

Plenary Indulgences and Possible Collective Absolution in Time of Emergency

The Apostolic Penitentiary has announced that "the gift of special Indulgences is granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who care for them in any capacity, including through prayer." It also reminds the faithful of the possibility of

collective absolution in times of emergency.

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**Note from the Apostolic
Penitentiary on the Sacrament of
Reconciliation in the current
pandemic, (20 March 2020)**

“I am with you always”(Mt 28:20)

The gravity of the present circumstances calls for reflection on the urgency and centrality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, together with some necessary clarifications, both for the lay faithful and for ministers called to celebrate the Sacrament.

Even in the time of COVID-19, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is administered in accordance with

universal canon law and with the provisions of the *Ordo Paenitentiae*.

Individual confession is the ordinary way of celebrating this sacrament (cf. can. 960 *CIC*), while collective absolution, without prior individual confession, cannot be imparted except where there is an imminent danger of death, since there is not enough time to hear the confessions of individual penitents (cf. can. 961, § 1 *CIC*), or a grave necessity (cf. can. 961, § 1 *CIC*). 961, § 1, 2 *CIC*), the consideration of which is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop, taking into account the criteria agreed upon with the other members of the Episcopal Conference (cf. can. 455, § 2 *CIC*) and without prejudice to the necessity, for valid absolution, of *votum sacramenti* on the part of the individual penitent, that is to say, the purpose of confessing serious sins in due time, which at the time could not be confessed (cf. can. 962, § 1 *CIC*).

This Apostolic Penitentiary believes that, especially in the places most affected by the pandemic contagion and until the phenomenon recedes, the cases of serious need mentioned in can. 961, § 2 CIC above mentioned, will occur.

Any further specification is delegated by law to diocesan bishops, always taking into account the supreme good of the salvation of souls (cf. can. 1752 *CIC*).

Should there arise a sudden need to impart sacramental absolution to several faithful together, the priest is obliged to warn the diocesan bishop as far as possible or, if he cannot, to inform him as soon as possible (cf. *Ordo Paenitentiae*, n. 32).

In the present pandemic emergency, it is therefore up to the diocesan bishop to indicate to priests and penitents the prudent attentions to be adopted in the individual

celebration of sacramental reconciliation, such as the celebration in a ventilated place outside the confessional, the adoption of a suitable distance, the use of protective masks, without prejudice to absolute attention to the safeguarding of the sacramental seal and the necessary discretion.

Furthermore, it is always up to the diocesan bishop to determine, in the territory of his own ecclesiastical circumscription and with regard to the level of pandemic contagion, the cases of grave necessity in which it is lawful to impart collective absolution: for example, at the entrance to hospital wards, where the infected faithful in danger of death are hospitalised, using as far as possible and with the appropriate precautions the means of amplifying the voice so that absolution may be heard.

Consideration should be given to the need and advisability of setting up, where necessary, in agreement with the health authorities, groups of “extraordinary hospital chaplains”, also on a voluntary basis and in compliance with the norms of protection from contagion, to guarantee the necessary spiritual assistance to the sick and dying.

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).

Never before has the Church experienced thus the power of the communion of saints, raising to her Crucified and Risen Lord her vows and prayers, especially the Sacrifice of Holy Mass, celebrated daily, even without the presence of the people, by priests.

Like a good mother, the Church implores the Lord that humanity may be freed from such a scourge, invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy and Health of the Sick, and of her Spouse Saint Joseph, under whose patronage the Church has always walked the world.

May Mary Most Holy and Saint Joseph obtain for us abundant graces of reconciliation and salvation, in attentive listening to the Word of the Lord, which he repeats to humanity

today: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46: 10), “I am with you always” (*Mt 28 :20*).

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on March 19, 2020,

Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patron of the Universal Church.

Mauro Cardinal Piacenza, Major Penitentiary

Krzysztof Nykiel, Regent

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Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic (20 March 2020)

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer” (*Rom* 12: 12). The words written by Saint Paul to the Church of Rome resonate throughout the entire history of the Church and guide the judgment of the faithful in the face of all suffering, sickness and calamity.

The present moment in which the whole of humanity, threatened by an invisible and insidious disease, which for some time now has become part of all our lives, is marked day after day by anguished fears, new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering.

The Church, following the example of her Divine Master, has always had the care of the sick at heart. As Saint John Paul II points out, the value of human suffering is twofold: “It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the

Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, 31).

Pope Francis, too, in these recent days, has shown his paternal closeness and renewed his invitation to pray incessantly for those who are sick with the Coronavirus.

So that all those who suffer because of COVID-19, precisely in the mystery of this suffering, may rediscover “the same redemptive suffering of Christ” (*ibid.*, 30), this Apostolic Penitentiary, *ex auctoritate Summi Pontificis*, trusting in the word of Christ the Lord and considering with a spirit of faith the epidemic currently underway, to be lived in a spirit of personal conversion, grants the gift of Indulgences in accordance with the following disposition.

The *Plenary Indulgence* is granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

Health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good

Samaritan, exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick of Coronavirus according to the words of the divine Redeemer:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn 15: 13*), will obtain the same gift of the *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions.

This Apostolic Penitentiary also willingly grants a *Plenary Indulgence* under the same conditions on the occasion of the current world epidemic, also to those faithful who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least half an hour, or the recitation of the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, to implore from 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.

The Church prays for those who find themselves unable to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of the *Viaticum*, entrusting each and every one to divine Mercy by virtue of the communion of saints and granting the faithful 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 the use of the crucifix or the cross is recommended (cf. *Enchiridion indulgentiarum*, no.12).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, Health of the Sick and Help of Christians, our Advocate, help suffering humanity, saving us from the evil of this

pandemic and obtaining for us every good necessary for our salvation and sanctification.

The present Decree is valid notwithstanding any provision to the contrary.

Given in Rome, from the seat of the Apostolic Penitentiary, on 19 March 2020.

Mauro Cardinal Piacenza, Major Penitentiary

Krzysztof Nykiel, Regent

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