

HOW TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION WELL

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The Eucharist

The Eucharist is a mystery and it cannot be explained completely. The best words pale in comparison to the true meaning of this mystery, but it is not difficult to imagine what the sentiments of Jesus were during those last moments before the sacrifice at Calvary, when he instituted the sacrament.

What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us. He will go the Father, but He will also remain among men. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he is really present, with his body and blood, with his soul and divinity.

We should never forget that every time we receive communion, we receive Jesus Christ: the son of God. He is in us and stays with us with all the power of his divinity and the strength of his love. St Theresa said: "When he walked on earth, and the sick were cured just by the feel of his garments, how can we doubt that he will work miracles while he is within us? If we have faith, he will give us what we ask for since he lives in us. And it is unlikely that he will not repay us for our hospitality."

Certainly, sanctity does not depend on us alone; it is the work of God in our soul. But when we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, we sometimes think: How is it possible that God is in me when I am still the same as before? Why do I remain disobedient, sensual, lazy, materialistic- in a word, egoistic- in spite of Holy Communion? God being the omnipotent one, the fault lies within us- our lack of proper interior disposition in the exercise of our free will, or more accurately, our inability to detach ourselves from obstacles that obstruct the path toward sanctification.

Every time we receive communion, Jesus enters our hearts. This happens without any external manifestations; it simply happens because we have faith and we know who is in us. This is the reason why we prepare ourselves before receiving Holy Communion, by turning our minds away from the things that normally distract us.

The matter of preparation is basically one of putting priorities to enable us to achieve what we are aiming for. One cannot give a fixed formula that will work for

everybody and under all conditions. We just have to emphasize the important fact that God comes to us through Holy Communion and therefore he unites himself intimately into the very essence of our being- Christ lives in me.

The Better Preparation

After our evening prayers are said, we can make the best use of the few minutes before going to sleep by beginning our preparation. After all, what good will it do us if we keep on worrying about the problems left unsolved during the day? God loves us so much that it is more worthwhile to devote those few precious minutes to him. Many people prefer to read a novel, watch the television or listen to the radio, to empty their minds before sleeping. If we wish to read, we should read the kind of book that will stir in us the stronger desire to receive our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Why not take time to get ready for communion? If we do, our thoughts the following day will not be in such a confused state for we will be filled with thoughts of God.

It is also helpful during these quiet moments to say a communion prayer and repeat it slowly, with faith and love, in the presence of our Lord. Consider this prayer: "Lord, I wish to receive you with the purity, humility and devotion with which your Holy Mother received you, with the spirit and fervour of the saints." This prayer is short and easy to learn. Reciting it repeatedly during the day will aid us greatly in our preparation. This is not anything compulsory; it is merely an aid. Later on, with our personal initiative and imagination, we may even discover better ways to prepare ourselves.

Usually, it is helpful to invoke the Blessed Virgin or Saint Joseph or our guardian angel. They help and enlighten us in our act of receiving Jesus into our souls. Ultimately, of course, the one we address is God.

All this can be summed up in one word: recollection. This is not, however, something that we simply stop doing at a certain point in time. It is a frame of mind or an interior disposition that we put ourselves in and we sustain it as the day goes on, until it is time to receive and meet our Lord in the Eucharist. A spirit of recollection enables us to concentrate better on our way to the church: it helps guard our senses and not to allow thoughts other than those of our Lord to occupy our minds. We must, for instance, be careful of our sense of sight because through our eyes, the windows of our souls, we can be drawn toward useless distractions.

We try not to offend God by reading the papers, because this seems appropriate during breakfast. Once our attention is focused on our Lord, our conversation should

also be directed toward him and not on useless talk that can only make us lose sight of our goal.

Holy Communion is not merely the act of receiving Christ who is present in the holy sacrifice of the Mass; the Mass itself constitutes the best preparation for Holy Communion. The Act of Contrition, the epistle, the consecration- during which we adore Christ, and the bread and wine are changed into his body and blood- all these help us prepare for Holy Communion. On the days we are not able to hear Mass, however, we should not just resign ourselves to missing communion. We can ask a priest to give us communion outside of the Mass whenever our request is reasonable.

This is not a rule which will apply to everyone when we speak of the circumstances under which we receive Holy Communion. Some of us are able to prepare fully, but there are those who have to leave the church before the end of the mass or immediately after receiving our Lord. Then there are those who are physically tired. But they are not deprived of the fruits of communion for these reasons. The secret of effective preparation is in the intention: if we convert our work into prayer, if we keep in mind what our Lord wants of us and act accordingly, we imitate Jesus Christ, who helped Saint Joseph in his carpentry shop and set aside time to preach in the distant places of Palestine. We should find a way of preparing ourselves the way Jesus did- to be constantly recollected and offering to God everything that we do.

Instead of making our jobs or our lack of time an excuse for not attaining that perfect state of having Jesus in us, we should offer these difficulties to the Sacred Heart so that we can overcome them and have the best disposition for receiving Jesus.

Can We Receive Communion If We Are In A State Of Mortal Sin?

NO.

We have to realize that in receiving the Eucharist we are receiving God. We will then understand why a soul which is blotted with sin cannot receive this sacrament. When we are in a state of mortal sin, the sacrament we turn to is the sacrament of penance. By this sacrament, our sins are pardoned and sanctifying grace is restored to our soul.

It is good to recall at this point what St. Paul taught while he was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that if anyone eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonours him, he is guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood.

As you can see St. Paul gives us an insight into the height of transcendentalism. What he says is not something incidental: it is a principle we must adhere to- to receive communion in a state of mortal sin is to bring to oneself judgment and condemnation. If we do receive communion in this state, we commit an even graver sin. In order to restore grace in us, in order to receive Jesus Christ properly, we need to go to confession and do penance.

To prepare ourselves sufficiently for communion in a situation like this, we must observe all the necessary steps. This means we should examine our conscience so that we may become aware if we are guilty of mortal sin. If we are, it is not enough to make an act of contrition: we must go to confession. It is in supreme reverence to the Eucharist that the Church has ordered that unless he goes to confession first, anyone in a state of mortal sin may not receive the sacrament.

There are times when during mass, a person in a state of mortal sin longs to receive the Lord when he sees people awaiting their turn to receive communion. In a case like this, an option is to make a spiritual act of communion. This pious act, recommended by the Church, is effective in sanctifying oneself, and it can be done several times a day. A person can make a spiritual act of communion even if he is in a state of mortal sin, but has a strong desire to receive our Lord.

Even when, after an examination of conscience, we are convinced that we have no mortal sin in our soul, it would still be advisable to make an act of contrition, as perfect as we can make it, to clear our soul of venial faults and even of those other sins we may not be aware of- an act of contrition that extends to all the sins, past and present, of our life; for it can happen that some of our sins escape our attention: "Of my hidden sins cleanse me, O Lord," cries the Psalmist. Thus it can be said that the soul finds itself well prepared to receive the Eucharist by that sorrow of contrition which purges it of the stains and vestiges of sin.

Now What Shall I Tell Him?

The time immediately after communion is the time for private dialogue with Christ. Our moments with him should be very private. We should avoid all distractions that might threaten this privacy. The question arises – now what shall I tell Him? There are occasions when the Lord makes it easy for us to have a dialog with Him but there are times when He seems to test our faith, and we feel an interior emptiness or lack of imagination. Some people think that they make a good communion when they feel

something, when there is an emotion that goes with the sacrament. They forget our Lord's words to St. Thomas: "Blessed are they who, without seeing, believe." We should remember these words when, after receiving communion, we find that we feel nothing and have little to say. God does not ask us to move mountains; He only asks that being moved by faith, we go to receive Him without expecting consolations and looking for emotions to accompany the sacrament. It might help if we recall the saying, "don't seek consolation from God; seek the God of consolation."

When we insist that we do not have anything to say, does it mean that nothing is going on in our lives, that there is nothing more we need or that we are already saints? Do we not have problems? Does the church not need our prayers? Is everything in our family running smoothly? What about the people we love, our friends and acquaintances- do they need our prayers? Do we not have faults we want to overcome? Have we attained complete control of our passions? What about the apostolate? And the fulfilment of the resolutions we made during our examination of conscience? What about the virtues we need? What about our health, our character, and the spiritual and material needs that sometimes cost us our happiness?

Frequent, Or Daily Communion, And Venial Sin

Frequent or daily communion is permitted for all faithful, regardless of class or condition, so that no one should be debarred from availing himself of it, as long as he is in state of grace and goes to the communion table with a right and pious intention. Right intention consists in not going to the communion table out of routine, or vanity or human respect, but to fulfil the will of God, achieve closer union with Him through clarity and cure ones own weaknesses and faults through that divine medicine. And while it would be good that those who receive communion frequently, or even daily, be free of venial sins, it is enough that they have no mortal sins. However, it would be good to cleanse the soul of venial sins through the act of contrition, asking the Lord to help us make a resolution of amendment.

The church recommends that daily, as is to be desired, the faithful actively participate in great numbers in the sacrifice of the mass; find nourishment in Holy Communion with a pure and holy heart; and give thanks to Christ our Lord for such a great gift.

The conditions of the Eucharistic fast have been lightened (for healthy persons it is of one hour duration before communion) that there is not much difficulty in taking daily communion. Thus, it would be more out of lack of interest for the things of God

and the good of the soul that a Christian would not go to communion frequently or daily.

Without Falling Into Routine

There are others who do not receive Holy Communion daily or at least often enough because of fear that the act might become routine or mechanical. There is nothing wrong with being accustomed to daily communion, just as there is nothing wrong with eating regularly. What is wrong is receiving our Lord without the proper disposition. The person who does not prepare himself, who does not avoid distractions when Jesus enters his heart, is the person who lapses into routine. Approaching the Eucharistic table becomes mechanical when our imagination is wilfully on other things. When we do not give importance to the sacrament we are receiving, we are just going through the motions. In short, routine is the lack of proper disposition of the soul about to receive Christ. By no means should we stay away from frequent communion under pretexts inspired by the devil to draw us away from God. Don't think it is reverence to stay away from communion if you are prepared to receive Him. The only irreverence is to receive Him unworthily.

Ten Minutes

The church counsels the faithful to think of God after Holy Communion, providing liturgical books containing prayers expressly for this purpose. This private moment is necessary. The presence of Jesus Christ lasts in us as long as the unchanged species remains unchanged- its odour, colour, taste, and appearance. When the sacramental species is consumed, the sacramental presence of Christ as God-man ceases, but his presence as God continues since He is united with the Holy Trinity who dwells in the soul that is in the state of grace. That is why even though we may not be able to approach Christ, the time following communion carries with it a special intimacy of which we should avail of.

We do not know exactly how long this period is, but many believe it is approximately half an hour. It may not even be that long, but out of respect for our Lord, we should give at least ten minutes of our time after communion, remembering that this thanksgiving can extend throughout the day by our conduct which reflects that God is in us.

(abridged version)