

What is an indulgence?

Every sin has consequences. It affects our relationship with God and the Church, weakens our ability to resist temptation, and hurts others. The need to heal these consequences, once the sin has been forgiven, is called temporal punishment. This temporal punishment is not inflicted by God, but could be thought of as the natural effects of sin.



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When we celebrate the sacrament of Penance, our sins are forgiven and the eternal punishment of sin is removed. However, the temporal punishment of sin remains. When we sin it is like hammering a nail into a plaster wall. When we ask for and receive God's forgiveness it is like removing the nail from the plaster. Although the nail is gone, the hole remains and needs to be repaired. Likewise, we have to repair the hurt we have caused to others and ourselves.

Christians are called to strive to grow in virtue and repair these hurts through works of mercy, charity and through prayer and acts of penance. Because of the fullness of redemption obtained for us by Christ, the Church attaches an indulgence or pardon to certain prayers and actions.

Indulgences, which are granted through the mercy of God and the action of the Church, remove part (partial indulgence) or all (plenary indulgence) of the temporal punishment due to sins that have already been forgiven.