



## **Offero the Giant by Joe Sixpack**

Every one knows about St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, and many of you probably have a St. Christopher medal around your neck, on your key chain, or in your car. But do you know the story behind St. Christopher? Well, as Paul Harvey would have said, “Here’s the rest of the story.” (I’m really telling my age.)

There was a giant of a man who had powerful, almost super-human strength. His name was Offero. He lived in the land of Channan in the early Christian era. Dissatisfied with himself and desiring adventure, the big man left his homeland saying, “I’ll roam the world in search of the mightiest of kings, then I’ll spend the rest of my life being that king’s servant.”

After wandering around a long time, Offero met a hermit guarding a violent and dangerous stream. This hermit guided travelers to a place in the stream where they could cross safely. Offero took time to talk to the hermit, and the humble man of God in turn told him the gospel message of Jesus, the King of Kings.

“How can I serve this King?” the big man asked.

The holy old hermit told him to settle down near the stream and carry travelers across on his shoulders. That would be the way he could serve the King. Offero joyfully agreed, “I’ll remain here and serve the King as faithfully as I can!”

One day he heard a soft and friendly voice calling from the opposite bank, “Offero, take me over!”

Going across the stream he found a precocious little boy waiting to be carried across. Lifting the little boy to his shoulders, Offero descended into the raging stream. But the water suddenly began to rise, and the stream became more and more violent as he crossed. To make matters worse, the boy on his shoulders got heavier and heavier. Struggling against the rushing waters and gasping for breath, Offero cried out, “Child, you’re incredibly heavy! I feel like I’m carrying the whole world on my shoulders.”

The little boy answered smiling, “You carry more than the world; you carry Him who created the heavens and the earth. I weigh so heavily because I carry the weight of the sins of the world.”

Then He dipped His hand in the water and baptized the giant. Offero suddenly found himself on the other bank. Jesus saved Offero both physically and spiritually. Since then Offero has been called Christopher—meaning Christ-bearer.

St. Christopher carried Christ on his shoulders—the God-Man who is equal to the Father and has the highest place in heaven, next to God. Believe it or not, you are a Christopher, a Christ-bearer, even more so than the giant Offero. He carried the Christ child on his shoulders, while you carry him in your heart, especially after Holy Communion.

Actually, just as Offero took on the awesome responsibility of carrying Jesus across the water, we have an even more awesome responsibility carrying Jesus in us from Communion. The

Church teaches that Jesus is fully and truly present in the Holy Eucharist with His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The basis for that teaching is mostly drawn from the majority of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel and the several accounts of the Last Supper, but it is by no means limited to those passages. We know beyond any reasonable doubt that the Holy Eucharist is the true physical body of Jesus Christ, every bit as much as we know that there is invisible air in the world for us to breathe.

Since we know that Jesus is really and truly present in the Most Holy Eucharist, His Presence implies a great responsibility for us when we receive Him in Holy Communion. That responsibility has always been logically implicit, but the Apostle Paul makes sure we don't overlook the implication.

After his explanation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the 11th chapter of I Corinthians, Paul writes, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself" (vs 27-29).

What does this mean, and how does it create a responsibility for us? Well, putting it bluntly and succinctly, it means if we receive Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin, we condemn ourselves to God's judgment to an eternity in hell. The only remedy if we find ourselves in this situation, of course, is having recourse to the sacrament of Penance—making a good confession. Presumably, a lot of people receive unworthily—in a state of mortal sin—and this is the additional mortal sin of sacrilege.

Why can it be presumed that lots of people receive unworthily? Human nature tells us all we need to know to make that presumption. Week after week, virtually everybody in any parish church gets in line for Communion, but also week after week few go to confession. In fact, so few confessions are heard these days that most priests only allot 30-45 minutes for confession once a week. Before catechesis became so deficient, you could count on every priest in the parish to have scheduled several hours for confession every week. It stands to reason that lots of communicants who don't frequent the confessional also don't have any business standing in the Communion line.

The biggest problem is, most modern Catholics don't know the difference between a mortal sin and a venial sin. As Pope St. John XXIII told us, modern mankind has lost its sense of sin. I live in a dynamite parish, full of Catholics who are serious about living the faith as they understand it, and their greatest hallmark is the virtue of charity—they truly love one another. That said, there isn't a week go by that I don't see regular Mass attending Catholics commit sin in public... at the church. Since these are such good people, I can only conclude that they don't know any better.

So that leads to the responsibility part of this discussion. Every Catholic has a serious obligation to form a right conscience, which means learning the difference between venial and mortal sin. The alternative to living up to this serious obligation is to face a very difficult and embarrassing judgment at the end of life. And make no mistake: Our infinitely loving God is also infinitely just—He will not be mocked.

It does no good to think you are not committing a mortal sin just because you "feel" like what you're doing isn't sinful. God has given us an objective set of moral norms to live by, and the Church in her Christ given authority has given us some additional directions. Collectively, this Christian morality is called the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. Nowhere in them will you find anything that allows you to ignore the law or disagree because you don't like what's there. And trying to fool yourself (or God) is superfluous. So learn what you should know now, while you still can. Make a good confession with frequency and regularity (at least once a month). Your eternal destiny depends on it. This is What We Believe...Why We Believe It.