

It wasn't a coincidence. When Martin Luther decided to nail his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenburg Castle Church, he chose Halloween to do it. This Augustinian monk held fiercely to many grievous doctrinal errors, but he did understand one thing: the liturgical year of the Catholic Church.

The liturgical year is meant to do two things at once: through it, we cast our eyes back towards Christ's life on earth and through it we simultaneously cast our eyes forward through the long history of mankind, a history which will be crowned in the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ. Luther understood this. That's why he really had no choice. His attack on indulgences had to take place on All Hallow's Eve. We moderns don't realize the significance of the day because our seasons are confused.

For instance, we all know that America celebrates New Year's Day on the wrong day. The new year doesn't begin January 1st, it begins on the first Sunday of Advent. Advent, of course, is the season during which we meditate on man's sinfulness and prepare for Christmas. At least, we used to.

### **The Confusion of Seasons**

Up until World War II, every Christian treated Advent as a time of preparation and repentance. Stockings, ornaments, even Christmas trees, were not erected in any house until Christmas Eve. During Advent, everyone meditated on the world's wickedness prior to God come in the flesh (past), and prepared themselves for the Last Day, when God comes as Judge (future). For centuries, Christmas was at once both a reminder of the Incarnation, the First Coming, and a reminder of Dooms-Day, Judgement Day, the Second Coming.

That's why Christmas gifts were exchanged only during Christmas season (which doesn't start until Christmas Eve). The exchange of gifts not only recalled the gifts of the magi to the Christ child (past), they also reminded us of the wonderful exchange of Divine Persons within the Trinity, the exchange we enter into in Heaven after Judgement Day (future).

World War II changed all that. Because it took six weeks to transport anything by ship over the ocean, Americans were told to buy their Christmas gifts for their sons overseas by Thanksgiving, or their sons would not receive those gifts during Christmas season. American businesses liked the extra income generated by the much longer and earlier selling season – six weeks beats twelve days hands down.

Sixty years of advertising broke two millenia of Christian practice. Halloween has now become the closest thing we have to an Advent season. Advent is now a four-week long Christmas season, and Christmas season is now Purgatory. The season during which we are supposed to celebrate our life in heaven with the Christ child is now the time we pay all the bills.

In Luther's time, everything was still in its proper order: Death, Purgatory, Judgement Day. Death and Purgatory were recalled first through the commemoration of All Saints' Day, emphasizing those who died and went straight to heaven, and all Souls' Day, emphasizing those who died and still had more purification ahead of them.

Purgatory, of course, is not someplace any of us are supposed to end up. God calls each of us to purify our lives of every sin while we are still alive here on earth. Indeed, we are called not only to purify our lives of every sin, but to purify the universe of every consequence of every sin we may have committed. And make no mistake about it: every sin carries a consequence, not just a spiritual consequence, but a material consequence.

### **How Grace Works**

When you or I sin, we remove grace from our lives. Grace is power. It is the ability to live life in peace and joy. When we remove this power, we are unable to live life peacefully or with joy. So, no matter how secret my sin may be, because it removes from me the power to be peaceful and joyful, I will be rendered unhappy by my sin. Because I lack the grace of joy, I will inevitably lash out at you, with unhappy word or fist, as a direct consequence of my oh-so-secret sin. Because I am not at

peace, each of you who meet me are tempted to relinquish your peace. If any of you do, you will pass the pain along to the people you meet. The effects of my secret, solitary, stone-hearted sin ripple inexorably out into the world, tearing apart more and more lives.

There is good news. When I go to confession, my sins are forgiven and the grace, the power, to be joyful and at peace is restored to me. All I have to do is live it.

There is bad news. Even though my ability to live peacefully is restored, the effects of my earlier sins are still rippling through the world. Others are still being tormented by the consequences of my sin.

There is astonishing news. God expects me to purify the world of these rippling consequences. He gives me the grace to do it through the works of indulgences.

An indulgence is the flood of grace brought into the world through my obedience to Christ and His Bride. It is a somewhat arbitrary obedience that answers for my earlier arbitrary disobedience. God does not owe me this grace, He gives it to me freely, for He knows I cannot clean up the mess I made unless I receive this assistance. The flood of grace from my repeated obediences slows or removes the negative consequences of my past disobediences.

### **Why Indulgences Matter**

Paul tells us that we are God's co-workers (1 Cor 3:9). God's work is the total eradication of sin and all its consequences. Thus, our work is likewise the total eradication of sin and all its consequences. He expects each of us to do our part.

We each learn obedience as Christ did, through suffering (Heb 5:8). Every living man must learn obedience, must clean up his own mess. I can only win the flood of grace, the indulgence, if I am first in a state of grace: my sins must first be forgiven in confession. I can win the flood of grace only for myself, or for those who can no longer obey in the flesh because they no longer have their flesh with them. That is, I can assist those who cannot easily help themselves – the dead.

Some people die in a state of grace, but have not

finished cleaning up their mess. This poses a problem. There is only one way to cleanse the world: join in Christ's suffering. But Christ suffered in His own body. When I am dead, I do not have a body until the Last Day. Because of this crippling lack, my spiritual suffering must do double-duty, for the part of me which is supposed to do the work of suffering, that is, my flesh, is not present to help out. This double-duty suffering is Purgatory.

When I, as a living man, offer indulgences for the dead, I acknowledge that 1 Corinthians 12 is correct: when one suffers, all share the pain. The pain of those in Purgatory is my pain, for the consequences of their sins still affects me – that's part of the reason they are in Purgatory. But, when my assistance has helped a soul complete the necessary purification, 1 Corinthians 12 likewise applies: when one is honored, all share the glory.

In Luther's time, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day were the pre-eminent days for Catholics to remember and apply 1 Corinthians 12. On those days, Catholics flocked to perform indulgences, for they wanted to purify the world of the consequences of sin, they wanted to purify themselves, they wanted to help those who had died complete their purifications.

The weeks between All Hallow's Eve and the First Sunday of Advent corresponded to the end of the ages. In a few short weeks, the new age would be upon them! In this new age, Christmas-Parousia would be celebrated. Everyone had to prepare, all had to sweep their house clean of leaven, that is, the consequences of sin, and ready themselves for the heavenly banquet, where they would feast on the pure flesh of God.

Sadly, Luther's badly-formed theology had no place for meaningful human suffering or men as divine co-workers. He rejected both indulgences and purgatory. So, he attacked indulgences at the crucial moment – the moment during the year when men began to prepare themselves to consciously live as divine co-workers.

His attack on Catholic theology may have begun with indulgences, but it ended by destroying the common understanding that God empowers man to sanctify everything, even time itself. Today, what Luther began on Halloween has reached full crescendo. He did attack it at the crucial moment, for the word "crucial" comes from the Latin "crux", which means Cross. By nailing his attack on indulgences on that door, he crucified the idea that men should share Christ's sufferings.

Now, especially in America, Christ suffers alone.

Do you want to change that?

Then take back the seasons.

Here's one way to do it. The Calendar of Indulgences, created by Bridegroom Press, is a simple appointment calendar that lists every indulgence Christ offers us through His Bride, the Church. It explains what an indulgence is, how to do each one, and gives you an opportunity to consider each in turn over the course of the year, so that you can choose the ones which best suits your spiritual needs in each liturgical season. Historical notes are arranged chronologically throughout the months, showing how the doctrine of indulgences developed from apostolic times onward, while weekly reminders to fast and receive Confession help you order your spiritual life. The last section of the calendar shows you how to Scripturally defend a different doctrine of the Church. Use the calendar to keep track of regular activities, use it as you would any other calendar, and slowly allow yourself to be caught up in the prayerful rhythms of the liturgical year.

God gave us the liturgy so that we could learn to change our lives. We have to find some way to allow the liturgical year into our lives. This liturgical year, make a resolution to let Him change you.

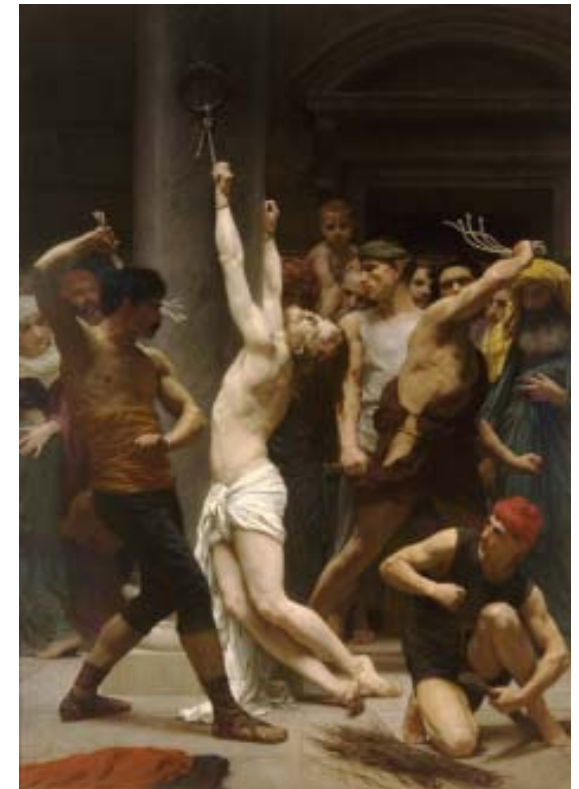
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# Nailing Christ to the Cross



**Explaining  
Purgatory and Indulgences**