

COMMUNION

The entire Eucharistic celebration leads towards the moment of Communion since the table of the Word implores its completion with the Eucharistic Bread. As well, the consecration of the gifts not only tends towards Christ glorifying and thanking God, but also towards the sacramental union of the faithful with Christ, eating of His Flesh that is given up and the Blood that is shed for the salvation of mankind. **“The Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ Himself who has offered Himself for us.”** (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1382)

Communion is, above all, the culmination of the Mass, since it is “at the same time and inseparably the sacrifice in which is perpetuated the sacrifice of the Cross and the sacred banquet, where in the communion of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the faithful participate in the goods of the Paschal sacrifice, renew the Covenant between God and man, and foreshadow and anticipate in faith and hope, the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father. (Eucharisticum Mysterium, 3)

Sacramental Communion with Christ makes our union with Him grow. It apart us from sin. It renews and deepens our incorporation to the Church in our baptism.

Eucharistic Communion is the most loving and profound, the most certain and sanctifying spiritual encounter that we can have with Christ in this world. It is an ineffable spiritual union with the glorious Jesus Christ. In the area of love and of grace, it is an indescribable mystery, something that can hardly be expressed in our human language.

Christ gives Himself in communion as food, as “living bread come down from heaven”, that transforms into Himself those who receive Him. To those who receive Him with faith and love, He promises them immortality, abundance of life and the future resurrection. Further still, He assures them a perfect, vital union with Him: **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”** (Jn 6:56-57)

Since it is a moment of such an extraordinary grace, we should prepare ourselves to live it with an intense faith, with an attitude of adoration and complete surrender to His will. Only the grace of God, which acts through prayer, can adequately prepare us. That is why Christian piety has created so many prayers to prepare us for communion. The present Missal presents us with two prayers for the priest to say, one of them in secret before receiving communion. They reflect the sentiments of the Church. The longest is: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, through your death gave life to the world; free me by this your most holy Body and Blood from all my sins and from every evil; keep me always faithful to your commandments, and never let me be parted from you.”**



The Lord said, “Take and eat... Drink from it, all of you.” (Mt 26:26-27) Benedict XVI commented in this respect: *“It is not possible to eat the Risen One, present under the sign of bread, as if it were a simple piece of bread. To eat this Bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the person of the living Lord. This communion, this act of eating, is truly an encounter between two persons, it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer. The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the assimilation of my life with his, my transformation and conformation into he who is living Love. Therefore, this communion implies adoration, it implies the will to follow Christ, to follow the One who goes ahead of us.”* (Homily. Corpus Christi, 2005)

St. Therese of Lisieux said that Jesus does not stay in the Eucharist to be kept in a golden and cold ciborium, but rather to live in the hearts of the faithful. **Love impulses Christ to institute the Eucharist to be close, further still, inside those who love Him, so that they could live from Him and for Him: “The one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”** (Jn 6:57)

Communion is the pledge of the future glory, it is a deposit of heaven, where our whole existence will consist of loving and adoring Christ. Once again, let us renew in ourselves, the gratitude and awe before the love of God that becomes the Eucharist so that He can be eaten, to unite us to Himself and transform us in Him.

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, grant us the grace to receive your Son in the Sacrament of love with an open and pure, simple and obedient heart like yours, so that we can be transformed into a living sacrifice, in the “Body that is given” for the life of the world.

We live in a culture very sensitized to human rights. In this context, sometimes the mystery of Eucharistic communion is misinterpreted as if receiving the Lord under the consecrated species of bread and wine were a right of the faithful, regardless of any other consideration. **The fact that the Eucharist is the most excellent gift of God to man, the gift of Himself, is easily forgotten. It is something that in no way can man “demand” from God.**

Another of the factors that determine our social situation is the marked relativism and moral subjectivism.

They try to make their own conscience the measure of all things without submitting it to any superior objective value. These principles affect life and decisively influence at the hour of evaluating the state of one’s own conscience and judging the possibility of receiving Communion.

Pope Benedict has written: *“I would like to call attention to a pastoral problem frequently encountered nowadays. I am referring to the fact that on certain occasions – for example, wedding Masses, funerals and the like – in addition to practicing Catholics there may be others present who have long since ceased to attend Mass or who are living in a situation that does not permit them to receive the sacraments. At other times*



members of other Christian confessions and even other religions may be present. Similar situations can occur in churches that are frequently visited, especially in tourist areas. In these cases, there is a need to find a brief and clear way to remind those present of the meaning of sacramental Communion and the conditions required for its reception.” (SC 50)

St. Paul speaks clearly about the possibility of unworthy communions: *“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the Body and Blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying.”* (1 Cor. 11:27-30) **The Apostle attributes the worst disgraces of the Christian community of Corinth to an abusive use of the Eucharistic Communion.**

It is thus necessary that each one of us examine ourselves attentively, with a correct and certain conscience before receiving the Precious Body of Christ. In any case, the state of grace, of friendship with God, constitutes the “minimum condition” to be able to receive the Eucharist, and Christian life can never be considered under minimum criteria. Together with the cleanliness of conscience, love, a living faith and an intense desire for union with God should be present in our hearts.

This desire of union has led the Church towards a more frequent reception of Eucharistic Communion. At the beginning of Christianity, above all in the III and IV centuries, there are numerous documents that make us think that they lived daily Communion as something normal. The most pious Christian faithful, simply responding to the expressed will of Christ, “Take and eat, take and drink”, saw in sacramental Communion the normal way of consuming their participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Only the catechumens or the sinners subjected to penitential discipline saw themselves deprived of Communion. Soon, however, even in the incipient monachism, this traditional criteria began to debilitate in practice or is put into doubt for different reasons. The doctrines of St. Augustine and St. Thomas influenced so that for reasons of reverence and holy fear, the faithful should abstain from receiving daily Communion. In any case, love and hope, two things that the Scriptures always invite us to live, are preferable to fear. That is why when Peter said, **“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”** Jesus responded, **“Do not be afraid.”**

Due to this consideration of the Eucharistic mystery, during many centuries, **there was a tendency in the Church, even in very fervent atmospheres, to receive the Eucharist on few occasions,** only on during special feast days of the liturgical year; or on a monthly or weekly basis, with the permission of one’s confessor. This tendency was even more accentuated, to the point of error, with Jansenism. That is why, without doubt, one of the most important acts of the pontifical Magisterium in the history of spirituality is the decree of December 20, 1905. In the decree, St Pius X recommended, under stipulated conditions, **frequent and daily Communions,** opposing the Jansenistic position.

“The desire (indeed) of Jesus Christ and of the Church, that all the faithful of Christ approach the sacred banquet daily, is especially important in this, that the faithful of Christ being joined with God through the sacrament may receive strength from it to restrain

wantonness, to wash away the little faults that occur daily, and to guard against more grievous sins to which human frailty is subject; but not principally that consideration be given to the honor and veneration of God, nor that this be for those who partake of it a reward or recompense for their virtues. Therefore, the Sacred Council of Trent calls the Eucharist, ‘an antidote, by which we are freed from daily faults and are preserved from mortal sins’.” According to which:

1. **Let frequent and daily Communion . . . be available to all Christians of every order or condition, so that no one, who is in the state of grace and approaches the sacred table with a right and pious mind, may be prevented from this.”**
2. **Moreover, right mind is in this, that he who approaches the sacred table, indulges not through habit, or vanity, or human reasoning, but wishes to satisfy the pleasure of God, to be joined with Him more closely in charity and to oppose his infirmities and defects with that divine remedy.”**
3. **Although it is especially expedient that those who practice frequent and daily Communion be free from venial sins, at least those completely deliberate, and of their effect, it is enough, nevertheless, that they be free from mortal sins, with the resolution that they will never sin in the future...”**
4. **Care must be taken that careful preparation for Holy Communion precede, and that actions befitting the graces follow thereafter according to the strength, condition, and duties of each one.”**
5. **Let the counsel of the confessor intercede. Yet let confessors beware lest they turn anyone away from frequent or daily Communion, who is found in the state of grace and approaches (it) with a right mind. . . .”**



(Denz 1981-1989)

John Paul II wrote: “The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord’s body and blood are received in Communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through Communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he ‘poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mt 26:28).” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 16)

It seems clear that in the grave subject of frequent Communion, the greatest temptation of error today is a lax attitude, and not the Jansenistic rigorism, both being grave errors. Between both extremes of error, the doctrine of the Catholic Church, expressed in the decree of St. Pius X, remains valid. Today, the “**Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily.**” (CCC 1389)