

Mercy Sunday's Special Graces, Plenary Indulgence: Are They the Same?

by Dr. Robert Stackpole

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A Mr. Dwyer asked: What is the difference between that special graces promised by Jesus for devout communicants on Mercy Sunday, and the plenary indulgence for Mercy Sunday devotions that was instituted several years ago by Pope John Paul II? Are they the same thing? Or are they different?

Simply put: They are NOT the same thing!

The main difference, of course, is that an "indulgence" is something offered to the faithful by the Church, as the keeper of the keys of the kingdom, with authority to "bind and loose" (see Mt 16:17-19). The special graces of Mercy Sunday, on the other hand, were promised directly by our Lord, through a prophetic revelation given to St. Faustina (see Diary of St. Faustina, 699). The Church has not officially ruled that this particular promise was an authentic supernatural revelation (and no Catholic is required to believe it as a matter of faith), but the Church has discerned, in various ways, that there is nothing that violates Catholic doctrine in this promise.

Briefly, here are the other main differences between the "special graces" promised by Jesus for Divine Mercy Sunday, and the plenary indulgence offered by the Church for special devotions to The Divine Mercy on Mercy Sunday:

1) The special graces that our Lord promised for Mercy Sunday come solely through the reception of Holy Communion on that day, in a state of grace, with trust in The Divine Mercy. Any plenary indulgence granted by the Church, on the other hand, involves the fulfilment of a number of conditions, including prayer for the pope's intentions, confession and Holy Eucharist, and the carrying out of the special indulgenced work (in this case: participating in public devotions to The Divine Mercy on Mercy Sunday itself).

2) The special graces promised by our Lord for Mercy Sunday can be received by a soul in a state of grace, but with imperfect love for God, and imperfect contrition for sin—as long as the soul merely trusts in the Mercy of God, and clings to Him because of His promised benefits. A plenary indulgence, however, can only be obtained through the performance of an indulgenced work as an expression of pure love for God. If the intentions of one's indulgenced work are not pure (say, the work is done in part out of fear of hell or purgatory, and loathing for oneself — or the desire to impress one's friends and relatives! — rather than purely out of love for God) then the indulgence obtained will be only partial, not plenary.

3) The special graces that our Lord promised for Mercy Sunday can only be received for oneself, through the devout reception of Holy Communion on Mercy Sunday (as stated in #1 above). A plenary indulgence, however, can be offered for oneself, or for souls suffering in purgatory.

4) The most special grace promised by our Lord for Mercy Sunday is nothing less than the equivalent of a complete renewal of baptismal grace in the soul: "complete forgiveness (remission) of sins and punishment." Such a measure of grace can only be received otherwise through baptism itself, or through making a sacramental confession as an act of perfect contrition for sin, out of pure love for God.

As you can see, this is no easy topic. However, you can find a more in-depth treatment of this same subject in the John Paul II Institute of Divine Mercy section of this same website, in the document entitled "Understanding Divine Mercy Sunday."

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