

# The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

## The Eucharist (Part 2)

*by Fr. Antony*

The liturgy of the Eucharist has two great parts that form a fundamental unity: the gathering, the liturgy of the Word, with readings, homily and general intercessions and the liturgy of the Eucharist, with the presentation of the bread and wine, the consecratory thanksgiving, and communion. This together forms one single act of worship.

At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood. Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion.

The Holy Eucharist is specifically distinguished from the other sacraments. The first and principal effect of the Holy Eucharist is union with Christ by love, the spiritual and mystical union with Jesus by the theological virtue of love. Christ Himself designated the idea of Communion as a love union. When he said "Whoever eats my flesh, and drinks blood, remains in me, and I in him" (**John 6: 56**). St. Cyril of Alexandria beautifully represents this mystical union as the fusion of our being into that of the God-man, as "when melted wax is fused with other wax".

A second fruit of this union with Christ by love is an increase of sanctifying grace in the soul of the worthy communicant. Together with the increase of sanctifying grace, there is also another effect, that is, a spiritual delight of the soul. Just as food and drink delight and refresh the heart of man, so does this "Heavenly Bread" produce in the soul of the devout communicant, ineffable bliss.

According to the Catholic Church's teaching, Eucharist does not remit mortal sin, but it blots out venial sins and preserves the soul from mortal sin, says the Council of Trent. The Holy Eucharist is not merely a food, but a medicine, as well; it preserves us from spiritual death. The spiritual writers recommend frequent Communion as the most effective remedy against impurity.

The Catholic Church also teaches that Holy Eucharist is the "pledge of our glorious resurrection and eternal happiness", because, Jesus said, "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day" (John 6: 54). Thus the church fathers Ignatius, Tertullian, as well as the patristic writers said that Holy Eucharist is the "door by which we enter upon the unending happiness".

Only bishops and priests, scripturally considered, can validly consecrate. Any priest who is not debarred by canon law may lawfully celebrate the Eucharist. The ordinary minister of Holy Communion is a Bishop, a priest or a deacon. The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is an acolyte, or another of Christ's faithful. If the needs of the Church require, and the ministers are not available, then lay people, even though they are not lectors

or acolytes, can distribute Holy Communion in accordance with the provisions of the law (**Code of Canon Law: 910, 230**).

According to the teaching of the Council of Trent, the Christ who is really present in body and blood, soul and Divinity, could be received under either species alone or both.

Anyone who is conscious of grave sin may not receive the Body of the Lord without previously having been to sacramental confession, unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, which includes the resolve to go to confession as soon as possible (**Code of Canon Law: 916**).

The official teaching of the Catholic Church on the issue of receiving the Eucharist by a non-Catholic is that: "Celebration of the sacraments is an action of celebrating community, signifying the oneness in faith, worship, and life of the community. Where this unity of sacramental faith is lacking, the participation of the separated brethren with Catholics, especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist, penance, and anointing of the sick, is forbidden. The Church can, for adequate reasons, allow access to those sacraments to a separated brother. This may be permitted so long as he declares a faith in these sacraments in harmony with that of the Church. The judge of this urgent necessity must be the diocesan bishop" (**Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism**).

The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ. In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. "The Catholic Church has always offered, and still offers, to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession" (**CCC. 1377-78**).