Pray for the souls

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November is the month dedicated especially to the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Holy Mother Church, who never forgets her suffering children, gives us an opportunity during the first eight days of November to come to their aid by obtaining **plenary indulgences applicable to the faithful departed**.

Through the Church's treasury of spiritual goods, we can do something concrete for souls who can no longer merit for themselves. They are saved. They will certainly someday attain the Beatific Vision. However, they must first undergo whatever purification remains necessary before entering the presence of God. Only the pure see God.

They need our help. And we, who are still making our way through this vale of tears, can help them.

From **1 November through 8 November**, the Church grants a plenary indulgence, applicable to the souls in Purgatory, to the faithful who devoutly visit a cemetery and pray for the departed. The prayer may even be entirely mental. You don't need a special formula, although the traditional *Requiem aeternam* is easy and fitting.

On **2 November, All Souls' Day**, there is another indulgenced work: devoutly visit a church or oratory and recite there the *Our Father* and the *Creed*. The usual conditions apply. This indulgence, too, is applicable only to the departed.

The local Bishop or Ordinary can permit the church-visit indulgence to be obtained instead on All Saints' Day or the preceding or following Sunday.

For the norms governing these indulgences, see the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, concession 29, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1471–1479.

NB: These indulgences are specifically for the dead. You cannot apply them to yourself. Normally, only one plenary indulgence may be gained per day, so the existence of two indulgenced works on All Souls' Day does not mean that you can gain two plenary indulgences that day.

What are the usual conditions?

Along with performing the indulgenced work, you must:

1. Be in the state of grace, with at least the general intention of gaining the indulgence.
2. Make a sacramental Confession.
3. Receive Holy Communion.
4. Pray for the intentions from the Roman Pontiff. An Our Father and a Hail Mary suffice.
5. Be free from all attachment to sin, even venial sin.

That last condition might seem very hard.

Being detached from all sin does not mean that you have already achieved sinless perfection. It means that you sincerely reject every sin and have no deliberate affection for any sin, however small *at the time of the indulgenced work*. We must be willing to surrender even those familiar little sins to which we have grown embarrassingly attached. This is not an impossible ideal. The Church doesn't ask the impossible. You can do this, but it could take some time and discipline, many examinations of conscience and many fervent Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

A few practical points.

One good sacramental Confession can suffice for several plenary indulgences. You do not have to go to Confession eight days in a row. The Confession, Communion and prayers can be fulfilled within several days before or after the

indulgenced work. It is fitting, especially for Communion and prayer for the Pope's intentions, that these take place on the day of the cemetery visit.

If the full conditions for a plenary indulgence are not fulfilled, the indulgence is **partial**, provided the conditions for gaining a partial indulgence are present.

A word about indulgences, because Protestant polemics and, alas, from inadequate Catholic catechesis.

An indulgence does not forgive sins. Sins are forgiven through the mercy of God, ordinarily in the Sacrament of Penance when *mortal* sin is involved. Nevertheless, even after the guilt of sin and its eternal punishment have been remitted, temporal punishment can remain. Out of justice, something has to be done about satisfaction.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains in *CCC* 1471 that an indulgence is the remission before God of *temporal punishment* due to sins whose guilt has *already been forgiven*. A plenary indulgence remits all of that temporal punishment. A partial indulgence remits some of it.

Christ entrusted to His Church the authority to dispense these spiritual benefits from the inexhaustible treasury of His merits and those of His saints. This belongs to the mysterious and consoling reality of the Communion of Saints.

We are bound together in Christ. The saints in glory intercede for us. We on earth pray for one another and for the departed. The souls in Purgatory benefit from the suffrages of the faithful, especially the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The souls in Purgatory cannot go to Confession again. They cannot attend Mass and receive Communion as we can. They cannot make a pilgrimage to a cemetery and gain an indulgence for themselves. Their earthly time of meriting has ended.

But we can act on their behalf.

Some of those souls may have no one left on earth who remembers them. Their names have disappeared from family

conversations. Their graves are neglected. Perhaps nobody has prayed for them in decades.

God knows them. Holy Church remembers them.

We should remember them, too.

How might you do this? Find a cemetery. Go there and pray for the dead. If possible, attend Holy Mass and receive Communion. Make a good Confession. Make an honest effort to detach yourself from every sin. Do this each day from 1 through 8 November, if you can.

And don't stop praying for the dead when 8 November has passed. The whole month of November is a time to pray for the dead in a special way. A devout cemetery visit with prayer for the departed on other days of the year carries a partial indulgence. That's not nothing!

We pray for the Poor Souls now. Someday, unless we go directly to Heaven, we may be among them, longing for the prayers of those whom we have left behind.

Memento mori.

And perform the spiritual work of mercy of praying for the dead.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis. Requiescant in pace. Amen.

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

GO TO CONFESSION.
PRAY FOR THE DEAD.