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Making Ourselves Ready to Receive Holy Communion Worthily

Instead of a homily today, I would like to give a general instruction on how to receive Holy Communion worthily. The reason for this instruction is due to the dire state of belief among Catholic people about what the Eucharist is. Many were never taught of the Church's longstanding belief that the Eucharist is the body, blood, soul and divinity of the risen Christ. Sadly, some have flat out rejected this belief and have left.

The Church calls the presence of Christ in the Eucharist 'the real' presence. The 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist begins at the time of the consecration. From that moment forward what lies before us on the altar and in the tabernacle is the same Jesus who walked upon this earth and whose life and works are contained in the accounts of the four Gospels. He is totally present in every single fragment of the Eucharist and every drop of the Precious Blood. The remains of Holy Communion are reserved in the tabernacle in order to nourish the sick and dying as well as for our personal and collective adoration.

On the night of the Last Supper the Church holds that Jesus instituted the

Eucharist to be the living sign of his sacrificial death and the source of unity with him and all those who are called into a community of believers in holy baptism. When Jesus says: 'this is my body' and 'this is my blood' we believe in faith that his words have the power to make real what they proclaim. Remember that we are talking about God, now, whose word can bring forth creation and raise the dead to life.

We also believe that on the night before he died that he gave the authority to confect, to make the Eucharist present, to his priests, those whom he had consecrated that night and whom he continues to consecrate in our time through the bishops who are in communion with Peter, who is the vicar of Christ. Priests and bishops are in '*persona Christi*' in the holy Mass. They stand in his place. They are his icon. So when the priest consecrates the Eucharist, it is really Jesus who is doing so. The intention of Jesus, when he instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood on Holy Thursday night, was for his 'real presence' to continue on in his Church until he returns in glory. This has been the constant belief of the Church for 2,000 years.

If we believe that the sacrament of the holy Eucharist contains the 'real presence' of Christ then it should affect the way that we approach him, the love that we

shower upon him, and the care and devotion that we observe when we receive him in Holy Communion. If we do not believe, or if we act like it doesn't matter and we receive Holy Communion, then we cause Jesus great sorrow and contribute to the weight of his passion.

I believe that you are here because you love Jesus and your desire is not to bring him offense or to cause him pain. But we could very well be doing this through genuine ignorance or lack of discipline. That is why it is important that we review the guidelines that the Church gives us in order to prepare ourselves to receive him worthily in Holy Communion and in a state of grace.

Our preparations to receive Holy Communion worthily begin at home. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches the following: *"To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church. Bodily demeanor (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest (1387)."*

What is the fasting that the Church requires of us in order to worthily receive Holy Communion? Canon Law requires that the fast begins at least one hour prior to the reception of Holy Communion. To make it easier to remember, I

suggest to begin one hour prior to the time of the Mass that you are going to attend.

The Eucharistic fast helps us to remember that which we are about to receive and makes our hearts and souls hunger to receive him. Recently, I was watching a brief video on our website by a Franciscan brother regarding the Eucharistic fast. He offered this analogy: if you are invited to dinner you do not stuff yourself with food before you go to the meal. How much more the Eucharistic banquet that we are invited to attend. The Eucharist is the most important meal of the day.

The Church, in her pastoral care of the sick, makes exceptions to this rule. But for the healthy person, they must abstain from everything, with the exception of water and medicine at least one hour before Mass. If a person willfully refuses to observe the Eucharist fast they should refrain from receiving Holy Communion so as not offend the Lord.

In our preparations to receive Holy Communion worthily we must examine our conscience. Every Catholic must attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Yet, a person in the state of mortal sin should not receive Holy

Communion until making a good confession. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *“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”* (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Mortal sin is a free deliberate choice that kills the life of grace in a person.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that *“The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church. The Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins, that is proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation”* (1395). It also teaches that *“by the same charity that it en-kindles in us, the Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin”*(1395).

St. Paul connects the unworthy reception of Holy Communion to a sick spiritual life that eventually leads to a dead spiritual life. The unworthy reception of the Eucharist begins to sicken the person. Eventually, the desire for the Eucharist lessens; the Mass and the entire spiritual life become a chore.

So for a quick review. What must we do to prepare to receive the Eucharist

worthily:

- We must abstain from all food and drink, with the exception of water and medicine one hour prior to the time of the Mass that we will be attending.
- We must examine our conscience, that has been informed by the teaching of the Church, to determine if we are free from mortal sin. If we are in mortal sin we should still attend Mass but not receive Holy Communion until we have gone to sacramental confession.
- We must never have gum or candy in our mouth.
- We must refrain from making judgments on those who do not receive Holy Communion at Mass, nor should the fear of what others think pressure us into receive Holy Communion unworthily, and thus bringing harm to Jesus, to our soul, and the unity of his Church.

I pray that this teaching will make us ready to receive Holy Communion worthily and in a state of grace.

Amen.