

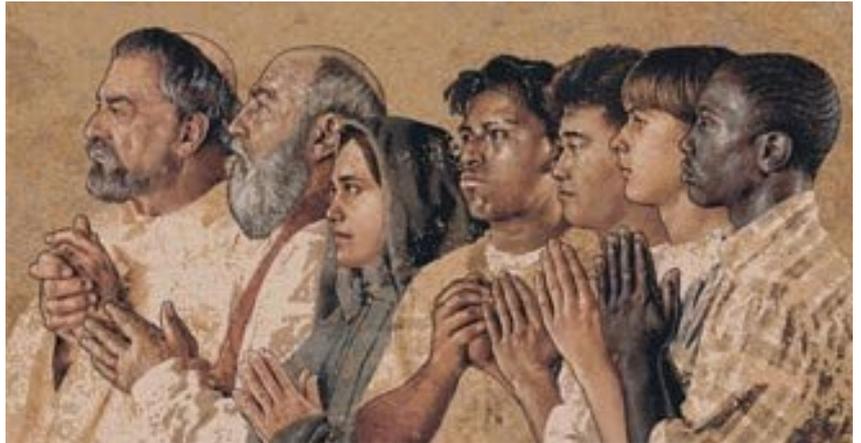
The Saints and Eucharist Communion

The masters of spiritual life teach us that holiness is the sole source of the plenitude of Christian life. That is why the saints are our models, because in them, we see men and women who have lived the Gospel in its totality. Christian life is a mystery of Communion with God, which is accomplished and perfected in an admirable way through the receiving of the Body of Christ, truly present in the Eucharist.

It is not unusual that the saints have especially loved this personal encounter with the Risen Lord in Communion. The witnesses who gave their testimony for the process of canonization of St. Thomas Aquinas affirm

that, “He wept daily as he celebrated Mass,”

above all at the moment of receiving Communion. St. Ignatius of Loyola also wept frequently during the Mass. St. Therese of Lisieux, recalling her first Communion, said, “When all the joy of heaven comes into a heart, this exiled heart cannot support it without weeping.” And after her second Communion, “Once again the tears flowed with ineffable sweetness. I repeated within myself endlessly the words of St. Paul: ‘I no longer live, it is Jesus that lives in me.’” (Story of a Soul) We don’t weep because we are men of little faith, and we barely know what we are doing when we celebrate the Mass or assist at it.



Of St. Francis of Assisi, the biographer Celano tells us how he “burned with love towards the sacrament of the body of the Lord, feeling oppressed and annulled with stupor when he considered such an estimable lowering of the Lord and such an ardent charity. He considered it a grave despise not to go, at least once a day, if possible, to Mass. He received Communion many times, and with such devotion that it inspired great devotion among those present. Feeling special reverence towards the Sacrament, worthy of all respect, he offered the sacrifice of all of his members, and on receiving the spotless Lamb, he immolated his spirit with that sacred fire that was always burning in the altar of his heart”. (II Celano, 201)

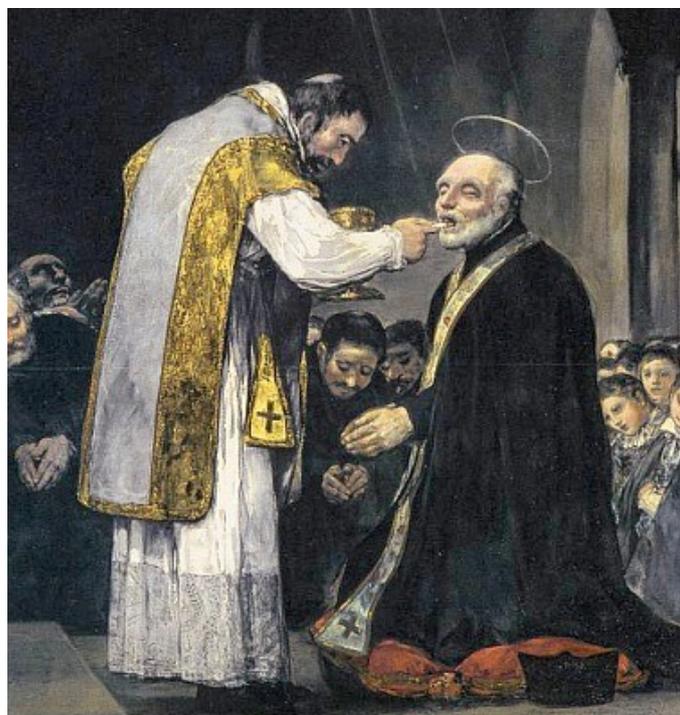
Not uncommonly, the saints received very special graces in Holy Communion, graces that have been decisive for their lives. St. Theresa of Avila received

the grace of spiritual marriage on November 18, 1572, after having received Communion from the hands of St. John of the Cross. She herself attested that it was during a Communion, when she became, with Christ, in marriage, “one flesh”: “One day, after receiving Communion, it seemed to me that my soul truly became one thing with that most sacred body of the Lord”. (Spiritual Testimonies 39; VII Mansions 2,1) And St. Theresa found Jesus, risen, glorious, full of immense majesty in Communion: “not a dead man, but the living Christ: and He makes me see that He is God and man, not as He was in the sepulchre, but as He was when He had gone forth from it, risen from the dead. He comes at times in majesty so great, that no one can have any doubt that it is our Lord Himself, especially after Communion: we know that He is then present, for faith says so. He shows Himself so clearly to be the Lord of that little dwelling-place, that the soul seems to be dissolved and lost in Christ.” (Life 28, 12)

J. M. Iraburu points out in his writings about the Eucharist, how there have been some saints that lived nourished only by the Eucharistic Bread, that is to say, with the Body of Christ. In these miraculous cases, God has wished to show us, in an extreme form, to what point Christ has the ability in the Eucharist “so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” (Jn 10:10)

Blessed Raymond of Capua, Dominican, who, for years, was St. Catherine of Siena’s spiritual director, tells us

that “following almost incredible steps, little by little, she reached an absolute fast. The holy virgin devoutly received Holy Communion many times, and each time, she received so many graces that, the senses of her body and her inclinations being so mortified, solely through the strength of the Holy Spirit, her soul and body were equally nourished. From this, a man of faith can conclude that her whole life was a miracle... I myself, have witnessed how that thin body, nourished only with a glass of cold water, that... without difficulty, was the first to rise, that walked farthest and worked more than those that accompanied her and who were healthy; she knew no weariness... At the beginning, when the virgin began to live without eating, Fr. Tommaso, her confessor, asked her if she ever felt hungry, to which she answered, ‘I am so satisfied with the coming of the Lord, on receiving the Blessed Sacrament, that I cannot in any way feel the desire for any kind of food’.” (Legenda Maior: St.



Catherine of Siena II, 170-171)

The hunger for Christ in the Eucharist was sometimes even tortuous in St. Catherine. But when she received Communion, sometimes she was absorbed in God for hours or even days. Once “her confessor, who saw her so inflamed as he gave her the Blessed Sacrament, that he asked her what had happened, and she said, ‘**Father, when I received from your hands the Blessed Sacrament, I lost the light of my eyes and could not see; moreover, what I saw, took hold of me so strongly that I began to consider all things, not only the riches and pleasures of the body, but also any kind of consolation or delight, even spiritual ones, as repulsive dung. For which I begged and pleaded so that those pleasures, even the spiritual ones, be taken away from me so that I could conserve the love of my God. I begged Him also that He take away from me all wishes and that He only give me His will. In effect, He did so, because He gave me as an answer, ‘Here you have it, my sweetest daughter, I give you my will’...** And so it was, because as those of us that were near her saw it, from that moment on, in any circumstance, she was pleased with everything and she was never upset.” (ibid. 190)

St. Therese of Lisieux always recalled with emotion the day of her First Communion. “**How sweet was Jesus’ first kiss to my soul...! It was a kiss of love. I felt loved, and I said to Him, ‘I love you and I offer myself to you forever’.** There were no questions, no battles, no sacrifices. For a long time, Jesus and poor Therese have been looking at one another and they understood each other... **That day was not just a gaze, it was a fusion.** They were no longer two: Therese had disappeared like a drop of water that is lost in the middle of an ocean. **Jesus only remained, He was the owner, He was the King”.** (Story of a Soul)

The saints, that have understood well Who is given to us in Communion, took a great deal of care with the preparation to receive Communion, especially with a frequent sacramental Confession. We ask that Mary, the Eucharistic woman, may help us to receive this madness of love, the Eucharist, with an ever greater veneration and gratitude.

“Oh man full of avarice! What has your God left you? He left Himself, true God and true man, hidden under the whiteness of the bread. Oh fire of love! Wasn’t it enough to have created us in your image and likeness, and having recreated us through the grace of the blood of your Son, without having to give us as food a whole God, divine essence? Who has obliged You to do so? Charity alone, as a madman of love such as you are.” (St. Catherine of Siena. Prayers and soliloquies, 20)

