

# The Church Suffering - Purgatory

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[Since the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, there has been a considerable simplifying of ways and means of gaining an indulgence. We reproduce this pamphlet, however, by way of encouraging Catholics to pray for the Souls in Purgatory and to remind them of the rich treasury of prayers available to them to deepen their spiritual life and to be of assistance to the 'Church Suffering'.

CATHOLICS are bound to believe that "there is a purgatory and that the souls detained therein are helped by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar." (Council of Trent, Session 25, On Purgatory.) This doctrine of the Church is also the doctrine of Holy Scripture and of Tradition.

We will mention but two such passages. In the Second Book of Machabees, Chapter 12, Verses 43-46, we read: "Judas, making a gathering, sent twelve thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem for sacrifice to be offered for sins of the dead, thinking well and religiously concerning the resurrection. (For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.) And because he considered that they who had fallen asleep with godliness, had great grace laid up for them, it is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."

And St. Paul in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 3, Verses 14-16, says: "If any man's work abide, which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

The Church, which teaches that the fire of hell is really fire, has not said the same of purgatory. St. Catherine of Genoa, whose teaching was examined and approved before she was canonized, says: "This sense of the grievousness of being kept from beholding the Divine Light, coupled with that instinctive longing which would fain be without hindrance to follow the enticing look of God — these things, I say, make up the pains of the souls in purgatory."

## WHERE IS PURGATORY?

Relative to purgatory, we can only say that it is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.

Regarding the place, we may distinguish, according to St. Thomas, and say that purgatory is one place according to general law, and thus the location of purgatory is a lower place joined to hell, so that one and the same is the fire that torments the damned in hell and purifies the just in purgatory.

But another is the place of purgatory according to dispensation; and so sometimes we read of those who are punished in diverse places, either for the instruction of the living or for the aid of the dead,

that their punishment being known to the living it may be mitigated through the suffrages of the Church.

#### WHY DO THE POOR SOULS SUFFER?

If this question means on what account do they suffer, we reply that they suffer either for venial sins that are not repented nor forgiven before death, or for sins whose guilt was forgiven in this life but whose punishment, if any is still due, must be completed after death.

If it means why do they suffer, the answer is that they suffer in order to make atonement to God and to remake their souls. We cannot imagine a soul that defies its Maker basking unrebuked in His love — reason rebels against the thought. There must be a penalty, punishment — the offence must in some way be paid for. Reason tells us that. A reasonable boy who is punished for a fault by his father takes the punishment understandingly, even though it is hard; and one who knows that he ought to be punished, and is not, instinctively feels that something is not in order, since right is not being done and wrong is being let go free.

Suffering remakes our souls, heals them. Let us say that in this life it brings back the bodily appetites, overgrown and unhealthy, to their natural limits, restores the soul's control over the body, and frees the soul from wrong habits and desires; and through suffering willingly endured, we can have our purgatory, or a part of it, in this life. If at the hour of death the soul is not pure enough to enter heaven at once, it will burn out all unworthiness by suffering willingly in purgatory. Willingly, we say; for in purgatory the soul realizes what is due to God and desires wholly to repair the wrong done to Him. In its great love it longs to suffer in order to be clean, in order to reach God, in order to make amends to Love.

This willing love is beautifully expressed in Newman's "The Dream of Gerontius," in which the soul, "with the intemperate energy of love, flies to the feet of the Emmanuel," but, realizing its unworthiness, speaks thus to the Guardian Angel:

"Take me away, and in the lowest deep  
There let me be, And there in hope the lone night-watches  
keep, Told out for me. There, motionless and happy in my pain,  
Lone, not forlorn — There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,  
Until the morn. There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,  
Which ne'er can cease To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess  
Of its Sole Peace There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:  
Take me away, That sooner I may rise, and go above,  
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day."

#### STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN?

It is possible to go straight to heaven; and there are, no doubt, souls that pass straight to heaven. People should do more than seek to avoid hell. By striving to avoid even purgatory, they will all the more surely at least avoid hell. Everyone should strive to attain heaven immediately after death, because God really desires it as part of His plan.

There are various means of avoiding or mitigating our purgatory. To mention some of them, we may briefly enumerate: Baptism, martyrdom, frequent confession, the gaining of indulgences, frequent Communion, Extreme Unction (the Anointing of the Sick), Mass celebrated for the living, the religious life. Then there is the spirit of penance, which can be developed by every Christian by the constant remembrance of past sins and by flight from the occasions of sin. To these means may be added the loving acceptance of an earthly purgatory and of death, the practice of doing all for the

love of God, the forgiveness of injuries, the avoidance of passing judgment on others, spiritual infancy, detachment from earthly things.

Other holy dispositions and salutary practices are the constant remembrance of the last things and the heroic request for one's purgatory here on earth.

An infallible means of mitigating our purgatory on earth is a great charity toward the souls of the departed; for God treats us as we treat others. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

#### THEY CAN PRAY FOR US

It is the pious belief of the Catholic faithful that the Poor Souls can pray for us. Though in their sufferings they cannot help themselves, they can help others, even though they are in purgatory. They can pray for others, for they are in the grace of God. In fact, according to the holy Fathers, that is one of the greatest joys and consolations of the Poor Souls in their night of pain; already from purgatory they can help us and repay us by their intercession.

St. Catherine of Bologna says: "When I wish to be sure of getting a favour I have recourse to these suffering souls, that they may intercede for me with our common Father; and usually I feel that I have them to thank for the answer to my prayer."

"Oh, if we but knew," says the sainted Cure of Ars, "the power that these good souls have over the heart of God and what graces we can get through their intercession, we would not so often forget them.

We must pray much for them that they may pray much for us."

This is, indeed, a Christian thought of olden times, one that is brought home to us even from the inscriptions in the Roman catacombs.

#### SUMMING UP

The definitive teaching of the Church with reference to purgatory is very limited. The Council of Trent decreed: "Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has from the Sacred Scriptures and the ancient tradition of the Fathers taught in Councils and very recently in this Ecumenical Synod that there is a purgatory and that the souls detained therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar; the Holy Synod enjoins on the Bishops that they diligently endeavour to have the sound doctrine of the Fathers in councils regarding purgatory everywhere taught and preached, held and believed by the faithful."

Points of sound doctrine are the following:

1. It is absolutely certain that the souls in purgatory are sure of their salvation and can no longer sin. They "rest in Christ" and "sleep in the sleep of peace."
2. It is likewise certain that they suffer the pain of loss, temporary deprivation of the Beatific Vision, the sight of God, and that this pain is very great.
3. It is the common teaching that they likewise suffer the pain of sense, and it is the more common opinion in the Latin Church that they suffer by fire.
4. As regards the gravity of the pain, nothing certain is known. Theologians differ. St. Thomas Aquinas, after pointing out that Scripture reveals nothing on this question and that no decisive

argument can be brought forward to settle it, considers it more probable and more in accordance with private revelations to hold that, as a rule, souls suffer their purgation in the fire of hell itself. And he applies the illustration of St. Augustine's, "In one fire, gold glows and straw smokes," to show how the fire which endlessly torments the devils can purify a soul that dies in the charity of God. St. Thomas thinks that the least pain of purgatory is greater than the greatest of this life; while St. Bonaventure thinks that the greatest, but not the least, pain of purgatory is more bitter than the pains of this life. But all theologians hold that the suffering souls bear these pains patiently, in great resignation and hope, and that this hope affords them immense Joy.

5. There is likewise nothing certain as regards the duration of the pains. But all Fathers and theologians are unanimous in teaching that purgatory will not endure beyond the last day. Those who live at the end of the world will be quickly cleansed of their light stains by means known to God.

6. The suffering souls are also helped by the prayers of the saints in heaven, as can be seen by the prayers of the Church, for example: "That they may come to share eternal bliss through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin and of all the saints."

That, briefly, is about all we know of purgatory. It remains to help the holy souls by prayers, Masses, good works, indulgences.

"It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead." They will fervently pray for us after their release and, very probably, also while still in purgatory.

#### PRAYER FOR THE POOR SOULS

There is a mighty incentive to prayer for the holy souls in the following incident related by Cardinal Baronius.

A holy man, and one who during the whole course of his life had done much for the souls in purgatory, lay in the agonies of death. He was, moreover, sorely tempted by the devil — tempted in particular with thoughts of despair. Suddenly in the midst of this darkness he saw thousands of heavenly spirits, clad in shining armour, fighting in his defense against the Evil One. "Oh, who are you, blessed beings, who thus defend me?" he cried in grateful astonishment. Came the answer, "We are the souls whom by your penances and Masses you have released from purgatory, and we have come to conduct you to heaven."

What a reward for his ceaseless charity in behalf of the suffering souls!

We know that prayer for the dead is indeed one of the very greatest acts of charity. As St. Thomas says, "Prayer for the dead is more pleasing to God than prayer for the living, for the dead have a greater need of assistance, and they do not possess that power of helping themselves which the living enjoy."

"Prayer for the dead is more pleasing to God." It is a prayer of self-sacrificing devotion. It most nearly approaches the perfect negation of "Each man for himself." Such prayer is perfect in its humility. It is a work of charity that can easily be carried out with the perfection of obedience to Our Lord's words, "Let not your left hand know what your right hand does." Such prayer possesses extraordinary efficacy. The God of mercy has willed that through it we may dispense of the treasure of His mercy as we will, may apply the Blood of Jesus for the adorable purposes of expiation and

deliverance. Moreover, prayer for the dead urges us on to greater personal efforts at holiness and thus brings to us numerous graces and blessings.

"The dead have a greater need of assistance." Purgatory, to use Biblical names given this place of expiation, is a prison house, a pit; it is the cleansing fire, the furnace of purification, the refining pot. There all stains must be removed from the soul by suffering, the most grievous of which is the loss of God, unutterable longing for the unseen face of Jesus, for the Beatific Vision. "The least suffering of a Poor Soul is greater than the most intense agony we can think of here," says St. Anselm. "I consider that this transitory fire is more insupportable than all the afflictions of this earth," St. Gregory tells us. Put all the sighs and tears and miseries and woes of earth together. More than that the holy souls must suffer. Oh, how great their need of assistance!

"They do not possess the power of helping themselves." The Church Suffering is helpless unless helped by the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant. We repeat: The Poor Souls cannot help themselves; but they can help and pray for us. And we can pray for them. Happy souls! Heaven is surely theirs. Poor souls! How fearfully they feel that nothing impure shall enter the kingdom of heaven!

Yes; pray for the living, for the sick, the afflicted, sinners, the dying. It is pleasing to the God of love and mercy. But most precious, most powerful, most dear to the Sacred Heart is prayer for the souls in purgatory. And remember that souls are helped principally by the most august Sacrifice of the Altar. It is the most efficacious means. "Masses! Masses!"

Pray for your deceased parents, relatives, and friends first of all. "At least you, my friends!" they moan in pitiable anguish. "Oh, why don't you pray for me!" How little we do for them! How quickly we forget our dearest ones in their direst need! Revelations to saints tell us that for little faults souls must sometimes suffer for years. We do not know. Let us, accordingly, pray unceasingly, and have Masses said, and assist at Mass, and receive Holy Communion, and offer up mortifications for our loved ones. If they happily need them not, our good works will benefit other souls. God lets no prayer go unanswered.

Pray for the most abandoned souls. Some, it is thought, may remain in purgatory until the judgment day. How many there are who are saved at the very last moment by an act of perfect contrition — but saved for a long, long purgatory! A lady's husband — we tell it by way of illustration — had committed suicide by flinging himself into a raging stream. Almost frantic in her grief, she came to the sainted Cure d'Ars. "Be comforted," said he. "There was some distance from the bridge to the stream. Your husband before expiring made his peace with God by a rapid act of perfect contrition. He is saved, but in purgatory. You must pray hard for him."

Pray for those nearest their release, that God may quickly be honoured the more by the newfound bliss of many a liberated soul. How truly we can promote the honour and glory of God in this way!

Pray for all the departed. Set no limit to your devotion. And let there be an ever recurring refrain in your heart as you do and dare for the suffering souls. Let it be the gracious Saviour's consoling assurance: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

#### MASS — MOST EFFICACIOUS MEANS

"Lay this body anywhere," St. Monica said to her son, St. Augustine; "be not concerned about that; only this I beg of you, that, wheresoever you be, you make remembrance of me at the Lord's altar." And from his deathbed St. Louis of France wrote to Philip the Bold, "Dear son, I pray you that you

will help me with Masses." Again, St. Margaret of Scotland, when dying, said to Theodoric, "One thing I desire of you, that as long as you live you will remember my poor soul in your Masses."

It is an outstanding fact, and a deplorable one, that many Catholics fail to realize that nothing possesses greater efficacy for the relief and release of the souls in purgatory than the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass. They forget that the Church teaches that the holy souls are helped principally by the most acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar. It is the most efficacious means. They forget that, as St. John Chrysostom says, at the moment when the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered the angels present fly to open the prisons of purgatory and to execute all that God has been pleased to grant. They forget the consoling statement of St. Jerome that when the Holy Sacrifice is offered for a soul in purgatory, it ceases to suffer during the time Holy Mass lasts. They forget that funeral pomp and flowers and cold blocks of stone are but a solace for the living, not aids for the dead. They are blind to the effects of the salutary Sacrifice, blind to the great relief received by souls while the holy and tremendous Victim lies upon the altar.

And why do they forget all this? Is it not because of that indifference which is synonymous with half-faith, the thing that is responsible for the strange inconsistencies frequently noted in Catholic life? We repeat, it is truly deplorable how this most efficacious means is subjected to strange neglect in its application to the Poor Souls.

Holy Mass should be offered up especially for the dear ones at most frequent intervals, no matter how long ago departed. But this bounden duty is almost criminally disregarded. This being so, we cannot but add the remark that the last will and testament of a Catholic in which there is no provision for Masses is a document as sadly unjust to self as it is incomplete. Heirs, generally speaking, are the same the world over: selfish, grasping, greedy, usually dissatisfied with their portion. They will do little or nothing for the testator unless under compulsion. Countless instances are recorded where Catholics of means died, leaving no bequest for Masses, with the result that the only Mass offered for them was the funeral Requiem. Not to provide for self in a matter so vital is extremely rash, to say the least.

We add — a pertinent remark — that Catholics instead of sending flowers, which can be of no assistance to deceased friends, should send spiritual bouquets of Masses, sometimes called Mass cards. The donor arranges with the priest to have the Holy Sacrifice offered a certain number of times for the deceased, procures a card specially prepared for the purpose, and sends it to the house of mourning. What a fragrant token of love!

Nor ought Masses to be offered only for relatives and friends. They should be requested for the souls in purgatory in general also — and many of them. As prayer for the dead is one of the greatest acts of charity we can perform for our neighbour, so the offering of Holy Mass for them is, without doubt, the greatest of the greatest.

"Masses! Masses!" the suffering souls wail in anguish. "Oh, if you but knew!"

#### THE HEROIC ACT

The Heroic Act is explained in the following decree of the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences dated Dec. 18, 1885, and confirmed the following day by Pope Leo XIII:

"The Heroic Act of Charity in favour of the souls detained in purgatory consists in this, that a member of the Church militant, either using a set formula or simply by an act of his will, offers to God for the souls in purgatory all the satisfactory works which he will perform during his lifetime,

and also all the suffrages which may accrue to him after his death. Many Christians devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, acting on the advice of the Theatine Regular Cleric, Father Caspar Olider, of blessed memory, make it a practice to deposit the said merits and suffrages as it were into the hands of the Blessed Virgin that she may distribute these favours to the souls in purgatory according to her own merciful pleasure." [Italics ours.]

1. The Heroic Act consists in this, that a Catholic offers to God for the souls in purgatory all the satisfactory works which he himself will perform as long as he lives, as well as all the suffrages that come to him in any way after his death.
2. This act may be made in any way, without any particular formula, and even only mentally.
3. Each one is free to offer his suffrages (prayers, supplications, good works) either in whole or in part to God for the souls in purgatory.
4. He who has made the Heroic Act even in its most ample form, that is, by offering the suffrages in whole to God, is not by any means prevented from offering suffrages for this or that particular soul, as he pleases. For it must needs be that each one should have the power of satisfying his special obligations, which frequently arise.
5. The Heroic Act is always revocable; and once revoked, it may again be made or renewed. This revocation, as well as this renewal, may be explicit or implicit. For instance, one who has made the Heroic Act cannot per se gain a jubilee indulgence for himself. But if he wishes, he can certainly acquire it for himself, inasmuch as by the intention of gaining an indulgence of this kind he revokes the Heroic Act; and, having acquired it, that act again obtains its force and efficacy, unless it has been perpetually revoked.

From these principles we gather that the Heroic Act may be made permanently or for a definite time only. We also gather that if one wishes to be sure of gaining the indulgence of the Apostolic Blessing or the plenary indulgence imparted in the confessional by those who have that special faculty, one may revoke the Heroic Act for that purpose and then renew it again. It suffices that this be done mentally.

The Heroic Act is not a vow but partakes more of the nature of an offering made to God and to Mary and is revocable at will. It always remains doubtful to what extent God accepts this oblation. The practice of the Heroic Act is based on the communion of saints, in virtue of which the good deeds of one member of Christ's body benefit all the other members. Its meritoriousness results from the more intense charity (love of God and His suffering friends) which inspires it. Its heroicness arises from the willingness it involves to take upon oneself the dreadful pains of purgatory for the love of one's neighbour. For those who make it, however, there always remains the reasonable hope that God in His goodness, and the sainted souls in their gratitude, will not allow the punishment to be exacted to the full. God will surely never be outdone in generosity. For those who are a little worried about the Heroic Act and would like to have some exceptions, the above explanation will be consoling. Those who generously wish to persist in all the heroicness of the act will probably make only those exemptions suggested by number 4 above. But all are perfectly free to do as they please in this matter.

It is to be further noted (Lehmkuhl, *Theol. Moralis*, Vol. 1, 261) that all the good works of a just man, whether they be meritorious, satisfactory, or impetratory (made on behalf of another as an entreaty), also possess a satisfactory value (inasmuch as all are laborious, says Vermeersch) by

which we may satisfy for the punishments due in purgatory either to our own sins or to the sins of others. All this satisfactory value is what we give to the Poor Souls through the Heroic Act, in addition to the suffrages offered for us after our death. Nor does this satisfactory value in any way diminish merit. Moreover, it purifies the soul of man and makes him more acceptable to God.

The conclusion we draw from this is that there is nothing to prevent one who has made the Heroic Act from praying (sacrificing, suffering, working) for any and every grace and blessing, be it for oneself or others, living or dead, since every good work of what kind so ever possesses some satisfactory value and he has offered all such value to the poor souls. Indeed, this should be an incentive to multiply his good acts for his spiritual growth. Without his even adverting to it, he will then be constantly offering his gifts to the holy souls.

The following is one way of making the Heroic Act (remember it is not a vow and does not in any way bind under pain of sin, i.e., it may be freely retracted at any time without sin): "O my heavenly Father, in union with the merits of Jesus and Mary, I offer you for the holy souls in purgatory all the satisfactory works of my whole life, including all the indulgences that I gain, as well as all the works which will be offered for me and all the indulgences that will be gained for me after my death. And these works I place in the hands of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, that she may apply them to those souls whom she, in her wisdom and maternal love, desires to free soonest from purgatory. Mercifully accept, O God, this offering and let me increase daily in your grace. Amen."

We add that the faithful who make the Heroic Act in favor of the Poor Souls may gain a plenary indulgence, applicable only to the departed, on any day that they receive Holy Communion, provided they have made their confession and visited some church or public oratory and said at least one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the intention of the Pope. They can also gain a plenary indulgence on any Monday of the year (or, if prevented then, on the following Sunday) if they hear Mass in suffrage of the holy souls and fulfill the usual conditions, i.e., confession, Communion, visit, prayer as above for the Pope's intention.

Priests who have made the Heroic Act enjoy the indult of a personal privileged altar every day of the year.

N.B. Religious who have no church or public oratory of their own attached to their house may visit the semi-public chapel in their house and yet comply with the above visit to a church or public oratory. (Cf. Canon 929 of the 1917 Code.)

## GAINING INDULGENCES

One of the conditions for gaining an indulgence is that you have the intention to gain it. If you wish to gain indulgences for yourself, it is sufficient that you have at least a general intention, one that you made with your will in a general way, to gain all the indulgences you can gain, which intention will hold good until you retract it. But it is advisable at the beginning of each day to renew your intention to gain all the indulgences that you can gain during the course of the day. However, as stated, to gain an indulgence for yourself it is not necessary that your intention be actual or virtual (virtual: without actual advertence to the will-act made); it suffices that it be habitual, once made by the will and not retracted.

So you must have the intention in order to gain indulgences for yourself. There is perhaps one exception, namely, the plenary indulgence to be gained because of the Apostolic Blessing in the hour of death, of which the Roman Ritual [of St Pius V] (Title V, chapter 6, number I) says that it is

wont to be imparted "to those sick who either have asked for it or who in all probability would have asked for it." Hence, in this case, and in this case alone, it seems that the intention that is called "interpretative" by theologians suffices. An interpretative intention is one that actually was not and is not but would be if one had adverted to it; it is merely a disposition of the will toward having an intention.

Now, what we have said above applies to indulgences that you can gain for yourself. When it is a question of gaining indulgences for the faithful departed, an express and actual intention to do so is required, unless one has made the Heroic Act in favour of the Poor Souls. In other words, when you wish to gain indulgences for the Poor Souls, a general intention to gain them is not sufficient; you must have an explicit and at least habitual intention to gain them for the Poor Souls. Hence, it is advisable that when you wish to gain all the indulgences you can gain during a certain day for the Poor Souls, you make just that intention in the morning, unless, we repeat, you have made the Heroic Act, in which case all the indulgences you can gain at any time are already given in advance to the Poor Souls, and that implicit intention suffices.

We might mention one exception to the above. It is the indulgence of the privileged altar, because in that case the Mass is in itself privileged, inasmuch as a Mass offered on a privileged altar is in itself enriched with a plenary indulgence for the deceased. Hence, the application of this indulgence does not depend upon the intention, not even upon the virtual intention of the priest who offers the Mass or of the one who gives the stipend. The reason for this is that this indulgence is applied by the priest as a minister of the Church. And just as the priest is not free to offer or not to offer the Sacrifice in the name of the Church, so neither is he free not to apply the indulgence which the Church has annexed to that particular oblation. (Cf. De Angelis, De Indulgentiis, nn. 64, 65.)

We may add that according to Canon 930 [of the 1917 Code of Canon Law] all the indulgences granted by the Roman Pontiff, through himself or through the Roman Curia, are applicable to the souls in purgatory, unless otherwise stated. Moreover, there are some indulgences which are applicable to the Poor Souls alone, such as the plenary indulgences that can be gained on All Souls' Day as often as one who has received the Sacraments visits the church and says six Our Fathers, six Hail Marys, and six Glories for the intention of the Holy Father. [The new Enchiridion now states: 'A plenary indulgence, applicable ONLY to the souls in purgatory, may be obtained by those who, on All Souls Day, piously visit a church, public oratory, or - for those entitled to use it, - a semi public oratory. It may be acquired either on the day designated as All Souls Day or, with the consent of the bishop, on the preceding or following Sunday or the feast of All Saints. On visiting the church or oratory it is required that one Our Father and the Creed be recited.' Number 67.]

Two ejaculatory prayers that have indulgences applicable only to the holy souls are the following, each having an indulgence of 300 days each time, [a partial indulgence]: "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen."

"Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them everlasting rest."

#### FACTS ABOUT INDULGENCES

An indulgence is a remission in whole or in part of the temporal punishment due to sin. Often temporal punishment remains due to a sinner after eternal punishment has been remitted. That temporal punishment consists in sufferings which God will inflict upon the soul in this life or in purgatory, until it has paid all its debts and is quite free from stain.

But this debt of temporal punishment can also be paid by gaining indulgences. One can gain indulgences either for oneself or for the poor souls.

An indulgence is plenary when all the punishment due to sin may be remitted by it. It is partial when a part of the temporal punishment is remitted. {Note, the new (1968) Enchiridion now proclaims that every indulgence is now either plenary or partial. It no longer categorises partial indulgences as having specific values, but clearly, previous custom gives us a guide as to the spiritual merit of various prayers and acts.]

How much temporal punishment is remitted by a partial indulgence of 600 days, for instance? We give the following popular explanation.

In the early ages of the Church the penances imposed for sin were much more severe than are those now usually given. There were public penances, severe fasts, wearing of sackcloth and ashes, and such like severities. Some penances were called canonical, because they were imposed, not at the mere will of the confessor, but according to certain canons, or laws, of the Church. So, for instance, for breaking the Sabbath one had to fast three days on bread and water; ten days for talking in church. A penance of from three to ten years was imposed for disobedience; of ten years for adulterers; of a lifetime for murderers. Such penitents were, moreover, excluded from church or made to stand at the door in penitential garb. By doing this penance they obtained remission of temporal punishments due to their sins.

Now, when we say that one gains an indulgence of 600 days, for instance, we do not mean that one's purgatory is shortened by 600 days. We mean that as much temporal punishment is remitted by God as would have been remitted by 600 days of the severe canonical penance of the early ages of the Church.

{Bear in mind that should someone perform 600 days of actual bread and water fasting, for instance, as was done in years gone by, then the Merciful and Gracious God would reward such a soul with an abundance of other spiritual benefits as well, benefits supplementary to the partial indulgence. The Good God cannot be outdone in Generosity. He does not play favourites.}

This being so, what a treasure indulgences really are! Those are, indeed, truly wise in the Holy Spirit who strive to gain as many as they can.

And those who make the intention and gain indulgences for the Poor Souls will be sending many souls from purgatory to heaven and will merit a great reward. "Amen, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of these you did it to me" . . . "I was in prison and you came to me."

#### CONDENSED INFORMATION

Canon 911 of the [1917] Code of Canon Law says that "indulgences should be greatly esteemed by all." And we must often recall that the gaining of indulgences is of greater advantage to us than the gaining of all earthly goods and that we ought cheerfully to take upon ourselves the little trouble which their gaining may cause us.

Then Canon 928 [of the 1917 Code] says that a partial indulgence may be gained as often as the works prescribed are repeated, unless the contrary is expressly stated. This Canon also says that, unless the contrary is expressly stated, a plenary indulgence may be gained only once a day, even though the same work is performed several times.

It is perhaps because of a wrong understanding of this Canon that some people have the erroneous notion that more than one plenary indulgence can never be gained on the same day. The notion is erroneous. The Canon says, "Unless the contrary is expressly stated"; and the contrary is expressly stated regarding various plenary indulgences. Again, the Canon speaks about the same work. It does not say that more than one plenary indulgence cannot be gained on the same day for different works.

#### HELPFUL ITEMS

Now, when we reflect on some of the recent decrees on indulgences and see how matters stand today, we can enumerate the following helpful items of information. {Consult the 1968 Enchiridion for the current legislation on various Indulgences and their requirements.}

1. As regards for the Pope's intentions, we find that for the Portiuncula indulgence (the special indulgence available to those who visit a Franciscan Church) the faithful are at each visit to the church to say the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory six times. No other prayers will do.
2. So, too, for all such 'toties quoties' plenary indulgences (as often as the church is visited) — e.g., All Souls' Day, Rosary Sunday for the members of the Confraternity — six Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glories are prescribed. No other prayers will do.
3. According to a special decree, one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions, or the equivalent, is sufficient for gaining other plenary indulgences, for instance, like the one that can be gained for saying the prayer before an image of the Crucified after Holy Communion.
4. Indulgences attached to ejaculatory prayers and invocations, according to a special decree, can be gained also if the prayers are said only mentally.
5. Canon 934 [of the 1917 Code] says that mental prayer alone is not sufficient when prayer for the Pope's intentions is prescribed; so vocal prayers are then required, that is to say, the words must be uttered exteriorly, though they need not be audible.
6. If one has also confessed and received Holy Communion, a plenary indulgence may be gained as often as one says the Rosary of five decades before the Blessed Sacrament, either exposed or reserved in the tabernacle. No prayers for the Pope's intentions are in this case prescribed or necessary.
7. One plenary indulgence can be gained each time the Way of the Cross is made; and one additional plenary indulgence the first time on Communion days. The same indulgence can be gained with a crucifix enriched with the indulgences of the Way of the Cross when one is legitimately impeded from making the stations proper. No prayers for the Pope's intentions prescribed.
8. A plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions, except that the prayers for the Pope's intentions may be said anywhere, may be gained daily for reciting the whole of the Divine Office before the Blessed Sacrament, even if divided into parts. (There are partial indulgences for such recitation of a part of the Divine Office.)
9. The words of [the 1917] Canon 934, n. 2, to the effect that "indulgences (annexed to prayers) entirely cease because of any addition, subtraction, or interpolation whatsoever," are not to be understood rigorously of any and every addition, etc., but rather only of those which alter the substance of the prayers. (Sacred Penitentiary, Nov. 26, 1934.)

## OTHER POINTS

As we think over these generous concessions, a number of other points come to mind.

1. The usual conditions for gaining a plenary indulgence are: confession; Communion; visit to a church or public oratory (or semi-public oratory for those who have the right to use it, if no church or public oratory is attached, provided nothing special is prescribed); prayer for the Pope's intentions. It is to be noted that the usual conditions are not always prescribed, e.g., none of them are really prescribed for gaining the indulgence of the Way of the Cross.
2. The parish church, etc., does not concern the Sisters who have a chapel, when a visit is prescribed for the gaining of an indulgence, no matter how near it is.
3. Confession ceases to be a condition for daily communicants or those who go at least five times a week, or for those who confess at least twice a month, except for a Jubilee indulgence.
4. The Pope's intentions are, ordinarily:

1. The spread of the Catholic Faith. 2. The liberty and exaltation of Holy Mother Church. 3. The conversion of sinners. 4. Peace and concord among Christian rulers. 5. The extirpation of heresy.

These intentions need not be known or adverted to, however. It suffices simply to pray for the Pope's intentions.

## SOME PLENARY INDULGENCES

So, taking the foregoing as a sort of basis, we find that the following are some plenary indulgences that may be gained each day, observing what is to be observed. All are applicable to the Poor Souls.

1. One plenary indulgence for saying the prayer before an image of the Crucified after Holy Communion. No visit to church prescribed. One Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions sufficient.
2. One each Communion day for those who have made the Heroic Act. Usual conditions. One Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions sufficient.
3. One each day, under the usual conditions, for saying the prayer to Christ the King, which begins: "O Christ Jesus, I acknowledge Thee to be the King of the universe. . . ." One Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions sufficient.
4. One each day for saying the whole breviary for the day before the Blessed Sacrament. Confession and Communion. One Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions.
5. One each time for saying the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament. The conditions are confession and Communion. No prayers for the Holy Father required. The decades may be separated, provided the five are said within the same day.
6. Two plenary indulgences for the first time the Way of the Cross is made on Communion day. One each additional time, the only condition for this one being the state of grace, which is, of course, necessary for all indulgences.
7. Visit the church and say one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory for the Pope's intentions, in order to gain any indulgence you may be able to gain because of prayers said daily for a certain length of time (as "Jesus, Mary, Joseph"), because of certain feast days, Confraternity grants, etc., for which

only a visit and prayer may still be needed. This visit and prayer may be all that is still needed to gain a plenary indulgence and if so. God knows, you may gain it.

#### LITTLE INDULGENCED PRAYERS

[The Church's 1968 Enchiridion classifies all the following as capable of meriting a partial indulgence.]

Indulgences of seven years for each of the following each time it is said, even mentally. (If you wish the indulgence to go to the Poor Souls, let that be your intention.)

1. Jesus, Mary, Joseph.
2. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul.
3. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony.
4. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, let me breathe forth my spirit in peace with you.
5. My Lord and my God, being truly sorry for my sins and loving Thee above all things, I now profess my willingness cheerfully to accept from Thy hand whatever kind of death it may please Thee to send me, with all its sorrows, pain, and anguish. Amen.
6. My Lord and my God! (But only at the Elevation of the Host at Mass or during Exposition.)
7. The longer ejaculatory prayer beginning "Soul of Christ, be my sanctification," if recited after Holy Communion.
8. Making the Sign of the Cross with holy water, pronouncing the words.

Indulgence of three years for each of the following each time it is said, even mentally.

1. My God, I believe in Thee, because Thou art truth itself.
2. My God, I hope in Thee, because Thou are kind and faithful to Thy promises.
3. My God, I love Thee above all things, because Thou art all good, and I love my neighbour as myself, for love of Thee.
4. My God, I am truly sorry for my sins, because I love Thee Who art so very good, and I firmly purpose to sin no more.
5. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. (While saying this you must make the Sign of the Cross.)
6. By the sign of the holy Cross, deliver us from our enemies, O our God.
7. We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.
8. Graciously give peace, O Lord, in our days, that, being assisted by the help of Thy mercy, we may ever be free from sin and safe from all disturbance. Amen.
9. Be mindful of us, O blessed Joseph, and intercede for us with thy foster-Son by the pleading of thy prayer: do thou, in like manner, render the blessed Virgin Mary thy Spouse, gracious unto us, for she is the Mother of Him, who with the Father and Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth world without end. Amen.

10. Grant unto us, Lord Jesus, ever to follow the example of Thy holy Family, that in the hour of our death Thy glorious Virgin Mother together with blessed Joseph may come to meet us and we may be worthily received by Thee into everlasting dwellings: Who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

11. Grant, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that in the hour of our death we may be refreshed by Thy holy Sacraments and delivered from all guilt, and so deserve to be received with joy into the arms of Thy mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Indulgence of 600 days for each of the following each time it is said, even mentally.

1. To the King of ages, immortal and invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2. May the most just, the most high, and the most lovable will of God be in all things done, praised, and evermore exalted.

3. Teach me, O Lord, to do Thy will, for Thou art my God.

4. O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

5. O God, Thou art all-powerful, make me a saint.

6. O God, come unto my assistance: O Lord, make haste to help me.

7. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies.

8. Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on

9. To Thee be praise, to Thee be glory, to Thee be thanksgiving through endless ages, O Blessed Trinity.

10. Lord, increase our faith.

11. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

12. Lord Jesus Christ, Thou only art holy. Thou only art the Lord. Thou only art the Most High.

13. Heart of Jesus, burning with love for us, set our hearts on fire with love of Thee.

14. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.

15. O Lord, send labourers into Thy harvest.

16. Come, O Lord, and do not delay.

17. Hail, O Cross, our only hope.

18. God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.

19. May the grace of the Holy Spirit enlighten our senses and our hearts.

Indulgence of 300 days for each of the following each time it is said, even mentally.

1. My God, my only God, Thou art all mine; may I be always Thine.

2. All through Thee, with Thee, and in Thee, O my God!

3. Lord, I am nothing, but, although nothing, I adore Thee.

4. My God, I love Thee.
5. My Jesus, mercy.
6. Jesus, My God, I love Thee above all things.
7. Jesus, for Thee I live; Jesus, for Thee I die; Jesus, I am Thine in life and in death. Amen.
8. Blessed be Jesus Christ and His most pure Mother!
9. Jesus, for love of Thee, with Thee and for Thee.
10. O Jesus, with all my heart I cling to Thee.
11. Jesus.
12. Mary.
13. Joseph (when said in spiritual or corporal necessities.)
14. O Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament, have mercy on us.
15. I adore Thee every moment, O living Bread from heaven, great Sacrament!
16. Heart of Jesus, I put my trust in Thee!
17. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe in Thy love for me.
18. All for Thee, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.
19. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I give myself to Thee through Mary.
20. Holy Mary, deliver us from the pains of hell.

In the Raccolta, which is the official English translation of the Church's official collection of prayers and devotions enriched with indulgences, which in Latin is called *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* (Handbook of Indulgences), and which was last issued March 3, 1952, there are 781 such prayers and devotions.

It goes without saying what a treasure this book is for all who esteem indulgences highly, both for themselves and for the poor souls. The Raccolta is a book of over 700 pages, printed on excellent paper, with large, legible type, and durable binding. (It is available in New York; from Benziger Brothers.)

(Any financial profit made by the Central Office of the Sodality of Our Lady will be used for the advancement of the Sodality Movement and the cause of Catholic Action.) Our thanks go to them for this pamphlet.

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