

WHAT IS INDULGENCE?

CHURCH GRANTS SPECIAL INDULGENCE TO CORONAVIRUS PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS

By Fr. Benedict Mayaki, SJ

On 20 March, the Apostolic Penitentiary issued a decree granting plenary indulgences to “the faithful suffering from the Covid-19 virus, commonly known as coronavirus, as well as to healthcare workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.”

The document comes in response to pastoral, spiritual and sacramental concerns for those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, which has raised “new uncertainties and above all widespread physical and moral suffering”.

The decree is signed by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, the Major Penitentiary of the Apostolic Penitentiary, and the Regent, Father Krzysztof Nykiel.

Conditions for the plenary indulgence

The Decree grants a plenary indulgence to coronavirus patients quarantined by health authorities in hospitals and in their homes if, “with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite themselves spiritually through the media to the celebration of the Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion.”

The plenary indulgence can also be obtained by the faithful if they at least “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 fulfill the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy father’s intentions), as soon as possible.”

A plenary indulgence is also granted to healthcare workers, family members and all those who, “exposing themselves to the risk of contagion, care for the sick” under the same conditions stated above.

Also, the faithful who offer a “visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or Eucharistic adoration, or read the Holy Scriptures for half an hour, or recite the Holy Rosary, or the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross, or the recitation of the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy” while praying for an end to the pandemic will be granted a plenary indulgence.

A few clarifications

In a note accompanying the Decree, the Apostolic Penitentiary provided for some eventualities linked with providing the Sacrament of Reconciliation for those affected by the Covid-19 virus.

The note explained that the diocesan bishop has complete discretion over the administration of collective absolution except where there is an “imminent danger of death” or a “grave necessity.” Individual confession remains the ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Also, if there is need to impart absolution to several faithful, the priest is obliged to inform the diocesan bishop as soon as possible.

Bishops are also tasked with evaluating the level of the pandemic in their respective jurisdictions to be able to set up prudent protocols for the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation that safeguards the sacramental seal.

The note also encouraged setting up groups of voluntary “extraordinary hospital chaplains” who, obeying health norms and in agreement with health authorities, can provide spiritual assistance to the sick and dying.

Indulgences

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, an indulgence is “a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.” Indulgences are either partial or plenary depending on if they remove part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin.