

Praying for the Dead and Gaining Indulgences During November

Explaining indulgences and practices Catholics can do during the month of November for the Poor Souls in Purgatory.

DIRECTIONS: It is during November that the Church meditates on the Communion of Saints, which is the charitable link with the faithful who have already reached heaven (Church Triumphant), the faithful departed who are still expiating their sins in Purgatory (Church Suffering) and of the pilgrim faithful here on earth (Church Militant). *"In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin."* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1475).

On November 1st the Church celebrates the Solemnity of All Saints, a holyday of obligation, honoring all those faithful in heaven. Throughout November the Church also remembers our faithful departed. The need and duty of prayer for the departed souls has been acknowledged by the Church at all times. It is recommended in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: *"It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins."*(2 Maccabees 12, 46). This duty has found expression not only in public and private prayers but especially in the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the repose of souls.

Throughout November the Church prays for all who are in the purifying fires of Purgatory, waiting for the day when they will join the company of the saints in heaven. The celebration of Mass is the highest means the Church can provide for charity for the dead, but we can also relieve their sufferings through our prayers, sufferings and penances. We can also help the Poor Souls by doing acts and prayers that have indulgences attached to them. There are many indulgences, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, that can be obtained during the month of November.

An indulgence is *"the remission before God of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned."* To obtain this remission there are proper dispositions and certain conditions predetermined by the Church that must be met by the faithful. The remission is acquired through the intervention of the Church, who has the power to loose and bind granted through Jesus Christ. *"As minister of the Redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the satisfaction won by Christ and the Saints"* (Enchiridion of Indulgences).

To understand this practice of indulgences, the Catechism explains: It is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man." (1472, 1473)

An indulgence can either be partial or plenary. It is partial if it removes only part of the temporal punishment due to sin, or plenary if it removes all punishment. To be able to gain an indulgence, one must have the intention to gain them, and perform the works at the time and in the manner prescribed. To attain a plenary indulgence, three conditions must accompany the prescribed act:

1. the faithful must receive the **sacrament of confession**, either eight days before or after the pious act is performed,
2. receive **Holy Communion** on that day
3. and recite **prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father** (one Our Father and one Hail Mary is the minimum, but any other additional prayers may be added).

All attachment to sin, even venial sin, must be absent. If one's disposition is less than perfect or if some of the above conditions are not fulfilled, the indulgence becomes partial. One must also remember that one can acquire one plenary indulgence once a day.

Indulged Acts for the Poor Souls: A partial indulgence can be obtained by devoutly visiting a cemetery and praying for the departed, even if the prayer is only mental. **One can gain a plenary indulgence visiting a cemetery each day between November 1 and November 8.** These indulgences are applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory.

A plenary indulgence, again applicable only the Souls in Purgatory, is also granted when the faithful piously visit a church or a public oratory on November 2. In visiting the church or oratory, it is required, that one Our Father and the Creed be recited.

A partial indulgence, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, can be obtained when the Eternal Rest is prayed. This is a good prayer to recite especially during the month of November: ***Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.***

Many families add to the "Prayer Before Meals" the second half of the "Eternal Rest" prayer: ***Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, Which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty, through Christ, our Lord, Amen. And may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.***

It is a good devotion to pray for the departed all through the year, not just November. After these Souls in Purgatory are in heaven, they will intercede for us. We should all develop prayerful habits, such as praying the "Eternal Rest" prayer when passing cemeteries, to remind us of our eternal destiny.

For more information on the Church's teachings on indulgences, read the Enchiridion of Indulgences given by the 1968 Decree of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary.

Also see The Catechism of the Catholic Church section on Indulgences, Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 4, Subsection 10, 1471-1479.