

The Reception of Holy Communion (Part 2) –

Not a Good-Feeling Spiritual Vitamin, But a Real Person and a Growing Union of Persons

We talked last week in Part 1 about how receiving Holy Communion is certainly one of the main climatic moments throughout each Catholic Mass ceremony/liturgy. We say “Amen” before we receive not just to say “Yes” or “I believe” to the fact that Jesus is fully present in Holy Communion, but we say “Amen” also to affirm all that the Catholic Church teaches and especially all of how we try to follow Christ as his disciples and live according to the Gospel with as much faith, hope, and love as possible! In addition to this beautiful reality of striving to follow Jesus with all of our hearts, we now turn our attention to the effects of Holy Communion on our bodies and our souls. After all, if we are receiving Jesus Christ, the infinite God become man, His very body, blood, soul, and divinity, if we are truly receiving all of Him in that sense, then this should change us or affect us in some dramatic way, right?

I'd like to mention one quick reflection that has really helped me to “get the most out of receiving communion” in this sense of how it changes us on a personal and spiritual level. First of all, there are a lot of people who generally have very positive and even emotional experiences when receiving communion. People often tell me how they experience a deep sense of calm or peace, or people are filled with joy or hope or love in their souls through receiving Christ in the Eucharist. On the other hand, that experience is not always universal, and even for people who experience those spiritual consolations, sometimes they seem to fade or sometimes they do desire even more out of Holy Communion and coming to Mass in general. My first encouragement to help you with this is to realize that even though God does want to give us these emotional or spiritual consolations when we receive communion, His desire is not primarily about the emotions or feelings after we receive. God's desire in and through the Eucharist is a growing communion relationship with each one of us! True love (*and a true communion as far as 'com-union'... meaning 'with union'*) always involves a certain amount of emotions and feelings, but the central part of true love is sacrificing for the good of the other. In other words, do we approach the Eucharist ONLY to experience those good emotions or spiritual consolations, or do we approach Christ in the Eucharist as a person, who wants to help us continue to grow more and more into a perfect communion with Him throughout our entire lives?!

A very brief way to summarize this first reflection is – don't approach Holy Communion just as a 'feel-good spiritual vitamin.' Rather, approach Holy Communion as receiving a person more fully into your soul and into your life. A person who wants what is best for you, and will sometime give you consolations, but at other times will certainly encourage you to grow or sacrifice for Him or for other people. For example, when is the last time you sat down after receiving communion (sat down or knelt down in the pew), and then you said to Jesus in your soul, “Ok, Lord what do you want to say to me today? Even if it is a challenge or a call to conversion or growth in some way, what are calling me to strive for with your grace this week?” The goal of the Eucharist, the goal of Holy Communion is for our relationship with Jesus Christ to grow more and more into a union of persons preparing for the perfection of heaven! This means that yes, sometimes Christ will want to give us consolations or words that just encourage us or pick us back up or give us a fresh new perspective on something to show us how He really sees it the right way. But other times, like a good Father, like a true Savior from sin, Jesus in the Eucharist will challenge us to avoid occasions of sin, He will exhort us to grow in virtues and good habits, and he will ask us to do uncomfortable things to sacrifice for Him and for others in our lives. May we enter into this communion with Christ in the Eucharist as fully as possible; Because He is alive, He is not just a good-feeling vitamin but a person who gives Himself totally to us in love in this way, and this is the greatest gift we could ever hope for God to give us - Himself in real relationship of perfect love.