Chapter 11. The doctrine and practice of indulgences which have been in force for many centuries in the Catholic Church have a solid foundation in divine revelation which comes from the Apostles and "develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit," while "as the centuries succeed one another the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."(2) For an exact understanding of this doctrine and of its beneficial use it is necessary, however, to remember truths which the entire Church illumined by the Word of God has always believed and which the bishops, the successors of the Apostles, and first and foremost among them the Roman Pontiffs, the successors of Peter, have taught by means of pastoral practice as well as doctrinal documents throughout the course of centuries to this day. 2. It is a divinely revealed truth that sins bring punishments inflicted by God's sanctity and justice. These must be expiated either on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and calamities of this life and above all through death,(3) or else in the life beyond through fire and torments or "purifying" punishments.(4) Therefore it has always been the conviction of the faithful that the paths of evil are fraught with many stumbling blocks and bring adversities, bitterness and harm to those who follow them.(5) These punishments are imposed by the just and merciful judgment of God for the purification of souls, the defense of the sanctity of the moral order and the restoration of the glory of God to its full majesty. Every sin in fact causes a perturbation in the universal order established by God in His ineffable wisdom and infinite charity, and the destruction of immense values with respect to the sinner himself and to the human community. Christians throughout history have always regarded sin not only as a transgression of divine law but also—though not always in a direct and evident way—as contempt for or disregard of the friendship between God and man, (6) just as they have regarded it as a real and unfathomable offense against God and indeed an ungrateful rejection of the love of God shown us through Jesus Christ, who called his disciples friends and not servants. (7) 3. It is therefore necessary for the full remission and—as it is called—reparation of sins not only that friendship with God be reestablished by a sincere conversion of the mind and amends made for the offense against his wisdom and goodness, but also that all the personal as well as social values and those of the universal order itself, which have been diminished or destroyed by sin, be fully reintegrated whether through voluntary reparation which will involve punishment or through acceptance of the punishments established by the just and most holy wisdom of God, from which there will shine forth throughout the world the sanctity and the splendor of his glory. The very existence and the gravity of the punishment enable us to understand the foolishness and malice of sin and its harmful consequences. That punishment or the vestiges of sin may remain to be expiated or cleansed and that they in fact frequently do even after the remission of guilt(8) is clearly demonstrated by the doctrine on purgatory. In purgatory, in fact, the souls of those "who died in the charity of God and truly repentant, but before satisfying with worthy fruits of penance for sins committed and for omissions (9) are cleansed after death with
purgatorial punishments. This is also clearly evidenced in the liturgical prayers with which the Christian community
admitted to Holy Communion has addressed God since most ancient times: “that we, who are justly subjected to
afflictions because of our sins, may be mercifully set free from them for the glory of thy name.”(10) For all men who walk
this earth daily commit at least venial sins; (11) thus all need the mercy of God to be set free from the penal
consequences of sin. Chapter 24. There reigns among men, by the hidden and benign mystery of the divine will, a
supernatural solidarity whereby the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one also benefits the others. (12)
Thus the Christian faithful give each other mutual aid to attain their supernatural aim. A testimony of this solidarity is
manifested in Adam himself, whose sin is passed on through propagation to all men. But of this supernatural solidarity
the greatest and most perfect principle, foundation and example is Christ himself to communion with Whom God has
called us. (13) 5. Indeed Christ “committed no sin,” “suffered for us,”(14) was wounded for our iniquities, bruised for our
sins...by his bruises we are healed.”(15) Following in the footsteps of Christ,(16) the Christian faithful have always
endeavored to help one another on the path leading to the heavenly Father through prayer, the exchange of spiritual
goods and penitential expiation. The more they have been immersed in the fervor of charity, the more they have imitated
Christ in his sufferings, carrying their crosses in expiation for their own sins and those of others, certain that they could
help their brothers to obtain salvation from God the Father of mercies. (17) This is the very ancient dogma of the
Communion of the Saints,(18) whereby the life of each individual son of God in Christ and through Christ is joined by a
wonderful link to the life of all his other Christian brothers in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ till, as it
were, a single mystical person is formed. (19) Thus is explained the “treasury of the Church”(20) which should certainly
not be imagined as the sum total of material goods accumulated in the course of the centuries, but the infinite and
inexhaustible value the expiation and the merits of Christ Our Lord have before God, offered as they were so that all of
mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. It is Christ the Redeemer himself in whom the
satisfactions and merits of his redemption exist and find their force. (21) This treasury also includes the truly immense,
unfathomable and ever pristine value before God of the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the
saints, who following in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have sanctified their lives and fulfilled the
mission entrusted to them by the Father. Thus while attaining their own salvation, they have also cooperated in the
salvation of their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body. “For all who are in Christ, having his spirit, form one Church
and cleave together in him” (Eph. 4:16). Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in
the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the
Church, is strengthened by a communication of spiritual goods. For by reason of the fact that those in heaven are more
closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the
Church offers to God here on earth and in many ways contribute to building it up evermore (1 Cor. 12: 12-27). For after
they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), through him and with him and
in him they do not cease to intervene with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they have won on earth
through the one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5), by serving God in all things and filling up in
their flesh those things which are lacking of the sufferings of Christ for his Body which is the Church (Col. 1:24). Thus by
their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened. (22) For this reason there certainly exists between the faithful
who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still
pilgrims on earth a perennial link of charity and an abundant exchange of all the goods by which, with the expiation of all
the sins of the entire Mystical Body, divine justice is placated. God's mercy is thus led to forgiveness, so that sincerely
repentant sinners may participate as soon as possible in the full enjoyment of the benefits of the family of God. Chapter
36. The Church, aware of these truths ever since its origins, formulated and undertook various ways of applying the fruits
of the Lord’s redemption to the individual faithful and of leading them to cooperate in the salvation of their brothers, so that the entire body of the Church might be prepared in justice and sanctity for the complete realization of the kingdom of God, when he will be all things to all men. The Apostles themselves, in fact, exhorted their disciples to pray for the salvation of sinners. (23) This very ancient usage of the Church has blessedly persevered, particularly in the practice of penitents invoking the intercession of the entire community, and when the dead are assisted with suffrages, particularly through the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. (26) Good works, particularly those which human frailty finds difficult, were also offered to God for the salvation of sinners from the Church’s most ancient times. (27) And since the sufferings of the martyrs for the faith and for the law of God were considered of great value, penitents used to turn to the martyrs, to be helped by their merits to obtain from the bishops a more speedy reconciliation. (28) Indeed the prayer and good works of the upright were considered to be of so great value that it could be asserted the penitent was washed, cleansed and redeemed with the help of the entire Christian people. (29) It was not believed, however, that the individual faithful by their own merits alone worked for the remission of sins of their brothers, but that the entire Church as a single body united to Christ its Head was bringing about satisfaction. (30) The Church of the Fathers was fully convinced that it was pursuing the work of salvation in community, and under the authority of the pastors established by the Holy Spirit as bishops to govern the Church of God. (31) The bishops, therefore, prudently assessing these matters, established the manner and the measure of the satisfaction to be made and indeed permitted canonical penances to be replaced by other possibly easier works, which would be useful to the common good and suitable for fostering piety, to be performed by the penitents themselves and sometimes by others among the faithful. (32) Chapter 47. The conviction existing in the Church that the pastors of the flock of the Lord could set the individual free from the vestiges of sins by applying the merits of Christ and of the saints led gradually, in the course of the centuries and under the influence of the Holy Spirit’s continuous inspiration of the people of God, to the usage of indulgences which represented a progression in the doctrine and discipline of the Church rather than a change. (33) From the roots of revelation a new advantage grew in benefit to the faithful and the entire Church. The use of indulgences, which spread gradually, became a very evident fact in the history of the Church when the Roman Pontiffs decreed that certain works useful to the common good of the Church "could replace all penitential practices" and that the faithful who were "truly repentant and had confessed their sins" and performed such works were granted "by the mercy of Almighty God and... trusting in the merits and the authority of his Apostles" and "by virtue of the fullness of the apostolic power," not only full and abundant forgiveness, but the most complete forgiveness for their sins possible." (35) For "the only-begotten son of God... has won a treasure for the militant Church and has entrusted it to blessed Peter, the keybearer of heaven, and to his successors, Christ’s vicars on earth, that they may distribute it to the faithful for their salvation, applying it mercifully for reasonable causes to all who are repentant and have confessed their sins, at times remitting completely and at times partially the temporal punishment due sin in a general as well as in special ways insofar as they judge it to be fitting in the eyes of the Lord. It is known that the merits of the Blessed Mother of God and of all the elect... add further to this treasure." (36) 8. The remission of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven insofar as their guilt is concerned has been called specifically "indulgence." (37) It has something in common with other ways or means of eliminating the vestiges of sin but at the same time it is clearly distinct from them. In an indulgence in fact, the Church, making use of its power as minister of the Redemption of Christ, not only prays but by an authoritative intervention dispenses to the faithful suitably disposed the treasury of satisfaction which Christ and the saints won for the remission of temporal punishment. (38) The aim pursued by ecclesiastical authority in granting indulgences is not only that of helping the faithful to expiate the punishment due sin but also that of urging them to perform works of piety, penitence and charity—particularly those which lead to growth in faith and which favor the common good. (39) And if the faithful offer indulgences in suffrage for the dead, they cultivate
charity in an excellent way and while raising their minds to heaven, they bring a wiser order into the things of this world. The Magisterium of the Church has defended and illustrated this doctrine in various documents. (40) Unfortunately, the practice of indulgences has at times been improperly used either through "untimely and superfluous indulgences" by which the power of the keys was humiliated and penitential satisfaction weakened, (41) or through the collection of "illicit profits" by which indulgences were blasphemously defamed. (42) But the Church, in deploring and correcting these improper uses "teaches and establishes that the use of indulgences must be preserved because it is supremely salutary for the Christian people and authoritatively approved by the sacred councils; and it condemns with anathema those who maintain the uselessness of indulgences or deny the power of the Church to grant them." (43)

9. The Church also in our days then invites all its sons to ponder and meditate well on how the use of indulgences benefits their lives and indeed all Christian society. To recall briefly the most important considerations, this salutary practice teaches us in the first place how it is "sad and bitter to have abandoned ... the Lord God." (44) Indeed the faithful when they acquire indulgences understand that by their own powers they could not remedy the harm they have done to themselves and to the entire community by their sin, and they are therefore stirred to a salutary humility. Furthermore, the use of indulgences shows us how closely we are united to each other in Christ, and how the supernatural life of each can benefit others so that these also may be more easily and more closely united with the Father. Therefore the use of indulgences effectively influences charity in us and demonstrates that charity in an outstanding manner when we offer indulgences as assistance to our brothers who rest in Christ.

10. Likewise, the religious practice of indulgences reawakens trust and hope in a full reconciliation with God the Father, but in such a way as will not justify any negligence nor in any way diminish the effort to acquire the dispositions required for full communion with God. Although indulgences are in fact free gifts, nevertheless they are granted for the living as well as for the dead only on determined conditions. To acquire them, it is indeed required on the one hand that prescribed works be performed, and on the other that the faithful have the necessary dispositions, that is to say, that they love God, detest sin, place their trust in the merits of Christ and believe firmly in the great assistance they derive from the Communion of Saints. In addition, it should not be forgotten that by acquiring indulgences the faithful submit docilely to the legitimate pastors of the Church and above all to the successor of Blessed Peter, the keybearer of heaven, to whom the Savior himself entrusted the task of feeding his flock and governing his Church. The salutary institution of indulgences therefore contributes in its own way to bringing it about that the Church appear before Christ without blemish or defect, but holy and immaculate, (45) admirably united with Christ in the supernatural bond of charity. Since in fact by means of indulgences members of the Church who are undergoing purification are united more speedily to those of the Church in heaven, the kingdom of Christ is through these same indulgences established more extensively and more speedily "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the deep knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ." (46)

11. Therefore Holy Mother Church, supported by these truths, while again recommending to the faithful the practice of indulgences as something very dear to the Christian people during the course of many centuries and in our days as well—this is proven by experience—does not in any way intend to diminish the value of other means of sanctification and purification, first and foremost among which are the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of Penance. Nor does it diminish the importance of those abundant aids which are called sacramentals or of the works of piety, penitence and charity. All these aids have this in common that they bring about sanctification and purification all the more efficaciously, the more closely the faithful are united with Christ the Head and the Body of the Church by charity. The preeminence of charity in the Christian life is confirmed also by indulgences. For indulgences cannot be acquired without a sincere conversion of mentality ("metanoia") and unity with God, to which the performance of the prescribed works is added. Thus the order of charity is preserved, into which is incorporated the remission of punishment by distribution from
the Church's treasury. While recommending that its faithful not abandon or neglect the holy traditions of their forebears but welcome them religiously as a precious treasure of the Catholic family and duly esteem them, the Church nevertheless leaves it to each to use these means of purification and sanctification with the holy and free liberty of the sons of God. It constantly reminds them, though, of those things which are to be given preference because they are necessary or at least better and more efficacious for the attainment of salvation. (47) Holy Mother Church has then deemed it fitting, in order to give greater dignity and esteem to the use of indulgences, to introduce some innovations into its discipline of indulgences and has accordingly ordered the issuance of new norms. Chapter 512. The following norms introduce appropriate variations in the discipline of indulgences, taking into consideration the proposals advanced by the episcopal conferences. The rulings of the Code of Canon Law and of the decrees of the Holy See concerning indulgences which do not go counter to the new norms remain unchanged. In drawing up the new norms these three considerations have been particularly observed: to establish a new measurement for partial indulgences; to reduce considerably the number of plenary indulgences; and, as for the so-called "real" and "local" indulgences, to reduce them and give them a simpler and more dignified formulation. Regarding partial indulgences, with the abolishment of the former determination of days and years, a new norm or measurement has been established which takes into consideration the action itself of the faithful Christian who performs a work to which an indulgence is attached. Since by their acts the faithful can obtain, in addition to the merit which is the principal fruit of the act, a further remission of temporal punishment in proportion to the degree to which the charity of the one performing the act is greater, and in proportion to the degree to which the act itself is performed in a more perfect way, it has been considered fitting that this remission of temporal punishment which the Christian faithful acquire through an action should serve as the measurement for the remission of punishment which the ecclesiastical authority bountifully adds by way of partial indulgence. It has also been considered fitting to reduce appropriately the number of plenary indulgences in order that the faithful may hold them in greater esteem and may in fact acquire them with the proper dispositions. For indeed the greater the proliferation (of indulgences) the less is the attention given them; what is offered in abundance is not greatly appreciated. Besides, many of the faithful need considerable time to prepare themselves properly for acquisition of a plenary indulgence. As regards the "real" and "local" indulgences, not only has their number been reduced considerably, but the designations themselves have been abolished to make it clearer that indulgences are attached to the actions performed by the faithful and not to objects or places which are but the occasion for the acquisition of the indulgences. In fact, members of pious associations can acquire the indulgences proper to their associations without the requirement of the use of distinctive objects. NORMS n. 1—An indulgence is the remission before God of the temporal punishment due sins already forgiven as far as their guilt is concerned, which the follower of Christ with the proper dispositions and under certain determined conditions acquires through the intervention of the Church which, as minister of the Redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the satisfaction won by Christ and the saints. n. 2—An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due sin. n. 3—Partial as well as plenary indulgences can always be applied to the dead by way of suffrage. n. 4—A partial indulgence will henceforth be designated only with the words "partial indulgence" without any determination of days or years. n. 5—The faithful who at least with a contrite heart perform an action to which a partial indulgence is attached obtain, in addition to the remission of temporal punishment acquired by the action itself, an equal remission of punishment through the intervention of the Church. n. 6—A plenary indulgence can be acquired only once a day, except for the provisions contained in n. 18 for those who are on the point of death. A partial indulgence can be acquired more than once a day, unless there is an explicit indication to the contrary. n. 7—To acquire a plenary indulgence it is necessary to perform the work to which the indulgence is attached and to fulfill three conditions: sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion and prayer for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff. It is
further required that all attachment to sin, even to venial sin, be absent. If this disposition is in any way less complete, or if the prescribed three conditions are not fulfilled, the indulgence will be only partial, except for the provisions contained in n. 11 for those who are "impeded." n. 8—The three conditions may be fulfilled several days before or after the performance of the prescribed work; nevertheless it is fitting that Communion be received and the prayers for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff be said the same day the work is performed. n. 9—A single sacramental confession suffices for gaining several plenary indulgences, but Communion must be received and prayers for the Supreme Pontiff's intentions recited for the gaining of each plenary indulgence. n. 10—The condition of praying for the Supreme Pontiff's intentions is fully satisfied by reciting one "Our Father" and one "Hail Mary"; nevertheless the individual faithful are free to recite any other prayer according to their own piety and devotion toward the Supreme Pontiff. n. 11—While there is no change in the faculty granted by canon 935 of the Code of Canon Law to confessors to commute for those who are "impeded" either the prescribed work itself or the required conditions [for the acquisition of indulgences], local Ordinaries can grant to the faithful over whom they exercise authority in accordance with the law, and who live in places where it is impossible or at least very difficult for them to receive the sacraments of confession and Communion, permission to acquire a plenary indulgence without confession and Communion provided they are sorry for their sins and have the intention of receiving these sacraments as soon as possible. n. 12—The division of indulgences into "personal," "real" and "local" is abolished so as to make it clearer that indulgences are attached to the actions of the faithful even though at times they may be linked with some object or place. n. 13—The Enchiridion Indulgentiarium [collection of indulgenced prayers and works] is to be revised with a view to attaching indulgences only to the most important prayers and works of piety, charity and penance. n. 14—The lists and summaries of indulgences special to religious orders, congregations, societies of those living in community without vows, secular institutes and the pious associations of faithful are to be revised as soon as possible in such a way that plenary indulgences may be acquired only on particular days established by the Holy See acting on the recommendation of the Superior General, or in the case of pious associations, of the local Ordinary. n. 15—A plenary indulgence applicable only to the dead can be acquired in all churches and public oratories—and in semipublic oratories by those who have the right to use them—on November 2. In addition, a plenary indulgence can be acquired twice a year in parish churches: on the feast of the church's titular saint and on August 2, when the "Portiuncula" occurs, or on some other more opportune day determined by the Ordinary. All the indulgences mentioned above can be acquired either on the days established or—with the consent of the Ordinary—on the preceding or the following Sunday. Other indulgences attached to churches and oratories are to be revised as soon as possible. n. 16—The work prescribed for acquiring a plenary indulgence connected with a church or oratory consists in a devout visit and the recitation of an "Our Father" and "Creed." n. 17—The faithful who use with devotion an object of piety (crucifix, cross, rosary, scapular or medal) properly blessed by any priest, can acquire a partial indulgence. But if this object of piety is blessed by the Supreme Pontiff or any bishop, the faithful who use it devoutly can also acquire a plenary indulgence on the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, provided they also make a profession of faith using any legitimate formula. n. 18—To the faithful in danger of death who cannot be assisted by a priest to bring them the sacraments and impart the apostolic blessing with its attendant plenary indulgence (according to canon 468, para. 2 of the Code of Canon Law) Holy Mother Church nevertheless grants a plenary indulgence to be acquired at the point of death, provided they are properly disposed and have been in the habit of reciting some prayers during their lifetime. To use a crucifix or cross in connection with the acquisition of this plenary indulgence is a laudable practice. This plenary indulgence at the point of death can be acquired by the faithful even if they have already obtained another plenary indulgence on the same day. n. 19—The norms established regarding plenary indulgences, particularly those referred to in n. 16, apply also to what up to now have been known as the "toties quoties" ["as often as"] plenary
indulgences.n.20—Holy Mother Church, extremely solicitous for the faithful departed, has decided that suffrages can be applied to them to the widest possible extent at any Sacrifice of the Mass whatsoever, abolishing all special privileges in this regard. **Transitional Norms** These new norms regulating the acquisition of indulgences will become valid three months from the date of publication of this constitution in the Acta Apostolicae Sedis. Indulgences attached to the use of religious objects which are not mentioned above cease three months after the date of publication of this constitution in the Acta Apostolicae Sedis. The revisions mentioned in n. 14 and n. 15 must be submitted to the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary within a year. Two years after the date of this constitution, indulgences which have not been confirmed will become null and void. We will that these statutes and prescriptions of ours be established now and remain in force for the future notwithstanding, if it is necessary so to state, the constitutions and apostolic directives published by our predecessors or any other prescriptions even if they might be worthy of special mention or should otherwise require partial repeal. **Given at Rome at St. Peter's on January 1, the octave of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 1967, the fourth year of Our Pontificate.**

**POPE PAUL**

### VI

**NOTES**