

By
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The Escort

St. Philip Neri noticed that a young friend of his was in the habit of receiving Holy Communion and almost immediately getting up and going out. So one morning Fr. Philip had two altar boys ready with lighted candles and told them to accompany the young man home, one on each side of him. Naturally he stopped and asked the boys what in the world they were doing. “Father Philip sent us to escort you home,” said the boys.

Going back into the church, the young man found Fr. Philip and asked for an explanation. “When the priest is carrying the Blessed Sacrament,” said the saint, “he’s accompanied by two altar boys with candles, and it seems to me the same escort is due to anyone who is carrying It in his heart.”

The young man stayed and made his thanksgiving not only that day, but every day after that.

Before making the points I want to get across I need to make a couple of clarifications about this story. First, St. Philip Neri lived back in the 16th century. Anytime the Eucharist was exposed in the monstrance and taken in procession or relocated from one place to another, there was always an escort of two altar boys with lighted candles. Indeed, this has always been the Church’s practice until recent times; the practice seemed to vanish sometime after Vatican II.

Second, the young man leaving after Communion in the story isn’t referring to his leaving immediately after receiving and before Mass had ended. In those days, no one would even consider such a disrespectful act. You see, in those days people still had a respectful fear of God and loved Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist.

The Real Presence of our Lord lasts, even after Communion, as long as the appearance of bread remains—about ten minutes or so. Therefore it’s fitting to spend this time thanking our Lord, loving Him, and asking for His blessings on ourselves and others. This is actually the most precious part of our day, and we should use it well.

The first point I want to make is about our thanksgiving after Communion. Modern Catholics seem to have lost an understanding of the need for this practice. We all realize we couldn’t even take another breath without God. Yet at Communion we actually have God condescend to us so we can actually consume Him... to make Him a part of us, and we appear to take that totally for granted.

When we return to our pews after Communion, the reason we kneel (or are supposed to) while the priest puts away the altar vessels and corporal is so we can make an act of thanksgiving for just having received the most precious Thing in the universe: the Body of Christ. We’re not sup-

posed to be fidgeting, looking around, or checking our watches. We're supposed to begin making our thanksgiving.

Notice I said begin to make our thanksgiving. An act of thanksgiving after Communion isn't done by simply saying, "Hey, Jesus, thanks for dropping by." No, the act of thanksgiving is supposed to be something thought out and well done. That means you probably won't be finished with your act of thanksgiving by the time the priest begins the final blessing and conclusion of Mass. that also means spending a couple of extra minutes after Mass kneeling in your pew to finish your act of thanksgiving.

All the time people say to me, "Joe, I don't know what to say to God." Most companies that publish missalettes help you with that problem. They print formulated prayers on the back cover of the missalette or just inside the back or front. In my parish, the missalettes Father uses has the two prayers I've always traditionally used for my act of thanksgiving on the back cover: *The Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas*, and the *Anima Christi* (Soul of Christ). Maybe you'll want to try these prayers to help you.

The other thing I want to address is people receiving Communion and darting for the door immediately afterward. Apart from the fact that people who do this are thoughtless, disrespectful of Christ, and unappreciative of His sacrifice for us, it's a mortal sin on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation. You see, we're required to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation. That means the *whole* Mass. To leave before the priest says, "The Mass has ended..." is to *not* fulfill the obligation to attend Mass, and failure to fulfill that obligation is a mortal sin. After doing this the first time means every subsequent Communion received is done so sacrilegiously, thus piling mortal sin on top of mortal sin.

You may wonder why I'm even bothering to say anything about this, since people who leave immediately after Communion are those who will probably never read this anyway. Frankly, I'm not writing this for them; I'm writing this for you. It may not be something you want to be told, but you have a certain culpability in this too.

We all have a life-long moral obligation to practice the Works of Mercy—*all of them*. The Works of Mercy come in two forms: the Corporal Works of Mercy, and the Spiritual Works of Mercy. One of the Spiritual Works of Mercy is to admonish the sinner. So you have an obligation to say something to the people you know who leave Mass early.

"Joe, that's Father's job." Yeah, it is, but it's doubtful he knows who's doing it, because he's rightly focused on distributing Holy Communion. That means it's up to you. So if you know people who leave Mass after receiving Communion, say something to them. Charitably (the operative word) explain to them why it's wrong to immediately leave Mass after they go to Communion.

"Joe, I can't do that. They'll get mad at me." Maybe they will, even if you say something to them in the most charitable way possible. So? At the end of the day, it's not their feelings you need to be worried about, but rather pleasing God by obeying the Spiritual Works of Mercy. After all, our relationships to others only have temporary implications, but our relationship and obedience to God have eternal implications. Remember this: *Comfort and Conviction don't live on the same block!*

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