Vatican
News
A family prays next to a relative's grave in a cemetery during All Souls' Day in Khartoum, Sud

A family prays next to a relative's grave in a cemetery during All Souls' Day in Khartoum, Sudan, in this Nov. 11, 2014, file photo. (CNS photo/Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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With the COVID-19 pandemic still underway and with restrictions on gatherings still in place in some countries, the Vatican has again extended the period of time when people can earn a plenary indulgence for visiting a cemetery and praying for the souls of the faithful in purgatory.

Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican tribunal dealing with matters of conscience, said the indulgences traditionally obtained during the first week of November can be gained throughout the entire month of November, the Vatican announced Oct. 28.

The cardinal said he was acting in response to "pleas recently received from various sacred pastors of the church because of the state of the continuing pandemic."

Traditionally, the faithful could receive a full indulgence each day from Nov. 1 to Nov. 8 when they visited a cemetery to pray for the departed and fulfilled other conditions, and, in particular, when they went to a church or an oratory to pray Nov.

2, All Souls' Day.

Because of the pandemic and the popularity in many cultures of visiting cemeteries for All Souls' Day, some local governments and dioceses closed cemeteries in the first week of November to prevent crowding. That led Cardinal Piacenza to issue a decree in 2020 extending the period for the indulgences.

The decree for 2021 renewed those provisions.

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Indulgences are granted when a Catholic visits a cemetery to pray for the dead, goes to confession, attends Mass and receives the Eucharist and prays for the intentions of the pope.

An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment one deserves for one's sins; people often will seek the indulgence on behalf of a loved one who has died or, especially in early November, for an unknown soul in purgatory.

The church teaches that prayer, particularly the Mass, and sacrifices may be offered on behalf of the souls in purgatory. The feast of All Souls differs from the Nov. 1 feast of All Saints precisely because it offers prayers for the eternal peace and heavenly rest of all those who died in a state of grace, but not totally purified.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."