

# Pope expands indulgences for 2000 fest

## Individuals — and nations — offered ways to show penitence in holy year

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ROME — For Roman Catholics, the year 2000 offers early salvation.

Pope John Paul II announced Friday that throughout the millennium celebration, penitents who do a charitable deed or give up cigarettes or alcohol for a day can earn an "indulgence" that will eliminate time in purgatory.

Indulgences are a form of amnesty that releases penitents from certain forms of punishment in this life or the next.

The medieval church sold indulgences, a practice that helped drive Martin Luther to rebel, leading to the Reformation. They remain a

source of theological debate between Protestants and Catholics, and since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church has played down their importance.

By restoring indulgences to so prominent a position, the pope is making penitence a theme of the millennium celebration. He is also reassuring conservatives in the church. But by broadening the ways believers can earn an indulgence, the pope is also trying to imbue indulgences with some of the ecumenical spirit he wants to give the celebrations.

In a papal bull titled "Incarnationis Mysterium" (The Mystery of the Incarnation) that will be issued

Sunday, John Paul formally proclaimed 2000 a holy year and issued edicts that in many ways serve as a practical guide to spiritual salvation during the period.

Parts of the papal document dealt with collective penitence. The pope asked Catholics to seek forgiveness for past historical errors during the celebration, which will run from Christmas 1999 through the Feast of the Epiphany, Jan. 6, 2001. He also asked rich nations to ease or substantially eliminate Third World debt.

The pope said individual sinners would be granted "plenary indulgences," a full pardon for sins, as opposed to a shortening of the time spent in purgatory. In Catholic theology, souls in purgatory are purifying themselves before their entry into heaven. He included acts of penitence or charity work as a

way of earning an indulgence.

Throughout the period, believers will be offered a wider selection of ways to receive a plenary indulgence. They may follow tradition and attend a mass in one of several designated churches and perform such devotions as the rosary. Or, an appendix to the pope's letter explains, they may visit the sick, the imprisoned or the disabled or give to the poor.

Or they may choose acts of private sacrifice. As the appendix, signed by Cardinal William Baum, a top Vatican official, explained, "This would include abstaining for at least one whole day from unnecessary consumption (e.g. from smoking, or alcohol, or fasting)." The text points out that signers must also fulfill the "usual spiritual and sacramental conditions" and say the "usual prayers."

... Confession ...

... the usual prayers ...