

**“The Lord gave them bread from heaven:  
man ate the bread of angels.”**

***Psalm 78: 24-25***



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If you've participated in a Funeral Mass here in St. André's Parish during the last several months, chances are that you've heard a brief announcement made before the distribution of Holy Communion:

**It is our Catholic faith that the Eucharist is really and truly the Body and Blood of Christ and a sign of our unity in him, and so it is the Church's longstanding tradition that Holy Communion be given only to Catholics who are properly prepared to receive the Sacrament. Those who are not able to receive Communion today are invited to join with us in prayer from their places in the church.**

You might be wondering, "Where did that come from?" This Sunday's Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ seems like the perfect time to offer an explanation.

Most Funeral Masses in our parish these days are attended by a large number of non-Catholics and non-practicing Catholics, who often do not know whether they should come forward to receive Holy Communion. Your parish priests can attest that, when distributing the Blessed Sacrament, we see their confusion and discomfort all the time. An increasing number of people, simply imitating what they saw others doing, were taking the Sacred Host (since if someone of appropriate age comes forward with their hands extended, we do not deny anyone, but presume they are prepared to receive) and then did not know what to do with it. We were regularly seeing them—both adults and children—take the Host back to their pews, play with it in their hands, and even sometimes slip it into their pockets.

As faithful Catholics, we're sure you understand how terribly distressing it is to witness such disrespect (even if unintentional) shown to the Body of Christ! The priest, deacon, or a server would then have to approach these individuals in their pews and ask them to either consume the Host immediately or return it—which was a terribly awkward conversation to have in the middle of a Funeral Mass, and a matter of great embarrassment for these guests in our churches.

The issue was getting steadily worse instead of better, and so it was discussed at a meeting of our parish staff last winter. The brief announcement we are now using is the result. To use it was not a decision made lightly, and the words were carefully chosen, given the delicate nature of the matter and the need to be both clear and brief. They reflect the consistent teaching of the Catholic Church, going back to the days of the Apostles:

**The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist: “Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). To respond to this invitation we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience: “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 anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1384-1385].**

Whether out of habit or fear, we know that there are not a few Catholics who come forward although consciously in a state of mortal sin—choosing to receive Communion and offend God, rather than to remain at their place while others approach the altar. The Church’s guiding principle on this particular matter is expressed in the *Didache*, a document of Christian discipline as old as the New Testament itself (from about 70 A.D.):

**Whoever is holy, let him approach. Whoever is not, let him repent [10].**

The announcement we now make at Funeral Masses does not include an invitation for those who are unable to receive Holy Communion to come forward for a blessing. The Vatican’s Congregation for Divine Worship issued a letter in November 2008 stating that doing so is contrary to Catholic teaching and practice. It’s one thing to extend a simple, warm gesture toward a little child in his or her parent’s arms, quite another to give the impression that a blessing is somehow a substitute for partaking of the Holy Eucharist, or that the circumstances which separate an adult from Eucharistic Communion are not in fact very significant. (When people do present themselves for a blessing, however, we certainly respectfully acknowledge them, yet it does not seem appropriate to promote a habit that we have been specifically instructed to discourage.)

While making this announcement is not a perfect solution, we believe it is far more respectful to our guests than having to confront so many of them during Holy Communion and ask them to return a Host—and it is certainly more respectful to our Lord really and truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. If anyone is able to offer suggestions about how it might be improved, or can even propose another way to avoid the very uncomfortable situations we were facing with increasing frequency at Funeral Masses, we would be most grateful to hear your ideas.

**May the Heart of Jesus, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. Amen.**

*St. André Bessette Parish, Malone, NY  
Corpus Christi—Sunday, June 18, 2017*