last one is complied with in the state of grace.

This is the condition that is indicated when the Church grants indulgences to those who are *contrite of heart* or to those who comply with the prescribed work with *at least a contrite heart*. It is to be well noted that the words italicized do not mean anything else except that the state of grace is required in order to gain an indulgence and that *if one is not in the state of grace* it is to be acquired by perfect contrition. From this it follows that if one is already in the state of grace one need not necessarily make an act of perfect contrition in order to gain an indulgence (S. C. Indulg., December 17, 1870).

We may add that in order *fully* to gain a plenary indulgence the state of grace alone is not sufficient. In addition to the state of grace, freedom from every venial sin is required and, indeed, such freedom from venial sin that one has no affection for it, no clinging to it; for if a sin is not forgiven the punishment due to that same sin cannot be remitted. First the sin must be forgiven and then the punishment remitted. However, in case there is not such absolute freedom from even venial sin a plenary indulgence can be gained *partially*. Canon 926 states: "A plenary indulgence is understood to be granted in such a way that if one cannot gain it in its entirety, one may gain it partially,

in proportion to his dispositions." This, by the way, answers the question so often asked: "If one plenary indulgence remits all the temporal punishment due to sin, why should I gain more than one on the same day?"

That freedom from venial sin and affection thereto admits of various degrees. The greater the freedom, the more fully the plenary indulgence is gained.

However, devotion and the fervor of charity are not actually required for the gaining of indulgences nor do they *directly* augment the fruit to be gained through them as such. Their influence is only *indirect*, inasmuch as devotion and fervor procure the remission of venial sins and hence bring it about that through the indulgence the punishment due to those sins is remitted (cf. Cappello, *De Sacramentis*, Vol. 2, n. 965).