What is an Indulgence?

From 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, 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 (CCC #1471). Indulgences may be applied to oneself or to the dead, but not to other living persons.

What are the “Prescribed Conditions” for Seeking an Indulgence?

A plenary indulgence can be gained only once a day. In order to obtain it, the faithful must:

- be in a state of grace (free from mortal sin);
- have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin, even venial sin; striving to avoid venial sin;
- have sacramentally confessed their sins (either 20 days prior or following the indulgenced act). One sacramental Confession suffices for several plenary indulgences.
- receive Holy Communion on the same day the indulgence is sought. Preferably, this reception will be while participating in Holy Mass; and
- pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff; prayer for the Pope’s intentions is left to the choice of the faithful, but an “Our Father” and a “Hail Mary” are suggested. It is preferable that the prayer for the Pope’s intentions be said on the same day as the indulgenced act.