

## WHAT IS A NOVENA???

**Novena** (from *novem*, nine), is a nine day private or public devotion in the [Catholic Church](#) to obtain special graces. The octave has more of the festal character: to the novena belongs that of hopeful mourning, of yearning, of prayer. “The number nine in Holy Writ is indicative of suffering and grief” (St. Jerome, in Ezech., vii, 24;—P.L., XXV, 238, cf. XXV, 1473). The novena is permitted and even recommended by ecclesiastical authority, but still has no proper and fully set place in the liturgy of the [Church](#). It has, however, more and more been prized and utilized by the faithful. Four kinds of novenas can be distinguished: (1) novenas of mourning, (2) of preparation, (3) of prayer, and (4) the indulgenced novenas, though this distinction is not exclusive.

## SO - WHAT IS AN INDULGENCE???

The indulgence may be gained on any day of the novena, and those who are prevented by illness or another legitimate cause from communicating during the novena may gain the indulgence by doing so as soon as possible. All of these novenas without exception are to be made, in private or in public, with pious exercises and the reception of the [Sacraments](#), and for these usually a daily partial Indulgence can be gained and a plenary Indulgence at the end of the novena. The [Indulgences](#) and the conditions for gaining them are accurately given in detail in the authentic “[Raccolta](#)” and in the works on [Indulgences](#) by Beringer and Hilgers, which have appeared in various languages. The indulgenced novenas, to a certain extent official, have but contributed to increase the confidence of the faithful in novenas. Hence, even the private novena of prayer flourishes in our day.

## WHO CAN GRANT INDULGENCES???

The distribution of the merits contained in the treasury of the [Church](#) is an exercise of authority (*potestas jurisdictionis*), not of the power conferred by Holy orders (*potestas ordinis*). Hence the pope, as supreme head of the [Church](#) on earth, can grant all kinds of indulgences to any and all of the faithful; and he alone can grant plenary indulgences. The power of the bishop, previously unrestricted, was limited by Innocent III (1215) to the granting of one year’s indulgence at the dedication of a church and of forty days on other occasions. Pius X (August 28, 1903) allowed cardinals in their titular churches and dioceses to grant 200 days; archbishops – 100 days; bishops – 50 days. These indulgences are not applicable to the souls departed. They can be gained by persons not belonging to the diocese, but temporarily within its limits; and by the subjects of the granting bishop, whether these are within the diocese or outside—except when the indulgence is deemed as local. Priests, vicars-general, abbots, and generals of religious orders cannot grant indulgences unless specially authorized to do so. On the other hand, the pope can empower a cleric who is not a priest to give an indulgence (St. Thomas, “Quodlib.”, II, q. viii, a. 16).

## DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY TO GAIN AN INDULGENCE.

The mere fact that the [Church](#) proclaims an indulgence does not imply that it can be gained without effort on the part of the faithful. From what has been said above, it is clear that the recipient must be free from the guilt of mortal sin. Furthermore, for plenary indulgences, confession and Communion are usually required, while for partial indulgences, though confession is not obligatory, i.e. “at least with a contrite heart”, is the customary prescription. It is also necessary to have the intention of gaining the indulgence. Finally, from the nature of the case, it is obvious that one must perform the good works—prayers, alms deeds, visits to a church.