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# Pastor's Pen: Beyond a Cultural Catholicism Part 5

The next precept that we cover may seem a bit odd or even repetitive to the precept regarding the necessity to go to Mass on ALL Sundays and ALL Holy Days of Obligation. The next precept is that we must receive Communion at least once a year. Yes, at least once a year. In the Church, going to Mass and receiving Communion are not necessarily synonymous. That everyone goes to Communion at every Mass they attend is a relatively recent phenomenon. Why does the Church teach this as a precept? It is all about the state of one's soul.

## *It's All about Soul*

You will notice from last week's pastor's pen that there is also a precept that one must confess one's sins to a priest once a year. Confession and Communion are intimately tied. You'll notice that before we allow a child to receive their 1st Communion, normally, we have them celebrate 1st Confession first. Why? Because the teaching of the Church is that once a person has passed the age of reason (8 or so) that the ability to commit mortal sin is in play. If a soul is in a state of mortal sin, it is itself a mortal sin to receive Communion. Why? Because a soul in a state of mortal sin is in a state of rebellion and separation from God through one's own use of free will. This means that the effects of union that the Eucharist gives us are stopped at its source. The grace given is wasted. As I Corinthians 11: 27-29 says,

*"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself."*

Since the Church would rather not have you answer for the death of Christ, she teaches that a soul must be in a state of grace to receive the Blessed Sacrament.

However there is another issue as well. One must also believe what we believe. If one does not believe that Jesus is truly present in the Host and Chalice (aka transubstantiation or Real Presence), then if one receives the Blessed Sacrament, he or she does so in a state of disbelief in the very words of Jesus Christ Himself. In essence, for a Catholic to say that the Eucharist is a mere symbol or anything less than the actual Body and Blood of Christ is for that Catholic to call Jesus Christ Himself a liar. A liar? Yes! Jesus pronounces the bread to be His Body and the wine to be His Blood during the Last Supper. Hebrews tells us that the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ is once and for all. In every Mass, we directly participate in that one Sacrifice and are called to 'eat My Flesh and drink My Blood' (John 6:53). To say otherwise is to refute the Catholic faith and to refute the teachings of Jesus Christ.

## *What about Those Who Cannot?*

This issue is hotly debated in the certain sectors of the Church right now. Why not allow anyone to receive if the Bread and Wine truly are the Body and Blood of Christ? Why do we not allow little children, non-Catholics, and those who are in invalid marriages (among others) to receive? How can the Church teach this as a precept, yet excommunicate people?

In regard to children before the age of reason: as they do not yet understand what they are receiving, then it is withheld. It is because the reception of Communion requires an act of faith. That act of faith is a very simple "Amen" when they are told "The Body of Christ" or the "Blood of Christ." This is why anyone who receives must say "Amen:" it is an act of faith. Once that child is able to respond at an age-appropriate level with understanding and faith, we allow it.

In regard to non-Catholics: Part of the reason we have closed-communion is that faith matters. Faith unites us. If it is wrong for a Catholic who do not believe what we believe about the Eucharist to receive, then it is also wrong for anyone to receive who does not believe what we believe. Second, because the Eucharist seeks to unify us to God and each other (the movement of sacramental grace), when a person belongs to another faith, that union is not yet possible. One cannot live in schism from the entity it wishes to receive sacramental grace from. The sad and unfortunate reality is that the Body of Christ has been fractured for centuries. That cannot be glossed over. If we are to be united by the one Body of Christ, we must be open to its consequences. If we wish to be open to its consequences, then we must be open to the union that conversion begets.

In regard to those in invalid marriages: I will get into what constitutes an invalid marriage next week, but for a Catholic married outside of the Church for any reason is to refuse the sacrament of matrimony (as opposed to a civil marriage) and is to leave God's grace out of a vocation. This, like the other two, is more or less correctable. As marriage in the Church reflects the union between Christ and His Church, so every effort must be made to reflect that union in our lives. For some this means merely validating an invalid marriage; inserting the grace of God into that union. For all, they will have to look at the reasons they chose not to get married in the Church. Some will need to petition for annulments (with no guarantee that it happens) and some will have to look at their beliefs. I am delighted to help people work through this.

The Church does excommunicate people under very specific circumstances. When a person publicly and unrepentantly embraces a sin and teaches others to do so as well and has repeatedly rebuked calls to conversion by the bishop of a diocese, then a formal excommunication is done. Truth be told, though, any person in a state of mortal sin is excommunicated by their own choice. This is why confession is so important and why regular access to the Eucharist is necessary to maintain the state of the soul.

***What to do***

For those who are not Catholic and would like to join us and be able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) will be beginning this fall. See bulletin for contact info. For those who need marriage issues worked on, call me and let's get this done. Finally, confession times at SS Peter and Paul are ½ hour before all weekday Masses, 45 minutes before all Holy Day Masses, and between 4:30-5:15 on Saturdays. Confessions at St. Joseph are 45 minutes before Wednesday evening Mass and 45 minutes before all Holy Day Masses. Actually Confession time is anytime you ask me and I am not leaving to give Last Rites. So, let's do this right, so every reception of Communion draws you closer to Christ and His Church.