

Corpus Christi - (Year B) – June 3, 2018

EX 24:3-8; PS 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18; HEB 9:11-15; MK 14:12-16, 22-26

Many Catholics are understandably upset by surveys which claim that a *shockingly high percentage* of Catholics do **not** believe that the bread and wine—validly consecrated by a priest at Mass—become the **true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ**.

Here, for example, was the first paragraph of the summary of one such survey conducted a decade ago:

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life’s recent U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey has unearthed evidence of an identity crisis among American Catholics. “More than four-in-ten Catholics in the United States (45%) do not know that their church teaches that the bread and wine used in Communion do not merely *symbolize* but actually *become* the body and blood of Christ...”

On the **surface**, this certainly *looks* like a crisis. But there was a **major flaw** in the survey’s **methodology** evident in the wording of one of the survey’s main questions:

Do you believe that when people take Holy Communion, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ...?

The correct answer to that question is: “**No**”.

Here’s why!

The *way* the question is **worded** suggests that it is *in the act of taking* Holy Communion *by the faithful* that causes the substance of the bread and wine to change into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. That is patently **false**! It is the **Consecration** by the priest that brings about the change in substances. So, a **misleading survey result** flowed from a **poorly-worded question**.

Priests frequently take the opportunity each year on this feast—the **Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ**—to remind their flock about the **proper reception of Holy Communion**.

And this is a **very important** thing to do!

But very often, these **annual reminders of proper reception of Holy Communion** only touch upon the **external actions**—that is, the **way** that a communicant receives Communion **physically**—and never actually confront the **interior attitudes** that lead to **improper** or **irreverent** reception of Holy Communion—which, by the way, **almost always** occurs when Communion is received in the **hand**...instead of on the **tongue**.

So, let's look **below** the **surface** and examine the **roots** of **irreverent** reception of Holy Communion. Providentially, the **Scripture Readings** for today's Mass provide an excellent framework for just such an examination.

How so?

Well, in the **1st Reading** we heard:

Taking the book of the covenant, [Moses] read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will hear and do." Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words." (Ex 24:7-8)

Here we have an **Old Testament foreshadowing** of the basic structure of the Catholic Mass, as the people are led from the **proclamation of the word** of God to contact with the **"blood of the covenant"** (cf. Ex 24:7)—just as the **Liturgy of the Word** flows into the **Liturgy of the Eucharist** at Mass. In this passage from Exodus, it's important to note that Moses splashed the blood **"on the people"** (cf. Ex 24:8).

Then we see a **shift** occur in our **2nd Reading**—a **deepening development** of this Old Testament ritual **by**—and in the very person **of**—**Jesus Christ**. The **Letter to the Hebrews** tells us:

...when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be...he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls...can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. (Heb 9:11-14)

Jesus Christ—*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (cf. Jn 1:29)—replaced the sacrificial animal of the Old Covenant ritual with *himself*...and instituted something much more profound than the merely **symbolic, external, ritual cleansing** of the *flesh*...by **animal blood**.

Our **Gospel** today describes his institution of this **new reality** at the **Last Supper**:

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. (Mk 14:22-24)

Jesus took things much deeper than the merely symbolic Old Covenant ritual which brought about **no actual change** in the soul. His **new** covenant is different, because **his blood effects what it symbolizes**—a true cleansing of the soul.

Our brief Scriptural reflection now sets the stage for a **deeper examination** of *our own disposition*—to ensure that we receive Holy Communion with the **reverence, gratitude** and **respect** that our Eucharistic Lord deserves.

Here’s what **Canon Law** says about proper reception of the Sacraments:

Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them. (CIC 843.1)

Our focus here will be on what it means to be “**properly disposed**” to receive Holy Communion. And we’ll look at **three particular aspects of preparation** for Holy Communion—what we might call the **Three P’s of proper disposition**:

Punctuality, priority, and presentation.

We’ll start with the first of the **Three P’s: Punctuality**—which for our purposes today touches on the question of *being on time for Mass*.

In some cultures, being late is not as big a deal as it is in other cultures. *But our Catholic culture trumps the culture of our country of origin*. We should, for example, be **Catholic Americans** before we are **American Catholics**.

St. Paul made this distinction clear in his letter to the **Philippians** when he wrote that...*our citizenship is in heaven...* (Phil 3:20, NAB)

Now, returning to the question of **punctuality**, someone asked me just this past week:

“Father, when is a person too late for Mass to receive Holy Communion?”

I answered **their** question with a question of *my own*:

What part of the Mass is unimportant?

- Is it the **Sign of the Cross** that we make together to proclaim in word and action who we belong to?
- Is it the **Penitential Act** where we admit to God and to each other just how utterly unworthy of his love we have made ourselves through our sins?
- Is it the **Opening Prayer** where the priest gathers everyone’s intentions into one great communal prayer and lifts those intentions up to the Father?
- Is it the **Scripture Readings** where God reveals himself to us...and us to ourselves?

Which part of the Mass doesn’t matter?

Being on time is a matter of **respect**—respect for **God**...and for **each other**. Being *habitually* late to Mass communicates to God...and to others:

“My time is more important than yours”.

Being *habitually* late to Mass **proclaims with our actions**—no matter what we may *say* to the contrary—that our relationship with Jesus is pretty much an *afterthought*. And if we treat Jesus as an **afterthought** as a *matter of habit* throughout our earthly life, we’re kidding ourselves if we think we’ll **magically** make him **Priority #1** at the end of our life.

A great quote on the website, *The Art of Manliness*, drives home the importance of the *virtue of punctuality*:

When you make others wait for you, you rob minutes from them that they'll never get back...In coming to meet you at the agreed upon hour, they may have made sacrifices—woken up early, cut short their workout, told their kid they couldn't read a story together—and your lateness negates those sacrifices.

<https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/a-man-is-punctual-the-importance-of-being-on-time/>

It's bad **enough** if our habit of being late disrespects *another human being*.

It's **downright despicable** to do it to **Jesus**, who made *unimaginable sacrifices* for you...and me. If we can't even respect *Jesus* enough to be on time for Mass, then the way we treat **ourselves** and **others** will certainly be even **worse**.

The second of the **Three P's** is: **Priority**. Here we consider, specifically, the *one-hour pre-Communion fast*. **Canon Law** tells us what the pre-Communion fast entails:

A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from *any* food and drink, except for *only* water and medicine. (CIC 919.1)

“...*any* food and drink, except for *only* water and medicine.”

That means no **coffee**, no **gum**, no **mints**, no **cough drops**, no **soft drinks**, no **candy**, no *nothing*—**except water and medicine!**

I will even submit to you that the discipline of the pre-Communion fast ought to prohibit **snacks** for kids who *aren't yet old enough* to receive Holy Communion, but who are too old to nurse or to be bottle fed.

Why?

Well, first and foremost, it's just plain **rude** to bring food into the **Church**, with the exception of a bottle of baby formula for **infants** who don't breast feed and who **must** be fed!

On a deeper spiritual level, however, we **must** teach our **toddlers** to **hunger** for the **Eucharist**...and we must *not* mislead them to believe that there is such thing as “**snack time**” in *God’s house*.

If parents teach their kids to *tailor their Faith to their appetites* from their earliest years, then these parents should not be surprised years later when **their kids lose interest in the Faith** because Catholicism doesn’t **adapt** to their *appetites*, but rather, challenges them to **sacrifice**...something they’re trained *not* to do by **chomping on Cheerios** or **gobbling goldfish crackers** during Mass.

When **my parents** were little, the pre-Communion fast was from **midnight** until Communion. Some years later it was reduced to **3 hours** before Communion to make it easier for **increasingly undisciplined** Catholics. Now, it’s been reduced to the almost embarrassing **60 minutes** before Communion—and **people still complain**. *Coddled Catholics, incidentally, are not compelling evangelizers!*

The last of the **Three P’s** is: **Presentation**. Here we consider *the way we dress for Mass*. The importance of what we wear is best summed up by the words of the main character—**Josip Lasta**—in my favorite novel, *Island of the World* where he says:

“...clothing is a language of respect...a world of manners that is the basic level of human charity...” (p. 782).

It’s quite obvious, if we just look around today, that most people **don’t** think of the way they dress as a matter of **respect** and **human charity** toward *others*, especially in a culture where people *actually* think it’s ok to wear **pajamas on airplanes!**

If **dressing our best** is a sign of **respect** and **human charity** toward **God** and **others**, then what does it mean when a **male** parishioner wears **t-shirts, sports jerseys, shorts, jeans** or **flip-flops** to Mass; or a female parishioner wears a **skirt or shorts that are obscenely short**, or a **top that is obscenely low-cut and revealing?**

If the clothes we wear to Mass are appropriate for the **beach**, a **ballgame** or a **bar**, then we are guilty of far more than a lack of **self-respect**.

We are responsible for **offending the Lord**—in his own house—and **leading others into temptation**—temptation to **lust** if we dress **immodestly**...and temptation to **disgust** if we dress like **slobs**.

Respect for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is so *important*, and **disrespect** for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is so *inexcusable*, that the **Angel of Fatima** taught the **child visionaries** this prayer of *reparation* for offenses against our Eucharistic Lord:

O most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—I adore thee profoundly. I offer thee the most Precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ—present in all the tabernacles of the world—in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference by which He is offended. By the infinite merits of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners.

The **Gospel of John** tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... (Jn 1:1, 14)

In the **Incarnation**, the Son of God revealed his unfathomable love for us when he voluntarily *“became flesh”*—that is, became **human**—in order to *save* us.

In the **Holy Eucharist**, Jesus showed an even **humbler** love than he demonstrated in the **Incarnation** when he who *“became flesh and dwelt among us”* (cf. Jn 1:14) made himself into **food**...in order dwell *IN* us.

The real question in this extended reflection on *reverent reception of Communion* is not: **Does this examination of my attitudes and actions make me uncomfortable?**

The real question is: **Do I love Jesus enough to get to Mass early...dressed like I’m about to do the most important thing on the planet...with my mouth, my stomach and my soul reserved for nothing but the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of my beloved Savior in the Holy Eucharist?**

Our **proper disposition** to receive the Holy Eucharist is, itself, *an act of love* for Jesus that **consoles his Sacred Heart** for all the **disrespect** he endures Sunday after Sunday at the **hands** of Catholics in parishes across the globe.

Considering what **he’s** done for *us*...deliberately disposing **ourselves** to receive him in Holy Communion with the utmost **reverence** and **respect**...is the least **we** can do for *him*.