



HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE OF HOLY MASS EXPLANATORY NOTE IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19

At this difficult time when our parishioners are not able to attend Holy Mass this Office has been approached by many priests and parishioners with questions regarding the reception of Holy Communion outside of Holy Mass in these days.

The Most Holy Eucharist, “stands at the center of the Church's life”,¹ since it truly “contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and Living Bread.”² “The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as the gift *par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work.”³ That surpassing gift of the Eucharist is where the Church draws her life, the dynamic force of all her activity and her whole sense of purpose and direction. As the Second Vatican Council proclaimed, the Eucharistic sacrifice is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.⁴

Any discussion of weekday liturgical worship must begin by recalling the importance and normative character of daily Mass in the life of every Catholic community. Pope St. Paul VI recommended that priests “worthily and devoutly offer Mass each day in order that both they and the rest of the faithful may enjoy the benefits that flow so richly from the sacrifice of the cross.”⁵ Pope John Paul II echoes these words in stating: “We can understand, then, how important it is for the spiritual life of the priest, as well as for the good of the Church and the world, that priests follow the Council’s recommendation to celebrate the Eucharist daily,”⁶ and he like many popes before him, states that “priests should be encouraged to celebrate Mass every day, even in the absence of a congregation, since it is an act of Christ and the Church”.⁷

¹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003, 3.

² *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 5.

³ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 11.

⁴ *Lumen Gentium* 11.

⁵ Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, 1965, 33

⁶ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 31; cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 13.

⁷ Code of Canon Law c 904

It is important to make the distinction between the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion outside of Mass. It is clear that the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of the Eucharist cannot be separated theologically and are only separated temporally due to pastoral necessity.

With regard to the separation of the Sacrifice and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Pope St. Paul VI states: “The few things that we have touched upon concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass encourage us to say something about the Sacrament of the Eucharist, since both Sacrifice and Sacrament pertain to the same mystery and cannot be separated from each other. The Lord is immolated in an unbloody way in the Sacrifice of the Mass and He re-presents the sacrifice of the Cross and applies its salvific power at the moment when he becomes sacramentally present - through the words of consecration - as the spiritual food of the faithful, under the appearances of bread and wine.”⁸

In the same encyclical Pope Paul makes a distinction between the celebration of Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion: “For such a Mass brings a rich and abundant treasure of special graces to help the priest himself, the faithful, the whole Church and the whole world toward salvation - and this same abundance of graces is not gained through mere reception of Holy Communion.”⁹

It is the expectation of the Church that: “The faithful should normally receive sacramental Communion of the Eucharist during Mass itself, at the moment laid down by the rite of celebration, that is to say, just after the Priest celebrant’s Communion.”¹⁰ In fact the Second Vatican Council refers to it as the “more perfect form of participation in the Mass.”¹¹

Given the Church’s constant teaching with regard to the unity of the Sacrifice and the Sacrament it is clear that the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass should only be considered for significant pastoral reasons; e.g., the inability to participate in the Mass due to sickness, incarceration, or the regular and ongoing absence of a priest.

⁸ *Mysterium Fidei* 34

⁹ *Mysterium Fidei* 32

¹⁰ *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 88

¹¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55

The faithful are to understand that the Eucharistic sacrifice cannot take place without a priest and that although the Holy Communion which they may receive outside of Mass is closely connected with the sacrifice of the Mass, it is not equal to it.¹²

The casual and ordinary reception of Holy Communion outside of Holy Mass normalizes the separation of Sacrifice and Sacrament and makes ordinary what is envisioned by the Church to be an extraordinary occurrence.

From the earliest times the Church has constantly encouraged that the greatest solicitude is to be observed so that all the sacraments will be dispensed with reverence and exactitude. Particularly this is true of the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist, than which there is nothing more sublime, nothing holier, nothing more wonderful in the Church of God. For contained within it is all sweetness, the highest of God's gifts, Christ the Lord himself.¹³

In these days certain proposals have been made for the distribution of Holy Communion in ways which do not observe the great dignity and reverence which the Holy Eucharist deserves.

This Office is already aware of some egregious practices which have occurred which approach being *graviora delicta*. [Profanation of the Eucharistic species (Art. 3, § 1, n.1°)]

No one therefore may doubt "that all the faithful show this Holy Sacrament the veneration and adoration that is due to God himself, as has always been the practice recognized in the Catholic Church."¹⁴

Therefore, we encourage all the pastors of our local church to attach the greatest significance to the way in which we approach the Most Holy Eucharist so that a reverent and fitting worship and administration of this Sacrament can be maintained and promoted.

¹² cf. Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest 17

¹³ Cf. Roman Ritual

¹⁴ Ibid.

Some Practical Guidelines

- Given the social distancing recommendation of the state, Holy Communion to the homebound is suspended.
- The primary and original reason for reservation of the Eucharist outside of Mass is the administration of *viaticum*.¹⁵ Therefore, Holy Communion can and should be taken by a priest as *viaticum* to those who are dying.
- It is not licit for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to self-communicate or take the Blessed Sacrament to their family and friends.
- Communion Services even when social distancing and gathering limits are met are not allowed.
- Personal 'needs' must not be placed above the good of the whole Church and the reverence due to the Sacraments.
- Periods of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in our churches are encouraged along with Acts of Spiritual Communion.
- Pastors are urged to show no preference to certain parishioners with regard to access to Holy Communion.
- If a parish can accommodate parishioners at Holy Mass within the gathering limits established, those attending should be selected in such a way as to avoid any favoritism or unfair preference.
- Pastors are encouraged to communicate the Church's teaching with regard to the Most Holy Eucharist so as to eliminate the casual and irreverent attitudes which may exist in some places.

This is a time of great sacrifice for the People of God, let us aid them with a reverent and dignified care for the Most Holy Eucharist and by our daily offering of the Holy Mass, by which we are united as the Church of Christ.

¹⁵ Cf. Roman Ritual