

# The Holy Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist may be considered in the threefold relation of Sacrifice, Holy Communion and the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The Sacrifice of the Mass has been already explained; the explanation of the other parts is as follows:

## The Sacrament of Holy Communion

1. In the first Christian centuries the faithful usually received Holy Communion during Mass, after the communion of the priest. The sick and prisoners, however, were allowed to receive out of Mass. Men received the Holy Sacrament in the hollow of the right hand, supporting it with the left in the form of a cross, and in this manner conveyed it to the mouth. The women did the same, but on the right hand was spread a small white cloth made specially for this purpose, on which the Sacred Host was laid. However, since the middle of the sixth century it is customary to receive Holy Communion on the tongue. The Sacred Blood, which in the first centuries of Christianity was also given to the laity, was administered by means of a tube, and often out of the chalice itself.

2. It was the custom, in early times, to communicate daily, but as love of God gradually waxed cold, the faithful went less frequently to Holy Communion. Although the Christians in the fourth century communicated at least once a week, in the thirteenth century, 1215, the Church was compelled to enforce the command that all the faithful were to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, and that about Eastertime. This command is still in force. Although this is the extreme limit which the Church allows, the zealous Christian, however, will not be content with this practice alone; but according to the example of the first Christians will endeavor to communicate often, at least once a month.

3. Since the Christian in Holy Communion receives into his heart the greatest gift of God, yea, even the Dispenser of all graces, he is bound to receive this Sacrament only after careful preparation. He should prepare both body and soul for a worthy reception of Holy Communion. His soul should be in the state of sanctifying grace or at least he should have made a good confession. To receive Holy Communion when one is conscious, of having committed a mortal sin, is to incur the guilt of sacrilege. We should endeavor to purify ourselves from every venial sin, and even from every attachment to sin. Although venial sin does not

make our Communion unworthy, it hinders the workings of grace. We should, furthermore, prepare for Holy Communion by prayer, acts of self-denial, works of mercy, and awoken acts of faith, hope, humility and love. The better the preparation, the greater the plenitude of graces.

Our body must be prepared by fasting from midnight. This command originated in the early days of Christianity, and is to be strictly observed. No person is allowed to receive Holy Communion and no priest is permitted to say Mass, after having partaken of food whether solid or liquid, no matter how little it may have been. Only those who are in danger of death may receive Holy Communion after having partaken of food, but even those who are sick and not in danger of death, must communicate fasting.

This command is out of respect to the Body of our Lord. Fasting also increases devotion, and adds materially to the preparation for Communion.

Our dress should be clean and suited to our station. We should, if possible, wear better garments than those in daily use, and be modestly dressed. Pope Innocent XI in 1683, expressly forbade Communion to be given to women immodestly dressed.

4. Thanksgiving after Communion is also of great importance. As soon as we have received our Lord, we should occupy ourselves exclusively with this Heavenly Guest, in order to show him our love, and to lay before Him all of our own wants and necessities, as well as the wants of our Holy Church, and our family. Our thanksgiving should last at least a quarter of an hour, for so long, at least, our Lord remains in His humanity within us. If obliged to expectorate we should never eject the saliva on the ground; but, if it cannot be avoided altogether, we should use the handkerchief.

5. Holy Communion produces in a soul well prepared, wonderful gifts of grace:

a) It sustains the spiritual life, it preserves the soul from the spiritual death of sin, and endows it with strength to resist the temptations of the Evil One;

b) It increases sanctifying grace, filling the soul with

a holy joy and longing, and promotes the virtues, especially charity and purity.

c) Furthermore, it leads the spiritual life to perfection, and the soul by her intimate union with Christ attains the most intimate communion with the Church Militant, Suffering and Triumphant; her glory in heaven is more assured and increased; even the body which now participates in the graces of the soul, is more and more sanctified by the Body of our Lord and will one day partake of the eternal glory of the soul.

We should therefore go frequently, and well prepared to Holy Communion.

6. The Ritual for Holy Communion is essentially the same, whether it be administered during Mass or out of Mass. It is always considered as belonging to the Mass, therefore the priest when giving Communion always wears a stole the same color as the vestment of the day. The Council of Trent expressed the wish, that Holy Communion should be connected, as much as possible, with the Sacrifice of the Mass. The following is the rite:

a) The server says the *Confiteor*, while the priest takes the ciborium out of the tabernacle and uncovers it. Then the priest says two prayers, a form of absolution. The Church would admonish us thereby, that no one should approach the table of the Lord unworthily, but should prove and purify himself. It was formerly a prescribed custom that the people should on the day of Communion, wash hands and feet and appear in finer garments at the table of the Lord. We should communicate with the greatest veneration and the purest of hearts, therefore the *Confiteor* is recited and absolution, again given.

The two prayers which the priest says over the communicants after the *Confiteor* contain not a real sacramental absolution such as is given in the Sacrament of Penance, but it is a blessing of the Church, a Sacramental, which purifies contrite hearts from venial sin. These prayers are said in the plural, even if only one were to communicate; because they apply as well to all present who communicate spiritually, since they also partake of the graces dispensed in the Sacrament.

b) The priest *raises a Host* above the ciborium, showing it to the people with the words once used by John the Baptist calling his disciples: "*Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the World.*" By these words, our hearts should be moved to make an act of lively faith in the real

presence of Christ under the form of bread.

c) He then repeats three times the words of the Centurion of Capharnaum: "*O Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, speak only the word and my soul shall be healed.*" These words repeated three times by the priest should admonish us to make acts of faith, hope, charity and humility, and we should be entirely penetrated with these sentiments.

d) In administering Holy Communion, the priest makes the *sign of the Cross* with the Sacred Host over each communicant while saying the words: "The body of our Lord, Jesus Christ, preserve thy soul unto life everlasting, Amen." The sign of the Cross denotes that all the Sacraments receive their efficacy from the death of Jesus on the Cross.

e) When Holy Communion is given out of the Mass, the priest again *gives the blessing* at the close, that the Holy Communion may produce the greatest possible fruit in our souls. No further ceremony is used, so that the faithful may not be detained from immediate intercourse with their loving Redeemer who now dwells within their hearts. Would to God that every one would make use of these precious moments of grace. "How much those lose," exclaims St. Alphonsus, "who neglect to implore graces after receiving Holy Communion."

7. The Rubrics for administering Holy Communion as Viaticum differ somewhat from those to be observed under ordinary circumstances. First of all, the person need not be fasting, again, the priest uses the form: "Receive brother (sister) the Viaticum of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will protect you from the Evil One and lead you to life everlasting." From these words we see that the purpose of the Viaticum is to strengthen the dying in his conflict with the spirits of darkness, and to facilitate his entrance into heaven. Any one dangerously sick should not delay to receive the Last Sacraments; he will thereby the more easily regain his health, or be the better prepared to die.

8. The zealous Christian will often communicate spiritually, by awakening within his heart an ardent desire to be intimately united with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. It is not difficult to make a Spiritual Communion; we should recollect ourselves for a few moments, place ourselves in spirit before the tabernacle, make an act of contrition and consider how ardently Christ desires to bestow the treasure of His love upon us, then say "Lord Jesus, come I beseech Thee, into my heart"; finally thank Him and implore new graces.

We may communicate spiritually every hour of the day, more particularly during Mass or when passing by a church. As we take corporal food three times a day, so do many Christians receive Communion spiritually three times a day or even oftener.

## Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

1. Out of love for Jesus, every Christian should endeavor to visit Him in the mystery of His love as often as possible, and before the tabernacle renew his faith, inflame his love, and adore his God in union with the Angels, who invisibly hover around the altar. He should ponder on some incident in the life or sufferings of our Lord; place his own wants and those of others before Him, make good resolutions, communicate spiritually, and recommend himself to the Blessed Virgin. "Visits to the Blessed Sacrament" by Alphonsus Ligouri may be very appropriately used on such occasions.

2. To render proper adoration and veneration to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, confraternities of Perpetual Adoration have been established for over two hundred years.

Tabernacle societies have also been established in our time, which besides visiting the Blessed Sacrament, make it a rule to furnish poor churches with a proper habitation for the Blessed Sacrament, by providing altar furnishings, etc.

3. The Forty Hours' Adoration is a special devotion in atonement for all the insults offered to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It was introduced about the middle of the sixteenth Century, in commemoration of the forty hours during which the sacred body of Jesus lay in the sepulchre, from His death to His resurrection, and through this union of prayers to avert some calamity. St. Philip Neri was the most zealous promoter of this devotion.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Popes Benedict XIV and Clement XIII, ordained that the Forty Hours' Adoration should be held throughout the entire Catholic world on the so-called Carnival days, in expiation of the sins committed on those days. For this purpose the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for adoration forty hours, on three successive days, the Adoration being closed with procession and solemn Benediction. By a rescript dated Dec. 10, 1857, Pope Pius IX granted, among other modifications, the omission of the procession even inside the church if it cannot be properly held. Whosoever on these three days participates in the Adoration and receives the Sacraments can obtain

a plenary indulgence, which may be applied to the souls in Purgatory (Benedict XIV, January, 1748).

4. In olden times exposition of the Blessed Sacrament was not known. Even as late as the fourteenth century the faithful could see the Sacred Host only at the Consecration and at Communion. Just as little was Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament given. It is only since the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi that the Blessed Sacrament was more frequently exposed for public veneration. The more the love for Jesus waxed cold, the more He revealed His love for man to draw him to Himself. The Church prescribes that the altar on which the Exposition takes place, must be ornamented in festal array, adorned with flowers and illuminated with many candles. Faithful worshipers should never be wanting; they are the richest ornament of the Lord. At the close of the Exposition, just before Benediction, the last two verses of the "Pange Lingua" are either prayed or sung. During the last verse or after it, the priest incenses the Blessed Sacrament, then, sings or prays the versicle and the oration of the Blessed Sacrament. Putting on the benediction veil he ascends the altar and gives the Benediction in solemn stillness, in the form of a cross. The incense which envelops the altar as with a cloud, admonishes the faithful to be devout and reverent, in order to obtain the blessings bestowed by the Blessed Sacrament. The priest takes hold of the monstrance with his hands covered by the benediction veil, that he may not touch it with bare hands, thereby denoting his humility and respect. This solemn Benediction is an awe inspiring moment in Catholic worship; a rich stream of grace and mercy flows from the Blessed Sacrament into the hearts of the worshipers, but only in proportion to the purity and susceptibility of their souls.