



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week, we're going to begin looking at the Eucharist as Communion (remember that over this year we have looked at the Eucharist as Presence and Sacrifice). Here's an amazing point to ponder: God – the Blessed Trinity, totally self-sufficient and dependent on nothing and no one; God who creates all and is not created; God who has complete and perfect Communion interiorly through the union of the Blessed Trinity – wants us to be in communion with Him. He made us to be one with Him! He made us by love, for love.

Each of us has this longing. Every one of us is made for love. Because of the hurts we endure, we put up walls to protect our hearts, but at the core, we are all looking for union, to be loved, not for utilitarian reasons (what we can give or get), but for ourselves.

When Jesus gives Himself in the Eucharist, then, He is giving us the foretaste of the promise of heaven – perfect union with Him forever. When we are at Mass, we're a quarter-inch from Heaven, and receiving Communion allows us that taste of heaven.

So why, many times, does it not feel like heaven?

Some of this is because God hides Himself so as not to overwhelm us – He wants us to choose to love Him, and His unmediated presence would be too much for our humanity. That being said, we are called to act on faith to open ourselves to the grace of the Sacraments. When we are ill-prepared or not in a state of grace, we can be dulled to the graces God gives us – and even block their effect in our lives.

St. Paul talks about this in his first letter to the Corinthians. Just after sharing the story of the Institution of the Eucharist, he warns the Corinthians:

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. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. (I Corinthians 11:27-30)

Did you catch that? If we receive the Eucharist unworthily, we are not receiving the Bread of Life, but the bread of death – we “eat and drink judgment” on ourselves. This doesn't mean we need to be scrupulous and freak out about our sins, but rather we need to make sure we repent of our sins before we receive Communion. This means, for venial sins, taking the Penitential Act (“Lord, have mercy...”) at the beginning of Mass seriously. If we have mortal sins on our souls, we need to make sure we get to Confession. And if we are in a state of unrepentant serious sin (for instance, being in a sexual relationship not sanctioned by the Church – a marriage blessed in the Church), then, for the sake of the safety of our souls, we refrain from sacramental Communion until we have rectified the situation. (If you are in this situation, please reach out to me – I will do everything in my power to help you make things right with the Church.)

There is a story of a disciple of the famous atheist Voltaire writing to him about a problem. The disciple wanted to become an atheist and reject the Church, but he found he had a strange attraction to the Eucharist. He asked Voltaire how he could get over this “superstitious” belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Voltaire responded by telling him to

Keep receiving Communion; in fact, go five and six times a day. As you do, say to yourself, “I do not believe; I hate God; this is superstitious.” Not only that, counseled Voltaire, go out and commit dozens of mortal sins, but keep going to Communion, deliberately wanting to destroy your faith and curse your silly God. Four months later, the proud young man wrote back to say it had worked, that he was now a committed atheist. That young man used the Eucharist to divide – that is, to sever – his union with God (p. 225 *Priest for the Third Millennium* by Timothy M. Dolan)

While we may not choose to curse God as we go to Communion, our unrepentant sins – especially mortal sins – will work to sever our relationship with God... so how can we truly be in Communion with Him?

We are called to prepare our souls for receiving this most intimate of relationships – our Communion with God. He desires to be for us the Bread of Life, to draw us into perfect union with His Heart. As we prepare to receive Communion for our next Mass, let us look to come into true communion with Him, repenting of anything that stands between us.