



Take and Eat

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By:

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Cover Art:

"Communion of the Apostles," by Fra Angelico (1395 - 1455). This fresco can be seen at the Museum San Marco in Florence, Italy. It was painted between 1437 and 1446. The original is currently in the European Art Collection at the Boston Museum. This is a faithful photographic reproduction of a two-dimensional, public domain work of art. The work of art itself is in the public domain for the following reason: *



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FROM TIME TO TIME one hears of men going on a hunger strike and everybody knows what the inevitable result must be if they persist in refusing to take food. Little by little the body will grow more and more emaciated. Each day that the strike lasts sees the man's strength give way and ultimately death comes, for, through sheer lack of food, all power has been lost to resist its onslaughts.

Now, another sort of hunger strike is occurring and we propose to deal with it in the pages of this little book. You will find thousands of Catholics who refuse to give their souls the food that is essential to the soul's health. Can you guess the result? Of course, the soul sickens and dies. The soul has no powers of resistance, so it succumbs to the attacks of the forces of evil. You cannot put a soldier on the field and make no provision for keeping him supplied with food. A starving man must be fed and nourished before he can be expected to fight. In just the same way, your soul cannot hold out for very long against the many enemies who assail her unless she is kept fit for the fight by regular supplies of sustaining food.

You will come across people on every side who will explain to you how hard it is to "keep good" at this time. Undoubtedly, the world of today abounds in temptations of all sorts and a Catholic who steers through the labyrinth and keeps his course must be a skilled pilot. Passion is seething in the human breast and provisions for its gratification abound. What is easier than to allow one's ideals to run crashing into the reef? Who does not feel at times almost overpowered by the temptation to take his hand off the helm and, regardless of consequences, let his little craft dash recklessly into the vortex of excitement and sin? *

Poor, frail human nature, in which there is so much that is noble and lovable! How many embark on life's journey buoyed up with high-souled aspirations. Yet, they grow listless and inert before many knots have been covered! Many make resolute promises to God yet few, comparatively, prove their loyalty to Him when tested by the storms and winds and rain of temptation! What tears of bitter repentance for sin we see, followed by a return to husks of swine! Strange that it should be so—on the one hand this craving for goodness and on the other this apparent inability to attain to it, at least permanently!

We should pause here for a moment to remind ourselves of a vastly consoling truth. It is worthwhile to insist that it is quite a literal fact that the forces arrayed against us are too strong for us. We have no chance against them. The enemy is a shrewd master and he finds a willing ally in our "body of flesh" with its sinful tendencies. Left to ourselves, it is impossible for us to even conceive a good thought or cherish a holy desire. How much more impossible must it be to steer a straight course in the face of the violent storms that continually threaten to capsize your little boat?

* See "Talking of Temptation," by Father Nash, S.J. ("Irish Messenger" Office, ad.).

Recognize, the task is impossible. Admit readily to yourself that it cannot be done. If this is true, where does the consolation come in? Is not my utter helplessness calculated only to fill me with depression and make me give up the struggle altogether? What is the use in fighting sin and temptation if I am so hopelessly weak before them?

This attitude would be intelligible if we were left to ourselves. However, the same Lord Who assures us that without Him we can do nothing is far from abandoning us to the buffetings on life's ocean. The enemy is strong. Our merciful Lord has therefore provided us with a marvelous life-giving food precisely because we so sorely need a power that is stronger.

That food is nothing less than His Body and Blood.

“Take ye and eat; this is My Body. Take ye and drink; this is My Blood . . . He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life.”

Long ago the prophet fainted on his journey and was desperately tempted to lie down and die. However, God sent him a strengthening bread from heaven. He ate and walked forty days until he reached Horeb the mount of God. Our souls, too, need strengthening Food and nobody knows that better than Our Lord. “If God be with me who shall be against me?” In truth, God is living in me through frequent and fervent reception of Holy Communion. No wonder the enemy quails before His Face?

THE FIRST EFFECT ~ STRENGTH

“Take and eat” this divine Food and see what will happen. You will find a new strength growing within you—the exact strength you need. When you have made frequent and fervent Holy Communion a habit, you will begin to reflect within yourself on a happy change that has taken place in your life. Temptation will be there still and you know that it will always be possible for you to fall. While you recognize your weakness, it is none the less true that the attack will have lost much of its force. Moreover, passion, which formerly had such a strong appeal, will seem to have calmed considerably and the glittering objects that passion used to seduce you will be seen as only so much tinsel. You will have more confidence without being presumptuous in any way. You will have a sense of comforting security, for passion, though not dead, will be no longer the imperious tyrant of other days. In a word, you will have acquired strength—strength to do what you know you should do and to avoid what you know you should leave undone.

Such a happy change! It is such a relief! How has this result come about? Your new-found strength is not your own. You are receiving Holy Communion frequently and

ferently. Therefore, you have within you the strength of Jesus Christ Himself. In a new sense, the words of Saint Paul are yours, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me."

"Take and Eat." Never until we get to heaven, and not even then, shall we understand fully the anxiety of Jesus Christ for our eternal salvation. It is not fair to complain of our trials and temptations because no temptation is insuperable. "I can do all things in Him that strengthenth me." It is especially through this ineffable gift of Himself that Jesus pours His own strength, His own very life, into your soul.

He has sympathy with you in those attacks from the enemy. He understands how vehement can be the inclination to plunge recklessly into evil. However, do not tax Him by leaving yourself without provision for the fight. You cannot go down if you depend on Him. You cannot be seriously wounded if His life is abiding in you. Or, if you do fall and if you are wounded, you will immediately rise again. That is why we say that monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion, worthily received, is best of all. Why? Because the oftener you take and eat of this sacred Food the more your strength will increase or, better, the more His divine strength will wax within your soul and, if God be with you who shall be against you? This is why He leaves Himself to you under the form of bread—to indicate that Holy Communion is the source of strength.

There is scarcely a time when a priest stands in a pulpit that he does not want to speak about this first effect of Holy Communion. Such a marvelous remedy for the frailty of human nature! One has had the happiness of seeing lives revolutionized by the regular and fervent reception of this divine Food. Weakness gone before His strength, fear and anxiety giving way to joy and trust, temptations that hitherto seemed to hold the poor captive in manacles of steel now broken at last and freedom restored—these are some of the wondrous results that accrue to the soul through the strength of Christ communicated to her by means of Holy Communion. Try it.

What passes one's comprehension is that so many fail to use this divine remedy. You know you are a slave to impurity or drink, you know your soul is in imminent danger of being lost, and you have lived in habitual carelessness. Do you tell me that you really desire to rise above all that welter of sin and to live once again the life worthy of your manhood? Do you say that you wish you could be pure but that your case seems hopeless? You are contradicted by no less a Person than Jesus Christ saying, "He that eateth Me the same also shall live by Me."

Some months ago a priest said Mass on a Sunday morning in a country church. Out of a dense gathering of men, only two or three received Holy Communion. Why? One must presume that in a big crowd like that there were many sorely tempted, many possibly who had allowed themselves to be driven hither and thither before the violence of the storm?

Yet, here was the remedy and they will not take it. Here is the source of the very strength of God Himself, ready to place itself at their disposal and there they stand, staring vacantly before them and letting the food pass them by. One wonders if they are in earnest about their cure at all seeing that they make so poor a use of the prescription left them by the Physician.

You cannot break off that occasion of sin—without Christ. You cannot give up that companion who is leading you astray and or perhaps you are leading him astray—without Christ. With your weak vacillating will and pitted against such a foe, you have no chance to guide your barque through the raging torrents—unless Christ steers with you. With Christ, what a difference! His strength gathers your weakness to Himself; His holiness transforms the ugliness of your sinfulness; His steady hand is on the wheel; and His unerring gaze is fixed on the shore. His very life expands more and more within your soul every day. “Take and eat,” for you can do all things in Him Who gives you such strength.

A certain man had been a daily communicant for many years. Once each week he had to drive to a city one hundred and forty miles distant from his home. His business there required his presence at an early hour in the morning. Upon arriving in the city, he would normally pull his car outside a church, go into Mass, and receive Holy Communion. He had driven one hundred and forty miles fasting and without a smoke for the privilege of being able to receive Holy Communion. Not once or twice, but for many years. Here was a man who realized that monthly Holy Communion was good; weekly Holy Communion better; and daily Holy Communion best of all. Did he have temptations? Of course he did. Did he succumb? Of course he did not. Or, if he did, he at once recovered. Why? Because of the regular supply of grace from God—divine life itself was continually reaching his soul and strengthening his powers of resistance.

THE SECOND EFFECT ~ POSSESSION BY CHRIST

In many places of Holy Scripture you have sad instances of men who were brought to Our Lord because they were possessed by an evil spirit. These unfortunate, possessed men spoke as the evil spirit wished them to speak, moved as the evil spirit ordered them to move, and flung themselves here and there despite the efforts of the strongest men to hold them down. There is another sort of possession—a much happier possession—the possession that Our Lord designs to secure over your whole being through Holy Communion.

“Comprehensus sum a Christo Jesu,” wrote Saint Paul. “I am apprehended, or seized upon, by Jesus Christ.” The metaphor is from racing. The winner of the race seized upon his prize and held it in his possession as a sign of his prowess.

Now, the prize most valued by Jesus Christ, the valiant Champion, is the soul and the heart and the mind of the creature fashioned by the hand of our heavenly Father. That He should love human nature to such an extent is a miracle that we shall not exhaust even in eternity. Of that fact, there can be no sort of doubt. This is the prize He longs to seize and to hold in His possession. It is especially through worthily received Holy Communion that He secures His objective.

What does this possession by Christ imply? Think of the different faculties you possess and try to understand how each, if this second effect of Holy Communion obtains each faculty, will be brought under the controlling influence of Jesus Christ.

INTERIOR FACULTIES

First of all, you possess two interior faculties, your mind and your heart. The mind is the seat of thought. That mind of yours must henceforth cherish only the thoughts of Christ since He intends to acquire complete possession of it. “Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Hence, you will carefully exclude from your mind all deliberate thoughts of impurity, hatred, revenge, and selfish greed. Why? Because that mind of yours now belongs to Christ since He has taken possession of it through Holy Communion. How then could you entertain thoughts of that sort seeing that they are so foreign to the mind of Christ?

On the positive side, your mind will cultivate the thoughts that filled the mind of Christ. You know how He went about doing good to all men, ever thinking of their needs, and always on the watch to help. The mind of which He has taken possession must be like Him from now on—“all things to all men.” That divine Mind values most highly the things that are above, treasure to be laid up in heaven where neither rust nor moth doth consume. Receive frequently and fervently this divine Guest into your soul and you too will begin to relish eternal things. The race for power or money or sin that occupies the thoughts and energies of the bulk of mankind will seem to you, what it is in reality, a foolish waste of time and opportunity. You will see life from a new angle—the only opportunity you have to accumulate treasure in heaven—and you will be all keenness to make the most of that one opportunity. Thus, you will develop the mind of Christ through contact with Him in Holy Communion.

Then there is your heart, the seat of your affections. It was said of Saint Paul that his heart was the heart of Christ because, with his great apostolic love, he embraced only the

objects that were forever dear above all else to the Sacred Heart—the souls of men. When the mind is possessed by Christ light and conviction follow. When the heart comes under His divine influence the will reaches out to lay hold upon souls and lead them to Christ for He is an ardent lover of souls. In Holy Communion then, He seeks to obtain entire possession of your heart and fill it with the affections of His own Heart. Hence too, He will rigorously exclude all false unworthy objects. Affection to sin must go because if Jesus loved sinners He hated intensely sin that would rob sinners of the heaven prepared for them.

EXTERNAL FACULTIES

Your external faculties must also come under the power and control of Jesus through Holy Communion. Your eyes must never deliberately look at an object that He could not gaze upon.

Why? Because they belong to Him now since through Holy Communion He has taken possession of them. Your tongue upon which He rested must never utter an unkind word, still less must it spread lying gossip or foul language. It belongs to Him. It is His possession now since your Holy Communion. Your ears you will close to all that you know is opposed to what which He would have you hear. His hands were roughened with toil. Your hands will be ready to serve others in any way in your power. Those hands of yours are His property since He owns you through Holy Communion. Therefore, He can use your hands to help the members of His mystical Body. Finally, He must take possession of your feet. You will not use those feet to walk into occasions of sin. You will never allow them to lead you into places where He and His Blessed Mother cannot be welcome guests because they now belong to Him. He has taken possession of them by means of Holy Communion.

The whole idea of Saint Paul's theology is that the life of Jesus should grow within us by a continual increase of divine grace in the soul. Now, in Holy Communion, we receive the very Source itself of all grace. That is why it is such a supremely effective means to bring about the wonderful transformation that makes our faculties responsive to the most delicate touches of divine grace. Take and eat this Food regularly and fervently and a Christliness will inevitably follow. Monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion is best of all.

Saint Catherine could never receive Holy Communion without falling into an ecstasy that often lasted for hours afterwards. Saint Ignatius had the greatest difficulty in saying Mass due to the abundance of tears he shed when he recalled the self-abasing and tender love of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The Cure of Ars said if we realized what the Mass is we should die of love and wonder. Not so long ago a non-Catholic said to a Catholic, "If

I believed what you Catholics say you believe about the Blessed Eucharist I think I should never be off my knees.” When Doctor Orchard was still a protestant he attended Mass one day. When coming out of the Church he said to his companion, “These Catholics may be right or they may be wrong in what they believe about the Eucharist. But one thing I know—that priest who has just said Mass, he at least believes it.” The reverent attitude of that priest and his unmistakable deep spirit of faith as he moved about the altar and handled the Sacred Host produced their effect and contributed towards the conversion of that great Catholic.

THIRD EFFECT ~ BURNING LOVE

These things are said by way of introducing what we wish to bring forward as the third effect of fervent and frequent Holy Communion. Jesus does not give strength merely, nor does He content Himself with taking possession. Above all, through contact with Him, a fire of burning love is enkindled in the heart. “Hold Him and keep Him when all others forsake thee, for thy friend will not abandon thee or suffer thee to perish in the end.”

The man who is a regular and worthy communicant knows well the truth of the love of Jesus for him. He has not learned it merely out of books. He has not just listened to it in sermons. He understands from his own intimate experience (in a way he cannot tell you) that this language of love is no metaphor but literal truth. When Jesus Christ stretches out His arms wide to embrace all men and when He proclaims from the house tops that His Heart is on fire with love for us in our waywardness and sinfulness, it is, quite simply, the truth.

When Our Lord gave us this Gift, He was seated with “His own” at the supper table. He saw that very night Judas would betray Him with a kiss. Peter would deny Him three times—cursing and swearing that he had never even heard His name. The rest of His own would scamper away from Him in terror at the first appearance of danger. His “revenge” is to give them this Gift. “Take ye and eat.” Was there ever such a Lover?

As He sat there, He looked down through the centuries and saw many Peters and many Judases who would betray Him and repudiate His Gift. He saw the innumerable sacrileges that would desecrate His Eucharist. He saw that many would draw near to Him to receive Him, apparently indeed His friends, but in reality, even at that awful moment—appalling thought—their souls would be reeking with the guilt of mortal sin. Of all this, He would have to complain to Saint Margaret Mary. Of ingratitude, and sacrilege, and forgetfulness, and this “even from those consecrated to Me!”

Why then does He give the Gift at all? If the vast bulk of mankind will treat Him thus, why will He knowingly allow the Bread of Angels to be trampled underneath the feet of

swine? He allows this because, although the “vast majority” will repay His love with blasphemy, there will be at least a minority who will try to appreciate and love.

So ardently does He crave the love of man’s heart that He will go through that sea of sin and sacrilege for the sake of the few.

When the priest bends over the chalice at the Consecration of the Mass, Holy Church puts on his lips the words, “This is the chalice . . . which will be poured out for you and for many. . . . *Pro vobis et pro multis*. There is a clear distinction here. The Gift is first of all “*pro vobis*,” for those around Him, His intimate friends, and only after them, “*pro multis*,”—for the general multitude. The inner circle may be small but so intense is His love that He will endure sacrileges and insults provided He can be its center.

We have now touched upon three effects brought about in the soul that “takes and eats” this Sacred Food.

Strength—the very strength of Christ Himself. **Possession**, so Our Lord can control all man’s faculties little by little. **A burning love** that shrivels up the nonsense and the make believe of the world and establishes between Jesus and the soul a most holy, intimate, and abiding familiarity.

Yes, let us once again repeat our slogan. Monthly Holy Communion is good; weekly Holy Communion is better; daily Holy Communion, worthily received, is best of all.

Strengthened with Christ’s strength; possessed by Christ and possessing Him; loved by Him and loving Him ardently—if these are some of the wonders wrought by Holy Communion why do so many regard His Gift so casually? Why are there not many more daily communicants?

One reason we have touched upon already. It seems hard to excuse those who complain about the difficulties of living a good life if they refuse to use this wonderful antidote. Men going to war have to receive injections against disease. Every man on earth is fighting for his eternal salvation. He too needs an injection against the diseases that are sure to attack him and the divine Physician has supplied it. It is an infallible Injection, for it is His own precious Blood. If you do not use it, or use it only haphazardly, who is to blame if you fall a victim to sin? The question is, are you really in earnest at all about your eternal salvation?

Apart from the group of individuals who are not serious about their eternal salvation, there is another group that makes scant use of His Gift, though for a different reason. Many good Catholics will say to you, “Yes, I could go to Holy Communion often, but I would not dare. The fact is, I am not worthy.” Did anybody ever remotely suggest that you were worthy? Does not common sense tell you that, of course, you are utterly

unworthy? How could anyone of us, even the greatest saint, be worthy of admittance to this sacred Banquet? “If you had the purity of an angel and the holiness of John the Baptist you would not be worthy. . . .”

You receive Our Lord, not because you are worthy but because you are sorely in need of Him. “Without Me you can do nothing.” The only strictly required worthiness is freedom from mortal sin. What about venial sins? Certainly, cleanse your soul of them before Holy Communion by a good act of contrition. On no account, however, should you allow them to keep you away.

Here is a mother of a large family. Her youngest child spills tea on a new table cloth and she flies into a temper. Can she go to Holy Communion tomorrow? Yes, she absolutely can go. Here is a lady walking downtown and she runs into a bit of uncharitable gossip. Then she reflects afterwards, “What a pity! Now I cannot go to Holy Communion.” Please let me say very emphatically that she can. Here is a man playing cards and the language grows a bit coarse. That is not an ideal preparation for Holy Communion. However, if he has done his best to keep clear of that language, even if he has smiled or put in his few words, let him make his act of sorrow, make his promise of amendment, and go to Holy Communion. You tell a small lie to get out of a scrape, you indulge a habit of laziness, you pray with distraction—these things need not keep you from Holy Communion.

To avoid all venial sin for a long period is impossible, without a special grace from God. However, Holy Communion is one of the very best means to conquer these vicious habits. Venial sin disappears out of your soul when Christ enters into you in much the same way as darkness vanishes when you open the shutter and allow the glorious summer sun to stream into your room.

Nobody will misunderstand and argue that we seem to be condoning habits of venial sin. Far from it. Our only point for the moment is that venial sin does not constitute a barrier to the reception of this most Holy Sacrament. Everyone knows that no purity can be too great to receive the all-pure God. Everyone understands that frequent reception of Holy Communion should diminish enormously the frequency of venially sinful habits. So, if you fall into venial sins, make an act of contrition, go to Holy Communion, and confess those sins at your next ordinary Confession.

Suppose I commit a mortal sin and make an act of perfect contrition? Can I now go to Holy Communion, provided I have the intention of confessing at my next confession? No. This is a case where, with very rare exceptions, you should abstain from going to

Holy Communion. As soon as you make your act of perfect contrition your sin is indeed entirely forgiven,* but there remains on you the obligation to confess it before you receive Holy Communion.

The case would be different if you forgot to tell a mortal sin in Confession. You had your mind fully made up to tell it but somehow it went clean out of your head when you were kneeling before the priest. Can you go to Holy Communion? Yes. How often? You can go as often as you wish. Your only obligation in this case is to tell the forgotten sin at your next ordinary Confession. If an opportunity turns up to go to Confession when you would not ordinarily be going, there is no obligation on you to avail of it now merely because you forgot your sin. Hence, in this case go to Holy Communion as often as you like and tell the sin at your next ordinary Confession.

Understand, it is not necessary to go to Confession each time you go to Holy Communion. Many excellent Catholics miss opportunities to receive Our Lord because of this false notion. If you are going to Holy Communion frequently, you are certainly to be recommended to go frequently also to Confession. However, provided you are keeping clear of mortal sin, there is no reason in the world why you should not go to Holy Communion several times even though weeks may have elapsed during which you had not an opportunity of getting to Confession.

You have been to Confession on a Saturday and twelve days later you are at Mass and you are fasting. Is there anything to keep you from receiving Holy Communion? Nothing at all, provided you have not fallen into mortal sin in the meantime. The same will be true in another week's time. Of course, we must again stress that frequent Confession is much to be recommended when you are receiving Holy Communion frequently. However, recommendation is one thing and obligation is another. It would be a pity if you miss a chance to receive Our Lord when you might lawfully and laudably avail of it.

Sometimes people find themselves caught the other way. They have an opportunity to go to Confession but they cannot get to Holy Communion. You have to deliver mail or go to the factory on a Sunday morning and it is impossible for you, especially during certain seasons, to go frequently to Holy Communion. What about Confession? There is no difficulty, you say, about that on the previous Saturday. However, what is the use when I'm not able to go to Holy Communion? There is every use. Every sacrament brings grace to your soul. If you cannot receive both sacraments do make sure of at least one and you will reap much benefit.

* See "Heaven Open to All," by Father Halpin, S.J. ("Irish Messenger" Office, ad.).

What is to be said about smoking before receiving Holy Communion? It does not break the fast and therefore need not prevent you from going. However, as an act of reverence and self-denial, it is recommended that you abstain.

Having dealt with those who neglect this great antidote out of carelessness and also with those who refrain from Holy Communion through a false conscience, it remains that a word be said about those who actually do receive Our Lord frequently and yet, it would seem, do not reap the grand effects set forth in the beginning of this paper.

Perhaps you have heard it said that sin was never more prevalent and yet the crowds at the altar rails were never so big. You have our magnificent First Fridays, our Mission and Retreat Communions, and our Sodalties and Confraternities with their regular reception of Holy Communion. Yet, in spite of all this, there are such terrifying stories abroad about sin and laxity of every kind. What is wrong? If Holy Communion is so frequent yet crime is so common, can it be affirmed that the Gift is such a sovereign remedy after all? An anecdote or two will help with the answer.

Mass was just over in the small country Church on Sunday morning. I was kneeling in the organ gallery and I noted with joy that large numbers approached the altar for Holy Communion. It was a grand sight. I was edified especially by the big number of young men who drew near to receive Our Lord and returned to their places with hands devoutly joined—such fine numbers and such reverence. However, less than five minutes after the priest had left the altar, the Church was practically empty. I saw one man and his wife and child remain some considerable time in thanksgiving. Here and there, an isolated person, mostly women and girls, stayed on. However, the vast bulk of that crowd had vanished. Out of that big number, it was literally true that scarcely a dozen in all remained behind to thank Him for His Gift for even ten minutes.

Three young girls, about eighteen or nineteen years of age, came running to Mass. The priest was distributing Holy Communion. The girls had been chatting and joking right up to the Church door.

After a hurried splash of holy water and a quick glance towards the altar they saw that they were in time. Two or three people were still waiting for Holy Communion so our three little friends practically ran up the Church aisle, fell on their knees at the altar steps, and, all flushed and breathless, received Holy Communion.

The little lad had served my Mass with becoming attention and precision. Each morning during the retreat he had presented himself at the usual time for Holy Communion. We came back together into the sacristy about six or seven minutes later. During that few minutes he had been occupied with his duties as server and could have scarcely done

more than mumble an aspiration or two. Immediately upon reaching the sacristy, he pulled off his little cassock and was gone. What of his thanksgiving? He just did not make one.

On the last day of the retreat, when I knew I would not be saying Mass there the next morning, I asked the little lad if he had ever been told about thanksgiving after Holy Communion. Ever been taught that it was usual to spend at least a quarter of an hour thanking Our Lord and asking Him for the graces we need? He was a fine youngster and I believe he answered me truthfully. No. He was quite sure he had never been told about that quarter of an hour. Where was he going to school? It is hardly for me to tell you! But he told me and his answer surprised me.

A few years ago the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments issued an instruction about frequent and daily Holy Communion. Those who promote this most praiseworthy habit are warned to impress on their disciples the need for care concerning the conditions necessary for worthy reception of this most Holy Sacrament. Anything like “dragooning” people into going to Holy Communion is severely reprobated. Setting too much store on mere numbers is much to be blamed.

The Church does not want mere numbers. The mere routine reception of Holy Communion will not work in souls performing as outlined above. Are we allowing our young folk to dash up and dash down without a word of preparation and thanksgiving? Are we stressing the reception of Holy Communion to the detriment of the need to approach this most Holy Sacrament with due reverence, and employing our quarter of an hour afterwards in some effort to thank Our Lord? Are we guilty ourselves of this want of proper dispositions? If we are, let us not seek further for an answer to our query. Holy Communion does not work like a charm or a talisman.

Yes, we thank the Lord with a full and grateful heart for those First Fridays and those packed altar rails; but, once again, let us not rest on our oars. Mere mechanical reception is not enough.

We have to bring proper dispositions, not adequate dispositions, for that is impossible, but at least that measure of adequacy which our poverty can supply.

The Pope is pleading for attentive, fervent Holy Communion. That will bring those grand effects of which we have spoken. Jesus Christ has a right to expect that from us. Is He receiving it?

Flippancy shows itself in another way too. From time to time, one comes across a disgusting sentimentality in the matter of receiving the Sacraments, especially Holy Communion. Let me explain. You have a young person or a member of the Confraternity making the nine Fridays. Of course, nothing would induce them to omit

the Confraternity Holy Communion, or to “break” the Fridays. However, side by side with that resolve, excellent in itself, you have that person living in a free proximate occasion of serious sin. Have they the remotest notion of breaking that? Not they! They quite possibly have arranged to go back to it that very night. To watch their pious attitude now you would think them fit to be classed with the saints. Or, they are living beyond their means, indulging every extravagant whim, having outgrown, of course, the old-fashioned idea of paying their bills!

There is a want of solidity in their religion. Let the Almighty accommodate Himself and His Laws to their way of thinking and they will willingly serve Him! They like to “feel” holy and Holy Communion gives them that feeling, especially if a favorite hymn is played and sung at the time. As for changing their lives, breaking off that occasion of sin, or paying what they owe? Does it cross their mind that mere sentiment is no service, that their lip-service is a mockery, or that true religion is that which makes a person order his life as God means it to be ordered? Feeling may come or go, but the true servant of God is not swayed by it. He is loyal especially in times of stress. If he sees clearly that his life is out of joint with the teaching of Christ then he resolves, and at least tries sincerely, to change what is amiss. It is that sincerity and consistency that draws abundant blessings upon him when he receives Holy Communion.

So, it is not mere numbers that Christ wants. He complains, indeed, that there are many who abandon Him. However, in those who do draw near Him He surely has a right to look for proper dispositions. It is a catastrophe if those who do come think lightly of the supreme and sacred act they are performing.

“As He entered into a certain town there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood far off and lifted up their voices saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” When He saw, He said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” It came to pass that as they went they were made clean. One of them when he saw that he was made clean went back and, with a loud voice glorifying God, fell on his face before His feet, giving thanks and this was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, “Were not ten made clean and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God but this stranger?”

That complaint was wrung from the Sacred Heart by the evident ingratitude of the nine. Would you accuse these people of ingratitude towards Christ for the Gift of Himself in the Blessed Eucharist? I leave the answer to you, especially if you must number yourself among those who rush up and rush down without preparation or thanksgiving. Is it ingratitude—perhaps it is not. Is it the lack of a deep spirit of solid piety or a lamentable want of the spirit of faith—yes. It is this want that atrophies the effects of Holy Communion.

If you place a wet log on the fire, it will not light until the moisture is first expelled. If you sit on a hillside in summer before a beautiful panorama, you will not appreciate the beauty unless you open your eyes. If you are gasping with thirst, you will not assuage it by simply feeling that you have drunk a glass of spring water. In all these cases where there is question of producing heat, or enjoying the lovely landscape, or easing your thirst, you have to secure cooperation. You must place the log to be dried. You must use your eyes and you must raise the glass to your lips and drink.

In much the same way there must be cooperation between Our Lord and yourself when you meet in Holy Communion. All the treasures on earth are useless unless they can be enjoyed. All the “unsearchable riches of Christ” will not enrich your soul unless you come to receive Christ with proper dispositions and try to realize what you are about.

One is inclined to pursue this matter further and to ask, “Do these people know Christ at all?” Generally, they know a fair amount about the doctrines of His Church. Often they can rattle off definitions for you about the matter and form of a sacrament, the impediments of marriage, or the essentials of an act of perfect contrition. These are all excellent things to know. Often they can give you dates at will. They know the year of the definition of such and such a dogma, when this Council assembled, and when it dispersed and why. No one has any quarrel with dates and dogma, of course.

However, one often hears a complaint made up and down the country, and bitterly made, by those who have to teach religion. They complain that so much time is consumed and so much energy expended in hammering dates and figures and facts into the heads of children that there is none left for Christ Himself? Is there a danger that Christ and His loveliness are obscured if not entirely lost amidst this maze of facts that have to be marshaled round about Him?

Some time ago, a young woman about twenty years of age came to speak to her parish priest. She declared in all seriousness that she was in love with an atheist and a foreigner whom she had met during the week or two the boat he belonged to was alongside. At first the priest treated the tale as a joke and laughed at her. However, she meant business and had come to see what arrangements could be made about a marriage. The priest remonstrated. Did she not know what the Church taught about the evils of mixed marriages? Did she never learn at school about the impediments? He was met with a toss of the head and a breezy, “Oh, of course, Father, but we all looked upon that as just useful for the exams!”

Is our religious training superficial? Is our program too crowded? If reception of the all-holy and all-loving God in Holy Communion is fast becoming mechanical, is it because

we do not teach our children the reality of that holiness and that love and that loveliness? Have we to admit that they know not Christ Himself even if they do know quite a lot about Him?

Let me borrow here, with permission, an idea offered by another priest for his children. He explained to them that the suffix, “een,” signifies a small person who has not yet fully grown up. Thus Maureen is the growing girl, while Maire is generally the girl who has attained maturity. In the same way Christ is our Elder Brother. He has attained full stature. He is grown up. What are we? Each of us is a Christ-een—a little Christ—“growing up in Christ,” as Saint Paul expresses it. One can see at a glance the wonderful developments of which this beautiful idea is capable and how it can be made to serve as a foundation upon which to build deep love for that Elder Brother. In this way, the child comes to regard Our Lord as an intimate Friend, a member of the family, and each Holy Communion welds more closely the bond of love between the two. Is not this teaching religion? Is not this the burden of Saint Paul’s wonderful epistles?

Let us teach them Christ Our Lord—what manner of Man He was; what He thought about current problems, about war, and money-making and pleasure-seeking; what He loved and valued; how His conduct was ever consistent with His teaching, for “He began to do and to teach.” Then, let them understand something about sanctifying grace, that marvelous gift that makes the human soul His Tabernacle. “I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

The life of Christ is to expand more and more in that soul and the barriers are broken down by self-sacrifice. Accordingly, as the divine life expands within, it manifests itself more and more in one’s external conduct so the child becomes like the Elder Brother even in his way of speaking, acting, and judging. The great question is always, what would Christ say to this? How would He answer? How would He behave in these circumstances?

Comprehensus sum a Christo Jesu. He grows more and more into the soul of the child. He becomes the child’s greater self. Is this teaching religion? Granted, a course along these lines may not have some of the advantages of another course. Granted, the child may know less about definitions and dates and facts and figures. Granted, the child may not shine in an examination where theory supersedes practice. Would it not be worth the price if he were thus led to a closer and more intimate knowledge of the love and loveliness of Jesus Christ?

If our children grew up in Christ in this way and advanced each day in a personal love of Him, would not that love be bound to affect their attitude towards Holy Communion? Our Lord complained at the Supper Table that even His own did not know Him. “So long a time have I been with you and you have not known Me?” Lifting up His eyes, He

declared that this is eternal life that “they may know Thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.” Are we doing our part to acquire that knowledge and to impart it to others?

Small wonder that, without this knowledge, when they approach Him they develop the slipshod habit of coming without preparation and running away without thanksgiving. Small wonder that the evil habit contracted in childhood sets firmer as the years of youth and adolescence come on. Small wonder that Christ, looking out over the empty Church is forced to ask, “Where are the nine? Does only one in ten understand what Holy Communion is? Does only one in ten appreciate this Gift of God for what it is? Does only one in ten know Christ and nine in ten know merely about Him? One in ten! And where are the nine?”

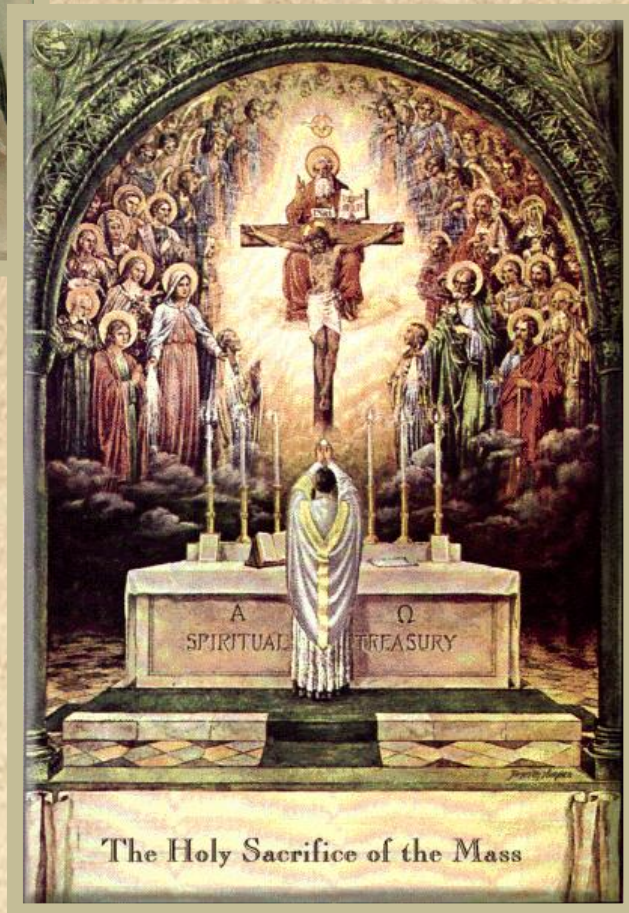
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