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How should we prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist?

How should we prepare to receive Communion? When should we receive Communion and what should we do afterwards? Here are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about Holy Communion.

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"Dear friends, we can never thank our Lord enough for the gift he has given us in the Eucharist. It is such a great gift, and that is why it is so important to go to Mass on Sundays. To go to Mass is not only to pray, but to receive Communion, this bread which is the body of Jesus Christ that saves us, forgives us, unites us to the Father. It is beautiful to do this!"
(Pope Francis, Audience February 5, 2014)

Summary

1. What does it mean to receive Eucharistic Communion? Who can receive Communion?
2. Why is it important to receive Communion?
3. How should we prepare ourselves to receive Communion?
4. When should we receive Communion?

5. What should I do after I have received Communion?

1. What does it mean to receive Eucharistic Communion? Who can receive Communion?

To receive Communion or the Eucharist is to receive Christ himself, the Son of the living God, who is present under the appearance of bread and wine.

In the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Body and Blood together with the Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ are "truly, really and substantially contained, and therefore the whole Christ."

This presence is called "real," not exclusively, as if the other presences were not "real," but *par excellence*, because through it Christ, God and

man, becomes totally present in our soul when we receive communion.

For this reason, in order to receive Christ in Eucharistic Communion, it is necessary to be baptized and to be in the state of grace. If one is conscious of having sinned mortally, that is, of having offended God in a grave matter, with full knowledge and consent, one should not approach the Eucharist without asking forgiveness and having previously received absolution in the sacrament of Penance.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- Let us go to receive our Lord. When we receive an important person, we bring out the best — lights, music, formal dress. How should we prepare to receive Christ into our soul? Have we ever thought about how we would behave if we could only receive him once in a lifetime?

- When I was a child, frequent communion was still not a widespread practice. I remember how people used to prepare to go to communion. Everything had to be just right, body and soul: the best clothes, hair well-combed — even physical cleanliness was important — maybe even a few drops of cologne... These were manifestations of love, full of finesse and refinement, on the part of manly souls who knew how to repay Love with love. (*Christ is Passing By*, 91)
- Jesus has remained within the Eucharist for love... of you. — He remained, knowing how men would receive him... and how you would receive him. — He has remained so that you could eat him, so that you could visit him and tell him about your things; and so that you could talk to him as you pray

beside the Tabernacle, and as you receive the Sacrament ; and so that you could fall in love more and more each day, and make other souls, many souls, follow the same path. (*The Forge*, 887)

2. Why is it important to receive Communion?

The Lord addresses to us an urgent invitation to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53). Communion increases our union with Christ. Receiving the Eucharist in communion gives us intimate union with Christ Jesus. What material food produces in our bodily life, communion accomplishes

in an admirable way in our spiritual life. Communion with the Flesh of the Risen Christ preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received in Baptism. This growth of Christian life needs to be nourished by Eucharistic communion, the bread of our pilgrimage, until the moment of death, when it is given to us as viaticum.

Moreover, communion separates us from sin. The Body of Christ that we receive in communion is "given for us," and the Blood that we drink is "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." As bodily nourishment serves to restore the loss of strength, so the Eucharist strengthens charity which, in daily life, tends to weaken; and this enlivened charity erases venial sins. By giving himself to us, Christ rekindles our love and enables us to break our disordered ties with creatures and to take root in him.

By the same charity that it kindles in us, the Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. The more we participate in the life of Christ and the more we progress in his friendship, the more difficult it will be for us to break with him through mortal sin. The Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins. This is proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is proper to the Eucharist to be the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church, that is, of those who are in the grace of God. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391- 1395))

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- As he was giving out Holy Communion that priest felt like shouting out: this is Happiness I am giving to you! (*The Forge*, 267)
- Your Communion were very cold: you paid little attention to

the Lord: you were distracted by the smallest trifle... But ever since you began to realise during an intimate dialogue with God that the angels are present, your attitude has changed... “Let them not see me like this!”, you say to yourself... —And see how, as a result of thinking, “What will they say?” — this time, for a good motive — you have advanced a little towards Love. (*Furrow*, 694)

3. How should we prepare ourselves to receive Communion?

To respond to this invitation, we must prepare ourselves for this great and holy moment. St. Paul exhorts us to make an examination of conscience: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord

unworthily will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Let every man examine himself, and then let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For whoever eats and drinks without discerning the Body eats and drinks his own punishment" (1 Cor 11:27-29). Those who are conscious of grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before approaching Communion.

Before the greatness of this sacrament, the faithful can only repeat humbly and with ardent faith the words of the Centurion (cf. Mt 8:8): "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come into my house, but one word from you is enough to heal me". To prepare properly to receive this sacrament, the faithful must observe the fast prescribed by the Church, which obliges them to abstain from all food and drink at least one hour before Holy Communion, with the exception of

water and medicines. By the corporal attitude (gestures, dress) the respect, the solemnity, the joy of that moment in which Christ becomes our guest is manifested. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1384-1389)

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- We should receive Our Lord in the Eucharist as we would prepare to receive the great ones of the earth, or even better: with decorations, with lights, with new clothes... —And if you ask me what sort of cleanliness I mean, what decorations and what lights you should bring, I will answer you: cleanliness in each one of your senses, decoration in each of your powers, light in all your soul. (*The Forge*, 834)
- Have you ever thought how you would prepare yourself to receive Our Lord if you could go

to Communion only once in your life? —We must be thankful to God that he makes it so easy for us to come to him: but we should show our gratitude by preparing ourselves very well to receive him. (*The Forge*, 828)

4. When should we receive Holy Communion?

The Church strongly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion when they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and imposes on them the obligation to do so at least once a year.

The Church obliges the baptized to participate in Holy Mass on Sundays and feast days and to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season,

having been prepared by the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church strongly recommends that the faithful receive the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or even more frequently, even every day.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- Go to Communion. It doesn't show lack of respect. Go this very day when you have just got over that 'spot of trouble.' Have you forgotten that Jesus said: It is not by those who are well, but by those who are sick, that the physician is needed? (*The Way*, 536)
- Build up a gigantic faith in the Holy Eucharist. — Be filled with wonder before this ineffable reality! We have God with us; we can receive him every day and, if we want to, we can speak intimately with him, just

as we talk with a friend, as we talk with a brother, as we talk with a father, as we talk with Love itself. (*The Forge*, 268)

5. What should we do after we have received Communion?

After receiving communion, it is advisable to dedicate a few minutes to give thanks to Jesus for his real presence in our souls. This is a gesture of respect and love. Each person will find a way to thank God personally for the possibility of receiving him.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- Christian life is not made up of rigid norms, because the Holy Spirit does not guide souls collectively, but inspires each one with resolutions,

inspirations and affections that will help it to recognize and fulfil the will of the Father. Still, I feel that, on many occasions, the central theme of our conversation with Christ, in our thanksgiving after holy Mass, can be the consideration that our Lord is our king, physician, teacher and friend. (*Christ is Passing By*, 92)

- He is our king. He desires ardently to rule our hearts, because we are children of God. But we should not try to imagine a human sort of rule — Christ does not dominate or seek to impose himself, because he "has not come to be served but to serve." His kingdom is one of peace, of joy, of justice. Christ our king does not expect us to spend our time in abstract reasoning; he expects deeds, because "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord!, shall enter

the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

- He is our physician, and he heals our selfishness, if we let his grace penetrate to the depths of our soul. Jesus has taught us that the worst sickness is hypocrisy, the pride that leads us to hide our own sins. We have to be totally sincere with him. We have to tell the whole truth, and then we have to say: "Lord, if you will" — and you are always willing — "you can make me clean." You know my weaknesses; I feel these symptoms; I suffer from these failings. We show him the wound, with simplicity, and if the wound is festering, we show the pus too. Lord, you have cured so many souls; help me to recognize you as the divine

physician, when I have you in
my heart or when I contemplate
your presence in the
tabernacle. (*Christ is Passing By*,
93)

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