

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of *The Catholic Mass*

January 2025

**(already in podcast = *INTRO, HISTORY, THEOLOGY* —
this is the *LAST* in the section —
5 more sections to go...)**

- *this section on THEOLOGY OF MASS...*
 - *The Mass and the Cross (x2)*
 - *Sacrifice, Meal, Sacrament?*
 - *Christ as Priest, Victim, and Communion, etc*
 - *The Nature of the Eucharist*
 - *Theological Errors on the Eucharist*
 - **NOW** — — — *Reception of Communion (Theology, history, importance, dangers, modern questions, Fruits)*
- **Theology**
 - **(last of three parts of the Mass — Offertory, Consecration, Communion —**
 - **Catechumens, Faithful, Communion)**
 - receive Body and Blood (soul and Divinity of OLJC) — both species containing whole and entire of each...
 - “In the most holy Eucharist under the species (i.e. kinds) of bread and wine Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered, and received.” — CIC 1917 c. 801
 - eg) — hand...what do you see? = body...but you know the blood is contained...
 - Christ is living in the Eucharist...therefore Precious Blood contained...
 - Canon Law (“theology”) — **CIC 1917 c. 845-869**
 - *common comment from pulpit for visitors (at funerals / weddings):*
 - baptized Catholic
 - not conscience of mortal sin
 - kneeling
 - on tongue
 - *necessary dispositions of recipient:*
 - freedom from excommunication and interdict (eg reality in 2023...)
 - freedom from mortal sin
 - actual devotion
 - Eucharistic fast
 - 1917 — c. 858 (mentioning midnight—then to 3 hours under Pius XII and now...)
 - 1983 — c. 919 §1. A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine.

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of *The Catholic Mass*

- §2. A priest who celebrates the Most Holy Eucharist two or three times on the same day can take something before the second or third celebration even if there is less than one hour between them.
- §3. The elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour.
- *obligation to receive:*
 - “Only a desire to receive Holy Communion is a necessary means of salvation. All who have the use of reason are bound by divine and ecclesiastical precept to receive Holy Communion.” — n° 597 Prümmer
 - St. Pius X — age requirements...
 - “Any baptized person who is not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to holy communion.” — CIC 1917 c. 853
 - Not to children with deficiency of age
 - in danger of death, at least knowledge of difference from common bread
 - NB — Eastern Church offers Communion at Baptism...
- **History**
 - *Apostles*
 - “...Whatever one thinks about the practice [of communion in the hand] today and its reemergence after Vatican II, it is important that our conversation be grounded in an accurate picture of the history of this practice. Receiving communion in the hand was the common practice of the Church in both East and West for the **first 800 years** of Christianity, and it was certainly considered reverent by the Fathers.¹
 - “Most often when speaking of reverence, however, the Fathers emphasize two main things: 1) that every precaution should be taken lest the Eucharist fall to the ground and 2) that communicants should be free from serious sin and quarrels with other Christians. With regard to the first precept, Origen of Alexandria cautions,
 - “You who are accustomed to take part in divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any small part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated gift be lost. For you believe, and correctly, that you are answerable if anything falls from there by neglect.”²
 - “With regard to the second,... There is also evidence that this was a contested subject (i.e., about what sins prevent someone from receiving), as it would

¹ <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/early-christian-communion-in-the-hand/>

² *ibid* — Origen of Alexandria

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of *The Catholic Mass*

continue to be throughout the history of the Church. For example, Augustine writes,

- “Someone might say that the Eucharist should not be received daily. Why? “Because,” he says, “one should choose the days on which one lives with more purity and self-control in order to approach so great a sacrament worthily. For one who unworthily eats and drinks to his own condemnation” (1 Cor 11:29). Another will say the opposite; he says, “On the contrary, if the wound of sin and the attack of the disease is in fact so great that such medicines need to be postponed, one ought to be removed from the altar by the authority of the bishop in order to do penance, and one ought to be reconciled by the same authority. For this is what it is to receive unworthily: if one receives at that time when he ought to be doing penance. But one should not by his own judgment abstain from or return to communion, as he pleases. On the other hand, if the sins are not so great that a person should be judged to deserve excommunication, he ought not to withdraw from the daily medicine of the Lord’s body.”³
- “On the one hand, I think this evidence precludes describing communion in the hand as intrinsically irreverent. It also rules out arguing for an intrinsic link between a rejection of the true presence and communion in the hand—the Fathers, on the whole, speak of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in highly realistic terms and also received on the hand.
- “On the other hand, this mode of communion is not anywhere associated with lay involvement or accessibility, nor is it thought to de-emphasize the role of the priest. The practice of communion on the tongue with the use of patens in the West, and in both kinds on a spoon with a drop cloth in the East, moreover, *are natural developments from the concern of the Early Church to prevent Eucharistic mishaps*. It is not solely the result of some weird “medieval” form of reverence.”
- “*It may well be the case that the sudden change in practice after Vatican II decreased devotion towards the Eucharist and belief in the true presence, and it may well be the case that there were bad actors who in fact desired this result.* From this brief historical survey, however, we know that this need not be the case, and we can look to the Fathers for a pious example as we seek to foster reverence towards the Eucharist in the liturgy today. We would also do well to teach, as the Fathers do, that reverence is not only about proper reception of the Eucharist, but also about living the kind of life to which the Eucharist commits us. On this point, I will leave you with a beautiful exhortation from the *Golden Tongue*:

³ *ibid.* — Augustine, *Letter* 54.3.4

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of The Catholic Mass

- “Think of what you receive in your hand and never lift it to strike another and never disgrace with the sin of assault the hand that has been honored with so great a gift. Think of what you receive in your hand and keep it clean of all greed and theft. Consider that you not only receive this gift in your hand, but that you also bring it up to your mouth, and keep your tongue clean of all disgraceful and outrageous words, blasphemy, perjury and all other sins of this sort. For it is a deed fraught with destruction to take the tongue which serve such awesome mysteries, which has become purpled with a blood so precious, which has become a sword of gold and to change its course to abuse, insolence and ribald jests. Have reverence for the honor which God has bestowed upon it, and do not lead it down to the vileness of sin.”⁴
- both species...
 - details —
 - common in Latin Church before 12th century
 - banned in Council of Constance in 1415 AD
 - reintroduced in VAT II
 - in use in Eastern Churches
 - Council of Trent states ONLY one species
 - TRAD...
 - “The most holy Eucharist is to be given only under the form of bread.” — CIC 1917 c. 852
 - Novus Ordo
 - “Holy communion is to be given under the form of bread alone, or under both species according to the norm of the liturgical laws, or even under the form of wine alone in a case of necessity.” — CIC 1983 c. 925
 - leaven vs. unleavened...
 - “Priests will distribute holy communion [made from] leavened or unleavened bread, according to the proper rites.” — CIC 1917 c. 851, §1
 - “Where necessity urges and there is not present a priest of a different rite, it is permitted to an oriental priest who uses fermented bread to minister the Eucharist in unleavened [form], and likewise to a latin or oriental priest who uses unleavened [bread] to use leavened [bread]; each must observe his own rites of administration.” — CIC 1917 n° 851, §2

⁴ ibdi. — John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instruction, 12.15-16,

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of *The Catholic Mass*

- TONGUE
 - original practice
 - Emphasis on maximum reverence and greatest prudence — “let nobody...eat that flesh without first adoring it” and in taking it people are warned: “...receive it: be careful lest you lose any of it, for it is the Body of Christ.”⁵ [such different manner than we see today in modern church]
 - change of original practice
 - “With passing of time, the truth of the Eucharistic mystery, of its power and of the presence of Christ in It were being more deeply studied. Due to an ever-urgent sense of the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament and of the humility necessary in order to receive It, the custom was established of the minister himself placing a particle of consecrated bread on the tongue of the communicant.”⁶
 - reasons for keeping on tongue
 - hand = to ~800 AD
 - tongue = last 1100 years (and does not lower dignity of person but supports knowledge of God and reverence expressed)⁷
 - “Furthermore this practice [of communion on the tongue], which must be considered traditional, ensures more effectively that Holy Communion is distributed with all due respect, decorum and dignity, so that the danger of profanation of the Eucharistic species is prevented, in which ‘in a unique way, Christ God and man, is present whole and entire, substantially and continually,’ so that finally the diligent care is preserved, which the Church always recommended regarding the fragments of the consecrated bread: ‘What you have allowed to fall, think of it as though one of your own members were amputated.’”⁸
- Importance
 - precept (once during Easter Time)
 - cf. C. 859, 860, 861 (not fulfilled by sacrilegious communion)
 - required by law in danger of death...important to provide for relatives...
 - cf. C. 864, §1
 - not necessary for (faithful to receive during) Mass...
 - yet priest must consume entire sacrifice (part of the definition)
 - preparation

⁵ Holy Communion p. 13

⁶ *ibid.* p. 15

⁷ *ibid.* p. 15 n° 1277

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 17 n° 1278

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of The Catholic Mass

- Eucharistic fast
 - cf. C. 858
- prayers
- attention and devotion
- thanksgiving
 - prayers
 - time
- even outside of Mass (allowed — graces)
 - “Even outside of Mass any priest whatsoever...can administer holy communion...”
— CIC 1917 c. 846, § 1 & 2
- Viaticum — part of Last Rites
- sick calls — graces of God
- frequency (cf. C. 863)
 - only once per day — cf. C. 857
 - spiritual communion available as well...especially if not worthy of sacramental communion
 - any day — cf. C. 867
 - “Frequent and daily communion as a thing is most earnestly desired by Christ Our Lord and by the Catholic Church should be available for all the faithful, of whatever condition and rank of life.” — n° 599... Prümmer
- **Dangers**
 - disrespect
 - hand —
 - Ancient practice allowed communion in hand and to take for later needs... — n° 1275⁹
 - “Soon the task of taking the Blessed Sacrament to those absent was confided to the sacred ministers alone, for this purpose, that the respect due to the Body of Christ and attention to the needs of the faithful be more carefully observed.”¹⁰
 - warning of hand not good = “lessening of reverence or profanation of the Sacrament or adulterating of the doctrine”¹¹
 - YES = 567 (315 were with reservations) — NO = 1233

⁹ *ibid.* p. 13

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 15 n° 1276

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 17 n° 1279 — Pope Paul VI decides...1969

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of The Catholic Mass

- NOT permitted but happened and never curtailed¹²
- “No matter what the method is adopted, let one pay attention not to allow any fragments of the consecrated host to fall or be scattered, and also to the proper cleanliness of the hands and that the proper gestures be maintained in keeping with local customs.”¹³
- “Communion in hand does not bring us closer to the sources of the primitive Church but rather to Protestantism and to many current doctrinal deviations.”
- spillage of Precious Blood
 - “When Communion is distributed under both species by intinction, it is never permitted to place in the hands of the faithful a host which has first been dipped in the Blood of Our Lord.”¹⁴
- routine (daily communicant)
- **Modern questions**
 - COVID era...
 - “forced” communion in hand
 - celiac disease
 - concern
 - gluten free
 - many are not affected — or just a portion of Host can be received
 - one species NOT enough!...eg — driver thought priest was heretic...
 - politicians...
 - “All those publicly unworthy are to be barred from the Eucharist, such as excommunicates, those interdicted, and those manifestly infamous, unless their penitence and emendation are shown and they have satisfied beforehand the public scandal [they caused]. — CIC 1917 c. 855, §1

¹² Interestingly, Canon Law did not empower this by law — as more votes needed...

Can. 455 §1. A conference of bishops can only issue general decrees in cases where universal law has prescribed it or a special mandate of the Apostolic See has established it either *motu proprio* or at the request of the conference itself.

§2. The decrees mentioned in §1, in order to be enacted validly in a plenary meeting, must be passed by at least a two thirds vote of the prelates who belong to the conference and possess a deliberative vote. They do not obtain binding force unless they have been legitimately promulgated after having been reviewed by the Apostolic See.

¹³ *ibid.* p. 25 n° 1289

¹⁴ *ibid.* n° 1290

Reception of Communion

Podcast #21 in series of The Catholic Mass

- **Fruits**

- God's presence in us
 - Almighty in us
 - Infinite in finite...
 - nourishment for spiritual life
 - as you feed body so you ought to feed soul
 - “daily Bread” from Our Father prayer
 - effects:
 - increase in sanctifying grace (sacrament of living)
 - unites us to Christ
 - food for soul
 - promise of future resurrection (i.e. if you are in grace to receive communion you will get to Heaven)
 - weakens inclination to sin (that is why you wish to receive often if struggling with sins...)
-

THANK YOU

Resources — references

- Holy Communion by Most Rev. Juan Rodolfo LAISE
 - <https://angeluspress.org/products/communion-hand?srsId=AfmBOorDmr05W8is19DSkxYZjNRU1ywydCtrTyRMBK252a1Dz-gTMUmT>
- The 1917 Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law, Ignatius Press
- Handbook of Moral Theology by Dominic Prümmer, OP
- Prayers for before and after communion:
 - Saint Thomas Aquinas Meditations for Every Day
 - Liturgical Year, by Dom Guéranger, OSB (each of the 15 volumes has particular devotions for Communion)