

 CHURCH

Saints who have had to live without the Eucharist

Meg Hunter-Kilmer | Mar 18, 2020

These stories will put our momentary fast from the Body and Blood of Christ into perspective.

With dioceses around the world canceling public Masses for weeks to come, many Catholics are already feeling starved for the Eucharist. When the world is fighting a global pandemic, it seems that the Mass would be more necessary than ever. But while public Masses are canceled, the private ones continue and the body of Christ is able to receive the graces from those Masses, especially when we make a spiritual communion.

Still, how can we who depend on the Sacraments survive this crisis when divorced from holy Mass? Well, there are plenty of saints (and millions more Christians) who've had similar experiences, months and years of surviving without the Sacraments. Looking to them can strengthen us to persevere.

Though not canonized, **thousands and thousands of Japanese Christians** lived without priests for nearly 250 years. They baptized their children in secret, passing down the faith in whispered lessons, praying before images of the Madonna and Child that were disguised to look like Buddhist images. In 1858 Japan finally readmitted Christian missionaries, who found 10,000 hidden Christians waiting for them. Imagine being raised with the near certainty that you would never in your life attend Mass, knowing of the Eucharist only because your grandmother's grandmother's grandmother once went to Mass. It puts social distancing in perspective.

The saints of **19th-century Korea** were in a similar situation. After the Gospel was first preached by Servant of God Yi Beok and his companions in 1784, the Church was run entirely by laypeople until 1795. At that point, **Bl. James Zhou Wen-Mo** arrived and discovered 4,000 Catholics, only one of whom had ever seen a priest. Wen-Mo served as the only priest in all of Korea for six years, until his martyrdom. For the next 36 years, there were again no Masses in Korea until a small group of French priests arrived in 1836—and were killed two years later.

St. Isaac Jogues (1607-1646) may have been prepared for torture and martyrdom when he traveled to North America to evangelize Native Americans. But as a priest, he wouldn't have expected to be deprived of the Eucharist — until his hands were marred by his captors. At the time, a priest who was missing thumb or forefinger was unable to celebrate the Mass, so from the time of his injury until (having escaped his Mohawk captors) his return to France 17 months later, Fr. Jogues was unable to

confess, to celebrate Mass, or even to attend Mass. He was given a special dispensation and permitted to celebrate Mass again, in spite of the state of his hands, and requested permission to return to America after his recovery. He was killed not long after his return, but his killer later repented and was baptized with the name “Isaac Jogues.”

Bl. Victoire Rasoamanarivo (1848-1894) was a Malagasy noblewoman and a convert to Catholicism. A leader in the Church in Madagascar, when the French were expelled from Madagascar in 1883, the departing priests left the care of the Church in her hands, along with **Bl. Raphael Rafiringa**, a Malagasy religious Brother. For nearly three years, Victoire and Raphael led the 21,000 lay Catholics in Madagascar, bringing them together each Sunday for communal prayer though there were no priests to celebrate Mass. Victoire explained, “I place before my mind the missionaries saying the Mass, and mentally attend all the Masses being said throughout the world.” Three years later, a vibrant community hungry for the Eucharist welcomed their priests back—all of them far more grateful for the Mass than they had been before their three years without it.

St. Mark Ji TianXiang (1834-1900) was an opium addict. Because his priest didn’t understand the nature of addiction, he told TianXiang that he couldn’t be absolved until he had beaten his addiction—which meant that he couldn’t receive communion either. For 30 years, TianXiang continued to practice the faith while being denied the Sacraments. He never did manage to get clean, but he died a martyr and has been canonized a saint not just for his martyrdom but for his decades of attempting to follow Jesus even in the absence of the Sacraments.

Bl. Laurentia Herasymiv (1911-1952), like countless other Catholics in Nazi concentration camps or Soviet gulags, spent the last months of her life without the Sacraments and in the near certainty that she would have no opportunity for viaticum or a final confession. Arrested for refusing to abandon the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church for Orthodoxy, Sr. Laurentia and **Bl. Olympia Bida** were sent to Siberia, where both died as a result of all they’d suffered at the hands of the communists. As she lay dying, she begged for the Eucharist, calling out in her delirium, “Jesus, I do not want to die without you!” She died, as she had lived for two long years, without the Eucharist, and was fully united to Jesus.

Tags: [SAINTS](#)

☺