



How to make a spiritual Communion

Cindy Wooden | Catholic News Service
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Pope Francis celebrates Mass in the chapel of his residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae, at the Vatican March 10, 2020. For the second day this week the pope celebrated Mass without a small group of the faithful in order to avoid the risk of spreading the coronavirus. VATICAN MEDIA | CNS

ROME — Public Masses are banned throughout Italy, but literally thousands of Masses are celebrated each day and, in addition to watching them on television or computer screens, the faithful can receive "spiritual Communion."

Pope Francis, after reciting a livestreamed Angelus prayer March 15, told people, "United to Christ we are never alone, but instead form one body, of which he is the head. It is a union that is nourished with prayer and also with spiritual communion in the Eucharist, a practice that is recommended when it isn't possible to receive the sacrament."

Obviously, receiving Communion is the way to participate most fully in the Mass, but it is not always possible for everyone to receive at every Mass, nor do many Catholics in the world even have regular access to Mass.

The idea of "spiritual Communion" — inviting Jesus into one's heart and soul when receiving the actual sacrament isn't possible — is part of Catholic tradition.

In the 1700s, **St. Alphonsus Liguori** wrote a special prayer for spiritual communion:

My Jesus, I believe you are really here in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you more than anything in the world, and I hunger to receive you. But since I cannot receive Communion at this moment, feed my soul at least spiritually. I unite myself to you now as I do when I actually receive you.

Auxiliary Bishop Paolo Ricciardi of Rome, writing in the Vatican newspaper March 11, said, "This month all priests will continue to celebrate Masses and even if they cannot participate, Christians will continue to carry into the world the grace of years of abundance to face these weeks of famine."

The bishop prayed that acts of only spiritual Communion would help people "joyfully rediscover all of the good that the Eucharist has given us from the day of our first Communion."

"Let us increase our desire to receive it again at Easter with a renewed awareness of encountering the living Christ with joy on our faces and in our hearts — and not with those faces we sometimes see at Mass," he said, and "with a commitment to beginning again from the Eucharist to give life to the world."

In countries where Catholics can and do receive the sacrament frequently, they do not hear the term "spiritual Communion" very often, but it has been mentioned even in recent church documents.

The Vatican's preparatory document for the 2012 International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin said those who cannot receive the Eucharist can have spiritual Communion, declaring their desire to receiving the Eucharist and uniting "their suffering of that moment with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ."

The working document for the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist in 2005 addressed the idea of offering up the sacrifice of being unable to receive Communion. It said: "Spiritual Communion, for example, is always possible for elderly persons and the sick who cannot go to church. In manifesting their love for the Eucharist, they participate in the communion of saints with great spiritual benefit for themselves and the church. By offering their sufferings to God, the church is enriched."

In "Sacramentum Caritatis," the document Pope Benedict XVI issued in 2007 reflecting on the synod, he cautioned people against thinking they had "a right or even an obligation" to receive the Eucharist every time they went to Mass.

"Even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental Communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual Communion," Pope Benedict wrote.

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Those unable to receive Eucharist can have spiritual communion

By Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB
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In his encyclical, "[Ecclesia de Eucharistia](#)" ("A Eucharistic Church"), in April 2003, Pope John Paul II encouraged the practice of spiritual communion, "which has been a wonderful part of Catholic life for centuries and recommended by saints who were masters of the spiritual life."

Spiritual communion isn't as much a part of the Catholic vocabulary and consciousness as it was in the past, though it is just as real an opportunity for eucharistic grace as it ever was. Ironically, the encouragement of actual reception of the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass and the routine availability of eucharistic Communion today, a wonderful development begun in the time of Pope Pius X and emphasized by the Second Vatican Council, may have helped cause this other eucharistic gift to be overshadowed in our time.

What is spiritual communion? St. Thomas Aquinas described it as "an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most holy sacrament and lovingly embrace him" at a time or in circumstances when we cannot receive him in sacramental Communion. The Catechism of the Council of Trent devoted a special section to spiritual communion in its program of renewal in the late 16th century. In the past, instruction manuals gave as the most familiar situation, the need of a mother to stay home from Sunday Mass to care for a sick child, thereby missing the opportunity for Communion.

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In such cases, the mother could make an act of spiritual communion, uniting herself with the Mass in her parish church and receive the spiritual benefit of Communion. The opportunities for receiving spiritual communion are limitless, but particular circumstances make it appealing in our time. Today there are many Catholics who may not be able to receive Communion because of a marriage not recognized by the Church. Often they are in a process of getting their marital status rectified, but until that is done, they cannot participate.

But they are not prohibited from receiving Communion spiritually and receiving strength from the grace of the sacrament during a waiting period which is often painful. As the availability of priestly ministry decreases, daily Mass becomes more and more scarce, and some communities may not regularly have even a Communion service on Sunday. In our mobile society, people who otherwise might be at Mass are frequently on the move.

Spiritual communion needs no special instruction; it only requires the same disposition as the actual reception of the sacrament and a turning to Jesus with the heart. These days as we experience a renewal of eucharistic adoration, those who come to spend time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament are receiving spiritual communion, even though they may not have called it by that name.

Prayer of Spiritual Communion

No particular prayer or formulary is required, though there are acts of spiritual communion in Catholic prayer books to help focus a proper intention. One of the most popular is that composed by St. Alphonsus Liguori:

“My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Blessed Sacrament.
I love you above all things and I desire you with all my heart.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
I embrace you as if you were already in my heart
and unite myself to you completely.
Please do not let me ever be separated from you.”

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Archdiocese of Washington

How Do I Make a Spiritual Communion?

Below are recommendations for how to make a ‘spiritual communion’ when unable to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The recommendations can be adapted based upon personal and family needs.

Gather with others in your household and begin a time of prayer with the sign of the cross.

Take time to read and reflect upon the readings from Sunday Mass. You can find the readings at usccb.org and a Sunday Gospel reflection on our YouTube channel. Additionally, a weekly televised Sunday Mass is available to watch at adw.org/tvmass.

Share prayer intentions quietly or aloud.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Pray one of the prayers of spiritual communion.

Close with the sign of the cross.