

Apostolic Pardon

In addition to these, there is a little-known, but important, plenary indulgence that is granted to the dying. If it is administered by a priest, it is called the “Apostolic Pardon” or “Apostolic Blessing.”

The current ritual of the Anointing of the Sick states that the priest “may add the apostolic pardon for the dying” after the penitential rite or after the sacrament of Penance. When Viaticum is given within Mass, “the apostolic pardon may be added after the final blessing.”

The Apostolic Blessing has two forms in the ritual for the Anointing of the Sick. Both are short and easy to memorize.

Form A: “Through the holy mysteries of our redemption, may Almighty God release you from all punishments in this life and in the life to come. May He open to you the gates of paradise and welcome you to everlasting joy.”

Form B reads as follows: “By the authority which the Apostolic See has given me, I grant you a full pardon and the remission of all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, (+) and of the Holy Spirit.”

The Handbook of Indulgences reassuringly stipulates that “If a priest cannot be present, holy mother Church lovingly grants such persons who are rightly disposed a plenary indulgence to be obtained in articulo mortis, at the approach of death, provided they regularly prayed in some way during their lifetime.” Note the two conditions. The dying person must be “rightly disposed” and have “regularly prayed.”

Being rightly disposed means to be in the state of grace and without attachment even to venial sin. This is required in the gaining of any plenary indulgence. But what does it mean to have “prayed regularly in some way during their lifetime”?

The Apostolic Constitution on Indulgences, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1967, puts it this way. If one of the faithful in danger of death is unable to have a priest to administer the sacraments and to impart the apostolic blessing, “the Church, like a devoted mother, graciously grants such a person who is properly disposed a plenary indulgence to be gained at the hour of death. The one condition is the practice of praying for this all during life. Use of a crucifix or cross is recommended for the gaining of this indulgence.”

The one condition necessary in such a situation, then, is that the dying person should have desired this indulgence – and prayed for it! No doubt, this can be accomplished in many ways; but one of simplest and clearest ways would be to ponder prayerfully the words of the Apostolic Pardon itself.