

# **IMMENSÆ CARITATIS—On Facilitating Reception Of Communion In Certain Circumstances**

## **Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments**

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Given on January 29, 1973

The proof of his boundless charity that Christ the Lord left to his Bride the Church, namely, the inexpressible and supreme gift of the eucharist, requires us to deepen our appreciation of this great mystery and to share ever more fully in its saving power. Accordingly, the Church, in its pastoral zeal and care, has repeatedly made practical laws and timely statements of doctrine aimed at furthering devotion toward the eucharist, the summit and center of Christian worship.

The new conditions of the present seem to demand that, without prejudice to the supreme reverence due to so great a sacrament,<sup>1</sup> access to communion be made easier, so that by sharing more fully in the effects of the sacrifice of the Mass, the faithful may more willingly and intensely give themselves to God and to the good of the Church and of all humanity.

The first measures to be taken are meant to prevent reception of communion from becoming either impossible or difficult because there are not enough ministers. Measures must be taken, secondly, to prevent exclusion of the sick from this great comfort of the spirit, the reception of communion, because of their inability to observe the law of fast, even in its current less severe form. Finally, it seems advantageous in certain instances to allow the faithful who request it to receive communion a second time on the same day.

In response therefore to the preferences of several conferences of bishops, the following norms are issued on:

1. special ministers for distributing communion;
2. broader faculty to receive communion twice in a day;
3. mitigation of the eucharistic fast in favor of the sick and the elderly;
4. devotion and reverence toward the blessed sacrament whenever the host is placed in the hand.

### **I. Special Ministers Of The Eucharist**

There are several situations in which a shortage of ministers of communion has been pointed out:

—within Mass because of a great crowd of people or some disability of the

celebrant;

—outside Mass when distance makes it difficult to bring communion, especially as viaticum to the sick in danger of death; or when the sheer number of sick people, especially in hospitals or similar institutions, requires several ministers.

In order, then, that the faithful who are in the state of grace and rightly and devoutly wish to share in the sacred meal may not be deprived of this sacramental aid and solace, Pope Paul VI has decided it opportune to authorize special ministers who will be empowered to give communion to themselves and others of the faithful, under the exact and specified conditions here listed.

I. Local Ordinaries possess the faculty enabling them to permit fit persons, each chosen by name as a special minister, in a given instance or for a set period or even permanently, to give communion to themselves and others of the faithful and to carry it to the sick residing at home:

- a. whenever no priest, deacon, or acolyte is available;
- b. whenever the same ministers are impeded from administering communion because of another pastoral ministry, ill-health, or old age;
- c. whenever the number of faithful wishing to receive communion is so great that the celebration of Mass or the giving of communion outside Mass would take too long.

II. The same local Ordinaries possess the faculty of granting individual priests in the course of their ministry the power to appoint, for a given occasion, a fit person to distribute communion in cases of genuine necessity

III. The local Ordinaries also may delegate these faculties to auxiliary bishops, episcopal vicars, and episcopal delegates.

IV. The fit person referred to in nos. I and II will be designated according to the order of this listing (which may be changed at the prudent discretion of the local Ordinary): reader, major seminarian, man religious, woman religious, catechist, one of the faithful—a man or a woman.

V. In the oratories of communities of both men and women religious the office of distributing communion in the circumstances stated in no. I may rightly be assigned to

the non-ordained superior of men religious or to the superior of women religious or to their vicars.

VI. If there is time, it is advisable that the fit person chosen by the local Ordinary as

a minister of communion and the person, referred to in no. II, appointed by a priest having this faculty, should receive a commission (<mandatum>) according to the rite annexed to this Instruction.<sup>2</sup> This minister is to carry out the distribution of communion in keeping with liturgical norms.

Because these faculties have been granted exclusively in favor of the spiritual good of the faithful and for cases of genuine need, let priests remember that such faculties do not release them from the obligation of giving the eucharist to the faithful who lawfully request it and especially of bringing and administering it to the sick.

The faithful who are special ministers of communion must be persons whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office, foster their own devotion to the eucharist, and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their own devotion and reverence toward the most august sacrament of the altar. No one is to be chosen whose appointment the faithful might find disquieting.

## **2. A More Extensive Faculty To Receive Communion Twice In One Day**

The discipline now in force permits the faithful to receive communion a second time on the same day:

—on Saturday evening or the evening before a holy day of obligation, when they are fulfilling the obligation to assist at Mass, even if they have received communion that morning;<sup>3</sup>

—at the second Mass of Easter Sunday and in one of the day Masses on Christmas, even if they have received communion at the Mass of the Easter Vigil or at the Mass at Midnight on Christmas;<sup>4</sup>

—also at the evening Mass on Holy Thursday, even if they have also received communion at the chrisem Mass.<sup>5</sup>

Over and above those listed, there are other situations of the same type that favor a second communion. The reasons for granting a new faculty therefore must here be set out in detail.

Like a provident mother, the Church has established from centuries-old practice and has received into its canon law a norm according to which it is lawful for the faithful to receive communion only once a day. That norm remains unchanged and is not to be disregarded simply for reasons of devotion. Any ill-advised desire to repeat communion must be countered by the truth that the more devoutly a person approaches the holy table the greater the power of that sacrament which feeds, strengthens, and expresses faith, charity, and the rest of the virtues.<sup>6</sup> For the faithful are to go forth from the liturgical celebration to do works of charity, religion, and

the apostolate "so that what they have received by faith and sacrament in the celebration of the eucharist they will hold to by the way they live."<sup>7</sup>

There may however be special circumstances in which the faithful who have already received communion on the same day or in which priests who have celebrated Mass attend some community's celebration. It will be lawful for these faithful and these priests to receive communion a second time in the following situations:

1. at ritual Masses in which the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, anointing of the sick, orders, and marriage are administered, as well as at Masses in which there is a first communion;<sup>8</sup>
2. at Masses for the consecration of a church or an altar, for a religious profession, for the conferral of a "canonical mission";
3. at the Masses for the dead on the occasion of the funeral, news of the death, the final burial, or the first anniversary;
4. at the principal Mass celebrated in a cathedral or parish church on the solemnity of Corpus Christi and on the day of a pastoral visitation; at a Mass celebrated on the occasion of a major religious superior's canonical visitation to a particular religious house or chapter;
5. at the principal Mass at a eucharistic or Marian congress, whether international or national, regional or diocesan;
6. at the principal Mass of any kind of meeting, pilgrimage, or people's mission;
7. at the administration of viaticum, when communion may be given to the members of the household and the friends of the sick person who are present.
8. Over and above the cases already mentioned, the local Ordinary is allowed to grant for a single occasion the faculty to receive communion twice on the same day whenever, because of truly special circumstances, a second reception is warranted on the basis of this Instruction.

### **3. Mitigation Of The Eucharistic Fast In Favor Of The Sick And The Elderly**

First, it remains firm and established that one of the faithful to whom viaticum is administered in danger of death is not bound by any precept of fast.<sup>9</sup> Also remaining in force is the concession made by Pius XII on the basis of which "the sick, even though not bedridden, may without any time limit take nonalcoholic drinks and either liquid or solid medicines before celebrating Mass and receiving communion."<sup>10</sup>

As for food and drink serving as nourishment, that tradition must be preserved according to which the eucharist was to be taken "before all food," as Tertullian says,<sup>11</sup> as a sign of the excellence of the sacramental food.

To give recognition to the dignity of the sacrament and to stir up joy at the coming of the Lord, it is well to observe a period of silence and recollection. It is a sufficient sign of devotion and respect on the part of the sick if they direct their mind for a brief period to this great mystery. The duration of the eucharistic fast, that is, of abstaining from food or alcoholic drink, is reduced to approximately a quarter of an hour for:

1. the sick in health-care facilities or at home, even if they are not bedridden;
2. the faithful of advanced years, whether they are confined to their homes because of old age or live in homes for the aged;
3. sick priests, even if not bedridden, and elderly priests, as regards both celebrating Mass and receiving communion;
4. persons caring for, as well as the family and friends of, the sick and elderly who wish to receive communion with them, whenever such persons cannot keep the one-hour fast without inconvenience.

#### **4. Devotion And Reverence Toward The Eucharist In The Case Of Communion In The Hand**

Ever since the Instruction <Memoriale Domini> three years ago, some of the conferences of bishops have been requesting the Apostolic See for the faculty to allow ministers distributing communion to place the eucharistic bread in the hand of the faithful. The same Instruction contained a reminder that "the laws of the Church and the writings of the Fathers give ample witness of a supreme reverence and utmost caution toward the eucharist"<sup>12</sup> and that this must continue. Particularly in regard to this way of receiving communion, experience suggests certain matters requiring careful attention.

On the part of both the minister and the recipient, whenever the host is placed in the hand of a communicant there must be careful concern and caution, especially about particles that might fall from the hosts.

The usage of communion in the hand must be accompanied by relevant instruction or catechesis on Catholic teaching regarding Christ's real and permanent presence under the eucharistic elements and the proper reverence toward this sacrament.<sup>13</sup>

The faithful must be taught that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and that therefore the worship of <latria> or adoration belonging to God is owed to Christ present in this sacrament. They are also to be instructed not to omit after communion the

sincere and appropriate thanksgiving that is in keeping with their individual capacities, state, and occupation.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, to the end that their coming to this heavenly table may be completely worthy and fruitful, the faithful should be instructed on its benefits and effects, for both the individual and society, so that their familial relationship to the Father who gives us our "daily bread,"<sup>15</sup> may reflect the highest reverence for him, nurture love, and lead to a living bond with Christ, in whose flesh and blood we share<sup>16</sup>

Pope Paul VI approved this Instruction, confirmed it with his authority, and ordered its publication, setting the day of publication as its effective date.

## **Endnotes**

1 See Council of Trent, sess. 13, <Decretum de SS. Eucharistiae Sacramento> cap. 7: Denz-Schon 1646-47: "It is unfitting to take part in any sacred function without holiness. Assuredly, therefore, the more that Christians perceive the sacredness and divinity of this heavenly sacrament, the more must they take every care not to come to receive it without reverence and holiness, especially since we have the frightening words of St. Paul: 'For those who eat and drink unworthily, eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body' (1 Cor 11:29). Those wishing to receive communion must be reminded of St. Paul's command: 'Let a man examine himself' (1 Cor 11:28). Church usage makes it clear that such an examination is needed because those conscious of mortal sin, no matter how contrite they may regard themselves, must not go to the eucharist without sacramental confession beforehand. This Council decrees that, when confessors are available, this practice must always be observed by all Christians, including priests obliged by office to celebrate Mass. A priest who in case of necessity has celebrated Mass without confessing beforehand must go to confession as soon thereafter as possible." See also Congregation of the Council, Decr. <Sacra Tridentina Synodus>, 20 Dec. 1905: AAS 38 (1905-06) 400-406. Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, <Pastoral Norms on Giving General Sacramental Absolution>, 16 June 1972. Norm I.

2 The <editio typica> of this rite was published separately.

3 See Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instr. <Eucharisticum Mysterium> 25 May 1967 no. 28.

4 See Ibid.

5 See *ibid.*; Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instr. <Inter oecumenici>, 26 Sept. 1964, no. 60; Instr. <Tres abhinc annos>, 4 May 1967, no. 14.

6 See <Summa Theologica> 3a, 79.7 ad3; 8 ad 1.

7 Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instr. <Eucharisticum Mysterium> no. 13.

8 See GIRM no 329.

9 See <Codex Iuris Canonici> can. 858, #1.

10 Pius XII, Motu Proprio <Sacram Communionem>, 19 March 1957, no. 4: AAS 49 (1957)178.

11 Tertullian, <Ad uxorem> 2,5: PL 1, 1408.

12 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instr. <Memoriale Domini>, 29 May 1969, which remains in force.

13 See <Sacrosanctum Concilium> art. 7. Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instr. <Eucharisticum Mysterium> no. 9. Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, Instr. <Memoriale Domini>, the words "they must prevent any possible lack of reverence or false opinions about the eucharist from taking root in the minds of the people".

14 See Paul VI, Addr. to members of the Permanent Council on International Eucharistic Congresses.

15 See Lk 11:3.

16 See Heb 2:14.

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