

Death is the passage to the fullness of true life. The Church, subverting the logic of this world, calls the Christian's day of death his *dies natalis*, the day of his heavenly birth, where "there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness [for] the world of the past has gone" (Aps 21, 4). Death is the prolongation, in a new way, of life as the Liturgy says: "For your faithful, O Lord, life has changed not ended; while our earthly dwelling is destroyed, a new and eternal dwelling is prepared for us in Heaven"(356).

The death of a Christian is an event of grace, having, as it does, a positive value and significance in Christ and through Christ. Scripture teaches that: "Life to me, of course, life is Christ, but then death would bring me something more" (Phil 1, 21); here is a saying you can rely on: if we have died with him, then we shall live with him" (2 Tim 2,11).

250. According to the faith of the Church, "to die in Christ" begins at Baptism. In Baptism, the Lord's disciples sacramentally die in Christ so as to live a new life. If the disciples die in the grace Christ, physical death seals that "dying with Christ", and consummates it by incorporating them fully and definitively into Christ the Redeemer.

The Church's prayer of suffrage for the souls of the faithful departed implores eternal life not only for the disciples of Christ who have died in his peace, but for the dead whose faith is known to God (357).

The Meaning of Suffrage

251. The just encounter God in death. He calls them to himself so as to share eternal life with them. No one, however, can be received into God's friendship and intimacy without having been purified of the consequences of personal sin. "The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent"(358).

Hence derives the pious custom of suffrage for the souls of the faithful departed, which is an urgent supplication of God to have mercy on the souls of the dead, to purify them by the fire of His charity, and to bring them to His kingdom of light and life. This suffrage is a cultic expression of faith in the communion of saints. Indeed, "the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honoured with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' (2 Mac 12, 46) she offers her suffrages for

them"(359). These consist, primarily, in the celebration of the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist (360), and in other pious exercises, such as prayers for the dead, alms deeds, works of mercy (361), and the application of indulgences to the souls of the faithful departed (362). (Taken from *The Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*. 249 -252)

What are Indulgences?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says in #1471 the following:

"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."

"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin." The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.

The Bible and the Church teach that sin has 2 components – the guilt of the sin, and the temporal punishment for the sin. The best example of this in scripture is in 2 Samuel 12:13-14 when Nathan told David that God had forgiven his sin of killing Uriah and stealing his wife Bathsheeba, but that his punishment would be the death of his son. Adam and Eve were also forgiven for their sin, but they had to endure the temporal punishment of toiling in the sun and the pain of childbirth.

Of the two components, guilt is the most important component, because if the guilt isn't forgiven (going to confession is the best way), then the punishment could be permanent (in hell), not temporal (in purgatory). This guilt and punishment concept is also true in the secular world – If you wreck someone's car, the owner can forgive you, but you still owe the debt of fixing his car.

The most famous biblical example of someone getting an indulgence is when Jesus, from the cross in Luke 23:43, gave the good thief complete remission for his sins, promising him that he would be in paradise that day. This power of binding and loosing sins and punishment was given to the Church by Jesus, in Matthew 18:18, when he said "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." "Whatever" means anything, including punishment for sins.