



Gravibus Ecclesia

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX Proclaiming a Jubilee For 1875 December 24, 1874

To All the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, other Ordinaries in Favor and Communion with the Apostolic See and to All the Faithful in Christ.

Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Moved by the grave calamities of the Church and this age and by the necessity of imploring divine aid, We have never ceased urging Christian people to please God by holy lives, works of penance, and pious supplication. For this purpose We have frequently granted indulgences to encourage true repentance; in this way, the faithful can become worthy of having their prayers graciously accepted by God. When the Ecumenical Vatican Council convened, We decided to do the same so that this grave undertaking might be aided by the prayers of the entire Church to God. Although the Council was suspended because of current calamities, nevertheless We proclaimed that said indulgence remained in effect.

Observance of Jubilee Year

2. The year 1875 signifies that sacred period of time which our ancestors and Our predecessors consecrated for the solemn celebration of a universal Jubilee. During tranquil times, the Jubilee year was observed with veneration and piety. It was always considered a year of redemption and grace, remission and indulgences, in which people from all over the world flock to Rome. It always resulted in the salvation of many souls.

Circumstances Affecting Jubilee Years

3. When Leo XII opened the Jubilee Year in 1825, it was accepted with such popular fervor that a constant stream of pilgrims arrived in this city throughout the whole year; the splendor of religion, piety, faith, charity, and all sorts of virtue shone in it. Because of the grievous conditions of the times, We had to omit the solemnity of the Jubilee in 1850. We wish that circumstances now were such that We could celebrate happily according to the custom of Our predecessors.

Current Evils

The difficulties which prohibited Us from opening the Jubilee have even increased. The many evils which afflict the Church include the following: attempts to separate souls from their faith in Christ, corruption of sound doctrine and the spreading of impiety, widespread scandals, the spreading corruption of morals, and the overturning of divine and human rights which could lead to the collapse of undistorted thinking. With such a collection of evils, We must see to the following: that faith, religion, and piety be defended and prosper; that the spirit of prayer be widely fostered; that those who have lapsed be aroused to repentance; that sins, which have deserved the wrath of God, be averted by holy works. Since the Jubilee is principally directed to these concerns, We thought that we should not allow the Christian people to be deprived of this salutary benefit, at least in that form which the condition of the times permits. Purified of their sins, they may more readily acquire divine favor and grace.

Announcement of 1875 Jubilee Year

4. Therefore We proclaim to the exaltation of the Church, to the sanctification of the Christian people, and to the glory of God, a universal Jubilee to last for the entire year of 1875 soon to begin. In view of this Jubilee We suspend the above mentioned indulgence conceded on the occasion of the Vatican Council; instead, We open that heavenly treasury of indulgences which is entrusted to Our dispensation.

Requirements for Indulgences

5. God has granted Us the power to grant indulgences to all the Christian faithful who are truly penitent and have confessed their sins and have been refreshed by holy Communion along with one of the following: either devoutly visiting the urban basilicas of Sts. Peter and Paul, St. John Lateran, and St. Mary Major at least once a day for fifteen continuous or interspersed days whether natural or ecclesiastical, that is, computing from first vespers of one day to the full evening twilight of the next day; or, devoutly visiting once a day for fifteen continuous or interspersed days their cathedral or principal church and three other churches of the same city or place or in its suburbs as designated by the Ordinaries, their vicars, or others delegated by them. There they should pray for the prosperity and exaltation of the Catholic Church and this Apostolic See, for the extirpation of heresies and the conversion of all in error, and for the peace and unity of the whole Christian people. All who fulfill these requirements may obtain once during 1875 the fullest indulgence, with remission and pardon for all their sins. These same indulgences may be applied to the departed souls.

Exemptions from Conditions for Indulgence

6. As for those at sea or journeying, they may obtain the same indulgence when they return home or elsewhere when they have fulfilled the above mentioned conditions and have visited the same number of times the cathedral or principal

church or the parish church of their domicile or place of sojourn. Ordinaries may dispense with the prescribed visits in the case of nuns, oblates, and other girls or women living either in monastic cloister or in other religious or pious houses and communities; anchorites and hermits; others, whether laity or secular, in prison or captivity or prevented by some bodily infirmity or other impediment from carrying out the above mentioned visits. They may also dispense young people who have not yet made their first Communion from the condition of Communion. Instead, they may prescribe other works of piety, religion, or charity in place of the visits or the sacrament of Communion mentioned above. Priests, sodalities, confraternities, universities, or colleges and those visiting their churches in procession can validly reduce the number of these visits according to their prudent judgment.

Confessors

7. Moreover, in the case of cloistered nuns and their novices, We grant them permission to choose for themselves for this purpose any confessor approved by their Ordinary for hearing the confessions of nuns. The rest of the faithful may choose for this purpose any priest approved for hearing the confessions of the laity by the Ordinaries themselves. And by the same authority, We grant to these confessors the right to absolve, within the said year, all those who came to confession to them, who seriously desire to gain the present Jubilee indulgence, and who have fulfilled the other requirements for obtaining it. On this occasion and in the internal forum of conscience only, they may absolve from excommunication, suspension and other ecclesiastical sentences and censures *a iure* or *ab homine*, no matter for what reason they were passed or inflicted even by Ordinaries, Ourselves or the Apostolic See, and also in cases which are specially reserved to the above and which are not otherwise understood to be granted in any ample concession. They may also absolve from all sins and excesses, however grave and enormous, even those reserved to the same Ordinaries, to Ourselves, and to the Apostolic See, as indicated above. However a salutary penance and whatever else is called for by law should be imposed. They may also commute to other pious and salutary works any vows, even those which are public and reserved to the Apostolic See. The only exceptions are vows of chastity, religion, and obligation which were received by a third party or which prejudice the rights of a third party, and also penalties which are labelled *praeservativa a peccato*, unless the commutation is judged to be of such a nature that it will prevent sin no less than the previous matter of the vow. They may also validly dispense penitents in sacred orders, and even religious men, from any hidden irregularity to the exercise of that order and the acquisition of higher orders, provided the irregularity has been contracted by the violation of censures.

8. We do not intend, however, by this letter to dispense from any other irregularity, whether public or hidden, nor from any defect, infamy, or any other inability or unfitness however contracted, nor to grant any faculty of dispensing beyond those mentioned, of making one suitable, or of returning one to a former state, even in the internal forum of conscience; nor to alter the apostolic constitution with its

appropriate declarations of Benedict XIV, Sacramentum poenitentiae, 1 June 1741, in the first year of his pontificate. Nor do We intend in any way to reinstate by this letter those who have been excommunicated by name by Ourselves and the Apostolic See or any prelate or ecclesiastic judge, nor those who have been suspended, nor those who have fallen under interdict, nor those who have been declared to have incurred other sentences and censures, nor those who were publicly denounced, unless within the year, they have made satisfaction and, where necessary, have been reconciled with the persons concerned.

Other Unusual Circumstances

9. Moreover, if anyone sets out to obtain the indulgence but dies before completing the required number of visits, if he is truly penitent and has confessed and received holy communion, We grant him the indulgence anyway. If, more over, after having obtained absolution from censures or commutation of vows or the aforesaid dispensations, anyone changes his intention of obtaining the indulgence, although he can scarcely be considered from this very fact to be free from the pain of sin, still We declare that the absolutions, communications, and dispensations which he has obtained with the above-mentioned disposition persist in force.

10. Moreover, We decree that this present encyclical is valid for all places. It applies to all Christians in favor and obedience with the Apostolic See dwelling in these places, even if they return to them afterwards from sea or land journeys. This encyclical is valid notwithstanding the following: decrees granting indulgences ad instar and other decrees of the Apostolic See or of universal, provincial, and synodal councils; general or special reservations of absolutions, relaxations, and dispensations; statutes, laws, usages, and customs of any mendicant or military order, congregation or institute even such as have been confirmed by vow, by apostolic approval, or by any other backing; privileges, indults, and apostolic letters granted to the above, especially those which expressly forbid a professed religious of any order, congregation or institute of this nature to confess their sins to a confessor who is not a member of their own religious family. For this time and for the purpose We mentioned, We fully abrogate all of the above even if for their proper modification they and their entire tenor must be specifically, expressly, and individually mentioned or if another special form must be employed for this purpose. Tenors of this kind are regarded as included in this abrogation. Such forms are considered as most exactly observed.

Inform the Faithful

11. On behalf of the Apostolic office which We administer and the solicitude with which We embrace the entire flock of Christ, We propose this salutary opportunity of obtaining forgiveness and grace. We earnestly beg and beseech all Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, other Ordinaries, Prelates and those legitimately exercising ordinary jurisdiction where a bishop or prelate of this nature is lacking who have favor with the Apostolic See, in the name of Jesus Christ, to announce to

your faithful this great good. Strive that all the faithful, reconciled to God by penance, direct the grace of the Jubilee towards the profit and advantage of their souls. Thus it will be your principal care that having first implored God to fill the minds and hearts of all with His light and grace, the Christian people be directed to receive the fruit of the Jubilee by opportune instructions and admonitions. They should understand that the nature of a Christian Jubilee is for the good of souls. In a spiritual way, those goods are most abundantly fulfilled every fiftieth year, according to the ancient Jewish law. They should also be taught the force of the indulgences and what is necessary for a fruitful confession of sins and for receiving piously the sacrament of the Eucharist.

12. Your labor as well as your example is required so that the faithful grow spiritually; therefore inspire your priests to work toward this also. They would set a good example if they first renewed the spirit of their holy vocation.

Current Evils

13. Today, there are many evils which must be corrected, and many good things which must be promoted. See that your people may come to detest the enormous crime of blasphemy which violates everything these days. Also, by observing the laws concerning keeping holy feast days and fast and abstinence, they may carry out their duties, thus avoiding the punishments which contempt of these things involves. Safeguard clerical discipline and care for the proper education of the clergy. In every way possible help beleaguered youth, which is exposed to so much danger. Christ hated this type of evil so much that He spoke the following words against its perpetrators: "whosoever scandalizes one of these little ones who believe in Me, it would be better for him to have a millstone placed around his neck and be put in the sea." [1]

Encourage Charity

14. Charitable works of all kinds should be exercised more fervently in a Jubilee year. Therefore, encourage almsgiving to assist the poor as sacred scripture recommends. Support especially those pious institutes which are most conducive to the well-being of souls and bodies. God will bestow heavenly gifts upon those who do so.

Advice to Clergy Personally

15. Finally We exhort each of you to utilize this occasion to acquire the grace of the Jubilee. If ever before, certainly now it is most necessary to cleanse your consciences from dead works, to offer sacrifices of justice, to produce worthy fruits of penance, and to sow in tears so that you may reap in joy. The divine Majesty has given abundant signs of what He asks of us, since for a long time now we labor because of our wickedness under his punishment, under the breath of the spirit of His anger. Truly "men are accustomed when they suffer any enormous difficulty to

send ambassadors to neighboring peoples for help. We, as is better, send ambassadors to God;" therefore let us implore help from Him, let us turn to Him with hearts, prayers, fasts and almsgiving. "For the nearer we are to God, the further our adversaries are repelled from us."[2]

16. Listen carefully to those of you who labor and are heavily burdened and those who, wandering from the pathways of salvation, are burdened beneath the yoke of evil desires and enslavement to the devil. Do not disdain the riches of the goodness, patience and benignity of God; and, while such an easy means of obtaining pardon is offered to you, do not by your contumacy render yourselves inexcusable before the divine Judge, thereby piling up wrath for your selves. Return from prevarication to wisdom, be reconciled with God. The world and its concupiscence is transitory; therefore, reject the works of darkness, put on the arms of light, and cease being enemies of your souls. Then you may win, at last, peace in this world and the eternal rewards of the just in the next.

17. These are Our dearest wishes; We do not cease asking them of our most clement Lord. If all Our sons in the Catholic Church join with Us in this prayer, We are confident that We will bountifully acquire these good things from the Father of Mercies.

18. As a guarantee, meanwhile, of all grace and heavenly blessings for the happy and salutary fruit of this holy work, We lovingly bestow from the depths of Our heart, the Apostolic Blessing on all of you, venerable brothers, and on you, beloved sons, who are enrolled in the Catholic Church.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, 24 December 1874.

References:

1. Mk 9.41.
2. St. Maximus of Turin, homily 91