

The Reception of Holy Communion (Part 3) – Do we receive God? Or does He receive us?

Most Catholics would agree that receiving holy communion during Mass is one of the most climatic moments throughout the entire celebration/ceremony, if not the most important or climatic moment of all. I'm receiving Jesus. I'm receiving the infinite God become man into my body and soul. This moment is very profound for so many people, but one little pitfall that I've seen at times is how we approach communion in regards to our role in truly receiving His presence and His grace, particularly in how we think it is up to our own strength to force God's presence to change us.

This pitfall is certainly not as 'bad' as people who might receive communion without any reverence or any devotion or seriousness, and it is a big issue to think that the infinite God wouldn't want us to take this deep communion of being united to His Perfect Divine Spirit with some gravity and supreme importance. His goal is to transform us into His very image and with His very Divine power, and therefore, when we receive communion, we are well aware of our weaknesses, limitations, and brokenness as we ask God to help us become like Him in every way possible. However, the main pitfall I'd like to come back to is one in which we are so stressed about this divide between our holiness and Christ's perfect and divine holiness, that we put all the pressure on ourselves to force this presence to change us.

For example, one day I was praying after Mass when I was in college, and I was praying very seriously and very devoutly. I remember that day fairly clearly because I was a good bit stressed as to how I could grow in a variety of ways in my character and in my spiritual life, and I was trying to focus on Jesus' presence in my soul and how I could do better in my relationship with God. My words were basically something like "you are within me Lord, and now I need to keep your presence there and keep acting perfectly throughout the rest of my day." Once again, this isn't the worst type of spiritual life, but it can be dangerous because the emphasis was how all on ME and MY OWN POWER rather than on God's grace and how God was working in my life, minute by minute and day by day. What snapped me out of this prayer was actually a good friend who was walking out of the church, and he must've seen the stressed look on my face during my prayer. He simply patted me on my shoulder and whispered, "don't forget Christ's joy." It was somewhat shocking to me in that moment...not only because I was surprised someone was touching me, but mainly because it was exactly what I needed to hear spiritually. The truth is that, yes, God wants to change us and transform us with the Eucharist and every single time we receive Holy Communion. However, He is doing this according to His grace, His method, and His timeline.

One image that might help you is to think about Jesus' presence in Holy Communion not just as one powerful circle that is only deep within us if we are absolutely perfect every second of every day. For example, we might think that this presence goes away once we leave Mass and the Church parking lot to go do something 'normal,' like when we go to eat breakfast or whatever our Sunday schedule looks like. Rather, a better image is imaging that we are surrounded by Christ's presence in every part of our body and soul, and He wants to come with us into the messiness, busyness, and complexity of our day to day lives. Yes, God wants to change us into His very image and transform us with His grace through Holy Communion, but let's ask Him to show us how He comes with us into our daily lives with Divine power of His grace! We receive God become man in holy communion, but really, He receives us into His Spirit and into a real relationship of grace, of love, and of joy.