

Praying for the Holy Souls

For the souls in purgatory | In November and throughout the year

“But as for drawing souls out of purgatory... how great are Our Lord’s mercies in this!” [1]

— Saint Teresa of Jesus (of Ávila), Doctor of the Church and Carmelite



Why do we pray for the departed?

The Church teaches that those who die in God’s friendship but still need purification are assured of salvation. We pray for them out of love, entrust them to God’s mercy, and share in the communion of saints. Scripture commends prayer for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:44–46); the Catechism teaches the value of prayer for them, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. [2]

What is a plenary indulgence?

A plenary indulgence is the complete remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. It does not forgive sins or replace Confession. A Catholic may gain an indulgence for oneself or apply it to the faithful departed by way of suffrage. [3]

Five opportunities for prayer

01 CEMETERY VISIT | NOVEMBER 1–8

Devoutly visit a cemetery and pray for the departed, even silently. During these eight days, a plenary indulgence applies only to the departed; on other days, this devotion carries a partial indulgence. [4]

02 THE HOLY ROSARY

Pray five decades continuously, meditating on the mysteries, in a church or oratory, with the family, in a religious community, or at another gathering for prayer that meets the conditions. [5]

03 EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

Spend at least 30 minutes in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. [6]

04 THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Devoutly follow the Stations of the Cross, normally at fourteen lawfully erected stations, while meditating on Christ’s Passion. [7]

05 THE AKATHIST HYMN OR PARAKLESIS

Devoutly pray this Eastern Christian tradition at a communal celebration that meets the conditions. According to legitimate custom, a suitable continuous portion of the Akathist may suffice. [8]

The Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God



A treasure of Eastern Christian tradition

The Akathist hymn honors Mary as Theotokos (“God-bearer” or Mother of God) and celebrates the Incarnation of Christ. Its Greek name means “not seated,” recalling the custom of standing while it is prayed.

Its 24 alphabetically ordered stanzas alternate praises addressed to Mary with the acclamation “Alleluia.” Its beloved refrain says, “Rejoice, O Bride Unwedded!” The hymn is a beautiful way to contemplate the mystery of Christ through Mary’s faith. [8]

Usual conditions for a plenary indulgence

1. Be in a state of grace when performing the indulgenced work.
2. Receive sacramental Confession (normally within about 20 days before or after).
3. Receive Holy Communion for each plenary indulgence, preferably on the same day.
4. Pray for the Holy Father’s intentions (for example, one Our Father and one Hail Mary).
5. Have complete detachment from every sin, even venial sin.
6. Perform the prescribed act with the intention of gaining the indulgence.

Normally one plenary indulgence may be gained each day. One Confession may suffice for several indulgences, but separate Communions and prayers for the Pope’s intentions are needed. If not all conditions are met, the indulgence is partial. [9]

Prayer for the faithful departed

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.

SOURCES AND NOTES

[1] Saint Teresa of Jesus, *Life*, ch. 39, §6 (English rendering).

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§1030–1032; 2 Maccabees 12:44–46.

[3] Catechism, §§1471–1479; Code of Canon Law, canons 992–994.

[4]–[8] Apostolic Penitentiary, *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, 4th ed. (1999), grants 29, 17, 7, 13 and 23, respectively.

[9] *Enchiridion*, norms 17–20; Apostolic Penitentiary, *The Gift of the Indulgence* (2000).

Vatican references: vatican.va (search “Enchiridion Indulgentiarum quarto editur” and “The Gift of the Indulgence”).