

What is an Indulgence?

Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church
Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth



Although when we receive the sacrament of Confession our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled with God, reparation for these sins remains, what the church calls, 'the temporal punishment of sin.' An indulgence is the remission of temporal punishment due for sins that are forgiven. Temporal punishment can be described as God's gentle, corrective love, just as any parent corrects their child in love. This punishment is either undertaken here on earth or in purgatory. A partial indulgence removes some of the temporal punishment due for sins, a plenary indulgence removes all temporal punishment for one's sin. For the removal of temporal punishment, all requirements must be met. To receive the indulgence one must sincerely repent, desire to grow in holiness, receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, and prayer for the Pope's intentions. The indulgence can be applied to either the individual seeking it, or to those who have died.

Indulgences are not merited on our part but are a true gift from God. To grant an indulgence, the church draws on the treasury of merit which contains the merits of Christ (his life, death and resurrection which have infinite merit), our Lady and the Saints (CCC 1476-1477.) These merits or good works can be shared for the benefit of others. In the Gospel of Matthew 6:19-20., Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal." With every good work that is undertaken by members of the church, this work is added to the treasury, which can be dispensed for the benefit of others. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the church of who by virtue of her power to bind and loose given to her by Jesus Christ, intervenes in favour of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins (CCC1478.)

Throughout the Jubilee Year (2025), the Year of Hope, by visiting a dedicated shrine of the diocese, one can obtain an indulgence. In Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, these sacred places are St John's Cathedral, Portsmouth, St Edmund's, Southampton, Bournemouth Oratory, St James, Reading, St Thomas, Jersey, and St Joseph's Guernsey.

A plenary indulgence can also be obtained by the sick, elderly, and housebound, who can arrange for the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist to be celebrated in their homes.

During a Jubilee, the reception of an indulgence is traditionally limited to one a day. However, the Vatican has proclaimed that for those members of the faithful who complete an act of charity on behalf of the souls of purgatory and receive the Eucharist for the second time that day, they can obtain a further indulgence for those who have died.

