

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD

“HOLY COMMUNION”

The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, which we celebrate today, reminds us that, as we participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and receive Holy Communion, we partake of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by our sharing in the Body and Blood of the Lord that we have true communion with Christ.

1. Communion with Christ

At the deepest level of our being, each one of us yearns for communion with God the Father. This can only be achieved through our communion with Christ, whose life and sacrificial death has achieved our reconciliation with God the Father.

One of the most profound images that our Lord presented to us in relation to communion is to be found in the 15th chapter of the Gospel of St John. Jesus said:

‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ... I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.’

These are powerful words for us to consider! Our communion with the Father is dependent upon our communion with Christ. And, in turn, our communion with Christ depends on our abiding in him.

2. Frequent Reception of Holy Communion

So long as the branches are connected to the vine, normal growth can continue. The same applies to us. If we are nourished by the Eucharist on a regular basis, we can grow in the spiritual life. For this reason, the Church, our Mother and Teacher, encourages us to receive Holy Communion on a frequent basis.

Reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is so essential to the Christian life that the Catholic Church declared at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 that all Catholics must receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at least once a year, especially during the Easter Season.ⁱ

This requirement was written into *Canon Law* (Can. 920 of 1983 code):

§1. Once admitted to the blessed Eucharist, each of the faithful is obliged to receive holy communion at least once a year.

§2. This precept must be fulfilled during paschal time, unless for a good reason it is fulfilled at another time during the year.

There can be a number of reasons why a person might not be able to receive Holy Communion at a particular celebration of the Eucharist. The reasons are between that person and God. However, there can be NO good reason for a Catholic to refrain from receiving Holy Communion for many years! Are you in need of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Do you need to be reconciled with the Church? If so, be not afraid! The Catholic Church is the vine and you are a branch that needs to be re-grafted to that vine for nourishment and growth.

3. Communion with the Diocesan Bishop

Reception of Holy Communion in a Catholic Church presupposes that a person is first of all well-disposed to receive the Sacrament. It means that (1) one is not aware of any unconfessed mortal sin, (2) one is not under any ecclesiastical censure, and (3) one is in communion with the diocesan bishop. For Roman Catholics living within the 19 counties of the Diocese of La Crosse, your bishop is William Patrick Callahan. There is no other legitimate Roman Catholic Bishop in this diocese.

Just as our communion with the Father is dependent upon our union with Christ, so it is that our union with Christ is dependent upon our union with our bishop. The Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse, being in union with the *Roman Pontiff*, Pope Francis, is our assurance of communion with Christ. Any ecclesial communion outside of this, even though it gives the appearance of being Catholic, is not in true communion with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Such ecclesial communions are either schismatic or protestant in nature.

4. Communion with Others

A person's reception of Holy Communion in the Catholic Church should be an expression of one's desire to be in union with all people, especially one's brothers and sisters in Christ. Within each parish community, divisions can easily develop. The graces received from the Eucharist should be our source of charity and the impetus to be reconciled with one another. The love of Christ impels us to do so.

It is essential for each individual Catholic to maintain communion with the Catholic, or *Universal*, Church. There is only One Church of Christ, and it subsists in the Catholic Church. Each member of the Catholic Church has the responsibility to pray for others, to participate in the Church's sacramental life, to support the Church in its mission, to learn the doctrines of the Church as presented by the Magisterium, and to be obedient to the directives of the Diocesan Bishop.

5. Breaks with Communion

When we look at the history of the Catholic Church, a great number of breaks with communion have taken place. Some were minor; others were catastrophic. At times, these breaks, or schisms, were subtle and took place over a length of time; on other occasions they were rapid and radical. They may have been due to theological errors (i.e. heresies) or philosophical errors; and the political climate often had a part to play in the break from full communion. Over the years, the Church has witnessed a most unfortunate splintering of Christendom.

The Diocese of La Crosse has its own unfortunate chapter right here in Necedah since 1949. Most locals are only too familiar with the unfortunate development of the cult of the “shrine” in Necedah. Without going into the details about the ‘shrine’ itself, it would be sufficient to say that consistent disobedience to the bishops of the Diocese of La Crosse led to its demise. Obedience to Christ is always shown by obedience to the Diocesan Bishop. Always!

6. Ecclesiastical Censures

A bishop has the authority to issue censures on Catholics under his jurisdiction. An ecclesiastical censure is a ‘penalty by which a baptized person, gravely delinquent and obstinate, is deprived of certain spiritual benefits until he [or she] gives up his [or her] obstinacy.’ⁱⁱ

The three kinds of censures which are imposed by Church law are excommunication, interdict, and suspension. The laity and clerics can be excommunicated or placed under interdict; suspensions are applied to clerics alone.

In some cases, a person can be absolved from his sin through a good confession, and yet have the censure remain until it is removed by the legitimate authority. However, ‘in the case of a censure which prevents the reception of the sacraments, the censured person cannot be absolved from the sins until he or she has first been absolved from the censure.’ⁱⁱⁱ

7. The Interdicts Imposed in Necedah

On March 29, 1975, seven people who were then leaders of the “shrine” in Necedah were placed under interdict by the then Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse. An interdict ‘is a censure by means of which certain sacred goods indicated by the law are forbidden to the faithful, although the latter do not lose communion with the Church.’^{iv} (see Can. 1332) The interdict placed on these individuals prevented them from receiving the sacraments in the Catholic Church.

On June 24, 1985, the Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse extended the decree of interdict to *all* who publicly associate themselves with the ‘shrine’.

On May 24, 1995, the Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse asked the question: ‘Is it possible that adherence to the “Shrine” can be approved by the Bishop of La Crosse as a legitimate devotion to the Blessed Mother?’ The answer he gave is: ‘No.’ ‘Because of the open and scandalous disobedience which has been associated with the “shrine” from its inception, the Church can never recognize it as a place favored with special graces.’^v

8. The Consequences of Disobedience to Ecclesial Authority

What are the consequences of disobedience to the Bishop of La Crosse? From my perspective, there are many. Not only have people been placed under interdict, and denied the grace of the sacraments, but there have been subsequent excommunications. People have begun receiving sacraments from priests and bishops who are not in full communion with the Bishop of the Diocese of La Crosse. Numerous people have entered into marriages which are likely to be invalid, depending on the circumstances. Countless invalid confessions were heard by clerics who had been suspended or even excommunicated. Hundreds of children have been baptized into quasi-Catholic communities, and are in need of reception into full communion with the Catholic Church. Disobedience to the Bishop of La Crosse has led to disorder in our parish and has brought about scandal, i.e. the spiritual downfall, of many good people.

9. Reconciliation and Return to Full Communion

In an attempt to bring some light to the interdict related to the ‘shrine’, I have placed some information about it on the third page of the bulletin.

If you had some form of public involvement with the ‘shrine’ then you are in need of reconciliation with the Church. I invite you to come to me to seek reconciliation formally from our Bishop.

If you have received sacraments at Our Lady of Victory Chapel or from another cleric in town who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church, please come and speak to me.

Be not afraid of being reconciled with the Catholic Church! Removing yourself from the ‘shrine’ and its activities does not mean that you are betraying the Blessed Virgin Mary! Remember that an authentic Marian devotional life can only be lived in the context of a life sustained by the sacraments offered by the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

We must understand that the Blessed Mother will only work to build up the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. The authenticity of Marian apparitions throughout the centuries has been shown, without exception, by strict adherence to the directives of the local diocesan bishop.

Complete obedience to our Diocesan Bishop, William Patrick Callahan, and not merely giving lip service to him, is the assurance that we are seeking to surrender ourselves totally to Christ.

May our participation in the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist today increase within us a burning desire to seek the will of God in our lives, to be instruments of God's love and mercy, and do all we can to remain as branches on the One Vine, Who is Christ the Lord. Amen.

ⁱ Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 2009, Preserving Christian Publications, Boonville, NY, p. 173

ⁱⁱ Fr John A. Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, 2001, Eternal Life, Bardstown, KY, p. 90

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} *The Code of Canon Law Annotated*, 2004, Midwest Theological Forum, Woodbridge IL, p. 1040

^v Taken from an undated notice given by Fr. James Lesczynski to the parishioners at St Francis Catholic Church, Necedah. I do not have access to the original document at this point.