

selves more than we love Him or our fellow man. This self love or pride is the root of all sin. When we die with vestiges of self love that caused us to sin, we are not ready to enter heaven.

Purgatory is a state of existence after death wherein we die of this destructive self-love that caused the sin. When we have reached the state of perfect love, we enter heaven. Anything less than perfection would be an affront to God's justice and a violation of heaven's integrity.

It is part of Catholic doctrine to believe that we can apply the Indulgences granted by the Church to the souls in purgatory. We are in communion with them, no less than with the saints in heaven. St. Augustine said, "For the souls of the pious dead are not separated from the Church";(13) and as they help us by their prayers, so do we help them by our fasts, alms-deeds, the sacrifice of the Mass, and particularly by the application of indulgences.

Scripture tells us that "It is therefore a holy and pious thought to pray for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin."(14)

The application of an indulgence to the souls in purgatory depends entirely on God. Although we have confident trust that God will take into account our good wishes and prayers, He has not pledged Himself irrevocably to do so, at least in the measure which we ask. We cannot be infallibly certain that such a soul, for which we have gained a plenary Indulgence, is at once on equal terms with the justice of God and ushered into heaven. The application of the indulgence is totally dependent upon God's acceptance of the satisfaction offered to Him.

The Apostle's Creed provides an appropriate answer to objectors. In the article on the Communion of Saints we are commanded to believe that there is, in the Church, a link which binds Christians together. Because we have a common identity of interests, we are entitled to a communion of spiritual goods. A family is enriched with the goods of the individual members; and the members benefit from the goods of the family, and each helps the other with the transfer of goods. So there is in the Church an interchange of supernatural goods. This enables one member, or the whole body of members, to provide a real and vital influence towards the spiritual well-being of another.

In virtue of the communion of the Church, the faithful, "called the saints" (15) are closely bound by the unity of faith, and should benefit one another by the

sharing spiritual goods. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."(16)

1. *City of God*, Bk 20, Chap. 9.
2. 2 Macc. 12:46.
3. Rom. 1:7.
4. Mat. 25:20.
5. Wis. 2:23.
6. 1 Cor. 13:12.
7. Wis. 2:24.
8. Rom. 5:20.
9. *Concerning Repentance*. Bk 2, Chap. 10, 96.
10. Joel 2:12-13.
11. Cyprian of Carthage, *A treatise Against the Heretic Novatian by an Anonymous Bishop*, 14.
12. Gen. 4:7; Prov. 11:18; Sir. 36:18; 51:30, 38; Matt. 5:12; 10:42; 25:34; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 6:10; 10:35; 11:26; James 2:24; Rev. 20:13; 22:7.
13. Is. 37:23; Jer. 1:19; Matt. 25:40; John 3:17 ff.
14. *Dichos* 64; CCC §1022
15. Mat. 16:19.
16. Eusebius Pamphilus of Caesarea, *Church History*, Bk 3, Chap. 23.

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Making Satisfaction for the Sins of Others

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Recently, I found myself in a discussion with another Catholic about the doctrine of Indulgences. My friend was under the impression that one person could gain an indulgence for another living person.

I referred him to *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1471 which states: "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal (in time) 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."

I pointed out that the Catechism does not say that we can gain an indulgence for another living person.

My friend replied, "Your right it doesn't say you can gain an indulgence for the living. But it also doesn't say you can't."

As the doctrine of indulgences can be confusing, I thought I might explain a bit.

In the beginning "God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity."(1) God raised man to the supernatural order, that is to say, to eternal life, consisting in the vision of God's essence, not "in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."(2) However, this most beautiful of God's works was marred by His own enemy. The devil was jealous of man, and "through the devil's envy death entered the world."(3)

Death entered the world by sin; it could not have entered unless man himself had opened the door for it, for God had given man immortality. And so, sin was brought into the world by man's transgression, and through sin, death, which has pervaded the whole of humanity.

God could not be outdone by the evil one, so He decreed that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."(4)

The grace of God comes to us through Jesus Christ, by virtue of His atoning sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus made satisfaction for the sin of man and effected the remission of the temporal debt due to our sins.

But before proceeding, it is necessary that we bear in mind the teaching of the Catholic Church about sin and the resulting guilt.

When a person sins willfully, his soul contracts a twofold guilt in the sight of God. The first is the *stain* which defiles the soul; the other is the guilt of *debt* to be paid to the justice of God. In offending God, man indulges himself at the expense of the Divine Law, and deprives God of the allegiance due Him as man's Creator. This flagrant act of injustice constitutes a real debt owed to God, and must be atoned for by a punishment, either self-imposed or imposed by God. When a sinner wishes to be restored to the grace and friendship of God, it is not enough for him to change his life, and avoid sin. He must feel a deep and abiding, inward sorrow for his past sins, and foster a sincere hatred and detestation of sin; in short, he must have real contrition. St. Ambrose wrote: "But I have more easily found such as had preserved their innocence than such as had fittingly repented." (5) The Lord impressed upon His people the necessity of this abject sorrow: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil." (6)

The Scriptures are replete with the testimonies of repentance. St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, the Prodigal Son, and many others bear testimony by their own conduct to the great Law of Penance.

Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) the guilt of stain is removed from the soul, but there still remains some debt to be paid to the Justice of God in the shape of temporal punishment, and the punishment must fit the crime.

We have clear instances of this truth from Scripture. For example: Adam and Eve, after their expulsion from Paradise, had, according to the opinion of the Fathers, obtained from God, because of their sincere contrition, pardon for their sins. Yet, God did not restore them to Paradise and they and their posterity remained subject to a large number of temporal punishments and physical failings — the darkness of the intellect, the depravity of the heart, the weakening of the

will, and above all, the expectation of an uncertain but inevitable death.

A more conclusive proof that a debt of temporal punishment often remains to be paid to the Justice of God after the sin has been forgiven, is found in the history of King David. The Lord, by the mouth of the Prophet Nathan, forgave David the sin of murder, but in addition to David's performing a heavy penance, God required the life of David's first-born son in recompense.

Natural law requires that whenever a person offends his fellow man, reconciliation cannot take place until the offender offers compensation suitable and proportionate to the grievousness of the offence. How much more, then, should man offer to God, besides true contrition, for the offense he has given to His Divine Majesty?

Scripture says, "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins which he hath committed, and will do righteousness, he shall live in eternal life, and shall not die in his wickedness. For the sins which he has committed shall be abolished from memory by the good deeds which succeed." (7)

Our good works can and do have merit and will be rewarded. (8) The good works may be done either directly for the honor and glory of God or indirectly by doing good to our neighbor, for God regards as done to Himself what is done to our neighbor. (9) Whenever we perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy, while in a state of grace, simply out of love for Christ and not for personal gain, we gain merit. This merit provides satisfaction to Christ. For the performance of every good work involves a certain amount of hardship or sacrifice and consequently self-denial, and this when borne out of love of God compensates for past sins. The Catechism quotes St. John of the Cross: "At the evening of our life, we shall be judged on our love." (10) Love atones for our sins; perfect love atones perfectly.

When we offend God willfully, we make ourselves liable to His justice for a debt of punishment which contrition (Confession) and absolution are not always sufficient to cancel. On the other hand, Jesus, His Blessed Mother, and His saints have acquired by their superabundant sufferings an inexhaustible treasury of satisfactory merits. These satisfactions would be useless unless they are given to those who might benefit from them. God allows these satisfactions to be transferred from the Treasury of Merit to individuals or to the poor

souls in purgatory, by the power of the Keys of the Church. (11)

Now, starting from these principles, which are grounded upon faith, let us examine the ways such a transfer or donation of satisfactory merits can take place within the Church.

There are three ways in which this transfer may take place. First, it may be made by a private individual of the Church; secondly, by a limited community of the faithful bound together by a common profession of faith, such as a religious community, or the faithful in a parish, or third, this transfer may be made out of the Treasury of the whole Church, by those authorized to dispense these merits. The first two ways are not indulgences.

Each of us may accumulate an individual treasury of merit. We can make satisfaction for others by asking God to transfer the merit we have gained to another living person.

There can be no doubt that an individual may apply to another his own satisfactions. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea relates that the Apostle John had succeeded in bringing back to the fold of Christ a thief who had been committing crimes for many years and despaired of finding God's mercy. St. John encouraged him by saying, "My son; fear not; thou hast still hope of life. I will give account to Christ for thee. If need be, I will willingly endure thy death as the Lord suffered death for us. For thee will I give up my life." (12) Thus St. John gave this sinner the satisfactions from his personal treasury, which he himself had acquired.

Individuals can make satisfactions for the sins of others. However, this kind of transfer, made by an individual member of the Church, and unwarranted by the endorsement the Church, is not an indulgence. Indulgences are granted out of the Treasury of Merit, whereas this concession originates from a private person's spiritual fund.

Keep in mind that by gaining indulgences we are not earning our way into heaven. Heaven is the free gift of God, which we receive through the Sacrament of Baptism. Once baptized, we are incorporated into the body of Christ and become children of God and a brother or sister of Jesus. As such we are entitled to His inheritance, which is eternal life.

Yet, in order to enter heaven we must be perfect in our love for God and must also love our neighbor as ourselves. God tells us that we must love ourselves as we are made in His image, but we must not love our-