

Tridentine Community News

September 10, 2006

Indulgences

Few Catholics today appreciate the great gift that Holy Mother Church gives us in the form of Indulgences. They aren't spoken of much any more. The popular press has given them a bad name, reminding people that at points in history, the Church "sold" Indulgences. But in our day and age, one could argue that they are needed more than ever.

Only half jokingly, one friend of this author refers to Indulgences as Heaven's Frequent Flyer Miles. That actually is a fairly good analogy: For just a little effort, ordinary activities can provide extraordinary graces. You just need to be aware of the rules.

Sin can be compared to a driver crashing into another car. The accident might be the driver's direct fault (by driving too fast on an icy road, for example): Consider this a Sin of Commission. The accident could also have been caused by negligence on the part of the driver (for instance, failing to have the brakes serviced): A Sin of Omission. Once the accident has occurred, two things must happen to restore order: the driver must apologize to, and be forgiven by, the person into whom he crashed; and the injured people and/or damaged cars must be made well again.

After one commits a sin, one must rectify one's relationship with Almighty God. The Sacrament of Confession is the ordinary means by which one admits one's guilt, and through the action of the priest, Our Lord forgives the sinner. But that is not the end of the story: Just as the driver (or his insurance) must pay for repairs, we sinners have a temporal debt to pay for having sinned. Only God knows how that debt will be exacted from us. It might come in the form of some suffering to be experienced during our earthly lifetime. It might also cause us to spend time in Purgatory after our death. There, souls are purified before being admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven.

In some respects, the Church is like a bank. Masses offered and good works performed earn graces, not all of which go directly to those present. Because Peter was given the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, logically the Church can disperse those "banked" graces as she sees fit. Indulgences are one such manner.

By performing certain acts, a person can earn either a Partial or a Plenary Indulgence. A Partial Indulgence is a remission of some of the temporal punishment due for sin, whereas a Plenary Indulgence is the remission of all such punishment. Think about that: By earning a Plenary Indulgence, you make yourself so right in God's eyes, that were you to die right after having earned one (presuming there were no new unconfessed sins on your soul), you would bypass Purgatory and go directly to Heaven.

How to Earn Indulgences

To earn a Partial Indulgence, one must only perform the work, or recite the prayer, prescribed. To earn a Plenary Indulgence, one must: 1) Perform the work or recite the prayer; 2) Receive Holy Communion; 3) Pray for the Holy Father's intentions (usually by saying an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be); 4) Receive sacramental Confession within "several days" (generally

interpreted to be eight days) before or afterwards; and 5) Not have any attachment to sin, even venial sin. This last qualification seems to be the most challenging.

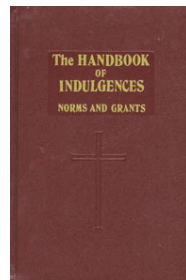
You must intend to earn the Indulgence. Some forms of Morning Offering prayers include a general declaration that one wishes to earn all of the Indulgences that one can that day. Indulgences may be earned for one's own soul, or may be applied to the souls in Purgatory. One may not apply an Indulgence to another living person.

Some prayer books mention the "Heroic Act of Charity": This is a solemn offering to God of all of the Indulgences that you will earn during your lifetime, as well as those that others will apply to you after your death, to the souls in Purgatory. A somewhat frightening thought, one who makes the Heroic Act effectively offers to spend time in Purgatory on behalf of others, as he renounces all opportunities to remit temporal punishment for himself.

Two of the easiest ways to earn a Plenary Indulgence are to say the Rosary in a church, and to spend one half-hour in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Both of these opportunities, as well as Confession, are available to us at the Tridentine Mass almost every Sunday.

Be Aware of the Changed Rules

A note to those with older hand missals or holy cards: The system of earning Indulgences changed significantly in 1968. Partial Indulgences no longer have a set time (e.g.: 300 days remission of punishment) associated with them. Second, the list of acts and prayers which earn Indulgences has been revised. The former "Raccolta" book of Indulgences has been supplanted by the "Enchiridion of Indulgences", available in an English edition ("The Handbook of Indulgences") from Catholic Book Publishing Company (www.catholicbookpublishing.com). This is a book every Catholic should own. Even for those who follow the Tridentine rite



and calendar, the new rules for Indulgences apply. The old formulas remain meritorious, but do not earn Indulgences unless they are also listed in the new guide. Also, one can now only earn one Plenary Indulgence per day. Formerly, one could earn more than one daily on the basis of a single Confession and Communion.

In 1999, the Vatican revised the Enchiridion yet again. Speculation has arisen that one now has up to about 20 days before and after Confession in which to earn a Plenary Indulgence. However, no official English edition is available, and the original Latin text still refers to a vague "*pluribus diebus*".

Indulgences are a marvelous means to get souls to heaven, the perfect companion to receiving absolution in the Sacrament of Confession. Far from being a "pass to heaven," Indulgences are a means to developing habits of holiness that stay with you.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org with your thoughts.