

## The Reception of Holy Communion (Part 5) –

### *Why Can Only Catholics Receive Holy Communion?*

#### ***Exclusive and Harsh? Or a Covenant Commitment/Renewal Each and Every Sunday?***

One of the more difficult questions I receive (and you might certainly get asked this as well by friends or family) is why are Catholics only allowed to receive Holy Communion during a Catholic Mass? There is a lot to unpack here, but I think I can at least explain the basics to help us grow in our understanding of this Catholic teaching and ancient truth of our faith. I would say that there are at least two main points (there are many more than these two points, but this will help us summarize and get right to the crux of the matter):

- Holy Communion for Catholics is different than what holy communion means for other Christian denominations.
- Even if someone *personally believes* what the Catholic Church teaches, that is not enough because receiving Jesus every Sunday in Holy Communion is a renewal of the **covenant promise** of our entire faith and relationship with Christ.
  - o {this covenant promise is unique to Catholics, so only Catholics can renew it and live it in that sense}

The first and most fundamental way to explain this to other people who might be visiting and/or coming with you to attend Mass (if they are not Catholic) is simply to explain how the Catholic understanding of holy communion is different than other Christian churches. They might use the same words or phrase at times, but we believe and know to be true that at every Catholic Mass, Jesus becomes truly present under the form of bread and wine. This is not a symbol. This is not even just a presence that exists only at Mass and only if you believe and want Jesus to be present. This is not Jesus kind of spiritually present together with the bread and wine. The bread is no longer bread, it is Jesus Christ, and His body, blood, soul, and divinity. Sometimes just trying your best to explain this difference to other people will help them understand why they are not allowed to receive. However, you may certainly still run into people who say they **personally believe** that Jesus is truly present in holy communion (i.e. they believe what the Catholic Church teaches about holy communion in a sense), so they might argue that they should be able to receive when they come to Mass. The main reason we still do not allow non-Catholics to receive communion is because something more is happening than simply a personal and private reception of Jesus into our souls. When we say “Amen” to the priest or extraordinary minister who is distributing holy communion, we are saying “I believe” not only to Jesus being truly present in Holy Communion, but also in fact to our faith and life within the Catholic Church as a whole. One of the best ways to explain this is with the biblical concept of covenant and specifically covenant renewal when we are receiving holy communion, but I think I will save that explanation for next week! Here are some helpful links to check out if you are interested:

Guide to receiving Holy Communion – <https://www.eucharisticrevival.org/post/70-usccb-guidelines>  
Fr. Mike Schmitz video on this topic – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jxwGIXfoOo>