



## THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, INDULGENCES, ABSOLUTION, & GOD'S MERCY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During the past month and a half, the norms of life have been changed. The coronavirus pandemic has not been selective in who or what it affects; every facet of daily life has been halted or reconstructed to prevent the spread of the virus and save human life. As a Church, we have been asked to make many sacrifices out of charity for the common good of our community. These sacrifices have been painful, and they should be, for true charity from the heart gives a piece of ourselves for the benefit of another.

As Catholics, we are Sacramental people and the greatest loss we have experienced is the ability to receive the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While we are encouraged to make a prayer of Spiritual Communion to unite ourselves with the Lord when we cannot receive the Eucharist, many have requested information on how to address our need to experience absolution and God's mercy when Sacramental Confessions are not available during these challenging days. This document addresses those concerns.

### PERFECT CONTRITION & FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Pope Francis has repeatedly said that we must rely on God's mercy and understanding of our hearts.

*"Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by votum confessionis, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452)."*

Perfect contrition requires the love of God, the sincere desire for forgiveness and the ardent commitment to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation **when it is able to do so again**. If a person has these, they will as the Catechism states "obtain forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones".

### HOW DO I MAKE AN ACT OF PERFECT CONTRITION?

Pope Francis has encouraged Catholics confined to their homes to seek God's forgiveness through an "act of perfect contrition" and go to confession later, when restrictions are lifted. *"You do what the Catechism says. It is very clear...speak to God, he is your father, and tell him the truth...Promise him 'Later I will confess, but forgive me now.' And immediately you will return to the grace of God."*

Perfect contrition comes from the heart; it is an extension of God's grace and continual beckoning to return to Him with a contrite heart. There is no set formula for making an act of contrition, but a common one is:

*“My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing, to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”*

### **PLENARY INDULGENCES**

In a decree issued on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the Apostolic Penitentiary, provided numerous ways that the faithful may obtain a plenary indulgence daily.

### **WHAT IS A PLENARY INDULGENCE?**

*An indulgence is “the expression of the Church's full confidence of being heard by the Father when - in view of Christ's merits and, by his gift, those of Our Lady and the saints - she asks him to mitigate or cancel the painful aspect of punishment by fostering its medicinal aspect through other channels of grace” (St. Pope John Paul II, General Audience, September 29, 1999)*

A **plenary indulgence** removes all the temporal punishment due to sin (CCC, 1471).

### **HOW DO I RECEIVE A PLENARY INDULGENCE?**

In the Apostolic Penitentiary decree, Pope Francis has laid out the criterions required to receive a plenary indulgence.

- ❖ To the faithful suffering from the Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes. They are asked to engender a penitential spirit and unite themselves spiritually through participating/watching Holy Mass on television; to praying the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross or participating in other devotional practices. They should endure this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfill the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as they are able to. *What this means: Every day you are in lockdown and unite yourself to these activities and/or prayers-you can obtain a plenary indulgence.*
- ❖ Health care workers, family members and all those who are exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, by caring for those with the Coronavirus will obtain the same gift of the Plenary Indulgence under the same conditions. *What this means: if you work in healthcare or are considered an “essential worker”-you can obtain a plenary indulgence.*
- ❖ To the faithful who spend time in prayer with the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, pray the Rosary, the Way of the Cross, or recite the [Chaplet of Divine Mercy](#) (click on link for more information) with the intention of imploring Almighty God the end of the epidemic, relief for those who are afflicted and eternal salvation for those whom the Lord has called to Himself will also obtain the gift of a Plenary Indulgence. *What this means: when you pray any of these prayers or devotions with the intentions noted-you can obtain a plenary indulgence.*

- ❖ To the faithful who are unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and *Viaticum*. The Church entrusts each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting a Plenary Indulgence on the point of death, provided that they are duly disposed and have recited a few prayers during their lifetime (in this case the Church makes up for the three usual conditions required). For the attainment of this indulgence, it is suggested that a crucifix or cross be shown to the person if possible. *What this means: for those who are ill or dying and unable to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick or final Holy Communion before death, are given a plenary indulgence.*

April 15, 2020

Office for Divine Worship, Diocese of Columbus